

## **An Economist's point of view - Randy Barcus, Spokane Wa.**

One of the things that is often overlooked in proposals like allowing ORV's on city streets and trails is the cost of providing adequate public safety.

For example, it is not a really good idea to have citizens dealing with motorists (passenger vehicles or ORV's); this is why we have police and sheriff's deputies. If ORV's are allowed in Ferry County, then the number of police officers and the costs of policing will increase with the scale of the ORV use.

A common argument made is that it will be just a small increase in traffic. That argument does not hold any water, because if it is a small increase, then the economic benefits are also small. You cannot have it both ways. A good argument to make is that if the number of vehicles increases 20%, then you could expect the cost of policing to increase 20%. Then ask the Commissioners where they think that money will be coming from. Will it be a specific (unenforceable) tax on the ORV users, or will it be a tax on the citizens of Ferry County.

Another non-trivial omission in these cases is the provision for emergency medical care; fire department personnel, hospitalization, and transportation to larger hospitals for critical injuries. You make the case that car/ORV collisions often result in severe trauma to the ORV participant. I can attest to this, as my older son is a Montana Highway Patrolman and his primary job is motor vehicle accident investigation. Montana allows ORV's on city, county, and state highways, and the accidents he investigates are often very serious injury and/or fatalities. The costs of providing emergency medical services would also scale with the planned impact of the proposal. Once again, you cannot have a big economic benefit without a big cost increase in medical response. I'm not sure if the hospital in Republic is a publicly or a privately owned facility, but regardless, if they are faced with significantly increased costs due to serious trauma injuries that occur regularly with ORV highway conflicts, then those costs need to be identified as well.

Your other arguments (especially the peace and quiet ones) are compelling. It would seem to me that your community would be much better served to push for non-motorized tourism as opposed to motorized tourism. Unfortunately, the motorized recreationists are much better organized than the multiple organizations of hikers, backpackers, horseback riders, photographers and the like. Both groups have a lot of spendable income, so it's not a choice between recruiting people with money versus people without money to come spend some time in your community. There are a lot more non-motorized groups out there to market to, but one thing we know for sure: if Ferry County gets the reputation of an open-motorized ORV place, the tourists seeking peace, tranquility and quiet won't come. Even though they are not organized like the ORV rider clubs, they are knowledgeable, and once the word gets around, it is nearly impossible to reverse their recreation plans.