

BOB HAM: FRONT LINE ADVOCATE

AMA Motorcyclist Of The Year

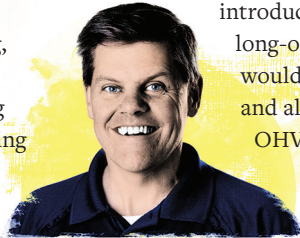
Eternal vigilance is the key to successful advocacy. As advocates for motorcycling, at times it seems like we spend more time defending what we have than promoting something new. There is always some group that is trying to curtail or prevent our two-wheeled enjoyment.

California motorcyclists have long suffered the ill effects of government over-reach, whether it's unjustifiable land closures or the imposition of onerous regulations. This is particularly true regarding off-road issues. It also is, arguably, more the case in the state of California than anywhere else. As the adage says: As goes California, so goes the rest of the country.

Since the creation of the state's Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Program in the 1970s, California off-roaders have regularly had to beat back attacks on this valuable state program. The California OHMVR program, which has been emulated by other states, is funded by gas taxes attributable to off-road sources, entrance fees at State Vehicular Recreation Areas and OHV registration fees. These funds are user fees intended to benefit those who pay them.

But funds generated by the program frequently have been diverted for other uses, usually to help bail out the state from overspending in other areas of government. A user fee that is diverted from its intended purpose for the benefit of those who pay the fee becomes a tax increase on that user.

Earlier this year, the OHMVR faced its most significant threat yet. By law, the program was slated to sunset in 2017. The initial reauthorization effort failed and a subsequent effort to renew



By Rob Dingman

the program for another five years—introduced at the behest of a group long-opposed to OHV recreation—would have gutted the program and allowed the diversion of the OHV user fees to non-OHV purposes.

Thanks to the coordinated efforts by a number of OHV interests, including the AMA, that proposal was reworked to permanently reauthorize the California OHMVR in a manner that will continue to be beneficial to California off roaders for years to come.

It should go without saying that reworking a proposal backed by OHV opponents into something that not only reauthorized the program, but made it a permanent part of the Department of Parks and Recreation, was a major undertaking. That effort was marshaled by a coalition of off-road enthusiast, competition and industry groups.

At the forefront of that coalition was a longtime motorcyclist, off-road racer and staunch advocate for responsible off-road recreation: Bob Ham. For his Herculean effort to protect and preserve the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Program, Bob Ham is the AMA Motorcyclist of the Year.

The AMA Motorcyclist of the Year recognizes the profound impact that an individual has had on motorcycling over the last year. Due to its national significance as an OHV program that has provided the roadmap for other states to follow in the creation of their own OHV programs, the loss of the California OHV program would have been devastating. For that reason, OHV enthusiasts owe Bob Ham and the coalition he worked with a big debt of gratitude for saving the California OHMVR.

I first met Bob Ham back in the 1990s,

while I was working for the Motorcycle Industry Council as a government relations specialist focusing on land use issues. Bob was always the go-to guy in California when it came to OHV concerns. And he has been involved in efforts to protect the California program since its inception. There can be little doubt that without his efforts, there would be no viable OHV program in the state of California today.

It must be incredibly gratifying for Bob to see this program permanently reauthorized, once and for all. That goes for everyone who enjoys responsible off-roading in California's nine State Vehicular Recreation Areas (see map on p. 34).

There's also a lesson here for those of us who do not live or recreate in the Golden State. The manner in which a devastating legislative proposal was turned into a win for the OHV community is truly impressive, and we can all take a page (or three) from Bob's experience, which he is happy to share with AMA members (see article on p. 32).

There are many equally dedicated OHV enthusiasts working in your state, for your benefit. Perhaps you are one of them. Your efforts are invaluable as we work to promote the motorcycle lifestyle and protect the future of motorcycling.

We are certainly fortunate to have had someone with Bob Ham's experience and adeptness in the legislative process working on behalf of off-road enthusiasts in California.

Congratulations to Bob Ham and to California off-road enthusiasts!

Rob Dingman is AMA president and CEO.

PS: If you are inspired by Bob's work, I encourage you to get involved with our AMA State Chapters and Volunteer Network. The AMA needs a pool of eager members willing to attend nearby public hearings or town hall meetings to share the AMA point of view on issues affecting motorcyclists' rights or the motorcycle lifestyle. Read how you can help on p. 28.