

A New President! Now What? Recreationists Must Unite and Mobilize

By Del Albright

Recreationists who enjoy the backcountry, waterways, off-pavement trails and SUV exploring have a huge new door of opportunity open to us – as well as a new challenge. The time has never been more critical for us to unite and mobilize to enjoy this new door and meet this new challenge. No matter how you wanted this election to turn out, we have to step up, work together, and mobilize our forces to help this new administration understand our sports and access issues.

Inherent with new Presidents, rotating congress critters, and term limits, we will always be in the game of educating new elected officials. It is our destiny if we are to survive.

I think there are a few steps we can take to ensure the future of our sports, no matter how you view this change in American politics. And one thing is for sure: we can all be proud of the fact that it is America and we can affect change by speaking up and working together. This is not the time to sit by and wait. We must act and help the newly-elected politician at all levels understand that we are the responsible stewards of our public lands and that we deserve access. Here are my suggestions for “now what?”

Step one is to unite our various sports and access interests at every opportunity. Leadership meetings and Summits, intra and inter-state, will help us find new ways to cooperate. Differences must be put aside and past intra-sport conflicts must come to an end. We need an Army now, more than ever. National groups like the BlueRibbon Coalition are an obvious membership for every recreationist in this country because “mixed use” will be an important strategy for keeping trails and riding areas open.

Groups like the North American Motorized Recreation Council (NAMRC) and the new BlueRibbon National Land Use Advisory Council (NLUAC) that facilitate regionalized communication will help us breach gaps in communication and facilitate long-term solutions to local and regional problems, as well as national issues. But no matter who works for us, we all need to be united in our efforts.

Step two is to engage recreationists at all levels to join up and be part of organized recreation. There are millions of us out there waiting for a reason to join up and get involved. This new Administration is the reason. They need us to help them understand who we are and what we stand for.

A quick internet search shows that those who oppose our access outnumber us by well over a million members and hundreds of millions of dollars. Just the numbers for a few key groups are shocking:

The Wilderness Society has over 300,000 members and supporters, with \$60 million bucks in the bank.

The Sierra Club with over 730,000 members and over a hundred million dollars in their kitty.

The National Audubon Society with net assets at the end of 2007 at over \$300 million and tens of thousands of members.

So why do we have so many off-pavement and waterway recreationists who are not members of something? The reality is that our state, regional and national organizations have not yet found the magic formula to engage all these pending members. I think this election changes that. We all now have reasons to jump in with both feet and to engage our friends and fellow recreationists to turn this

door of opportunity into one we'll never forget. We have to be the solution with our large organizations and become the empowerment to get others to join the cause. Membership in our standing organizations and clubs is absolutely critical to the survival of responsible recreation.

Step three is to adopt more of our public lands and engage with our state and federal land management agencies. We have to partner up with land management agencies at every opportunity and find ways for us to be involved in the use, management and future of those lands and waterways we love to play on. We need to be at the table when decisions are made, problems are identified, and solutions are implemented.

We have to take "ownership" of our resources. Oh, excuse me, we do own America! Let's not forget that. When it comes to public lands, they are YOUR public lands. So we need to do everything we can to ensure our lands are protected FOR the public instead of FROM the public. ☺
(That is the motto of the BlueRibbon Coalition).

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