



# **Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle (NOVA) Fuel Use Study Summary**

Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC)  
February 4, 2003



## Study Objective

...to determine the relative portion of motor vehicle fuel tax revenues attributable to vehicles operating off-road and on nonhighway roads for various recreational purposes.

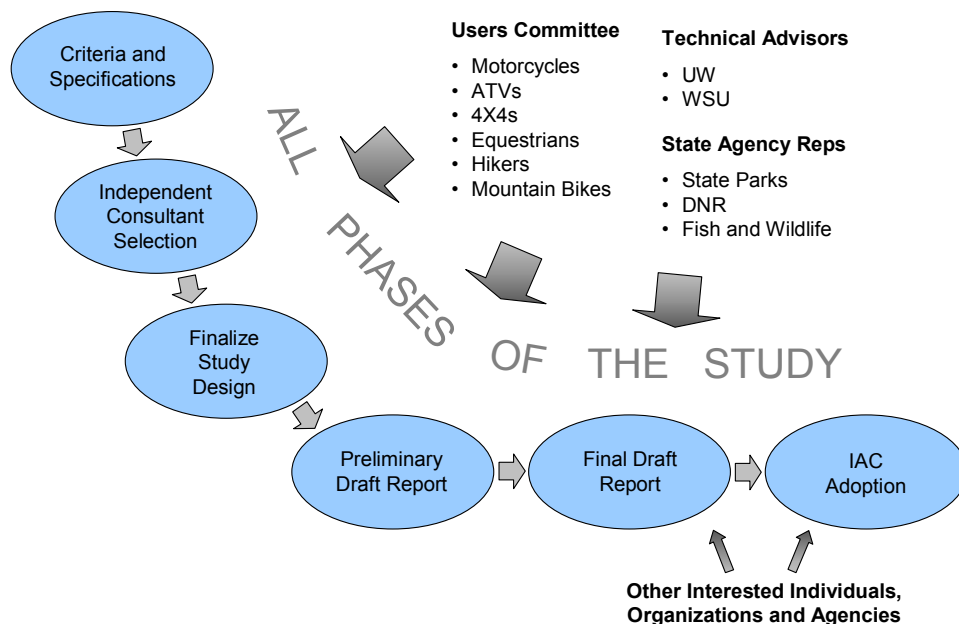
## Background

The Washington State tax on gasoline is used to support the construction and maintenance of state roads and highways. In the early 1970s the State Legislature decided that tax paid on gasoline consumed for recreational purposes on roads not supported by state funds (“nonhighway roads”), such as national or state forest roads, and gasoline consumed for off-road activities should be used to provide facilities and services for these recreational activities. The percentage of fuel attributed to non-highway road and off-road use and the formula for allocating the resulting funds to state agency recreational programs was based on a study of nonhighway recreational fuel consumption done in 1972-73 and on policy decisions made by subsequent legislatures.

In 2001, the State Legislature requested the Washington State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC) undertake a new study to measure the proportion of gas tax generated by different types of vehicles operating off-road and on nonhighway roads for various recreational purposes. The Legislature asked IAC to contract with an “independent entity” to conduct the study.

In September of 2001 IAC selected Hebert Research of Bellevue, Washington, to conduct the study. The consultant selection and subsequent study design, implementation and analysis was done in consultation with a Technical Advisory Committee (a survey expert from WSU and UW), representatives of the affected state agencies, and a six-member committee representing the major recreational activities.

## Fuel Study Stakeholder Involvement



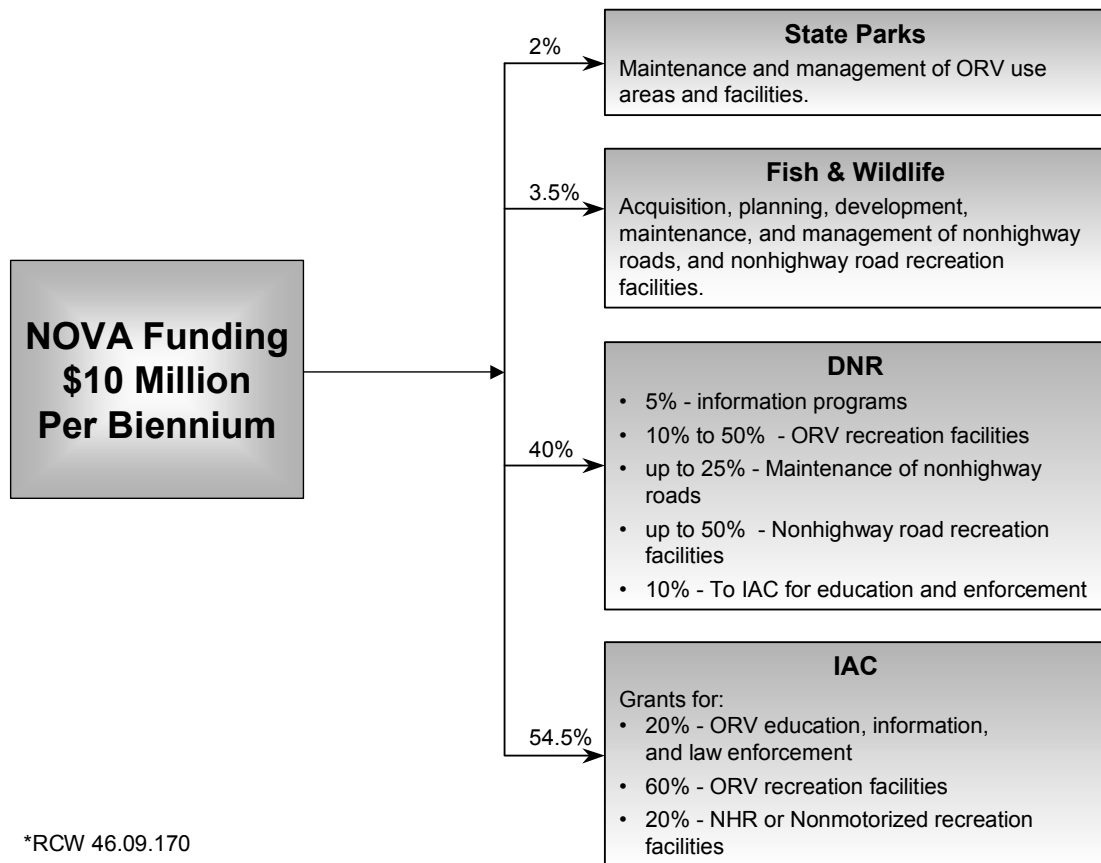
## Survey Results

- Questionnaires were mailed to 42,995 vehicle owners randomly sampled from DOL's database of 5.1 million street-licensed vehicles and registered off-road vehicles.
  - Questionnaires were mailed every two weeks over a one-year period to capture all seasons (December 16, 2001 – December 15, 2002)
  - 7,252 usable responses
- For vehicles using fuel on back roads or off-road, the main recreational activities reported were:
  - 26.6% of the respondents participated in hiking or backpacking
  - 12.1% in ORV use (ATV, motorcycle, 4X4)
  - 8.5% in cross-country skiing or snow shoeing
  - 6.7% in mountain biking
  - 3.8% in equestrian activities
  - 2.1% in snowmobiling
  - 42.0% in other activities (hunting, driving for pleasure, sightseeing, camping, fishing)

(results add up to more than 100% since some respondents engaged in more than one activity)

- Fuel use: 25.6 million gallons were consumed on nonhighway roads and off-roads during the one-year study period
  - 5.1 million gallons (20.0%) associated with ORV use (ATVs, motorcycles, 4x4s, snowmobiles)
  - 7.8 million gallons (30.4%) associated with hiking and backpacking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, and equestrian activities
  - 12.7 million gallons (49.6%) associated with other uses (camping, sightseeing, picnicking, hunting, fishing, berry picking, wildlife viewing, ...)

## Current Distribution of NOVA Revenues\*



## Conclusion

The current formulas allocating NOVA funds to the four agencies and to programs and activities within the agencies are based on information from a study conducted 30 years ago and are oriented at the traditional constituencies of ORV recreationists, hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians. The results of the 2002 NOVA Fuel Use Study demonstrate that more is needed than to make simple adjustments in allocation percentages. IAC staff will begin immediately to work with the six traditional recreation constituencies and, in addition, county sheriffs, land managers (including an ORV park representative), the three state agencies, and other recreational interests identified in the study to review NOVA program statutes and policies and consider a major revision in the NOVA programs, including statutory changes.