
CONSENT

Bill No: AB 1756
Author: Jeff Gonzalez (R)
Amended: 3/9/26 in Assembly
Vote: 21

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE: 13-0, 6/23/26
AYES: Cortese, Strickland, Archuleta, Arreguín, Blakespear, Dahle, Gonzalez, Grayson, Menjivar, Richardson, Seyarto, Valladares, Wiener

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/1/26
AYES: Becker, Seyarto, Allen, Cabaldon, Grove, Laird, Stern

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 73-0, 5/21/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Off-highway vehicle recreation: City of Needles

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill extends the sunset of an existing off-highway motor vehicle (OHV) “combined use” highway pilot project in the City of Needles by five years, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to administer and manage the state park system, including state vehicular recreation areas, which provide OHV recreational opportunities.
- 2) Defines an OHV to be a motorcycle, snowmobile, sand/dune buggy, all-terrain vehicle, jeep, or other vehicles as specified.

- 3) Defines highway as “a way or place of whatever nature, publicly maintained and open to the use of the public for purposes of vehicular travel. Highway includes street.”
- 4) Establishes OHV rules and regulations of the “off-road” including those governing registration, license, speed, safety, age, unauthorized access, reckless 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) Authorizes a local entity, DPR or a federal agency to designate a highway or a portion of a highway of three miles or less for “combined use” by a registered OHV for purposes of connecting, for example, OHV trail segments or an OHV recreational area to a service or lodging facility if the highway can also safely accommodate regular vehicle traffic.
- 6) Prior to the designation of a “combined use” highway, requires a local entity, the Director of Parks and Recreational or a federal agency to first notify the Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and prohibits a designation in which CHP determines would constitute a potential safety hazard.
- 7) Authorizes the above entities to promulgate necessary rules and regulations and install appropriate signage, as approved by the Department of Transportation (Caltrans). A “combined use” designation is only effective upon installation of such signage.
- 8) Permits a registered OHV with an appropriate license plate to be operated on a local or state two-lane highway but only to cross the highway; an OHV may cross a highway with more than two lanes but only a place designated by Caltrans or a local authority.
- 9) Prohibits an OHV from being operated on a combined-use highway under the following circumstances:
 - a) During the hours of darkness;
 - b) On a highway that does not have an operational stoplight;
 - c) Without rubber tires; and,

- d) Without a valid driver's license of the appropriate class and insurance.
- 10) Until January 1, 2028, authorizes the City of Needles to create a pilot project to designate "combined-use" highways on city roads, with the concurrence of CHP, for a total of no more than 10 miles per highway segment for purposes of linking existing OHV trails, trailheads, and services to Bureau of Land Management or United States Forest Service lands. Provides that the pilot is intended to provide a unified system of trails for OHVs, preserve traffic safety, improve natural resource protection, reduce off-highway vehicle trespass on private land, and minimize impacts on city residents.
- 11) Requires the City of Needles to submit two reports to the Legislature by January 1, 2027:
- a) The first report, to be prepared in consultation with CHP, Caltrans, and DPR, requires an evaluation of the safety and effectiveness of the pilot, including its impact on traffic flows, safety, and OHV usage on existing trails; and,
 - b) The second report, to be prepared in consultation with Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District, requires an evaluation of any impacts on cultural resources and archaeological sites, streambed modifications and water quality impacts, impacts on wildlife and aquatic habitat, native plants, traffic, particulate pollution, and noise.
- 12) Authorizes DPR to conduct, until January 1, 2030, an OHV "combined-used" pilot project at Red Rock Canyon State Park for no more than 10 miles per highway segment subject to the same or similar conditions as the City of Needles pilot project.

This bill:

- 1) Extends by five years to January 1, 2033, an OHV "combined use" highway pilot project in the City of Needles for purposes of linking existing OHV trails on federal lands and connecting OHV recreational areas with service and lodging facilities in order to create a unified system of OHV trails, preserve traffic safety, improve natural resource protection, reduce off-highway vehicle trespass on private land, and minimize impacts on city residents.

- 2) Extends by five years to January 1, 2032, two reports due to the Legislature on the safety and effectiveness of the pilot and any impacts to natural or cultural resources.
- 3) Provides that any “combined use” highways appropriately designated by the City under the pilot first created by AB 2152 (Smith, Chapter 185, Statutes of 2022) remain valid and effective for the extended duration of the pilot pursuant to this bill.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author, "AB 1756 is necessary to extend the City of Needles' Off-Highway Motor Vehicle (OHV) Pilot Program to January 1, 2033, to allow meaningful evaluation of its safety, environmental, and economic outcomes. The Legislature has recognized Needles as a remote, rural, and disadvantaged community of approximately 5,200 residents, geographically isolated by over 140 miles of desert and surrounded by heavily used federal recreation lands. Tourism is a primary economic driver, and the pilot was designed to create a unified, regulated system linking federal trails to lodging, fuel, and local businesses, supporting the local economy while reducing trespass and unmanaged access.

“Although authorized in 2022 under Vehicle Code §38026.2, the majority of the pilot period was consumed by engineering analysis, public outreach, and CHP safety concurrence. With the 9.20-mile Master Plan adopted in 2025, the program is only now entering implementation. This bill does not expand authority—it provides sufficient time to measure rural economic impact and safety performance.”

- 2) *Extension of the City of Needles pilot.* The City of Needles is located in San Bernardino County and the Mojave Desert region of Southern California. It is mostly surrounded by federal lands, much of which is used for outdoor recreation, including OHV recreation, including those under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Following precedent set by similar OHV pilots the Legislature approved for Inyo County and Red Rock Canyon State Park, the Legislature authorized the City of Needles to create its five-year pilot in 2022. For the next three years, the City undertook extensive planning and compliance activities, including

engineering and traffic safety analysis, coordinated with federal and state entities, and held public workshops.

The City Council adopted its “OHV Master Plan”, codifying the pilot, on September 9, 2025, with the concurrence of CHP, and a related signage plan on January 13, 2026. The Master Plan consists of 12 “combined-use” roadways, most of which are less than one mile, originating from locations within City limits and connecting to BLM lands. It is currently procuring signage; after installation and a public workshop, it anticipates announcing the official opening of the “combined-use” highways later in 2026.

Assuming this timeframe and without the extension provided by this bill, the public will have less than two years to access “combined-use” highways. Accordingly, it is reasonable to extend the current sunset through 2033 not only to allow for public use, but so the City can collect sufficient data to fulfill the statutory requirement of evaluating the pilot’s safety, environmental outcomes, enforcement impacts, and rural economic benefits.

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

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/3/26)

City of Needles
San Bernardino County
San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department
Sci California Coalition

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/3/26)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 73-0, 5/21/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Arambula, Chen, Garcia, Lackey, Lee, Ramos, Celeste
Rodriguez

Prepared by: Manny Leon / TRANS. / (916) 651-4121
8/5/26 14:57:40

**** **END** ****