



Board of Directors

January 6, 2021

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Chair

Ms. Terry Martino
NYS Adirondack Park Agency
PO Box 99
Ray Brook, NY 12977

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Vice-Chairs

RE: Public Recreational Use of ATVs on the Forest Preserve is a Terrible Idea

Barbara Rottier
Secretary

Dear Executive Director Martino:

David Quinn
Treasurer

At the December 2020 meeting of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), during the discussion of Forest Preserve matters around the Debar Mountain Wild Forest Unit Management Plan, Board member Arthur Lussi announced that he supports public recreational use of All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) on the public Forest Preserve. This is a terrible idea. ATV use on the Forest Preserve was an experiment that failed. Public ATV use was allowed in the 1990s on the Forest Preserve in the Adirondack Park and widespread ecological damage was the result. The damage was so great in some areas that DEC has never even attempted rehabilitation and restoration.

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PROTECT has enclosed *Rutted and Ruined: ATV Damage on the Adirondack Forest Preserve*, a 2003 report that pushed the state to close the Forest Preserve to ATVs. PROTECT has republished this report for Adirondack Park policymakers. This report documented the many ways that ATV use abuses natural resources. In short, as the ads published at the end of *Rutted and Ruined* state, these powerful machines are built to make the mud fly.

Peter Bauer
Executive Director

Protect the Adirondacks is very concerned about any new efforts to open the "forever wild" Forest Preserve to use by ATVs. In our view, this would be a grave mistake because of the enormous damage to natural resources that ATVs inflict and the longstanding failure of the DEC to control illegal ATV use on the Forest Preserve. PROTECT believes that ATV riding is an intensive and abusive recreational activity that should be relegated to private parks, such as the sport of motocross racing, and on industrial forestlands where the state has purchased conservation easements, which have an adequate maintained road network.

ATV Use on the Adirondack Forest Preserve: An Experiment that Failed

In the 1990s, ATV use on the Forest Preserve was allowed. This was not done through

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a centralized plan, but rather through disparate regional actions. No policy assessment had been done and certainly no environmental impact assessment was completed. As a result scores of roads and trails were illegally opened in the Forest Preserve for public ATV use.

In 2003, *Rutted and Ruined* catalogued ATV abuse of roads, trails and natural resources on the Forest Preserve, but also showed the way that ATV riders use public lands that is different from other recreational uses. These findings included the following observations.

- ATV use destroys road and trail surfaces and Forest Preserve facilities, such as bridges, and causes soil and wetlands damage in ways that other motor vehicles do not.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- ATVs regularly leave designated roads to illegally blaze new trails through the Forest Preserve. ATV bushwhacking off roads is very destructive.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- ATV use damages natural areas. These machines are designed and built to punish wild areas. The sport of ATV riding is suited only to private parks or industrial forest lands with an extensive engineered road system. ATV use is a specialized, intensive activity analogous to motocross racing and downhill skiing where specifically created facilities are required to support this sport.

Genuine Disabled Access via ATV is already Successfully Allowed; Disabled Use of ATVs Should be the Only Public ATV Use Allowed on the Forest Preserve

Many call upon the state to allow ATV use to provide access to wild areas for the disabled community, arguing that ATVs are in essence “wheelchairs in the woods.” The DEC studied this issue extensively in the late 1990s and developed a Commissioner’s Policy (CP-3) and a full program for disabled access through use of ATVs. Dozens of opportunities have been provided for legitimate disabled individuals access to designated remote and wild areas under a state permit system that authorizes limited ATV use. This program has been successful and has been widely supported by the environmental community. Further public ATV use is not needed to provide access for the disabled community because a successful program already exists for legitimate disabled access.

Conservation Easement Lands Should Provide ATV Use Opportunities

There is no place for ATVs in the public Forest Preserve because they damage natural resources. The State of New York has invested heavily in purchasing over 750,000 acres of conservation easements in the Adirondack Park. These are managed timberlands with hundreds of miles of roads used by large trucks and heavy equipment. These road networks makes conservation easement lands suitable for ATV use. One of the reasons for state purchase of easement lands was to expand recreational opportunities that are not suitable for the Forest Preserve.

Conclusion

ATV use was allowed on the Forest Preserve in the 1990s, but this use was ended due to extensive abuse of natural resources and public recreational infrastructure. ATV use on the Forest Preserve was an experiment that failed. PROTECT opposes Arthur Lussi’s proposal to open the Forest Preserve to ATVs and urges the APA Board to reject it.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please let me express our gratitude for the opportunity to submit these comments on this important matter.

Thank you very much. Stay safe.

Sincerely,



Peter Bauer
Executive Director

CC: APA Board
Executive: M. DeRosa, A Lefton
DEC: B. Seggos, J. Drabicki