



September 11, 2014

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Hon. Lani Ulrich  
NYS Adirondack Park Agency  
PO Box 99  
Ray Brook, NY 12977

Hon. Joe Martens  
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
625 Broadway, 14th Floor  
Albany, NY 12233

**RE: Illegal ATV Use on the Gull Lake Trail in the Black River Wild Forest Area has Caused Significant Natural Resource Damage**

Dear Chairwoman Ulrich and Commissioner Martens,

Protect the Adirondacks recently visited the Gull Lake Trail in the Black River Wild Forest. We were disheartened to find extensive All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) damage at many parts of this trail. The level of environmental damage is significant. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) should not tolerate this level of environmental damage to the natural resources and facilities of the Forest Preserve.

The Gull Lake Trail is a hiking trail under the *Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan* (SLMP) and Black River Wild Forest Unit Management Plan (UMP), though it appears to be managed for both motor vehicles and hiking as a practical matter. A gate at the east end of this trail at its junction with the Bear Creek Road has a sign that states ATVs are banned, yet an ATV side trail around the gate is plainly evident.

In many places soils are damaged and compacted, which has inhibited the ability to drain. In many places deep ruts are filled with algae covered water. In many places the mud puts are 18 inches deep or deeper. While many ATV riders plow through the muddy and damaged areas, many go around, which widens the trail and causes still more damage. In other areas, ATVs have blazed their own trails around damaged areas to avoid them altogether.

We reported on extensive damage from illegal ATV use in a special report in 2003 and it's highly unfortunate that in 2014 many of the places we catalogued in our report *Rutted and Ruined: ATV Damage on the Adirondack Forest Preserve* have not seen improvements, but rather have deteriorated. The Gull Lake Trail was rutted and ruined in 2003 and this abuse continues in 2014. The "forever wild" Forest Preserve deserves better.

**Protect the Adirondacks**

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This level of damage will take a long time for the Forest Preserve to repair. The DEC needs to commit resources to enforcement and to rehabilitation of damaged areas.

ATV riders use public lands differently than other recreational users. The impacts are long lasting and often destroy opportunities for subsequent users. In essence, ATVs cause considerable damage that destroys the outdoor experience for all who follow. Here's a list of the particular impacts of ATV use on the Adirondack Forest Preserve.

1. ATV use destroys road and trail surfaces and Forest Preserve facilities, such as bridges, and cause soil and wetlands damage in ways that other motor vehicles do not.
2. ATV use creates deep ruts and mud pits on roads and trails that become impassable. It seems that ATVs are often ridden for the backwoods riding experience where one can make the mud fly and tear up an area. This damage makes a road difficult to travel for all other users.
3. Roads and trails are widened by ATV users to avoid a damaged, impassable area, which causes further damage to the corridor's natural resources and wild character.
4. The Wild Forest character and the Forest Preserve experience are damaged by ATV use. Non-motor vehicle users that use the roads and trails damaged by ATVs find their Forest Preserve experience diminished as the roads are unattractive, deeply rutted, widened, and mud-filled swamps.
5. ATVs regularly leave designated roads to illegally blaze new trails through the Forest Preserve. ATV bushwhacking off roads is very destructive.
6. ATVs regularly trespass around gates and boulders that are erected to control motor vehicle traffic. ATVs can blaze trails through the forest to circumvent barriers in ways that other motor vehicles cannot.
7. ATVs regularly drive through streams, creeks and wetlands for sport rather than use bridges that provide motor vehicles with access over a stream, creek or wetland.
8. ATVs regularly trespass on snowmobile trails, designated roads that prohibit ATV use, and footpaths that intersect with roads. In short, ATV operators often go where they want.
9. ATV use has led to vandalism of Forest Preserve facilities, such as gates that control access.

These impacts are particular to ATVs. ATV damage remains widespread across the Forest Preserve due to illegal trespasses. In many Wild Forest units illegal trespassing by ATVs is widespread and continues unabated. Many are pushing for ATV riding to be a legal activity on the "forever wild" Forest Preserve. Open ATV riding on the Forest Preserve would cause untold amounts of damage.

The level of abuse raises questions about the DEC's commitment to stewardship of the Forest Preserve in DEC Region 6. This level of ATV use can only occur with DEC staff in the area ignoring this activity or tacitly approving it.

Please see pictures attached that show many points along the Gull Lake Trail where illegal ATV use has caused significant natural resource damage. The APA is supposed to provide oversight of Forest Preserve management by the DEC. That wetlands can be damaged and destroyed by ATV use, with completely inadequate protection by the DEC, should not be tolerated. The APA should investigate

the damage along the Gull Lake Trail and bring an enforcement action against the DEC for natural resource degradation.

On behalf of the Board of Director of Protect the Adirondacks, please accept our gratitude for the opportunity to submit these comments on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Peter" being more prominent than the last name "Bauer".

Peter Bauer

CC Governor Cuomo  
J. Malatros  
B. Seggos  
A. Tarpinian  
J. Walke  
S. Eisenstein  
M. Gerstman  
K. Moser  
R. Davies  
K. Richards  
P. Franke  
J. Drabicki  
APA Commissioners  
T. Martino  
J. Townsend  
K. Regan  
W. Linck



*These pictures show natural resource damage along the Gull Lake Trail in the Black River Wild Forest from illegal ATV use. This trail corridor has suffered extensive damage.*



*More pictures that show natural resource damage along the Gull Lake Trail in the Black River Wild Forest from illegal ATV use. This trail corridor has suffered extensive damage.*



*More pictures that show natural resource damage along the Gull Lake Trail in the Black River Wild Forest from illegal ATV use. This trail corridor has suffered extensive damage. Compacted soils have experienced considerable damage.*



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