
Project Proposal

Expansion of the Iron Range Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area / 2,500-Acre Virginia Site

Project Sponsor: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks & Trails Division. St. Paul, MN 55155-4052. Project funding will come from a mix of State and Federal Trail project funding sources, including Minnesota's dedicated off-highway vehicle funding accounts.

Project Description: This proposal entails developing off-highway vehicle trails, access roads, and associated infrastructure at the 2,500-acre Virginia Addition to the Iron Range Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area (OHVRA). This new site will be connected by trail to the OHVRA located at Gilbert which has been in operation since Fall 2002.

Project Location: (*See Project Map*). Generally, the Virginia Addition to the OHVRA is located east of the City of Virginia and north of the City of Gilbert on the land adjacent to the north, east and south boundaries of the St. Louis County Landfill. This includes land in T58N R17W, Sections 2, 3, 11, 14, 15, 16 and 23.

Need and Justification: This 2,500-acre addition to the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area was legislatively authorized in 1999 (*MN Session Laws, 1999, Chapter 231, Sect. 99, Subdiv. 4*). That portion of the OHVRA at Gilbert has been operating since 2002. The Virginia Addition, as yet undeveloped, will greatly add to the over all experience of recreation area visitors. The Iron Range OHVRA was always intended to include both components, since neither site provides sufficient recreational opportunity all by itself.

Site Design: All proposed development will take place within the statutory boundaries of the IROHVRA. The Virginia Addition will be developed for OHV trail riding with little need for new infrastructure beyond culverts, access roads, trail bridges and property boundary fencing. No buildings will be constructed at this site. A bridge will be constructed to facilitate vehicle crossing of the Pike River Flowage at the sites' main entrance at Gilbert. A culvert under State Highway 135 will also be developed to provide a safe off-road trail connection between Gilbert and Virginia portions of the combined facility. Coordination between MNDOT, DNR and the City of Gilbert will be essential in connecting the two sites by trail. This crossing will provide for off-highway vehicle traffic under the highway, as well as for maintenance and management vehicle access.

Trail Design: The OHV trails on the Virginia site will be designed using the DNR's recently published "*Trail Planning, Design & Development Guidelines*" for sustainable trail development. Site-specific trail construction will also be influenced by the terrain, geographic features and soil types, as well as by surface water features, wetlands, rock outcrops, old road beds, old mining roads and former railroad rights-of-way located on the site.

Wetland Impacts: Wetlands located in and around the Virginia Site have been identified and mapped during the planning process. Wetland impacts will be avoided and minimized during project planning and development, and any unavoidable impacts will be mitigated as required by state and federal law. Wetland delineation and permitting will precede any planned construction in or adjacent to identified wetland areas.

Surface Water Crossings: The Pike River headwater is located immediately adjacent to the Virginia Site. Crossing of the Pike River flowage will require use of an existing river crossing along an old County Road that once crossed the river. This bridge will need to be replaced. The final bridge design is not yet known. Consultation with permitting agencies will determine the type of bridge. The site also features varying terrain with many small flowages. Culvert placement will also be determined on a 'as-needed' basis site as trail development proceeds.

Vegetative Cover: The major cover types found throughout the site include aspen, black spruce, paper birch, sugar maple, red pine and small amounts of white pine and understory brush. Vegetative impacts will be limited to the areas of road or trail development. Trail corridors will be kept narrow in order to minimize stormwater runoff, and to preserve the existing forest canopy. Narrow trail corridors will also enhance aesthetics and add to the rider's recreational experience.

Soils: Soils within the project area can be described as either relatively undisturbed or altered by mining activity. Soils have been mapped and are available from the project sponsor. The majority of the undisturbed soils consist of 8 to 14" of loamy surface material (loam or silt loam textures) over a clay subsoil. The predominant soil drainage of this area ranges from moderately well to somewhat poor. A small portion of the area consists of coarse loamy surface material (loamy sand or sandy loam) over sand and/or gravel. Deep wet peat and wet organic mineral soils are also present.

Operation & Maintenance: The site will be operated and maintained by DNR's Parks & Trails Division out of the existing Gilbert OHVRA. Management methods and maintenance schedules will be similar to those employed at the Gilbert Site over the past six years.

Next Steps: A Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting is planned for 6:00 PM on Friday, February 6, 2009 at the Mountain Iron Community Center, 8586 Enterprise Drive South, just south of Highway 169 between Mineral Avenue and Mud Lake Road to hear public comment on the draft site design proposal. The public is invited to attend. Following the close of the public review period on February 13, 2009, the OHVRA Facility Master Plan (*dated 12/31/98*) will be amended to reflect plans for the Virginia Addition, and preparation of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (*per MR Ch. 4410.4300*) will begin. Project permitting and construction will move forward upon completion of project environmental review.

For More Information: See www.mndnr.gov for downloadable maps, committee rosters, a planning timeline and supporting technical data for the planned Virginia Addition to the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area. Hard copies of this and additional background materials is also available upon request from the address below.

Copies of the Iron Range OHVRA Master Plan (*dated 12/31/98*) are available for inspection at both the Gilbert and Virginia Public Libraries, and at the State Legislative Reference Library in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Submit Written Comments to:

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Comment Deadline: 4:30 PM on Friday, February 13, 2009

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