

ATVs banned on town land in Plum Lake

By Tracey Ludvik
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Plum Lake has become the third town within the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest to ban all-terrain vehicle use on town land or roads.

The towns of Presque Isle and Manitowish Waters previously banned ATVs. The towns are three of 16 that lie within or border the Northern Highland forest, where as many as 38 miles of ATV trails are being proposed.

Proposed new trails

The ATV Stakeholder's Advisory Group is studying two Northwoods corridors for potential trail development:

- o Iron County Loop: Runs about 18 miles across mainly state-owned lands connecting on both ends with existing Iron County trails. It would cross Highway 51 and the Manitowish River.*
- o Lake Tomahawk to Sayner Trail: Runs 20 miles between Lake Tomahawk and Sayner. It would use existing snowmobile trails and portions of forest roads. The trail could link to trails to the south and north in the future.*

For more information, call Dennis Leith at 715-358-9208 or go online to the forestry division at dnr.wi.gov.

The forest covers 220,000 acres in parts of Vilas, Oneida and Iron counties. ATVs also are banned on county land in Vilas County.

Noise and environmental damage are the main reasons residents have called for ATV bans.

The Plum Lake ban includes the business districts of the towns of Star Lake and Sayner. Nancy Atwater, 55, of Star Lake collected signatures for the Plum Lake petition.

"There's a large contingency of people who do not want ATV use in the state forest," Atwater said. The Northern Highland is "unique, fragile and the most ecologically sensitive of the state's forests," with 500-year-old stands of pine and hemlock, she said. Riders who don't stay on the trails cause destruction, Atwater said.

"We come here for peace and quiet," said Presque Isle town clerk Lorine Walters.

The ATV Stakeholder's Advisory Group was formed to recommend potential trail sites to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Team leader Dennis Leith said some of the towns within the Northern Highland forest have been receptive to opening roads for trails while others have not. Leith said the group will have to design ATV trails around those towns. "This darn ATV thing is so difficult," he said. "All you need is one bad apple out on the trails."

Cary Romanowski, 35, owns Romanowski Auto Sales and ATVs in Schofield. He said he would welcome a new trail because there are few near the Wausau area, and customers often say they would buy an ATV if there were more places to take them.

Proposals for two new trails in the Northern Highland forest face public hearings during the next two months, followed by a review by the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board.