

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**RECREATIONAL TRAILS
FOR ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES (ATVs)**

JULY 1, 2011 to JUNE 30, 2013

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

JANUARY 1, 2013

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Scope of Report

This report was requested by the Minnesota Legislature in Laws of Minnesota for 2011, First Special Session, Chapter 2, Article 1, Section 4, Subdivision 5, which directs the DNR to report on miles of all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails resulting from the following appropriations for fiscal years 2012 and 2013:

- \$100,000 the first year and \$100,000 the second year for the all-terrain vehicle grant-in-aid trails program;
- \$200,000 the first year and \$200,000 the second year for the creation and development of all-terrain vehicle trails.

This report addresses ATV trails planned, proposed, funded, and constructed between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2013 (January 1, 2013 to June 30, 2013 is estimated).

Summary Statistics for ATV Trail Development - FY12-13

Grant-in-aid ATV trails: Between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2013, 26 ATV GIA proposals, totaling over 600 miles, were initiated, reviewed, funded, or constructed with the appropriated funds.

State ATV trails: Between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2013, the DNR identified, planned, or completed over 70 miles of state ATV trail. This mileage includes trails in 8 state forests, and the Matthew Lourey State Trail in Pine County.

Background on ATV Trail Funding and Development

The mission of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is to work with citizens to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life. In accomplishing this mission, the DNR funds and develops trails for recreational all-terrain vehicle (ATV) riding. The DNR Division of Parks and Trails provides ATV trails primarily through two avenues:

- providing grant-in-aid (GIA) funds to local government sponsors through the state's Trail Assistance Program, authorized under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.927. In the GIA program, local government sponsors, the DNR, and organized clubs of ATV enthusiasts work together to identify, develop, and maintain trail opportunities on both private and public lands; and
- developing and managing ATV trails on state lands, primarily in state forests and on state trails.

Funding for ATV trails is generated by all-terrain vehicle registration, trail pass fees, plus a percentage of the state user-paid gas tax attributable to ATV use. Receipts are deposited in the all-terrain vehicle account in the natural resources fund, where they are available for appropriation.

Per Minnesota Statutes, Section 84.927, funds in the all-terrain vehicle account may only be spent for: ATV education and training programs; administration and enforcement; acquisition, maintenance, and development of trails and use areas; grant-in-aid programs to local governments for trail maintenance and construction, and safety grants.

The GIA Trail Program

First authorized in 1984, Minnesota's Off-Highway Vehicle Trails Assistance program – popularly known as Grant-in-Aid (GIA) – is a cost-share program to facilitate development and maintenance of trails for use by all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-highway motorcycles (OHMs), and off-road vehicles (ORVs) at the initiative of enthusiast groups or clubs, with the support and participation of local government sponsors.

ATV trail proposals are assigned priority for funding as follows:

- first priority is the maintenance of existing approved trails and trails systems;
- second priority is improvements or enhancements to existing trails and trail systems that result in greater utility, durability, visitor safety or satisfaction, improved resource protection, added trail mileage or trail connections, or improved day-to-day management or enforcement;
- third priority has been to develop substantially new trails, trail systems, riding areas, or support facilities.

The DNR prescribes a 7-step process for designing, reviewing, funding, and developing ATV GIA program trails. Depending on the complexity and scale of the project, the availability of land for trail development, funding constraints, environmental considerations, and the level of opposition or support, the 7-step process requires from several months to several years to complete. The process steps are depicted in figure 1.

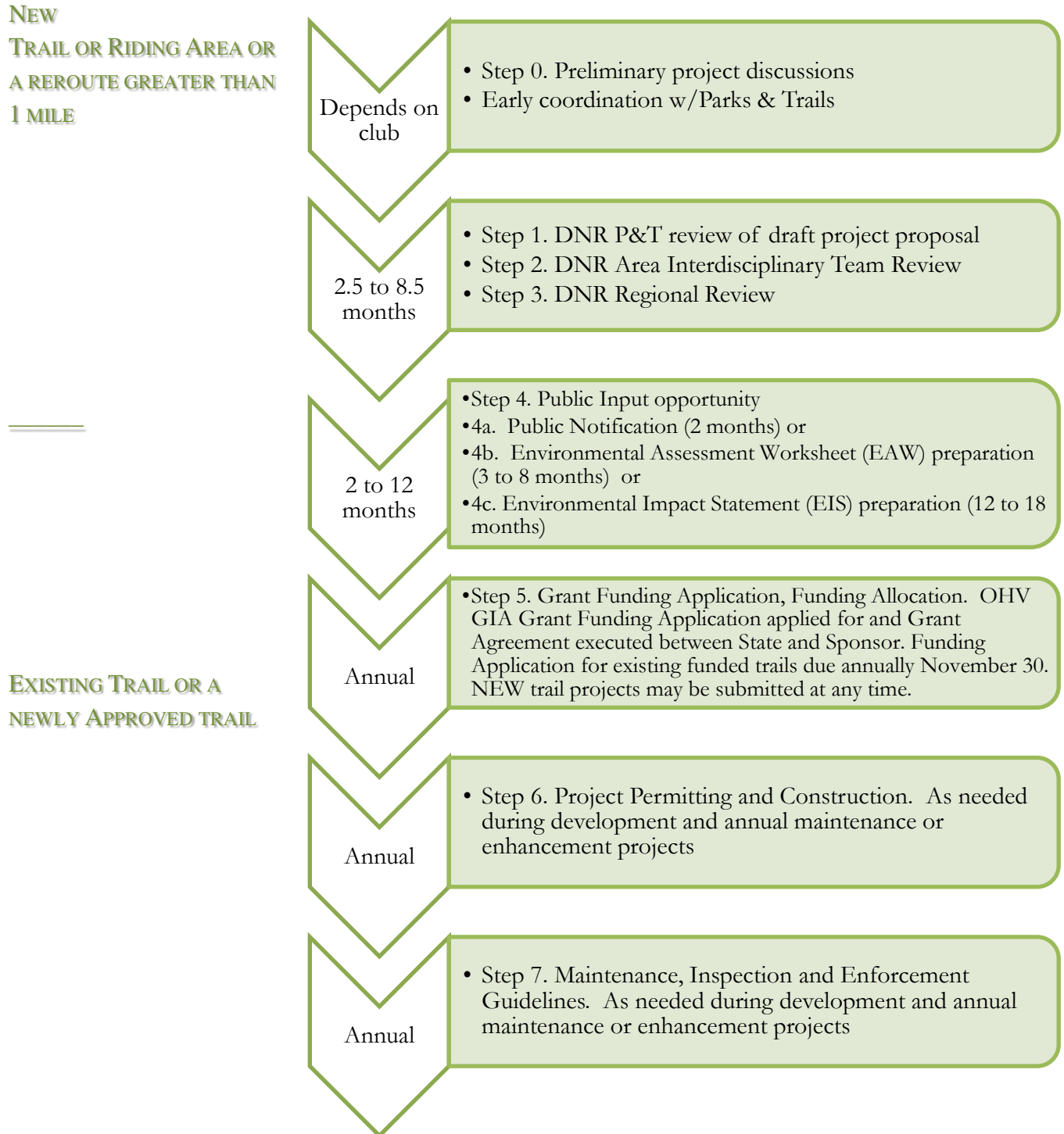
Costs for administration, acquisition, and development are divided between the GIA program (paying up to 65%) and the local club or sponsor (paying approximately 35%). Costs for maintenance are divided between the GIA program (paying up to 90%) and the local club or sponsor (providing at least 10%).

GIA trails or riding areas may be developed on a mix of private and public land. In addition, GIA funds may be awarded for signing, improvement, maintenance, and monitoring of existing trails on private and public lands. This second category includes a number of GIA trails that are designated on existing state forest trails. Once the trails are included as part of a GIA trail system, GIA funds can be provided through the local sponsor for clubs to perform improvements, signing, maintenance, and monitoring.

At the end of fiscal year 2011, there were 37 ATV trails in the GIA program, totaling approximately 1260 miles. **By the end of the 2012 to 2013 biennium, an additional 26 GIA ATV trail proposals, totaling approximately 600 miles, will be completed or nearing completion.** The DNR expects some 350 GIA ATV miles will be added by June 30, 2013, with the remaining 250 miles added in fiscal year 2014. Fourteen of the 26 proposals were initiated before the start of the 2012-2013 biennium, but were completed or substantially progressed during this timeframe; 12 of the proposals were initiated during the biennium.

Figure 1. OHV GIA 7-Step Process (from the DNR's OHV GIA Program Manual)

The outline below follows a proposal for a new trail from its inception (steps 0 to 4) through funding, development and ongoing maintenance (steps 5 through 7) with approximate timelines.



Considerations in GIA Trail Planning – New Corridors vs Existing Corridors

While approximately 350 additional ATV trail miles were approved for GIA funding during the reporting period, the majority of this mileage consists of corridors with legal ATVs use, but not designated or managed specifically for ATVs. Examples include public road rights-of-way (ROW), undesignated forest access routes in forests classified as "managed" for motorized recreation, and state and federal forest roads.

Siting trails on entirely new corridor can be complex and time-consuming. Considerations in proposing entirely new trail corridors include:

- surveying and engineering needed to identify an alignment;
- the need to negotiate land use agreements;
- costs of acquisition or easements;
- wetland delineation and mitigation requirements;
- potential public opposition to new development and new motorized use;
- requirements for review under state and federal environmental policy acts (e.g., 10 miles of new motorized trail requires a state EAW, per Minn. Rule part 4410.4300, subp. 37);
- higher costs of development (compared to existing corridors), and
- extended timeframe for trail planning and development

Because clubs and sponsors can establish GIA trails much more quickly if an existing corridor is used, this is frequently their preferred approach.

Establishing GIA trails on existing corridors also offers advantages:

- existing corridors often connect destinations and communities;
- GIA designation brings additional resources to managing existing ATV use;
- existing routes can be improved, and connections can be developed to provide more interesting riding opportunities;
- in forests with extensive wet or low-lying areas, existing routes are likely located on the most sustainable high-ground alignments;
- many routes and trails currently in use would benefit from being brought into the GIA program and receiving annual maintenance funds.

Local sponsors and clubs also may apply for GIA funds to sign, develop amenities, and maintain existing trails in state forests. This increasingly popular option is the simplest way for enthusiast groups and local sponsors to participate in the GIA program and to become stewards of trails they have been riding for years.

Table 1 summarizes ATV GIA trail progress attributable to the 2011 appropriation.

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Table 1. ATV GIA trails proposed, completed, or advanced during FY 2012-2013

Trail Name	Sponsor	*A. Trail miles new to GIA program	**B. Miles of GIA where ATV use is a new designation (subset of column A)	Status of GIA application	DNR review	Public review	MEPA review (EAW/EIS, if required)	Sponsor approval	FY 2012-2013 GIA Funds granted or budgeted	Notes
Woodtick Wheelers	Cass County	13.2	TBD	In development	Pending	Pending	EAW not required	Pending	50000	Continuing to work with Club and Sponsor to find suitable alignment
Emily/Over the Hills Gang	Cass, Crow Wing counties	80	2.2	In development	Pending	Pending	EAW not required	Pending	40000	Proposal still being developed
Northwoods/Soo Line	Beltrami County	35	14.4 ²	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW not required	Pending	5000	Public review completed December 2012
Roseau/LOW Sportsmen	Roseau, Lake of the Woods counties	81	81 ^{1,2}	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW not required	Complete	10000	Funded November 2012
Lake Agassiz Trailriders	Kittson, Roseau counties	100	100 ⁴	Complete	Pending	Pending	EAW not required	Pending	14000	DNR internal review started in Fall 2012
Upper Red Lake Trails	Beltrami County	TBD	TBD	In development	Pending	Pending	TBD	Pending	0	Proposal still being developed
Fourtown/Grygla	Beltrami county	32	0	Complete	Complete	Pending	EAW not required	Pending	10000	Proposal submitted
UPM Blandin	Itasca County	21	7	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW completed	Complete	45177	14 miles completed and opened; 7 miles under construction
Northwoods Regional Trail System	Itasca County									
• Solana SF Loop		14	0	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW completed	Complete	15000	Opened in 2012
• Blind Lake Connector		21	21 ²	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW completed	Complete	12000	Opened in 2012
• Hill City Connector		15	15 ²	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW completed	Complete	10000	Opened in 2012
• Pengilly to Goodland		19	19 ²	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW completed	Complete	10440	Opened in 2012
Little Moose	Itasca County	20	2	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW not required	Complete	32935	18 mi. completed; 2 mi. to be added in 2013
Bigfork Trail	Itasca County	25	25 ^{1,2}	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW not required	Pending	40000	Public review completed December 2012
East Range Multi-use Trail – Gilbert to Biwabik	St. Louis County	9	9 ²	Pending	Pending	Pending	EAW not required	Pending	10000	Alignment identified; in discussion with MNDOT
Chisholm Trail	St. Louis County	10	10	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW not required	Complete	10000	Opened June 2012
Chisholm Trail extension	St. Louis County	8	TBD	In development	Pending	Pending	EAW not required	Pending	0	Proposal still being developed
Wild Country Regional ATV Trail	Lake County	29.7	27.4 ^{1,2}	Complete	Complete	Pending	EAW not required	Pending	5000	Public review starting in January 2013.
Boyd Road Trail	Cook County	15.5	15.5 ^{1,2}	Complete	Complete	In process	Exempt from EAW	Pending	5000	Trail was designated during 2003-2008 classification process
Crow Wing County – Ft. Ripley to Pine Center	Crow Wing County	23 in FY12 8.5 in FY 13	23 ³ in FY12 8.5 ³ in FY13	Complete Complete	Complete Pending	Complete Pending	EAW not required EAW not required	Complete Pending	30000 5000	Construction underway in Summer 2012 Additional proposal for Spring 2013
Chatfield Trails	City of Chatfield	4.5	4.5	3.5 is complete 1.0 pending	3.5 complete 1.0 pending	3.5 complete 1.0 pending	EAW not required	Complete	10000	3.5 mile addition completed; 1 additional mile in proposal stage
Houston Trails ⁵	City of Houston	TBD	TBD	In development	Pending	Pending	TBD; federal EA required	Pending	[219000 ⁵]	Involves significant land acquisition, LAWCON "change in use", and federal RTP funding; funds not part of appropriation subject to report.
Yucatan Trails	City of Rushford	6.5	0	In development	Pending	Pending	TBD	Pending	15000	Existing private trail system; reconfiguration in discussion.
GIA OHV Parks										
Renville County ATV Park	Renville County	TBD	TBD	In development	Pending	Pending	TBD	Pending	0	Acquisition of lands pending for county park.
Appleton Area OHV Park ⁵	Swift County	18	0	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW not required	Complete	[222857 ⁵]	Acquisition of key parcel is pending. Matching grant to federal RTP funds; funds not part of appropriation subject to report.
Grant County Mudpuppies ATV Park	Grant County	2	2	Complete	Complete	Complete	EAW not required	Complete	32316	Acquisition of land for 40-acre county park
Total new GIA grants		610.9	386.5						\$416868	

¹GIA mileage is entirely or partially on forest roads (state, county, federal); little or no new corridor developed

²GIA mileage is entirely or partially on undesignated access routes in managed forests; little or no new corridor developed

³GIA trail is partially in public road ROW, little or no new corridor developed

⁴GIA trail is entirely in public road ROW, no new corridor developed

⁵Not included in total. GIA funding for this project was not part of GIA-related appropriation subject to this report

* Column includes the ATV GIA trail miles newly enrolled (or proposed) in the GIA program;

**Column indicates the number of trail miles in the proposal for which ATV use is a new formal designation (new designated ATV trail); these miles are a subset of the miles in the preceding column A.

State ATV Trails (state forests and state trails)

In addition to funding trails through the GIA program, the DNR plans, develops, and manages ATV trails on state-owned land, primarily in state forests or on state trails.

There are approximately 860 miles of state forest trail designated for ATV use. An additional 90-plus miles of State Trail established under Minnesota Statutes, sections 85.015 and 84.029, are designated for ATV use, including portions of the Taconite, North Shore, Gandy Dancer, Pengilly, Cloquet/Saginaw, and Matthew Lourey trails.

The DNR completed several significant ATV trail projects during the reporting period. **Most notably, the Matthew Lourey State Trail master plan was revised to allow ATV use on nearly its entire length north of St. Croix State Park.** Fifteen miles were improved, signed, and opened in early FY 2013, with the remainder opening by the end of the fiscal year. In addition to the 40-plus miles of continuous ATV riding opportunity provided on the Mathew Lourey Trail, the project creates connections and loop systems with adjoining ATV trails in the Nemadji and St. Croix state forests.

Significant resources also were used for debris removal and repair of ATV trails in the Nemadji, Chengwatana, and St. Croix state forests, which suffered extensive damage during storm events in both years of the biennium.

Table 2 lists state ATV trails projects proposed or completed during fiscal years 2012-2013.

Phase 2 Forest Trail Planning

The 2003¹ legislature directed the DNR to classify state forests for motorized recreation, designate trails, and close existing forest routes. To meet the 2008 deadline, the DNR needed to limited the effort to forest classification and closure or designation of existing routes only. The DNR did not consider any new trails during this effort, but assured trail users that potential new trails and system improvements would be addressed in a future phase. In late FY 2011, the DNR initiated a statewide review of the forest trails designated during Phase 1. The goals for this "Phase 2" review include:

- designating new trails to connect amenities, destinations, and communities;
- providing trails with a mix of difficulty levels, which would offer ATV enthusiasts what they are looking for instead of the universally easy trails that currently exist;
- designating trails for single uses in addition to mixed uses;
- designating hunter/walking and other non-motorized trails;
- designating areas where ATV use during hunting and trapping is restricted (*i.e.*, the exceptions in Minn. Stat., sec. 84.926 do not apply);
- avoiding damage to sensitive resources;
- addressing significant safety concerns and user conflicts;
- designating new trails and trail connections to create systems from the trail segments designated during Phase 1; and
- undesignating unsustainable trails.

¹ *Laws of Minnesota 2003, Chapter 128, Article 1, Section 167, as amended by ML 2005, first Special Session, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 152, and by ML 2007, Chapter 57, Section 155.*

Trail systems in 4 Pine County state forests were the first reviewed in Phase 2. During FY 2012-2013, the DNR conducted a public scoping meeting to solicit ideas for improved trail systems, identified unsustainable trail segments (to be undesignated), and proposed new trail systems and trail connections. During the remainder of FY 2013, the DNR will conduct formal public notification and review of the proposed trail system revisions, and will initiate formal environmental review (EAW) if required.

Recreational trail opportunities for each type of motorized use should provide a variety of trail types and range of difficulty levels. Difficulty levels should be apportioned so that about 10% of the opportunities are considered easy, and another 10% are difficult, with about 80% of the opportunity in the moderate range. A variety of experiences creates a higher level of user satisfaction, encourages trail riders to use the trails more often and for longer trips, and creates a greater appreciation for natural resources and the outdoors. If this range of opportunities is not provided as part of the trail system, trail users are more likely to seek variety and new places to ride off designated trails. If that occurs, the use may not be in a sustainable location or manner.

The greatest opportunity for new, high quality trail development is presented by the Phase 2 forest planning, as systems are completed and new opportunities are identified. This effort needs continued support and funding so progress can be maintained and trail systems can be completed as was promised during the first phase.

Table 3 summarizes Phase 2 ATV trail progress in FY 2012-2013.

Table 2. State ATV trail projects completed during FY 2012-2013

Trail Name	Trail Location	Miles of new ATV trail	DNR review status	Public review status	MEPA review status	Project cost, excluding staff time	Notes
Matthew Lourey State Trail	Nemadji and St. Croix state forests, Pine County	23.2	Complete	Complete	EAW completed	\$150000	Master plan revised; trail designated for ATV use in May 2012; construction and signing completed on 15 miles during summer 2012, remainder to be completed in 2013. The newly designated segments make connections to complete a 47-mile long ATV opportunity on the state trail.
Fond Du Lac State Forest trail	St. Louis County	.75	Complete	Not required	NA	5000	Trail section improved to allow for ATV use; provides connection from Berthiaume Forest Road westward to another ATV trail; completes system loop.
Con Con ATV Trail connections	Beltrami County, Beltrami Island SF	1	Complete	Not required	NA	4500	Routes designated; culvert crossing installed to connect a loop of 5.5 miles to an existing GIA trail; total trail system is 170 miles of riding opportunity. In FY 13 Beltrami County will sponsor this trail through the GIA program with the Fourtown/Grygla Sportsman Club for GIA.
Boyd Road Trail	Cook County, Pat Bayle SF	15.5	Complete	Compete	Exempt from EAW	75000	Route was designated during 2003-2008 Phase 1 designation process; but improvements needed to create a sustainable ATV trail; Cook County will sponsor as a GIA ATV trail.
Solana State Forest trail	Itasca County	14	Complete	Complete	Exempt from EAW	75000	Route was designated during 2003-2008 Phase 1 designation process; but improvements needed to create a sustainable ATV trail; Aitkin County will sponsor as a GIA ATV trail.
Bear Hunter Trail	Nemadji SF, Pine County	NA	NA	NA	NA	10000	The Bear Hunter trail suffered washouts during heavy storms in FY 2013. Culvert replacement and repairs were needed.
ATV trails in Nemadji, St. Croix, and Chengwatana SF	Pine County	NA	NA	NA	NA	36950	Clean-up and repairs on ATV trails, FY12 and FY13; includes \$15,000 in fleet expenses and \$21,950 for 2 contracts; includes damages from FY 2012 blowdown and flooding, and FY 2013 flooding.
TOTAL		54.45				\$356450	

Table 3. Phase 2 State Forest Trail Planning completed during FY 2012-2013*

Forest Name	Location	# of new ATV trail segments	Miles of new ATV trail	DNR review status	Public review status	MEPA review status	Notes
General Andrews SF	Pine County	10 segments	2.3	Complete	Pending	EAW not required	Public scoping meeting held in February 2012; draft proposal complete; public notice & comment period in early 2013; new ATV trail proposed to provide access to McCormick Lake day use area; FY 2013 completion anticipated.
St. Croix SF	Pine County	3 segments	3	Complete	Pending	EAW not required	Public scoping meeting held in February 2012; draft proposal complete; public notice & comment period in early 2013; FY 2013 completion anticipated.
Nemadji SF	Pine County	23 segments	10	Complete	Pending	EAW anticipated	Public scoping meeting held in February 2012; draft proposal complete; public notice & comment period in early 2013; Fall or Winter 2013 completion anticipated.
Chengwatana SF	Pine County	1 segment	1	Complete	Pending	EAW not required	Public scoping meeting held in February 2012; draft proposal complete; public notice & comment period in early 2013; proposed new segment will provide loop and access to St. Croix River overlook trail. FY 2013 completion anticipated.
TOTAL		37 segments	16.3				

*Phase 2 planning costs are primarily staff-related; implementation will involve staff, equipment, and materials costs, plus the cost to prepare an EAW if required.

Process Assistance and Staffing

As described earlier, the time required for completing an ATV GIA trail varies from several months to several years. The first step of formulating a trail proposal is often the most time-consuming. Before a trail can be proposed for GIA funding, the local sponsor and the participating club must identify the potential alignment for the trail; identify, contact, and negotiate use agreements with landowners along the potential alignment; design the trail; obtain engineering approvals for trail segments in public road rights-of-way; satisfy open meeting requirements; estimate trail costs; identify funding sources for match requirements; develop a project proposal and map; and prepare an application to the DNR for funding. The process can be complex and frustrating, especially for first-time applicants.

In 2010, the DNR established 4 regional OHV acquisition and development specialist positions to focus additional staff resources on identifying new trail opportunities and assisting local sponsors and clubs with formulating proposals and successfully completing the GIA application process. The specialists also work with DNR area supervisors to hold GIA information meetings in their respective regions, to provide updated program information for current participants, and to encourage interested clubs and government units to consider new trail proposals. **Since the acquisition and development positions were created, the number of GIA trail miles has increased significantly, including approximately 350 new miles enrolled during the FY 2012-2013 biennium, with an additional 250 miles anticipated in FY 2014.**

Planning new trails requires a significant commitment of field and central office staff resources. Before the OHV acquisition and development specialists were available, area supervisors provided the primary DNR support to local governments and clubs initiating and navigating the GIA proposal and funding process. Their availability to assist local governments with new trail proposals was limited by their primary position responsibilities, including planning, operation, development, maintenance and supervision of DNR-managed trails and water access facilities in their respective areas.

The OHV acquisition and development specialists have been key in advancing GIA proposals through the application, review, and funding process: identifying opportunities, potential conflicts, and environmental issues; coordinating interdisciplinary review, and ensuring communication and coordination among clubs, local sponsors, and DNR area, regional, and central office staff.

While not working directly with sponsors and enthusiast clubs, Parks and Trails central office staff also contribute to the success of ATV trail development: assessing statewide system needs; amending trail master plans; coordinating MEPA/NEPA compliance and preparing environmental review documents; conducting public review; setting statewide priorities; coordinating policy and communication; providing GIS analysis and forest-wide mapping; allocating resources; completing mandatory notification requirements, and preparing decision documents.

Summary and Conclusion

The FY 2012 to FY 2013 reporting period saw a significant increase in the number of ATV GIA trail proposals progressing through the DNR's 7-step review process. Before the regional OHV acquisition and development specialist positions were established, the majority of ATV GIA proposals did not advance past Step 0 of the process. Clubs and local sponsors did not have the resources to compile the key pieces of a sustainable trail proposal: land base, trail engineering and design, environmental analysis, public involvement, and identifying multiple funding sources.

With increased funding, and the full-time specialists providing outreach, technical assistance, and coordination, the DNR expects most GIA proposals can be implemented successfully. Including the proposals currently in-process, the DNR anticipates an additional 250 miles of ATV trail will be added to the GIA system in FY 2014.

The additional ATV trail funding in FY 2012 and FY 2013 also allowed the DNR to make significant progress improving state ATV trail systems, including opening the Matthew Lourey Trail for ATV use, restoring trail crossings damaged by severe weather events, and making key connections to existing trails, to provide greater opportunity, flexibility, range of difficulty levels, and longer trip lengths for recreational ATV riders. The DNR first proposed adding ATV use to the Matthew Lourey Trail in the late 1990s; the additional funding made implementation possible.

The majority of new GIA opportunities are created on existing corridors: existing forest roads, public road ROWs, undesignated forest routes not previously managed for ATV riding, and state forest trails that are improved and maintained by clubs with GIA funding. As described earlier, there are numerous constraints to developing motorized trails on new corridors. Because user clubs and local governments often want to establish GIA trails quickly, the DNR anticipates that the majority of future ATV GIA trail proposals will continue to be combinations of existing trail, forest roads, some public road ROW, and relatively short connecting segments of new corridor.

New ATV trail corridors and longer trails are most likely to be proposed and implemented through Phase 2 forest trail planning because the DNR administers the land base and has the staff resources to complete the extensive trail review and designation process. During Phase 2, the DNR plans to evaluate new trail opportunities for ATV riding as well as other motorized and non-motorized trail uses.

The DNR appreciates this opportunity to report on the acceleration of the ATV trail program during the 2012 and 2013 biennium.