

422 Hilltop Drive  
Madison, WI 53711  
August 20, 2007

Matt Frank, DNR Secretary  
101 S Webster Street  
PO Box 7921  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Secretary Frank:

It was an honor and a pleasure to meet you last Wednesday at the ceremony for the dedication of the 500<sup>th</sup> State Natural Area (SNA). As a part-time resident of the village of Starlake, I particularly want to thank you for taking the time to participate in recognizing the importance of one of our favorite areas.

Your words, and those of Governor Doyle and Paul DeLong, echoed the sentiments of all of us who spend time in our beautiful northwoods. We all want to preserve the natural beauty of the area and feel very strongly the desire to preserve it for our children, grandchildren, and generations to come. We owe it to them to do all we can do to preserve it!

But...right now, much of this area is in danger of being changed forever, destroyed is a better word to use. The 60 miles of proposed ATV trails through the Northern Highlands-American Legion (NH-AL) State Forest would have a devastating effect on the Forest. Part of the trail even goes right alongside the new Lake Laura Hardwoods SNA, right along the road right-of-way where we parked our cars on Wednesday, and along the western edge of the new SNA. You can be sure that a significant number of ATV riders would make their own rogue trails into and through the new SNA if the ATV trails are approved.

This is only one example of an area which will be adversely affected. The 60 miles of proposed trails go near ten undeveloped lakes and over ten streams, springs, wetlands, and creeks.

Proponents of the ATV trails claim that Wis. Statute 28.04 gives them a right to have trails because it states that State Forests are to provide a "full range of benefits for present and future generations." But, that statute also goes on to state that "The department shall also assure that the management of state forests is consistent with the ecological capability of the state forest land and the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and eco-systems.

These benefits include soil protection, public hunting, protection of water quality, production of recurring forest products, outdoor recreation, native biological diversity, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and aesthetics."

There is no way that ATV trails can be consistent with soil protection, protection of water quality, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and aesthetics. ATVs will certainly accelerate the introduction of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. And as for aesthetics, there is the issue of noise pollution robbing residents and users of the forest of the peace and tranquility, one of the main reasons that people come to the area.

The argument of some proponents that it would be an economic boon to the area now appears to be a hollow argument. A front page article in Wednesday's Vilas County News

Review referred to a study by Bob Smail, a graduate student at UW-Stevens Point. His study concludes that “the economic impacts...of ATV riders may be overstated.” The article states that “The study found that only about 5.5% of Wisconsin’s total population of 4.09 million people over age 16 (according to the 2000 census) are public land ATV riders.” “This is far less than the often-cited percentages exceeding 20%,” said Smail.

In February, 2004, Vilas County residents voted 63% to 37% against allowing ATVs on county-owned land in a non-binding advisory referendum. At the urging of local residents, three local town boards have passed resolutions banning ATVs from using town roads. The people are making their voices heard, but I’m afraid that big-money groups are going to succeed in pressuring the state to go against the wishes of what appears to be a majority of the public.

Please listen to the voices of reason from within your own department and encourage the Natural Resources Board to reject the proposal for ATV trails in the NH-AL Forest. Please help us to preserve this area for future generations.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Olson

cc: Paul Delong, Division Administrator, Forestry  
Dave Phillips, Chair, Governor’s State Trails Council  
Dennis Leith, Stakeholder Facilitator  
Sue Drum, Stakeholder Group Member  
Nancy Atwater  
William Sloey  
Frank Splitt  
Joe Heitz