

On Track

A Monthly Update on Forest Road & Trail Designation in Minnesota State Forests

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Winter riding opportunities

Most state forest roads are open for all motor vehicle use year round unless gated or signed closed, all forest roads may not be plowed free of snow in the winter. Check the list of forests and forest roads open at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trailconditions/listing.html>.

Some trails are available for off-highway vehicle use unless signed closed. Some trails are signed and groomed for snowmobile use. Driving on the groomed snowmobile trail with a motor vehicle may cause damage to the trail's snow-packed surface. Check the trail closures at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ohv/closures.html>.

Winter can be one of the busiest times in some forests for logging, use caution when sharing the routes with commercial vehicles and other forest users. Responsible riders are safe riders. Wear protective gear and maintain your machine. Don't take chances that endanger yourself or others. The future of OHVs depends on your behavior today.

Ice safety

Before venturing out on a frozen lake or pond keep in mind that there is no such thing as 100 percent safe ice. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources recommends the following minimum ice thickness for new clear ice: 4 inches for people, 5 inches for snowmobiles and ATVs, 8 to 12 inches for cars or small pickups, and 12 to 15 inches for medium trucks. The best advice is don't put yourself into needless danger by venturing out too soon or too late in the season. For more information on ice safety contact the MN DNR Metro (651) 296-6157 or toll free 1-888-646-6367 or email at info@dnr.state.mn.us.

Unightly blight or indispensable tools?

One of the concerns being expressed by state forest users is that too many signs are being erected in forests, especially in those classified as *limited*. As more OHV trails are designated and other unsustainable routes are closed, even more signs will be required to identify the status of each route.

Trail and road managers are torn between the desire to keep the forests as free from artificial enhancements (like signs) as possible, and the need to keep the public informed. They recognize that some may find the signs unsightly. However, signing has become a necessary means of letting people know which roads and trails may be legally traveled.

In a *limited* forest, motorized travel is only allowed on roads and trails that are posted and designated as open to motorized vehicle use. This is going to require a change of culture for many Minnesotans who have become accustomed to driving virtually unfettered on state forest lands.

For example, if the driver of a highway-licensed 4x4 pickup enters Solana State Forest (which is a limited forest) on a signed state forest road and wants to see what's down an unsigned logging trail, the person will have to park the vehicle and walk to explore the logging road. The absence of a sign at the entrance to the logging road means that the route is not open to motorized vehicles.

Classifications vary and have been subject to change, so state forest users need to find out the current classification of the state forest lands they intend to visit. The need to understand the meaning of posted signs (or the absence of signs) for each classification, and they need to know whether big game/trapping exceptions apply to the area.

When traveling through Minnesota's state forests, please remember to be safe, follow and obey all posted signs and regulations; be respectful of others and enjoy Minnesota's great outdoors!

Mississippi Headwaters Unit draft plan released

The draft plan and maps for the Mississippi Headwaters Unit went public on November 13, 2007. The proposal covers the forest classification review and road/trail designations for the Mississippi Headwaters SF and scattered DNR Forestry-administered lands in Southwest Beltrami County. DNR worked closely with the land departments for Beltrami, Clearwater, and Hubbard counties in developing the proposal.

The draft plan recommends a limited classification for the state forest. The "closed unless posted open" policy would apply to forest lands managed by DNR and Hubbard Counties inside the forest. Beltrami and Clearwater counties operate under an "open unless restricted" policy on lands under their jurisdiction. DNR, Hubbard County, and Beltrami County also agree to an Area with Limitations along the Mississippi River corridor.

Designations are proposed for both forest roads and trails in the draft plan.

The planning documents are available for public review and comment at DNR's website (www.mndnr.gov). A public meeting will be held on January 16, 2008 at Hobson Memorial Union at Bemidji State University. DNR will be taking comments from the public through January 23, 2008.

Northern Border open houses scheduled

The DNR and cooperating counties will co-host three open houses for the Northern Border state forests in December. The public is invited to view maps of state forest lands and inventoried access routes and comment on desired future motorized and non-motorized use of routes on state forest lands. There are 300,000 acres of state forest land and about 500 miles of inventoried routes in the Northern Border area which includes all or parts of eight counties in NW Minnesota.

The open houses will be held at:

- Warroad Public Service Building, Dec. 10 from 2 - 7 pm
- North Beltrami Community Center in Kelliher, Dec. 12 from 4 - 7 pm
- Baudette County Courthouse, Dec. 13 from 3:30 - 8 pm

For more information, visit the DNR OHV riding web page at www.mndnr.gov click on outdoor activities, then OHV riding or www.findthetrails.com



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Planning Progress

Chippewa Group

- Commissioner's Orders being drafted.

Cloquet Valley (St. Louis)

- Awaiting final approval

Crow Wing/Emily (Crow Wing)

- Awaiting final approval
- Team meeting with Commissioner scheduled for December 11.

East Central

- Inventory maps available on line.
- Public open houses held in August.
- Classification and route evaluation underway.

Koochiching/Itasca

- First public open houses expected January 2008.

Northern Border

- Open houses on December 10, 12, 13.

Sturgeon River (St. Louis County)

- Awaiting final approval.

Superior Group (North St. Louis County)

- Open houses held in June.
- Classification/designation exercise underway
- Draft proposal expected February 2008.

West Central Group

- Planning for the North Unit underway; MHSF draft plan released in November; WESF draft plan release in winter 2008.
- Analysis of comments underway for South Unit.
- South Unit final classification review and designation expected December 2007.