## Cattle Guards for Off-Highway Vehicle Trails



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## Introduction



0ne of the greatest sources of contention between recreationists and livestock permittees as trail use increases is gates. Gates are left open, allowing livestock to roam in places where they shouldn't. While the cows don't mind, ranchers, recreationists, and agency managers certainly do.

With dirt bike, all-terrain vehicle (ATV), and mountain bike traffic on the rise, trail managers have identified the need to evaluate small cattle guards that offer an alternative to gates.

Kent Traveller, from the Dixie National Forest, asked the Missoula Technology
and Development Center (MTDC) to evaluate and document designs for trail cattle guards that work. The cattle guards would be suitable for trails used by ATV's, motorcycles, mountain bikes, and hikers. They would need to be lightweight and easy to install, particularly when compared with the massive cattle guards used on roads.

MTDC found four trail cattle guard designs that were doing the job on several National Forests. Three are steel, or a combination of steel and wood. Another is made entirely of wood. We decided to show you all four. Differences in design, fabrication,
and installation could make any one of the four the top choice for your installation.

These designs were developed on the Deschutes, Caribou, Deerlodge, and Challis National Forests. We heard about others, but were unable to obtain documentation in time to include them. We modified the designs slightly in some instances to make them stronger or easier to fabricate and so they would be wide enough to accommodate the larger ATV's now being sold.

## Selection and Installation Considerations

Think about links between safety and trail-user psychology when choosing a design. Traveling fast is part of the thrill for many off-highway vehicle (OHV) users. But in the back of their minds most users also want to travel safely. Most users will slow down if they perceive danger or a hazard.

This is where your selection of cattle guards and their placement can affect the behavior of trail users. The Forest Service does not want to encourage reckless behavior.

Keeping the cattle guard narrow is probably the best way to convince users not to speed. If they think it will be a challenge to get across the cattle guard without mashing their fingers or scraping their machines, they will usually slow down. For ATV users especially, a cattle guard only slightly wider than their machine means they will voluntarily slow down to avoid hitting the sides. A narrow cattle guard blocks vehicles wider than those allowed on the trail.

So how wide is wide enough? This is a tricky question, because ATV's seem to be getting wider each year. In some cases the width of a large ATV differs little from a small four-wheel-drive vehicle (Figure 1). The width of the cattle guards described in this report range from 4 feet ( 1.2 m ) to 5 feet ( 1.5 m ). Cattle guard widths of 52 to 60 inches ( 1.3 to 1.5 m ) will allow most new ATV's to cross-just barely. Build them wider and you risk indiscriminate use by four-wheel-drive vehicles, which may not be allowed in your management plans. They are also too heavy to be supported by the cattle guards. Four-wheel drives will damage cattle guards, and their owners may claim damages if their vehicles are harmed (Figure 2).

Angling the wings of the cattle guard from top to bottom allows the top to be wider. This is often desirable to give riders, especially on motorbikes, a little extra margin for error to avoid catching


Figure 1-ATV's are becoming larger and more powerful. This Polaris Sportsman 500 is able to pull this trail/road grader on the Francis Marion National Forest, South Carolina.
their handlebars on the fenceposts.
Where your cattle guard will have little psychological effect on speed (in wideopen country, for instance), consider using the flat Deschutes Cattle Guard
instead of elevated designs to avoid sudden loss of control caused by a change in elevation.

Psycowlogy comes next. Will you be able to fool the cows into thinking your


Figure 2—For safety, you will absolutely want a straight approach on either side of the cattle guard. Modify the fence or the trail, if necessary, to ensure the approach is straight. Curves in the trail leading to the approach can help reduce speed. Note the gate to the right of the cattle guard for horse riders and livestock.
trail cattle guard is an impenetrable barrier to the greener grass and freedom on the other side? Probably.


The four cattle guards featured here actually work. Even when bunched up, cattle avoided these cattle guards. A trail cattle guard that meets these specifications should work:

- Length from 5.6 feet ( 1.7 m ) for the Deerlodge Trail Cattle Guard to 13 feet ( 4 m ) for the Caribou Trail Cattle Guard
- Suitable wings or side barriers (Figure 3)
- Spacing of about 4 inches ( 100 mm ) between the tread rails.

If the cattle guard is too short, lacks side guards or wings, or has incorrect spacing between the tread rails, cattle may be tempted to try to jump it or walk through it. We heard of one instance of a cow that had to be destroyed after it got its leg caught in another type of trail cattle guard.

In many cases, a wire fence gate is needed near the trail cattle guard for horse riders and to allow cattle to be moved between pastures.

A few practical considerations in the design are:

Steel or wood-Steel offers long life and strength. Wood is easy to work with and might be preferred for esthetic reasons. Our examples include the


Figure 3-The side supports (or wings), extending from the Deerlodge Trail Cattle Guard to the fencepost, are essential in persuading cattle not to jump the cattle guard. Butting the posts up to the cattle guard helps keep vehicle speed down, but at the risk of catching handlebars.
all-wood Challis design, the all-steel Caribou design, and two steel designs (Deerlodge and Deschutes) that have steel, but have wood sills or bases.

Transportation-The Deschutes and Challis designs can be assembled onsite or in the shop. The Caribou and Deerlodge Cattle Guards are fabricated in the shop. All designs can be hauled to the trail site in pickup trucks or on trailers pulled by ATV's, but there are substantial size and weight differences.

Installation-Cattle Guards that lie flat on the ground (Deschutes) require excavation and periodic cleaning. Elevated designs like the Deerlodge and Caribou can be placed without excavation (except for support sills for the Deerlodge design). The all-wood

Challis Trail Cattle Guard also needs periodic cleaning. Volunteers or forceaccount crews can install any of these cattle guards without heavy equipment.

Cost-Cost is an important factor. We have not verified costs down to the dollar, because they vary considerably due to labor for installation, materials (new or used), and the fabrication rates charged by local shops. None of the four designs is especially complicated to construct or install. Materials for the Deschutes Trail Cattle guard cost about $\$ 550$. The Deerlodge Cattle Guard cost $\$ 235$ the last time a shop fabricated some (sill timbers would also be needed). Materials for the Caribou design run about $\$ 150$ with new materials-less if it is made with used steel fenceposts. We do not have
cost information for the Challis design, but using treated lumber is worth the expense.

## Deschutes Trail Cattle Guard

After putting a lot of thought into a design, Dick Dufourd began installing these cattle guards on the East Fort Rock OHV trail system, Deschutes National Forest, in 1986. Since then, many more have been installed at BLM and Forest Service sites in central Oregon and throughout the Pacific Northwest. Both the Forest Service and BLM believe that the cattle guards have performed beyond expectations, at reasonable cost, and with minimal maintenance.

The Deschutes Trail Cattle Guard looks and works like a traditional road cattle guard. It provides a flat running surface (Figure 4). The design is a combination of a treated timber base and a steel deck made with an angle-iron frame and tread rails of square tubing. It is 5 feet ( 1.5 m ) wide and 8 feet ( 2.4 m ) long. The base is a wooden box constructed of 2- by 12-inch (50- by 205mm ) treated lumber. Lag screws attach the deck to the base. The wings are made of treated 2 by 4's.

Complete plans for the Deschutes Trail Cattle Guard are in Appendix A. All the materials for two cattle guards weigh about 600 pounds ( $270 \mathrm{~kg} \mathrm{)} \mathrm{and} \mathrm{can}$ easily fit into the bed of a pickup truck. Although the cattle guard is designed to be assembled onsite, if the deck can be transported to the site in one piece, all of the tread rails could be welded to the angle iron frame except for the last three on each end, which would be bolted. Welding reduces fabrication time, and the bolted tread rails provide cleanouts.


Figure 4-The Deschutes Trail Cattle Guard looks and performs like a downsized version of a traditional road cattle guard.

Maintenance is infrequent and easy. You simply unbolt some of the rails and scoop out dirt that has accumulated beneath the cattle guard. The approaches tend to get beat out with heavy use, especially in soft soils. These need to be raked smooth. In some situations, it may be desirable to harden the approaches with a soil stabilizer, geoweb, or some other trailhardening technique to keep the soil in place.

## Caribou Trail Cattle Guard

The Caribou Trail Cattle Guard was designed by Carl Stoddard, Mark Booth, and John Newcom from the Montpelier Ranger District, Caribou National Forest, Idaho. This all-steel cattle guard features economical recycled steel fenceposts and is fabricated in the District shop (Figure 5). It
has been used since 1995. Cattle were bunched and held against this trail cattle guard, and were also crowded through gates right next to them, but there wasn't a single attempt to breech the ramp.

Installed, the cattle guards are 13 feet ( 4 m ) long. They are constructed in two pieces and bolted together onsite. They can be carried in a pickup truck or on an ATV trailer.

Perhaps the major cost advantage for this design is the fact that installation takes less than 1 hour and can be accomplished easily by two people. There is no need to dig a pit or set brace posts. You simply cut any wire in the fence that is higher than 22 inches ( 560 mm ) above the ground, set the two halves of the cattle guard in place on either side of the fence, bolt them together, and tie the fence back into the wings of the cattle guard. The ground need only be relatively flat and not too boggy.


Figure 5-Carl Stoddard poses with the Caribou Trail Cattle Guard he fabricated in Montpelier, Idaho. Recycled steel fenceposts work fine as tread rails. MTDC modified the design shown here slightly to strengthen and widen the decking. The plans in Appendix B show the changes.

## Deerlodge Trail Cattle Guard

Eric Tolf, from the Jefferson Ranger District, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Montana, and the late Darrow Hippert, McGrew Machine and Fabricating in Whitehall, Montana, designed the Deerlodge Trail Cattle Guard (Figure 7). It is an elevated design and is shorter than the Caribou or Deschutes Trail Cattle Guards.

The original design called for 2- by 1 inch ( $50-$ by $25-\mathrm{mm}$ ) steel channel for the tread rails. The plans included in Appendix C show an optional design using 2 - by 2 -inch ( $50-$ by $50-\mathrm{mm}$ ) steel angle instead, which should cost less.

Steel angle iron, 2 by 2 inches ( 50 by 50 mm ), could be substituted for the steel fenceposts used here as tread rails. They would be welded at both ends to the box-tubing "stringers" with the point of the angle facing up.

This cattle guard is built with galvanized chain link fence material underneath the tread rails and over the X-shaped flat-iron support bars (Figure 6). The chain-link fence helps prevent users from slipping a foot or wheel between the tread rails. Cattle still avoided the cattle guard even with the chain-link fencing in place.

The original design was 44 inches $(1.1 \mathrm{~m})$ wide, but in the plans in Appendix B we widened it to 52 inches (1.3 m ) to accommodate wider ATV's. The District has constructed them 36 inches (. 9 m ) wide for trails where ATV's are not permitted.


Figure 6-The two halves of the Caribou Trail Cattle Guard bolt together easily. Chain-link fencing keeps people from slipping through, but still discourages cattle.

The cattle guard needs to be bolted to at least 2 - by 6 -inch ( $50-$ by $300-\mathrm{mm}$ ) treated timbers at both ends (the plans show welded tabs for bolting). These timbers are buried. Larger timbers could be used to raise the entire cattle guard, with the approaches built up to provide a smooth transition.

For a more substantial side barrier, you might consider constructing two short H -brace fences running in the same direction as the cattle guard.

## Challis Trail Cattle Guard

Howard Rosenkrance documented this design some years ago on the Lost River Ranger District of the Challis National Forest, Idaho (Figure 8). According to District staff, this all-wood design is still being used and serves its intended purpose.

Plans are included in Appendix D. If the cattle guard is set on railroad ties at two ends only, minimal excavation would be needed to level the ties. Approaches could be built up for a transition to the cattle guard. The lumber can be precut and assembled onsite. Buying treated lumber and applying additional treatment to any cut surfaces is a good investment, because it will help keep the structure from rotting.

The specified tread rail width is 48 inches ( 1.2 m ). However, they can be widened to handle the larger ATV's-or made narrower, for that matter. The wings made out of 2 by 4's are tied into the existing fence.


Figure 7-The Deerlodge Trail Cattle Guard has tread rails of either channel or angle steel. It is welded as one piece and can be easily hauled in one piece to the installation site.


Figure 8-The Challis Trail Cattle Guard. Treated 2 by 6's are used for tread rails. (One piece of decking is missing on the right side.)

## Sources



## About the Author

Brian Vachowski has been a Project Leader specializing in recreation, trails, and wilderness projects at the Missoula Technology and Development Center since 1993. He received a bachelor's of science degree in forestry from the University of Massa-
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## Library Card

Vachowski, Brian. 1998. Cattle guards for off-highway vehicle trails. Tech. Rep. 9823-2826-MTDC. Missoula, MT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center. 16 electronic $p$.

Describes four cattle guards that can be used to replace gates for off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails. Drawings and photos of the cattle guards are included. Cattle guards prevent the perennial problem of gates being left open.

Keywords: fencing, forest recreation, gates, mechanized recreation, OHV, range management, stiles

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Materials List


## Hardware-

Tempered steel hex head bolts (grade 5, coarse thread),
$1 / 2$ by 3 inches, plus washers, lock washers, and nuts
29 each
Lag screws, $3 / 8$ - by 4 -inch
Barbed or No. 9 wire
Galvanized common nails,16d
Galvanized fence staples, $1 \frac{1}{2}$-inch
Galvanized common nails for joist hangers, 6d
Wood preservative meeting AWPA M4

## Furnished-

## Posts and H-braces

## Optional-

Simpson SUR 26 skewed $45^{\circ}$ joist hanger (or similar) 4 each
Simpson SUL 26 skewed $45^{\circ}$ joist hanger (or similar) 4 each
Paint
Reflectors and/or delineators
Note: All lumber shall be pressure treated with creosote meeting AWPB LP 55 , or water-borre preservatives meeting AWPB LP 22 . Retention shall be 0.40 minimum.

## Deschutes Trail Cattle Guard Construction Notes

1-Locate crossings so the trail will cross at $90^{\circ}$ for safety. Where possible, locate cattle guard in timbered or rocky areas to discourage access by full-sized vehicles. Pre-installing posts and braces will save time. Need 9 feet inside posts.
2-Be sure to specify the retention when ordering the lumber. Note that the lumber order is different if metal joist hangers are used (recommended). It saves time to precut he lumber as shown on the materials list. This should be done in a shop to insure proper dimensions and straight cuts.

3-These are designed to be lightweight, portable, and easily constructed with simple hand tools. All the materials for two cattle guards will easily fit into the back of a standard pickup truck with the longest pieces being 10 feet. Cost is around $\$ 550$ each for materials. I use volunteers for construction. A six person crew can easily construct two cattle guards in a day.

4-In cases where the deck can be transported to the site in one piece, an alternate design is to weld all of the site in one piece, an alternate design is to weld all of the rails to the angle iron except for the last 3 on each end,
which are bolted. This will reduce fabrication cost and still provide cleanouts on each end.

5-Paint all lumber cuts with preservative. Be sure all lumber is standard or better or it could be too warped and knotty. When putting the base together, arrange the umber so the angle iron will rest on the flattest and straightest surfaces.

6-The cattle guard can be on a grade lengthwise, but must be level side to side.

7-Tools needed:
-Small (12-inch) chain saw - Hand saw

- Four hammers
- Half-inch drive socket set (2, if possible)
- Crescent wrench,10- or 12-inch
- Brace and bit (to drill 2 sizes to accommodate lag bolts) - Nail punch
- Two measuring tapes (minimum)
- Straight edge
- Level
- Shovels, picks, pulaskis
- Wood chisel
- Pencils
- Pencils

Wre cutters or fence tool
Two-inch paint brush (to apply preservative to cut ends)
Gloves for all (treated timber is messy, rails are oily)

- First aid kit
- Cattle guard plan
- Chain saw chap
- Safety goggles.

8-Sequence of construction.

- Set stakes to establish four corners and grade
- Set stakes to establish four corners and grade.
nail the box base together.
- Put base in hole. Dirt under base must be compacted and base must have firm, even bearing all around. Attach joist hangers (if used) before putting base in hole.
Square up and level base
- Lay angle iron on base
- Put one tread rail on each end and loosely attach with bolts.
Put on all other rails and put bolts through holes.
- Align deck with base, then tighten bolts.
- Recheck deck and base alignment
- Install lag bolts.
- Construct wings.
- Install barbed wire from bottom crosspiece to posts.


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## Materials List

24 each: T-type steel fenceposts (preferably used) 6 feet long
9 feet: Angle iron, 3 by 2 inches
10 feet: Angle iron, $1 \frac{1}{2}$ by 2 inches
54 feet: Anguare tubing, 1 by 1 inch
28 feet: Square tubing, 2 by 2 inches
33 feet: Flat bar, $1 / 8$ by $11 / 2$ inches
26 feet: Metal rod, $3 /$-inch diameter
12 feet: $G$ Galvanized chain link fence, 4 feet wid
12 feet: Galvanized chain link fence,
4 feet: Metal rod, $3 /$-inch diameter
6 each: Fence post plates
6 feet: Flat bar, $1 / 2$ by 2 inches
7 each: Lag bolts, $3 / 8$ by $11 / 4$ inches, plus lock washers and nuts
24 each: Lag bolts, $3 / 8$ by 3 inches, plus lock washers and nuts

## Construction Notes

The steel fence posts are cut to the proper length, the short pieces are welded on the ends to form additional tread rails, or are used for legs

The $J_{4}$-inch-diameter rod is cut into short pieces and inserted into the ends of the 1 -inch square tubing-the rod is easier to bend and makes for a stronger weld.

- The $3 / 8$-inch-diameter rod is slipped through the ends of the chain-link fence material and used to stretch and hold it tight. A short piece of the flat bar is bent and hold it tight. A short piece of the flat bar is bent and
welded at the center of the lowest and highest point of each half of the ramp to add additional strength to the rod. The ends of the rod are finally welded to the inside of the 2 -inch square tubing.
- The flat bar is bent at the proper angle on each end and welded to the 2-inch square tubing to provide lateral strength, additional tread strength, and to hold the chain-link fence in place.
- Steel angle iron (2 by 2 inches) could be substituted for the steel fence posts. They would also be welded on the ends to the 1 -inch square tubing with the point of the angle facing up.


Materials List
12 each: Channel for tread rails, 2 by 1 by 60 inches 12 each: Angle iron, 2 by 2 by 60 inches

12 feet: Channel for "stringers," 3 by $1 \frac{1}{2}$ inches 17 feet: Flat bar for wings, $1 / 4$ by 1 inch
8 inches: Flat bar for tabs, $1 / 4$ by 2 inches
4 each: Long bolts for wings, $3 / 8$ by 1 inch, plus lock washers and nuts
2 each: Lag screws for wings, $3 /$ by 4 inches
2 each: Treated lumber for across ends underneath, 2 by 6 by 60 inches
ach: Long bolts, $3 / 8$ by $2^{1 / 4}$ inches, plus lock washers and nuts


Appendix D-Challis Trail Cattle Guard Plans


## Materials Lis

15 each:Treated lumber, 2 by 6 by 48 inches
2 each: Treated lumber, 2 by 6 by 51 inches
2 each: Treated lumber, 2 by 12 by $851 / 2$ inches
4 each: Treated lumber, 2 by 4 by $4 \frac{1}{2}$ inches
Railroad ties, 51 inches lon
Treated lumber for wings
Wood preservativ
Suitable exterior glue

## Construction Notes

- The structure will last much longer if all new cuts made in the lumber are treated with wood preservative.

PLAN VIEW


ELEVATION VIEW



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     forth) should phone USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

