
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource
Operations and Rural Development
BC Wildfire Service

Off-road vehicle restrictions due to wildfires

Effective at noon Pacific time on Friday, Aug. 4, 2017, the operation of any off-road vehicle for recreational purposes on Crown land was prohibited throughout the Cariboo Fire Centre, Kamloops Fire Centre and Southeast Fire Centre. In addition, all on-highway vehicles were required to remain on defined road surfaces.

General comments:

What general advice do you have for people planning to head into the backcountry during the fire season?

- During periods of heightened wildfire activity, British Columbians and visitors are asked to review their planned recreational activities and avoid travelling in remote backcountry areas where access may be difficult.
- This can help reduce the risk of accidental wildfire starts and also mitigate fire threats to people if these remote areas are affected by wildfires and they must leave quickly.
- When fire danger ratings are elevated, wildfires can ignite easily and spread rapidly. Depending on conditions, the B.C. government may consider implementing formal backcountry access restrictions.

Why are backcountry closures or activity restrictions put in place?

- Our first priority is keeping people safe. Every British Columbian needs to do his or her part to ensure the safety of their community.
- In order to protect the well-being of people and communities, specific areas of B.C.'s backcountry may be formally closed to public access due to wildfires and firefighting activity, in accordance with the *Wildfire Act* and Wildfire Regulation.
- Certain activities (such as operating off-road vehicles) may also be restricted.
- Such closures and restrictions are not uncommon during the fire season.
- Backcountry closures and wildfire conditions are constantly monitored by BC Parks and the BC Wildfire Service.

Current off-road vehicle (ORV) prohibition

Why was the use of off-road vehicles (ORVs) and on-highway vehicles in the backcountry prohibited in the Cariboo Fire Centre, Kamloops Fire Centre and Southeast Fire Centre?

- Since noon Pacific time on Aug. 4, 2017, the operation of any off-road vehicle for recreational purposes on Crown land was prohibited throughout the Cariboo Fire Centre, Kamloops Fire Centre and Southeast Fire Centre to help prevent human-caused wildfires and protect public safety.
- The use of off-road vehicles was prohibited in these areas due to the extreme wildfire and weather conditions that we're experiencing in B.C. at this time.

What types of vehicles are considered to be off-road vehicles (ORVs) under this prohibition?

- Off-road vehicles (ORVs) include all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), "quads", off-road motorcycles, side-by-sides (e.g. Rhino, Argo or Razor vehicles).

Are all motorcycles considered to be off-road vehicles (ORVs) under this prohibition?

- *Off-road* motorcycles are considered to be ORVs under this prohibition.
- However, motorcycles which are licenced for on-highway use are **not** considered to be off-road vehicles and are permitted to travel on designated roads.

What constitutes a "road" and a "defined road surface"?

- For the purposes of this prohibition a defined road surface is defined as having a paved or mineral soil/ or mixed gravel/mineral soils surface.
- In addition, the road should be wide enough for, at minimum, a car to easily travel along without making contact with roadside vegetation.
- A road is **not** single track. The road surface should be free of vegetation, accumulations of dead organic material (e.g. piles of dead leaves), long grass and so forth.
- We ask that individuals use good judgement at this time and remind you that if your actions resulted in starting a wildfire you could be found liable for: wildfire suppression costs; damage to Crown forests and other forest or land resources; deterrent penalties; and reforestation costs.

How can I determine if the road I want to ride on is a designated road/authorised right of way?

- If you are unsure if the route you wish to travel follows designated roads, contact your local Front Counter BC or Natural Resource District Office.

Can you give me some examples of uses that are permitted and are not permitted under this prohibition?

- Jeeps, trucks and other “on-highway” vehicles are permitted on designated roads/defined road surfaces under this prohibition, including forest service roads. However, they are not allowed to go off-road.
- Travelling cross-country off of a designated road in a Jeep, truck or 4x4 is not permitted.
- Driving an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) on a forest service road or designated trail is not permitted.
- People who are going camping at a recreation site may travel on a forest service road (in an on-highway vehicle, or on a highway-licenced motorcycle).

Where can I ride my highway-licenced motorcycle?

- Highway-licences motorcycles can be ridden on paved roads (e.g. highways) and on designated roads/defined road surfaces. However, they are not allowed to be ridden off-road.

Where can't I ride my highway-licenced motorcycle?

- Under the prohibition individuals cannot ride highway-licenced motorcycle off-road, on trails or on other undefined roads. However, they can be ridden on paved roads (e.g. highways) and on designated roads.

Are there any exceptions to the current ORV prohibitions?

- The prohibition of off-road vehicles and on-highway vehicles does not apply to private lands or national parks.
- The prohibition of off-road vehicles does not apply to emergency responders or to agriculture or commercial/industrial users who operate vehicles for farming, emergency response or business purposes.
- The off-road vehicle prohibition does not apply to hunting guides and outfitters while they're using ORVs for business purposes. Such business purposes would include transporting or guiding hunting clients who are using ORVs to hunt or gain access to the backcountry; transporting supplies; setting up camps; and, general preparations for hunting operations.

My ORV has a spark arrestor. Why can't I go riding if I have one installed?

- Public safety is our paramount concern in the current situation.
- All ORVs should have a spark arrestor installed to reduce wildfire risks, but hot mufflers or build-ups of grass or other vegetation on hot spots can also help spark a wildfire — especially if the vehicle is driven in tall grass or weeds or off of established trails.

What is the fine for violating this prohibition?

- People can be issued a violation ticket that carries a fine of \$767.
- If the activity causes or contributes to a wildfire, the person responsible may be ordered to pay all firefighting and associated costs.
- Enforcement patrols have been stepped up this summer to ensure compliance with this prohibition.

When was the last time ORV activity was restricted in B.C.?

- This is the first time that ORV activity has been restricted in B.C., but area and activity restrictions are quite common.

What criteria are considered in making these decisions?

- Before implementing such a prohibition, the BC Wildfire Service considers the current fire danger ratings, wildfire activity in these areas, available firefighting resources and forecasted weather conditions.
- The current wildfire situation could get worse before it gets better, despite the efforts of our firefighters.

When will the current ORV prohibition be lifted?

- The prohibition will be lifted when the BC Wildfire Service determines that threat levels have been reduced to the point where operating an ORV in the backcountry is no longer considered to pose a significant risk to public safety.

General information about restrictions on backcountry access and activities:

What are the main ways to restrict public activity in the backcountry?

- There are several ways to restrict public activities or access in the backcountry:
 - a voluntary restriction (e.g. voluntarily avoiding travel in the backcountry)
 - an activity restriction, under Section 12 of the *Wildfire Act* (e.g. a campfire ban)
 - an area restriction, under Section 11 of the *Wildfire Act*, which could affect only a small area or a more extensive area (e.g. a backcountry closure)
 - a requirement to leave a specified area, under Section 13 of the *Wildfire Act*

Voluntary backcountry restriction:

- British Columbians may be encouraged to avoid going into the backcountry unless it is absolutely necessary. This would include areas outside of cities and towns that are typically more remote or undeveloped.
- Be aware of current and forecasted weather conditions. Wildfires can often be sparked by lightning storms, so people should always have an exit plan prepared so they can leave the area in case of a wildfire.
- Cellphones may be unreliable in remote areas of the backcountry. Where coverage is poor, it can be very difficult to locate people and notify them about potential wildfire dangers.
- Remote areas with poor access are difficult to evacuate and escape routes may be hampered by a wildfire or smoke.

Activity restriction:

- Activity restrictions may be applied to activities or the equipment used for participating in certain prohibited activities to help prevent starting new fires or

contributing to the spread of a fire (e.g. target shooting, campfires, off-road vehicles).

- In some circumstances, exceptions may apply if a person obtains the written authorization of an official to engage in a restricted activity (e.g. the use of fire for ceremonial purposes).
- Government officials, including Natural Resource Officers and Conservation Officers, will patrol in and around specified areas to enforce an activity restriction order and educate the public.

Closure of parks, recreation sites and trails:

- Public access to provincial parks, recreation sites and trails may be temporarily closed if the wildfire situation warrants it.
- This step can help reduce the risk of accidental wildfire starts, keep people out of harm's way and ensure that they do not interfere with firefighting activities or impede access to areas affected by wildfires.
- Government officials, including Natural Resource Officers and Conservation Officers, will patrol in and around these areas to enforce a closure and educate the public.

Area restriction:

- Area restrictions may be implemented to limit fire risks around particular wildfires, protect public safety and make sure that people do not interfere with firefighting activities.
- This is done through a Restricted Area Order that applies to a specific area.
- People must not remain in or enter the area designated by the order.
- Exceptions may apply if a person obtains the written authorization of an official to enter the area in order to travel to and from his or her residence or to travel to or from an operation or activity that has been specifically exempted in the order.
- Government officials, including Natural Resource Officers and Conservation Officers, will patrol in and around these areas to enforce the area restriction order and educate the public.
- An area restriction may be applied to a specific area or for a particular wildfire. It may also be applied across a broader area (or even provincially, which is known as a full backcountry closure).

How can I find out which area closures or restrictions are currently in place?

- Closures or requests for the public to stay out of specific areas are typically communicated through media releases, on government websites (e.g. www.bcwildfire.ca), social media channels and community bulletin boards.
- Links to all closures (apart from area restriction orders) are listed at www.bcwildfire.ca under "Information for Tourists and Travellers".

Can forestry activities be shut down?

- High-risk industrial activities have already been restricted in some areas to protect the lives of people working in our forests and to limit the possibility of accidental fire starts.
- Under the Wildfire Regulation, high-risk activities include things such as mechanical brushing, blasting with explosives, grinding, cutting with spark-producing tools, welding, operating a power saw to fall or buck timber, skidding logs, yarding logs using cable systems, portable wood chipping and other activities.
- More information on restrictions on forestry activity is available online at:
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/forestry/managing-our-forest-resources/wildfire-management/prevention/for-industry-commercial-operators/high-risk-activities>

Can you give me an example of when backcountry restrictions were implemented in the past?

- In order to protect the public, closures in areas where wildfires are burning are not uncommon during the fire season.
- In 2003, the B.C. government implemented a wider restriction to a large geographic area to help reduce the probability of new, human-caused fires.
 - Those restrictions included a backcountry voluntary restriction for the southern half of the province.
 - A full Backcountry Travel Restriction Order for the southern third of the province was implemented later that year.