

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1537

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Transportation

**Title:** An act relating to expanding access to funding from the multiuse roadway safety account for eligible cities and for the Washington state departments of natural resources and fish and wildlife for maintenance and guidance of motorized recreation on green dot roads.

**Brief Description:** Expanding access to funding from the multiuse roadway safety account for eligible cities and for the Washington state departments of natural resources and fish and wildlife for maintenance and guidance of motorized recreation on green dot roads.

**Sponsors:** Representative Barkis.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Transportation: 1/29/25, 2/6/25 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Expands the use of the Multiuse Roadway Safety Account (MRSA) to allow for the Washington State Department of Transportation to make interagency transfers to the Washington State Departments of Natural Resources and of Fish and Wildlife to help preserve roads managed by those agencies upon which wheeled all-terrain vehicles (WATVs) are authorized to travel, as well as for WATV-related signage and educational materials.
- Allows cities that have adopted ordinances allowing the travel of WATVs within their jurisdictions to be eligible to apply for MRSA funding.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION**

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 27 members: Representatives Fey, Chair;

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Bernbaum, Vice Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Reed, Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Low, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Mendoza, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Schmidt, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bronoske, Dent, Duerr, Entenman, Griffey, Hunt, Klicker, Ley, Nance, Orcutt, Paul, Ramel, Richards, Stuebe, Taylor, Timmons, Volz, Wylie and Zahn.

**Staff:** Mark Matteson (786-7145).

**Background:**

A wheeled all-terrain vehicle (WATV) is a specific category of off-road vehicle (ORV) that is regulated separately from other ORVs under some aspects of a state law first enacted in 2013 that allows the vehicle to be used for on-road use in addition to off-road use. Wheeled all-terrain vehicles have four wheels and must meet certain specifications to be regulated under state law.

When a WATV is registered for on-road use, the owner must pay a \$12 fee, and the proceeds are deposited into an account called the Multiuse Roadway Safety Account (Account). Moneys in the Account must be appropriated by the Legislature prior to expenditure. Expenditures may be used only for grants administered by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) for the following purposes: to counties to perform safety engineering analyses of mixed-vehicle use on public roads; to local governments to provide funding to erect signage related to the presence of WATVs; and to the Washington State Patrol or local law enforcement to defray the costs of enforcement of WATV regulations and of investigation of accidents involving WATVs. The WSDOT must prioritize grant awards: first, for the purpose of marking highway crossings warning motorists of potential WATV crossings, when a WATV recreation facility is on the opposite side of the highway from an ORV recreation facility parking lot; and second, for the purpose of erecting signage to notify motorists of an upcoming intersection at which WATVs may cross. Since fiscal year 2016, the WSDOT has awarded \$68,000 in grants to various counties for signage purposes.

Together with private landowners, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) cooperatively manage many roads within Yakima and Kittitas Counties under a Green Dot system. This system provides access for camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, and WATV travel, while protecting sensitive habitat from damage caused by motorized vehicles. Under the system, roads open to motor vehicle travel are marked with a round green reflector on a white route marker. Any roads not designated as a Green Dot or public access road are off-limits to motor vehicles.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The allowable uses of the Account are expanded. The WSDOT may make interagency

transfers from the Account to the DNR and WDFW to help preserve roads managed by those agencies upon which WATVs are authorized to travel, as well as for the purposes of WATV-related signage and educational and mapping materials. Cities or towns that have approved the operation of WATVs on roadways within their jurisdictions are also eligible to apply to the WSDOT for Account grants for WATV purposes.

Before an interagency transfer to either the DNR or the WDFW, the county or counties in which the proposed DNR or WDFW project would take place must submit a letter of support both to the implementing department and to the WSDOT.

The WSDOT must limit any interagency transfers to the DNR or the WDFW to the second year of the fiscal biennium. The WSDOT must also manage the interagency transfers such that a minimum of \$80,000 is available in the Account during the fiscal biennium for grants to eligible local governments.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 2025.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) This bill addresses an account that is funded by WATV users and is intended to be used in providing grants to the counties. Unfortunately, it has been a little bit challenging to get those funds out to help in the preservation, expansion, and maintenance of the WATV facilities. And so this idea came about a year ago, in conversations between the stakeholders and the DNR and the WDFW. The idea is that these agencies, which co-manage Green Dot roads that are used in part by WATV users, could use the funding to help preserve and maintain these roads.

Since 2013, 26 of the 39 counties and over 85 cities now have WATV ordinances and allow their use within their jurisdictions. The DOL a couple years back reported that there were over 64,000 WATV registrations statewide; this has continued to increase since. There is a high degree of interest to travel upon DNR and WDFW legacy roads, like the Green Dot ones found in Eastern Washington. This bill would allow these agencies access to these funds in the second half of the biennium to help maintain and mitigate impacts to these roads. That will, in turn, stimulate expenditures and other related tourism activities for rural communities.

The bill before you expands eligible recipients of the Multiuse Roadway Safety Account to certain cities and to the DNR and the WDFW. At the request of the Washington All Terrain Vehicles Association and the bill sponsor, the DNR worked with the WDFW and the

WSDOT over the interim to provide technical support in drafting this legislation. The bill allows the DNR and the WDFW to receive transfers from the WSDOT to conduct maintenance and guidance work on Green Dot roads. The Green Dot road system is a network of roads co-managed by the DNR and the WDFW, primarily in Yakima and Kittitas Counties, that provide over 800 miles of vital connectivity for on- and off-road recreational vehicles across a patchwork of ownerships. Since its inception in the 1980s, these roads have been heavily used by the WATV community but are woefully underfunded. Due to the lack of available maintenance funding, some Green Dot roads have fallen into disrepair to the point of being impassable to some vehicles, leading to a loss of public access, degraded user experience, and increased safety concerns. This bill could unlock key funding for the DNR and the WDFW to collaboratively prioritize maintenance projects.

The bill is also carefully constructed with respect to the counties and local jurisdictions. Before receiving funds from the WSDOT, the DNR or the WDFW must get a letter of support from the county where the projects will take place. Additionally, transfers to the DNR and the WDFW are only permitted in the second year of the biennium, and the WSDOT cannot draw the account down below \$80,000.

Off-road vehicle use is popular in Kittitas County, both to people who live there and to people who come visit Kittitas County for outdoor recreation purposes for tourism, hunting, or just enjoying the off-road vehicles themselves. This bill helps foster the partnership between Kittitas County, the DNR, and the WDFW to continue to improve these roads that are so important to the people that come to use them.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Andrew Barkis, prime sponsor; Brody Coval, Department of Natural Resources; Bill Clarke, Kittitas County Board of Commissioners; Cynthia Wilkerson, WDFW; and Ted Jackson, WA ATV.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.