



Frequently Asked Questions: Off Road Vehicle Use

The National Park Service (NPS) has developed an off-road vehicle (ORV) management plan and special regulation to preserve the unique plants and wildlife of this dynamic barrier island ecosystem while permitting the use of vehicles on designated ORV routes. The ORV management plan and special regulation go into effect on February 15, 2012. This FAQ will help you understand changes you need to know and how to get your ORV permit.

1. What is an Off-Road Vehicle (ORV)?

An ORV is any motor vehicle used off of paved park roads; such vehicles must comply with the vehicle and equipment requirements established by the park's ORV management plan and special regulation, and use designated ORV routes. Any vehicle that does not comply is not authorized for use off of park roads. ATV's, UTV's, and motorcycles are not allowed on park beaches.

2. Do I need a permit to use a vehicle off road at the seashore?

Yes. An ORV permit is required.

3. What are the ORV permit options?

There are two types of permits: 7-day/\$50 permits (valid from the date issued) and annual/\$120 permits (valid for the calendar year).

4. Where do I get my ORV permit?

Starting Feb 15, 2012, you can get your permit at any of NPS ORV permit offices located at:

- Bodie Island at the north end of the Coquina Beach parking lot (8101 NC 12 Highway, Nags Head, NC);

- Hatteras Island by the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse Visitor Center (46368 Lighthouse Road, Buxton, NC); and
- Ocracoke Island by the NPS visitor center (40 Irvin Garrish Highway, Ocracoke, NC).

Permit offices are open year-round, 7 days a week, 8 am–4:30 pm (closed Christmas Day). Hours will be extended on weekends and holidays during the summer season.

5. How do I get an ORV permit?

- 1) Go to one of the permit offices listed above--you must bring your driver's license and vehicle registration with you;
- 2) Fill in the permit form and view a 7-minute educational video;
- 3) Sign the permit to acknowledge that you understand and agree to abide by the ORV use rules at the park; and
- 4) Pay the permit fee.

Once this is done, you will be given a permit and a "proof-of-permit". The proof-of-permit is a color-coded windshield sticker (for annual permits) or a hang tag for your rear-view mirror (for 7-day permits). The proof-of-permit must be displayed on your vehicle during off-road driving.

6. Are there any specific permit requirements for my vehicle?

Yes. To get an ORV permit your vehicle must:

- Be registered, licensed, and insured for highway use and comply with inspection requirements for the state, country, or province where the vehicle is registered;
- Have no more than two axles and have tires that are listed or approved

by the U.S. Department of Transportation as described at: www.safercar.gov/Vehicle+Shoppers/Tires/Tires+Rating/Passenger+Vehicles; and

- Have a low-pressure tire gauge, shovel, jack, and jack support board.

Other equipment that is recommended, but not required, is a full-sized spare tire, first-aid kit, fire extinguisher, trash bag or container, flashlight (if night driving), and tow strap.

7. Is there a limit to the number of ORV permits available?

No. There is no limit to the number of permits available.

8. Where can I get a map of the designated ORV routes?

You can pick up an ORV route map when you get your permit. You can also get this map from the park website (www.nps.gov/caha), any park visitor center, or any Outer Banks Visitors Bureau welcome centers.

9. Does the ORV permit guarantee that all ORV routes will be open for me to use?

No. There are several reasons that parts of ORV routes may be closed to ORV use:

- There are seasonal closures along certain routes from Apr. 1–Oct. 31. These are shown on the ORV route map;
- Routes may be temporarily closed if the carrying capacity is reached;
- Routes may be temporarily closed if there is a specific need for resource protection; and
- Routes may be temporarily closed for safety reasons.

All closures are clearly signed.

10. How does the carrying capacity work?

The maximum number of vehicles allowed on any ORV route at one time is, basically, the length of the route that is open divided by 20 feet (6 meters). This, in essence, allows vehicles to park side-by-side, one row deep, as long as there is still room on the beach for two-way ORV traffic to pass behind parked vehicles safely. The carrying capacity prevents overcrowding and best provides for safety and visitor experience. In recent years, such closures have only occurred on the Bodie Island spit for several hours, once or twice a year--and there were still many miles of beach open for ORV use elsewhere on the seashore.

11. Several of my family members have ORVs. Do we need to get a permit for each vehicle?

Yes. You must get a permit for each vehicle.

12. Can family members or friends use my vehicle on the beach if I have an ORV permit for it?

Yes. The person driving the ORV permit-vehicle must have a valid state motor vehicle driver's license. The ORV permit must be in the vehicle and the proof-of-permit properly displayed. You should carefully review the regulations printed on the ORV permit with any person you let operate the vehicle. Your ORV permit can be revoked if they violate these regulations.

13. I plan to rent or lease an ORV during my vacation. How does the permit work with that?

In general, the person renting or leasing the vehicle should be the one applying for the ORV permit. Businesses that rent vehicles specifically for beach driving may obtain annual ORV permits for their fleet of rental vehicles and allow renters to use the permitted vehicles. The operator of the vehicle, whoever that may be, must obey the ORV regulations. The business-owned permit can be revoked if a customer violates the regulations.

14. Can I drive my two-wheel-drive vehicle on ORV routes?

Yes. Four-wheel-drive vehicles are recommended however, two-wheel-drive vehicles are allowed if, in your judgment, the vehicle is capable of off-road use in deep, soft sand.

15. What about tire pressure? What if my vehicle gets stuck on the beach?

When driving on ORV routes, tire pressure must be lowered in order to keep adequate traction within the posted speed limit. Tire pressure of 20 psi is recommended for most vehicles. The softer the sand, the lower the pressure needed. Re-inflate tires to normal pressure as soon as possible after you return to paved roads. If you get stuck and cannot get your vehicle out, your best bet is to call a commercial towing service. NPS rangers are not allowed to pull or tow your vehicle.

16. Can I tow a boat or utility trailer with my vehicle on ORV routes?

Yes. Towed boat and utility trailers with one or two axles are allowed. Trailers with more than two axles are prohibited.

17. Can I tow a travel or camping trailer (a trailer with sleeping and/or restroom facilities) on ORV routes?

No. Travel or camping trailers are prohibited on ORV routes. If you camp in the park, you must use one of the park's designated campgrounds.

18. What is the speed limit on ORV routes?

The speed limit is 15 mph unless otherwise posted.

19. What are right-of-way rules I need to know?

Pedestrians always have the right-of-way. Vehicles must yield to pedestrians and move to the landward side of the beach when approaching or passing a pedestrian. When traveling within 100 feet of pedestrians, ORVs must slow to 5 mph.

20. Can I drive on ORV routes at night?

Yes, but there are some seasonal restrictions:

- Nov 16-Apr 30, ORV routes are open to night driving 24 hrs a day;
- May 1-Sept 14, ORV routes on ocean beaches are closed to ORVs from 9 pm to 7 am to protect nesting sea turtles; and
- Sept 15-Nov 15, ORV routes will reopen when there are no turtle nests remaining on that route or portion of route. Maps showing ORV routes that have reopened to night driving will be available at ORV permit offices, the NPS Outer Banks Group Headquarters Office (1401 National Park Road, Manteo, NC), and on the park website.

21. Can I leave my ORV parked on the beach if I don't drive it between 9 pm and 7 am during the seasons that night-driving restrictions are in effect?

No. During the restricted seasons, all vehicles are prohibited on ocean beaches.

22. Is a separate permit required for night driving?

No. You only need your ORV permit.

23. Why I do sometimes see ORVs in areas closed to ORVs?

In addition to NPS vehicles being used by NPS employees to conduct approved management activities and emergency response vehicles, the NPS allows ORV use in certain areas closed to ORVs only for very specific purposes, this includes:

- Participants in regularly scheduled fishing tournaments if such tournament use was allowed in that area for that tournament before January 1, 2009.
- The use of special-permitted ORVs to transport mobility-impaired individuals to a predetermined location in a beach area in front of a village that is not otherwise open to ORV use. Contact 252-473-2111, ext. 121, for more information about this mobility-impaired transport permit.

- Commercial fishermen with a NPS commercial fishing permit when actively commercial fishing--as long as a beach is not a resource closure or a lifeguarded beach. Also, commercial fishermen can drive on the beach at 5 am on days when night driving restrictions are in effect for the general public if they are actively engaged in authorized commercial fishing activity and able to present a fish-house receipt from the previous 30 days.

24. Can I have a fire on the beach?

Yes, but a free Beach Fire Permit is required. Beach fires are allowed from May 1-Nov 15 only on the ocean beaches in front of Coquina Beach; the villages of Rodanthe, Waves, Salvo, Avon, Buxton, Frisco, and Hatteras; and the Ocracoke Day Use Area. Fires are prohibited from 10 pm to 6 am year-round. You can get a Beach Fire Permit at ORV permit offices, park campgrounds, and visitor centers.

25. Are pets allowed on the beach?

Yes, but must be on a 6-foot leash at all times. Pets are prohibited within any resource protection closure or on the beach adjacent to pre-nesting closures.

For more information, call 252-473-2111 or visit the park website at: <http://www.nps.gov/caha>.

We hope you have a safe and enjoyable visit.