

driving, compliance with, for example, signage, environmental protection, and anti-littering requirements. Any operator of an OHV must be able to reach and operate all controls necessary to safely operate the OHV.

- 5) Requires anyone operating a recreational OHV (ORV), generally defined to have four wheels, a steering wheel, and seating capacity for more than one, alone to be at least 16 years of age; those younger must be directly supervised in the ORV by a parent or guardian.
- 6) Defines an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) as a three-wheel vehicle designed for operation off-road by no more than one passenger straddling a single seat and using handlebars for steering.
- 7) Requires anyone operating an ATV without supervision to be at least 18 years of age; those between 14-17 years must possess an appropriate safety certificate, be in the process of taking a safety course, or be under the supervision of an adult who possesses a safety certificate. Those under 14 years must be accompanied by and be under the direct supervision of a parent or guardian, and possess a certificate or be taking a safety course.
- 8) Establishes that a driver convicted of reckless driving can be imprisoned for up to 90 days or subject to a fine between \$50 and \$500, or both; reckless driving causing bodily injury is punishable by imprisonment up to six months or a fine between \$100 and \$1000, or both. Other fines or penalties apply to removal or altering of trail signs or markers.
- 9) Imposes fines and penalties for violation of state or federal regulations restricting access into a federal or state wilderness area.
- 10) Requires certain equipment on OHVs including lighting, brakes, mufflers, spark arrestors, and emissions control devices.

This bill:

- 1) On or after July 1, 2029, requires an operator of an OHV, with specified exemptions, to possess a California Off-Highway Vehicle Safety and Stewardship operator card or evidence of completion of a reciprocal program in order to access off-highway lands open and accessible to the public, as specified.

- 2) Defines “operator” to mean an individual 16 years or older in control of an OHV, an individual who rents an OHV, or a visitor to California who engages in OHV recreation.
- 3) On or after July 1, 2029, prohibits a minor 15 years of age or younger from operating an OHV on off-highway lands open and accessible to the public without the supervision of a parent or supervising adult in possession of an operator card or equivalent.
- 4) Defines “supervision” to mean maintaining visual contact and a physical presence at a distance no more than 300 feet that allows a supervising adult to safely give assistance and advice to a child 15 years or younger operating an OHV.
- 5) Requires the Division of Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHV Division), under DPR, by June 30, 2027, to convene stakeholder group over a nine-month period to develop the Course.
- 6) Requires the stakeholder group to include individuals who have historically made positive contributions to the state’s OHV program, including the Deputy Director of the OHV Division, Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol, an OHV Division representative with peace officer authority, a representative of the Department of Motor Vehicles, and no more than two representatives from organizations representing these interests: OHV recreation, hunting or angling, manufacturing, rental operators or retail dealers, national OHV groups with conservation programs, environmental or conservation that have historically engaged in OHV issues, federal agencies, county governments, and federal recognized tribal governments with lands where OHV recreation occurs.
- 7) Requires the stakeholder group, on or before March 1, 2028, to submit a “consensus” report to the Deputy Director with course content recommendations.
- 8) Specifies that, on or before January 1, 2029, the OHV Division shall develop and implement the course, which, at a minimum, must include topics like safety, safety gear, trail etiquette, and environmental protection, as provided.
- 9) Requires the OHV Division to evaluate similar OHV safety programs in other states to determine whether completion of those programs could be granted reciprocity in lieu of completion of the course.

- 10) Authorizes the OHV division to establish a course fee of \$25 with the option to increase the course fee as necessary to cover the reasonable costs of carrying out the program, as specified. Further requires funds to be deposited into the Off-Highway Vehicle Trust Fund and upon appropriation, the fees must be made available for the administration of the provisions specified in this bill.
- 11) Mandates the issuance of an electronic or physical California Off-Highway Vehicle Safety and Stewardship operator card, valid for five years and subject to renewal, for successful completion of the course. Requires an operator to present their card to law enforcement upon request.
- 12) Requires the OHV Division to develop procedures to renew an operator card, which may include a requirement to complete an updated course.
- 13) Specifies that failure to possess an operator card or present one to law enforcement constitutes an infraction punishable by a court order to successfully complete the Course and:
 - a) For the first violation, a fine no more than \$100.
 - b) For the second violation, a fine no more than \$250.
 - c) For the third and subsequent violation, a fine no more than \$500.
- 14) Prohibits a peace officer from stopping an OHV for the sole purpose of determining whether the vehicle is being operated in violation of the bill's requirements.
- 15) Requires, prior to the implementation of the Course, the OHV Division to compile documented rates of OHV accidents and injuries to establish a baseline from which to evaluate the efficacy of the Course in achieving its stated goals. After January 1, 2030, this information must be included in the triennial report on the status of OHV recreation submitted by the OHV Commission to the Legislature.

COMMENTS:

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author, "According to the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, California tragically leads the nation in reported deaths from 2019 to 2021 due to off-highway vehicle (OHV) related incidents, accounting for the highest percentage of fatalities nationwide. This alarming statistic underscores the urgent need for action to protect our families and

communities. In recent years, the OHV community has united at events like the annual Safety Summit, passionately advocating for stronger safety measures in our parks. One critical step is requiring OHV operators to demonstrate their understanding of current rules and regulations through a convenient, self-guided online certification course. Neighboring states have already seen positive results by implementing similar off-highway safety programs. Now is the time for California to follow suit and set a new safety standard. I am honored to champion this community-driven call for legislative change and committed to ensuring safer experiences for everyone who enjoys our OHV parks.”

- 2) *What is an OHV?* OHVs are vehicles designed to be operated off-highway and can generally be categorized into three groups: ATVs, recreational off-road vehicles (ROVs), or utility terrain vehicles (UTVs). ATVs have three or more tires, a straddle seat for the operator, and handlebars for steering control. ROVs and UTVs have four or more tires, non-straddle or “side-by-side” seating, and automotive-type controls for steering, throttle, and braking (i.e., a steering wheel and pedals). While OHVs are not required to be registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) in the same fashion as standard on-road vehicles, OHVs are required to be registered with DMV and display a DMV-issued ID plate or sticker when operating on public land with registration renewal every two years.
- 3) *OHV operator safety.* Data compiled by the OHV Division for the state’s nine OHV State Vehicular Recreation Areas (SVRA) in 2023 and 2024 show sizable numbers of injuries, DUI arrests, citations and even fatalities. For example, in 2023, there were 58 DUI arrests, 335 OHV citations, 443 injuries (214 of these “major”) and six fatalities. In 2024, there were 44 DUI arrests, 276 OHV citations, 185 injuries and four fatalities. This data is not disaggregated by OHV type or age, for example, nor does it include local or federal incident data. Anecdotally and logically, the most inexperienced operators are typically the ones involved with accidents and like on-road vehicle accidents, speed is a major factor. Additionally, in a May 2025 report titled, “2024 Report of Deaths and Injuries Involving Off-Highway Vehicles with More Than Two Wheels,” by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the report echoes many of the safety challenges / statistics reported out by the state’s OHV Division.

The impact of the significant state resources invested in local and federal enforcement, education and safety partnerships on safety, including over \$7 million in grant funding to local enforcement agencies and nearly \$16 million to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service

from fiscal year 2021-22 to 2024-25 respectively is unclear. From 2016-2021, nearly \$28 million in grants were awarded to local, federal and NGO entities.

- 4) *OHV Operator Card*. This bill would require OHV operators, including on-road vehicles driven off-highway, 16 years old and above, on or after January 1, 2029, to possess a California Off-Highway Vehicle Safety and Stewardship operator card or evidence of completion of a reciprocal course. Modeled after a vessel operator card program created by SB 941 (Monning, Chapter 433, Statutes of 2014), covering basic vessel operations, rules of navigation and boating safety and issued by the Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW), all boaters, regardless of age, must possess a boater card as of January 1, 2025. As of November 2025, over 430,000 California boaters possess a boater card (out of approximately 4 million recreational boaters or roughly 10% of all boaters). Boating accidents appear to be falling since 2021, yet there appears to be insufficient data to draw definitive conclusions about the efficacy of the California Boater Card program, particularly given the low rate of compliance thus far.
- 5) *Technical committee amendments*. Due to committee hearing scheduling constraints, technical amendments will be taken in this committee that were agree upon in the previous policy committee. The amendments are technical / clarification in nature and simply better align each agency with the provisions specified in this bill.
- 6) *Double referral*. This bill was double referred to the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee, where it passed out on a vote of 6-1 at their June 23, 2026, hearing.

RELATED/PREVIOUS LEGISLATION:

SB 941 (Monning, Chapter 433, Statutes of 2014) – Required DBW, by January 1, 2018, to develop vessel operator cards and issue a vessel operator card to a person who has passed a vessel operator examination.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

POSITIONS: (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, June 24, 2026.)

SUPPORT:

California Association of Recreation & Park Districts
California Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians
California Medical Association (CMA)
California Outdoor Recreation Foundation
Off-highway Vehicles/district 36
San Diego Off Road Coalition (SDORC)
Sierra Access Coalition

OPPOSITION:

Sfv Alliance (unless amended)

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