

Environmental impacts - Public use of ATVs can cause significant, adverse impacts to natural resources, including soil degradation; destruction of vegetation; disruption of local hydrology; increases in surface runoff and erosion; direct impacts to streams and wetlands from ATV crossings, including increased siltation and turbidity, destabilization of shorelines, destruction of in stream and riparian habitat, and destruction of vegetation; fuel discharges, resulting in degradation of water quality; air pollution; and impacts on wildlife including direct mortality, habitat modification, and disturbance. Increased runoff and erosion from ATV impacts occur across the landscape and have serious consequences for soil and water quality (*Refer to page 107*) causing increased sedimentation and turbidity in multiple water bodies throughout the forest. These factors can affect biological health, for example, a stream's ability to support trout populations or aquatic plants' ability to photosynthesize. Sedimentation from recurring ATV damage often increases with successive storm events.

The environmental impacts (including noise), intensity, and nature of both legal and illegal ATV use has been shown to cause other recreational uses to decline, and in some cases completely cease, once an area is opened for ATV use. Over the years, attempts have been made to accommodate off highway and all terrain vehicle use on several State Forests but in each case, the use was not sustainable. Serious issues with soil erosion, illegal off-trail use and trail rutting developed. In all cases DEC was not able to find acceptable ways to mitigate the impacts, even when organized user groups were included in the process. In the end, each of the former off-road vehicle trail systems was closed.

- **Maintenance** – Preventing and controlling erosion and rutting is an expensive and difficult proposition. In most cases trails must be maintained by moving large quantities of gravel into remote wooded locations with manual labor or small specialized equipment. A full-time maintenance staff with a significant budget would be required to maintain a viable trail system. The types of hardened trails the Department would construct are not the type of trails a majority of the ATV or OHV users desire.
- **Potential conflicts with neighbors of State Forests** - State Forests are generally located in rural settings with a moderate level of housing development in the immediate area. Homes and building lots adjacent to State Forests are highly valued on the market. People who live near State Forests often choose to live there because it is a relatively quiet, undisturbed location. Neighbors are often opposed to the development of ATV trails because of increased ambient noise and disturbance levels.

- **Potential conflicts with other recreationists** - Recreationists who value and use State Forests because they provide places where one can experience solitude are opposed to the development of ATV trails because of concerns such as noise, pollution, disturbance to wildlife and ground or vegetation impacts. The impacts, intensity, and nature of both legal and illegal ATV use has been shown to cause other recreational uses to decline, and in some cases completely cease, once an area is opened for ATV use.
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• **Air and noise pollution** - There are varying opinions about the environmental impacts of the air pollution produced by ATVs. Presently, it is not possible to measure air pollution caused specifically by ATVs. Noise pollution is generally an issue of concern for those who currently use or live near State Forests as described above. The 1993 position paper states that machines will be monitored for compliance with muffler requirements and a minimum 1,000 foot buffer zone must be left between the trail and neighboring private structures. Leaving a 1,000 foot buffer zone from private structures precludes ATV trail construction, as it is nearly impossible to accomplish due to the pattern of ownership of State Forests and private lands.

Based on evaluation of past efforts to accommodate ATV use and the many impacts and constraints associated with off road vehicles, the Department will not permit ATV use on State Forests , except; • as may be considered to accommodate a "connector trail" through Unit Management Planning or a similar public process; and • on those specific routes designated for use by DEC-issued Motorized Access Permit for People with Disabilities (MAPPWD).