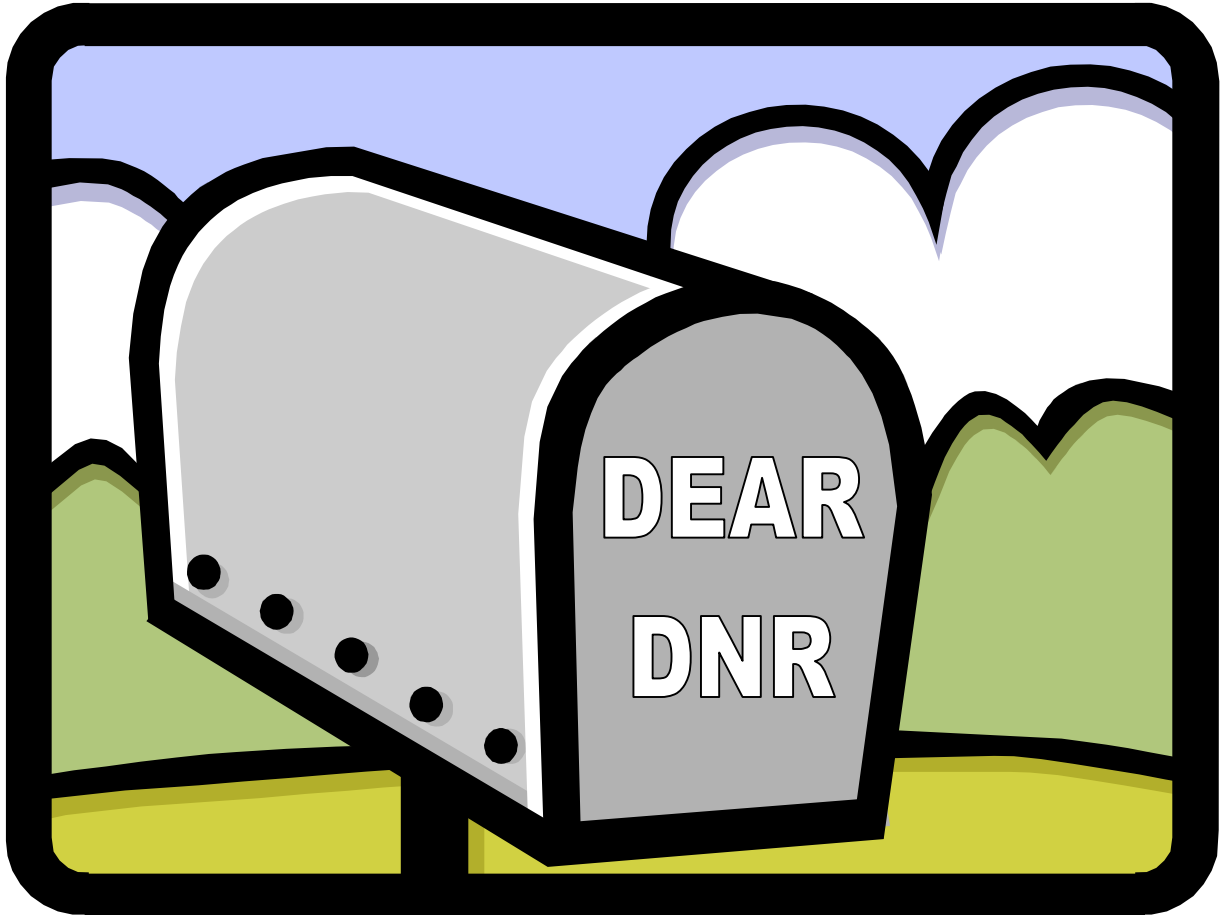


Forest Classification & Motor Route Designation Plan for the Rum River State Forest

**Response to Comments
December 19, 2006**



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Rum River Field Project Team

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BACKGROUND

Minnesota Laws 2003, Chap. 128, Article 1, Sect. 167 (as amended) requires the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to review the classification of all state forests and state forest lands by December 31, 2008. The DNR is to evaluate the current 'limited' forest classification, according to the process set forth in *MN Rules Chap. 6100.1950*, and retain or modify this classification as appropriate.

State Statutes also establish public notice and public meeting requirements, calling for a public meeting to be held in the county wherein the largest portion of the forest lands are located to "provide information and receive comment" on draft trail designation plans and forest classification proposals.

In the case of the Rum River State forest, legal notice was published in the State Register (Cite: 30 SR 1251) on May 15, 2006 summarizing the proposal and announcing two public meetings scheduled for July 18th in Onamia (Mille Lacs County) and July 20th in Mora (Kanabec County). A combined total of 40 citizens attended these DNR-sponsored meetings, and provided a mix of both written and verbal comments. Additional written comments were also submitted via Email and by US Mail during the 60-day comment period which ran from May 15th until 4:30 PM on July 28, 2006.

COMPILATION OF COMMENTS

Written comments were received from the following individuals: (alphabetical order)

- Bergman, Garth
- Bielegeski, Dan
- Blonigen, Jeremy
- Borer, Shannon O.
- Bromberg, John
- Cantwell, Bill
- Christensen, Kenny
- Fier, Robert
- Hedin, Ross
- Henke, William, Izaak Walton League, MN Division
- Huber, Charles & Nancy
- Jorgensen, Phil
- Jorgenson, Steve
- Lutgen, Craig, Trail geeks 4x4 Club
- Mains, Morgan
- Martinez, Ruben
- Mathison, Duane, Trail Geeks 4x4 Club
- Navum, Brian, Trail Geeks 4x4 Club
- Norton, Matthew, MN Center for Envir Advocacy
- Porter, Mike
- Ramstad, C.J., Editor, MN Off Road Magazine
- Rothaus, Richard M.
- Schwartz, Richard S.
- Simmons, Bon Hill, Lunatic Wrecking Crew
- Storbeck, Ben, Trail Geeks 4x4 Club
- Swart, Dennis
- Todd, Christopher
- Woodmansee, Alexandra, MN 4 Wheel Drive Assn.

RESPONSE TO TOPICS OF CONCERN

Public comments were sorted and distributed to the Rum River Team following the close of the public comment period for evaluation and response. The Team's draft responses, and proposed changes to the draft Forest Classification & Motor Route Designation Plan, were forwarded to the Regional Management Team, the Off-Highway Vehicle Policy Committee, and finally to the DNR Commissioner for review and approval.

Similar or related comments were grouped under six major headings (below). The departmental response to public comments and questions is organized accordingly. The categories are:

- **Expressions of Support for / Opposition to Motorized Access**
- **Support for 'Closed' Forest Classification**
- **Non-Motorized Area Questions**
- **Biodiversity / Listed Species Comments**
- **Planning Process Questions & Comments**
- **Off-Highway Vehicle Program & Policy Comments**

Support for / Opposition to Motor Access

COMMENT: A number of individuals expressed their support for or opposition to the proposed 'limited' forest classification, and/or for the draft motor route designation plan.

DNR RESPONSE: The DNR acknowledges these individuals and appreciates their perspectives.

COMMENT: One individual felt that, according to the draft proposal, ATVs were getting more and better access to the Rum River State Forest than were ORVs, even though in his opinion ATVs are capable of doing much more damage than are 4x4 trucks.

DNR RESPONSE: The current proposal calls for OHV use on only the 18.1 miles of State Forest Roads (includes both System Roads and Minimum Maintenance Roads) within the Rum River Forest. This mileage applies equally to ATVs, OHMs and ORVs. The DNR acknowledges that MS 84.926 does permit seasonal use of non-designated trails by licensed hunters or trappers with ATVs and HLV s, and off-trail game retrieval by ATVs.

COMMENT: One individual asserted that because OHV operators comprise only a small minority of the state's population, and because few ride in State Forests, more opportunity should be provided for the "super-majority" of self-propelled forest visitors who choose not to ride OHVs.

DNR RESPONSE: The DNR agrees that the majority of state land OHV use is utilitarian in nature (e.g., hunting, trapping, collecting) and that a sizable percentage of riders do report riding primarily, but not exclusively on private or other non-state public property. This fact is borne out by various studies conducted by or for the DNR over the past several years. The data also show that OHVs are frequently unaware of public land riding opportunities and confused regarding the ownership of trails and lands that they do ride on.

A significant portion of OHV use does occur on state lands in every region of the state. The "*Outdoor Recreation Study of the Foot Hills Forest Area*" (MN DNR, 2004) demonstrates this fact. In the case of the Foot Hills, forest visitation was estimated at nearly 60,000 visitor occasions annually, a level that actually exceeds visitation at nearby Crow Wing State Park. Most survey respondents reported accessing the forest via public-entry sites (75%), while the remainder (25%) enter via adjacent private property. **Perhaps most striking, was that 63 percent of all those surveyed reported riding an OHV during their visit to the Foot Hills.** This includes 55 percent of hunters and fully 40 percent of those engaged in 'other' outdoor recreational activities (e.g., hiking, fishing, bird watching, etc.).

The “2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey of Minnesotans” [MN DNR, 2005], MN DNR projects a 252% increase in off-road ATV driving between 2004-2014. While all other outdoor activities are expected to experience participation declines of between 11 and 25 percent, ATV riding is expected to increase dramatically due to the steady, rapid rate at which off-road recreation has grown over the past 10-years (e.g., ATV registrations have doubled every 4-5 years during the past decade). Although it is unclear how long this trend will continue, it is important that DNR plan responsibly for this use.

In a companion report: “Ten-Year Forecasts of Minnesota Adult Outdoor Recreation Participation, 2004-2014” [MN DNR, 2005], participation in off-road ATV riding is projected to increase to 36 percent of the state’s population by 2014. Numbers of riders and hours spent annually are projected to triple (305%) over this same period. This is remarkable, given that typical Minnesotans are expected to invest less time in outdoor recreation than in the past, as outdoor recreation participation rates ‘plateau’ in Minnesota.

COMMENT: One individual suggested that the DNR revisit recommendations contained in the 2001 OHV System Plan developed for Kanabec and Mille Lacs Counties. This (draft) plan envisioned much more opportunity for OHV travel, especially in the Kanabec County portion of the forest. What’s changed over the past five years that has resulted in such a dramatic reduction in riding opportunities?

DNR RESPONSE: The 2001 Draft OHV System Plan for Mille Lacs and Kanabec Counties did envision more miles of OHV trail than are contained in the current proposal. This plan, which was never finalized or adopted, covered a planning area much larger than does the 2006 Rum River State Forest Plan. The 1998-2001 OHV Statewide System Planning Process generated a great deal of controversy and eventually succumbed to intractable litigation.

Since that time, the State Legislature has provided DNR with specific guidance regarding forest reclassification and motor route designation. This process is now codified in state statute and rule, and serves as the template for forest evaluations occurring all across Minnesota.

During the interim, DNR Area Staff continued to explore the potential for this and other area forests to host vehicular recreation. Many of the lingering questions from the first planning exercise have since been addressed through focused resource inventory and field evaluation efforts. For example, the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) was recently completed for Kanabec and Mille Lacs Counties, leading to a substantially better understanding of the locations and importance of significant rare features. Much more is now known about the Rum River Forest, its resources, and its inherent limitations for providing OHV opportunities, than was known in 2001.

Support ‘Closed’ Forest Classification

COMMENT: Several individuals expressed their support for a ‘closed’ forest classification as regards motor vehicle use. A ‘closed’ classification would eliminate all off-highway vehicle use in the forest, for all purposes, year-round, including that on designated state forest roads. The seasonal hunting/trapping exceptions of MS 84.926 would not apply in a ‘closed’ forest.

Proponents argue that closure is necessary to protect and preserve the sensitive forest ecosystem from OHV impacts. Specifically, they cite impacts to forest soils, fragile wildlife habitat, exotic species spread, surface waters and wetlands. They also cite the desire for quiet, and for additional acres devoted to non-motorized recreation. Given the small size of the forest, and the prevalence of forest roads, they argue that OHV access is unnecessary. One individual suggested closing only the Mille Lacs Co. portion of the forest.

DNR RESPONSE: The team agrees that due to the small size of the forest, and the existing forest road network,

that motor access is 'good' in the Rum River Forest and no new routes need to be constructed or designated. That's why the team recommended a 'limited' forest classification with no OHV trail designations. The net effect, is that 61.6 miles of 'secondary' routes, currently legal to ride, will be closed to most OHV travel under this plan.

Off-trail or cross-country OHV travel are not permitted in a 'limited' state forest, except pursuant to MS 84.926, which provides for certain hunting and trapping exceptions. These exceptions apply only to licensed individuals who operate ATVs or Highway-Licensed Vehicles (HLVs) in the course of legitimate hunting or trapping activities during specified legal seasons. All other off-trail use is illegal and subject to enforcement action. MR 6100.1950, Subd 5-8 provides additional restrictions and prohibitions (e.g., rutting, damage to surface water, wetlands, trees or growing crops, motor use of non-motor trails) on the use of off-highway vehicles on Minnesota forest lands.

The Rum River Team did debate the merits of a 'closed' classification, but determined that closure was unwarranted and unnecessary to protect the forest from OHV impacts at this time. In the team's judgment, current levels of ATV and HLTV use for hunting and trapping are sustainable and associated effects manageable. Regular trail monitoring, maintenance and field enforcement will help ensure that non-designated routes do not fall into disrepair or generate unacceptable social or environmental impacts. Closing just the Mille Lacs County portion of the forest isn't an option under Minnesota State Law for forests south of US Hwy 2 (ML 2005, Ch 128, Art. 1, Sect. 167, Subd 1). Forest classification decisions can be revisited at a future date should conditions change or unforeseen problems arise.

COMMENT: One individual argued that, as a limited forest with no designated ATV trails, there is currently no off-road ATV travel allowed in the Rum. Therefore, no riding opportunities would be lost by switching to a 'closed' classification.

DNR RESPONSE: While the Rum River State Forest was indeed classified as 'limited' (routes closed to OHV unless posted open) in 2000 by then Commissioner Sando, pending the outcome of the current exercise it has, in fact, been operated and enforced as a 'managed' forest (routes open unless posted closed). The same is true of all seven of the forests originally classified as 'limited'. Enforcement Officers cannot begin to cite OHV users for riding on non-designated trails until such time as these forests are officially reclassified, signed and mapped.

Consequently, a change to the 'closed' classification would result in a net reduction of 79.2 miles of inventoried routes, including state forest road miles, that are presently legal to ride. Even transition to the 'limited' classification will result in a reduction of 61.6 miles of non-designated routes in the forest which were formerly open to OHV use.

COMMENT: One individual stated that there is no off-road ATV hunting currently, and that it would be "unwise" to begin it at this time.

DNR RESPONSE: Hunting is among the most popular activities within the Rum River Forest, and increasingly hunters have turned to ATVs to construct hunting stands, to access these stands, and to retrieve big game during the fall hunting season. While evidence of ATV use is not extensive or pronounced, especially in the Mille Lacs County portion of the forest, ATVs are being used in conjunction with big game hunting on state lands. ATV (and HLTV) use for these purposes is currently legal on non-designated routes within the forest, and would remain so under this plan, except within the designated Non-Motorized Area. ATVs may also travel off-trail pursuant to MS Chap. 84.926.

COMMENT: One individual argued that there is an 'extreme statewide imbalance' of forests classified as 'managed' or 'limited', and that closure of the Rum River State Forest would help achieve a more equitable motor/non-motor balance in Minnesota by boosting 'closed' forest acreages. Enforcement workloads could also be greatly reduced under a 'closed' classification.

DNR RESPONSE: Of the 12 forests completed to date, more than half of the total inventoried routes, formerly legal to ride, have now been closed to most OHV use. Two of the forests have been closed to all OHV use, roads included. Proactive route closures and 'Non-Motorized Area' designations within completed state forests help to

reduce motor vs. non-motor visitor conflict, and can effectively create substantial 'solitude' areas.

Securing compliance with Minnesota's OHV regulations is central to attaining the DNR's long-term goal of 'managed use on managed trails'. This task will be made easier by the substantial net reduction in motorized route miles resulting from the forest reclassification and motor route designation process currently underway (e.g., 61.6 miles of routes closed to regular motor use in the Rum River Forest alone). Improved signing and mapping of completed forests also enables trail users to make informed choices regarding appropriate trail use, thereby eliminating troublesome 'grey areas' and facilitating field enforcement.

COMMENT: The likelihood of non-native invasive species being spread into the Rum River State Forest is high (if OHV use is permitted). The forest should be closed to all but HLV use of designated State Forest Roads.

DNR RESPONSE: The introduction or spread of non-native species is a troubling and disruptive chronic vegetative impact. Timber operators, hunters, trappers, (motor or non-motor) recreational trail users and others can introduce invasive non-native plant species through the transportation of firewood, or via contaminated (with seeds and spores) clothing, shoes, boots, backpacks, bicycles or vehicle tires. Exotics are also be transported via wind, rain, surface waters, wildfire, birds and animals. Infestations already likely occur in parts of the forest.

MN DNR is committed to minimizing new routes through the forest and strictly enforcing prohibitions on off-trail travel. No new route designations are proposed for the Rum River Forest, and a total of 61.6 miles of existing routes will remain undesignated under this proposal, thus closed to regular motor use. The DNR is committed to controlling or eradicating known infestations of invasive non-native species on state lands, regardless of their origin or means of introduction. Visitors can help by alerting DNR Staff to the locations of suspected new infestations.

Non-Motorized Area Questions & Comments

COMMENT: – Will disabled hunters with a Special DNR Disabled Hunter Permit be able to continue to use their ATV in this Non-Motorized Area for hunting purposes?

DNR RESPONSE: The proposed "Non-Motorized Area" is an approximately 570 acre parcel in the Kanabec County portion of the Southern Unit of the Rum River Forest. It includes parts of Sect. 7 & 18 of T39N R25W. The Team's intent was to provide added protection for this unique geologic formation, for adjacent surface waters and wetlands, and for the rich plant and animal biodiversity located within the larger Esker / Tunnel Valley Complex.

The current proposal would eliminate all off-road access into this area, including that by disabled permit. OHVs and Highway Licensed Vehicles (HLVs) could continue to use designated forest roads through the area, and snowmobile trail use would be unaffected. Cross-country ATV riding, and the use of non-designated routes by ATVs or HLVs would be prohibited year-round.

Upon implementation, The boundaries of this non-motorized area will be added to visitor maps, and clearly signed at all major ingress/egress points in the forest. Perimeter signing will also be installed.

COMMENT: What is the scientific basis for closing the Esker / Tunnel Valley Area to motorized use? Have any scientific studies been done?

DNR RESPONSE: The Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) Program began in 1987 as a systematic survey of rare biological features. The goal of the survey is to identify significant natural areas and to collect and interpret field data on the distribution and ecology of rare plants, rare animals, and native plant communities. Once

these rare features have been identified and mapped, objective criteria are used to rank each site's biodiversity significance.

Recently completed surveys of Mille Lacs and Kanabec Counties identified an oak and mixed pine/hardwood forest located on the esker, and significant wetland plant communities in the tunnel valley below, both of which lie within larger sites ranked as of 'high biodiversity significance' by MCBS in 2004. This high ranking was due to the quality and size of the site, and the mix of rare features, including geologic features, native plant communities, and the occurrence of rare plant/animal species. [A summary of the MCBS biodiversity significance ranking criteria are available upon request.]

Eskers are composed of sand and gravel, which are easily erodible, especially by wheeled vehicles. Based upon the DNR Team's collective professional judgment, and an improved understanding of the fragility and threatened nature of the esker/tunnel valley formations, they recommended that motorized use be restricted to existing roads and trails within this 570-acre area.

COMMENT: How did you gauge the future potential for vehicular damage to the formation or to the biodiversity found on the site? Why would the existing trails suddenly become 'unsustainable'?

DNR RESPONSE: Soil erosion from any new trails, or from the increased use of existing trails, could lead to destruction of some of the plants on the forest floor, including listed rare species. The noise from increased traffic could also disrupt nesting birds, including those listed as special concern. Increased OHV traffic in future years would exacerbate these impacts.

COMMENT: Is the Esker really all that unique?

DNR RESPONSE: Eskers are not common in Minnesota, although there has never been a full assessment of the number or acreage of eskers in the state. Eskers are, however, increasingly threatened by sand and gravel mining all across the state. This particular 12-mile-long esker is one of the longest and best-formed esker/tunnel valley systems in central Minnesota. Protecting that portion of the esker located on state lands would help to protect and preserve intact native plant communities and rare species that add to its value and increase its uniqueness. Other portions of the formation are privately owned, and several areas have already been destroyed or greatly altered as a result of commercial mining activities.

COMMENT: The Esker / Tunnel Valley formation is actually much larger than the proposed area delineation. Why not expand the 'closed zone' to include more of the formation? Doesn't it all warrant protection?

DNR RESPONSE: The team discussed the merits of a number of different area configurations, some larger and some smaller than the current boundaries. The Team selected the final configuration based upon protection needs, current access to the formation and observed use patterns, field signing requirements, enforcement logistics, and based upon land ownership considerations. The team feels that the current configuration does adequately protect the esker/tunnel valley formation within State Forest boundaries from motorized use impacts. And, it does this in a practical, understandable, and enforceable manner. Changes to this Non-Motorized Area designation can be made should the current boundaries prove inadequate or unworkable over time.

COMMENT: Isn't the Esker located, at least in part, on State Trust Fund Land? Doesn't the DNR have a responsibility to produce income from Trust Fund parcels? What about the gravel pit located on this site? Will it be re-activated at some point as gravel demands increase?

DNR RESPONSE: The esker is located, in part, on State School Trust Fund Lands. The DNR has a fiduciary responsibility to generate dollars to benefit the Permanent School Fund, which is invested for the benefit of public education in Minnesota. Dollars are generated primarily via land and timber sales and mineral royalties. Although

not every acre of trust land produces a consistent revenue stream, collectively these lands provide many millions of dollars annually for education in Minnesota. Interest and dividends earned from investing the fund's principal (currently over \$570 million) are used to support local school districts all across the state. The DNR has taken a number of steps, in recent years, to improve revenue generation on School Trust Lands that it manages.

The DNR has a responsibility to protect and preserve these lands held in trust for all Minnesotans. In this case, the Area Team has recommended that a 570-acre parcel be protected from vehicular use. Area forestry officials plan to reclaimed and restore the currently inactive gravel pit to a more natural condition. There are no plans at present to resume gravel operations at this site.

Biodiversity / Listed Species

COMMENT: We find the discussion of 'biodiversity' to be subjective and biased (against motorized use). Couldn't most any area be classified as being 'biologically diverse'? Specifically, how might biodiversity be impacted by vehicular travel on pre-existing trails?

DNR RESPONSE: There are a total of eight sites of biodiversity significance in the Rum River State Forest, with three classified as "outstanding", three as "high", and two being of "moderate" biodiversity significance. The ways in which biodiversity could be impacted by vehicular travel include possible impacts to soils, plant communities, or to rare plants and animals. These are the principal components that lead to the high biodiversity significance ranking.

It is also important to remember that the routes in question are not 'pre-existing trails'. Most are former logging trails that were not generally planned, designed or constructed for continued vehicular use. Off-highway vehicle use of some of these routes has resulted in accelerated soil erosion and surface water or wetland sedimentation. Habitat impacts and vegetative damage have also occurred in some areas.

COMMENT: 'Special Concern Species' cited in the Rum River Plan, like the bald eagle, red-shouldered hawks and Blanding's turtles, are all well-represented across their rather limited ranges. How might these species be impacted by vehicular travel on pre-existing trails?

DNR RESPONSE: Increasing vehicular travel will increase the chance of collisions or damage to turtles and to other reptiles, amphibians, and small mammals. Noise could impact nesting success of state-listed birds. Other at-risk species include trumpeter swans, timber wolves and sandhill cranes.

COMMENT: Current scientific research does not support closing existing trails to protect those rare plants mentioned in the draft plan (e.g., butternut, Wood's sedge, Least moonwort, halberd-leaved tearthumb). Specifically, how might these or other plant species be impacted by vehicular use of pre-existing trails?

DNR RESPONSE: These plants would not necessarily be impacted if the existing trails were to remain exactly as they are today. However, in order to accommodate (especially) ORV use, the trails may, at some point, need to be widened or improved. Even with increased levels of ATV use, trails will likely become deeper and wider over time, increasing gullying and erosion, and possibly impacting rare plant species. Scientific data about these particular plant species does exist, and it's clear from the literature that each of these species has exacting habitat requirements that could easily be compromised given the types of habitat disruption or disturbance described above.

Planning Process Questions & Comments

COMMENT: One individual suggested that public meetings (for all forests) be held in the Mpls/St. Paul Metro Area, in addition to the county in which the forest is located.

DNR RESPONSE: The DNR acknowledges that weeknight public meetings held in locations distant from the Metro can make it difficult for those wishing to attend. However, this approach is consistent with public notice and meeting requirements set forth in MR 6100.1950. While the statute does not prohibit public meetings in addition to those required in the county most affected, such meetings are unlikely given the substantial logistical challenges involved with transporting the Area Planning Team and other Area Staff to and from the Metro for the many meetings associated with this statewide planning exercise.

In the final analysis, thoughtful written comments submitted via US Mail, email or fax for the record during the official comment period have the greatest impact on DNR planning teams and decision makers. The public meetings are but one facet of public participation in plan development, review and approval.

COMMENT: One individual asked whether motorized grant-in-aid or unit trails could be developed in the future in the Rum River State Forest if it retains its 'limited' classification. What about trails through the Non-Motorized Area?

DNR RESPONSE: Both motorized and non-motorized trails can be developed in a 'limited' state forest. Motorized travel in a 'limited' forest is restricted to designated routes signed 'open' for that particular use. Travel on unsigned or non-designated routes is not permitted, except pursuant to MS Chap. 84.926 (seasonal hunting/trapping). Future motor routes proposed through the Non-Motorized Area will be carefully scrutinized, since vehicular use is fundamentally inconsistent with the management objectives for this area.

COMMENT: One individual charges that the Rum River Team failed to assess (motorized) road and trail densities, and to evaluate the effects that high trail densities have on forest flora, fauna and other (non-motor) forest users.

DNR RESPONSE: The DNR has not adopted a trail density standard for state forest lands. Uncertainty exists regarding the precise relationship between road/trail density and effects on terrestrial and/or aquatic ecosystems. A direct cause-effect relationship has not been established for most species; nor have threshold density values beyond which specific impacts can be anticipated. The effects of trail density on other (human) forest users are even less well understood.

Even when roads or trails have large local effects, landscape-level consequences may be negligible if these roads or trails are confined to limited areas of the forest. The spatial distribution of routes can, in many cases, be a better predictor of landscape changes than is either road/trail density or the extent and distribution of forest disturbance. It is therefore, important to evaluate potential roads and trails, and potential effects, at the appropriate scale, and within the proper management context, in order to produce sound, defensible analytical results.

COMMENT: One individual charges that the DNR cannot afford the added expense associated with motor trail designation (e.g., repair, maintenance, monitoring, enforcement), especially when one considers 'external' costs of motorized recreation (e.g., pollution, destruction, noise, displacement of non-motor recreationists) that are typically borne by the taxpayer. Non-motorized trails are less expensive to operate and maintain.

DNR RESPONSE: The DNR is unaware of any detailed cost data that compares the costs of constructing, operating or maintaining motorized versus non-motorized trails in Minnesota. The DNR is, however, currently engaged in a multi-year Pilot Study of motorized trail systems which will help generate more reliable OHV trail cost data, and help refine future cost estimates and justify funding requests. Preliminary findings from this study were submitted in a

2005 report submitted to the Minnesota Legislature entitled: "Study of Off-Highway Vehicle Trails" pursuant to MN Laws 2003, Chapter 128, Article 1, Sect. 168. This pilot study continues today.

OHV Program & Policy Comments

COMMENT: One individual asked whether systematic, statewide trail closures (as per the current process) might not simply displace 'renegade' riders.

DNR RESPONSE: The DNR acknowledges that some OHV riders may be displaced from travel routes that were once legal to ride. The trade-off is that the statewide inventory of designated OHV trails has grown significantly as a result of this process. As forest plans are completed, visitor maps are being prepared to identify these newly designated trails. Through this process, problematic and unsustainable routes are dropped from the system, focusing additional maintenance and enforcement resources on these newly designated motor routes.

COMMENT: One individual asked how the DNR intends to achieve a motor / non-motor 'balance' by simply restricting motorized trail users.

DNR RESPONSE: The Rum River State Forest covers a relatively small land area (only 20,726 ac. of the 39,538 ac. forest is DNR-administered) and is well-served by State Forest Roads. This 18.1 miles of system and minimum maintenance roads, which is open to OHV use, provides good vehicular access to most areas of the forest.

Beyond the roads, lies a network of non-designated trails, mostly old timber harvest routes, that are heavily used by walking hunters, trappers, birders, and local collectors (e.g., berries, mushrooms, deer sheds, etc.). Non-designated routes will remain open seasonally to hunters and trappers (as per MS 84.926) and year round for non-motor users.

In the team's judgment, the current proposal strikes a motor/non-motor 'balance' by providing adequate motor access, while respecting the wishes of those who wish to recreate in the forest absent motorized disturbance.

COMMENT: One individual asked why there aren't ORV trails in State Parks.

DNR RESPONSE: Tettegouche State Park is the only one of Minnesota's 66 State Parks that permits the operation of Off-highway Vehicles (ATVs only). A number of State Parks, State Waysides and State Recreation Areas also contain snowmobile trails. Unlike state forests, the mission and focus of State Parks is to provide for natural area protection, resource interpretation and non-motorized recreational experiences.

COMMENT: One individual accused the DNR of fostering a 'bias' against 4x4 trucks, criticized the roads-only ORV opportunities proposed for the Rum, and questioned whether the DNR was still committed to providing challenging Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) 'truck trails'.

DNR RESPONSE: The DNR remains committed to providing for ORV travel and touring routes on state forest lands. The department will also pursue the development of special OHV Recreation Areas (like the Gilbert OHVRA) with specialized facilities for ORVs. However, the DNR will not provide 'technical trails', which challenge the driver and machine, on state forest lands. Nor will DNR permit mud pits, hill climbs, or the construction of artificial obstacles or challenges along state forest roads or trails.

COMMENT: One individual asked why after 12 completed forest plans, 4x4 trucks have 'zero miles of trails'?

DNR RESPONSE: The tally after the first 12 completed forests is 23 miles of ORV trail miles, mostly located in the Paul Bunyan State Forest (Hubbard Co.) and in and around the Foothills State Forest (Cass Co.). The total mileage

(roads + trails) open to ORVs in these first 12 forests is approximately 658 miles.

COMMENT: One individual asked whether plans to limit OHV access discriminate against the disabled.

DNR RESPONSE: Disabled individuals may, in some cases, obtain a Special Use Permit from the Area Forester in order to access areas otherwise off-limits to motorized use. Disabled persons may also contact their Area Enforcement Officer to obtain a special motorized hunting permit which allows them to use an ATV for hunting and trapping purposes. Motorized use within a 'closed' forest, or within a designated non-motorized access area, however, is not allowed under any circumstances.

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