

Forest Classification
and
Forest Road and Trail Designations
for the
West Central Forests – South Unit
Responses to Comments



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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Acknowledgements

The DNR West Central Forests Road & Trail Team gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following individuals to the forest classification and road/trail designation process.

Bruce Cox.....Clearwater County Land Department
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Introduction

On May 14, 2007 the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) published a notice in the *State Register* (31 SR 1681) of proposed motor vehicle use classifications and road/trail designations for State Forest Lands in the West Central Forests – South Unit. The planning area includes: 1) forest lands within the statutory boundaries of Huntersville, Lyons, Smoky Hills, and Two Inlets State Forests, and 2) scattered forest lands in Clay, Douglas, Otter Tail, Pope, Todd, and Wadena Counties. The proposal was described in statewide news releases dated May 15, 2007 and June 26, 2007. DNR released a draft plan errata on June 26, 2007 to modify recommendations for forest classification in Clay, Douglas, and Pope Counties. Two public informational open houses on the proposed classifications and road/trail designations was held on July 17 in Menahga, and July 19 in Detroit Lakes, to explain the proposal and to receive comments. The public comment period ended on August 1, 2007.

The DNR received comment forms, letters, and e-mails from individuals and organizations. The agency appreciates the time and effort of everyone who commented on the proposals. The draft proposals were improved and clarified as a result of the public review process.

This document is a compilation of the documents received and the DNR's response to the issues raised about the proposed motor vehicle use classifications and road/trail designations. The DNR's motor vehicle use classification and road and trail use designation decisions for State Forest lands in the planning area will be based on the draft proposal and response to comments. The classification and road and trail designations will be implemented by publication of written orders of the Commissioner of Natural Resources published in the *State Register*.

The DNR uses a content analysis process to develop a response to issues expressed by commenters. Comments were grouped by topic and statements of public concern were developed.

PROJECT SCOPE & LIMITATIONS

The final Forest Classification and Route Designation Plan contains vehicular use guidance for all State Forest lands in the West Central Forests – South Unit planning area. In total, more than 60,000 acres of state land and about 325 miles of inventoried routes were evaluated with respect to motor vehicle use.

The plan addresses only EXISTING inventoried routes located on state-administered forest lands; designation orders will be made only on existing routes. Approximately 1.6 miles of new ATV/OHM trail is proposed for future construction; if pursued this will be evaluated under a separate planning process. No grant-in-aid trail designations are proposed; existing and potential future routes were considered during the classification review and road/trail designation process. Trail designations are not subject to the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) rules for recreational trail projects.

The plan does not address OHV use in public road ditches or road rights-of-way (ROW), or the use of private lands, trails, or roadways. Nothing in this plan is intended to endorse nor discourage any potential future State Trail, unit trail, or Grant In Aid trail development proposals.

Route evaluations were based upon current use and existing conditions. Existing state forest roads and designated trails were presumed sustainable, with the current *managed* classification serving as the starting point. The Planning Team systematically evaluated each route proposed for designation in terms of need, physical suitability, and environmental factors.

All inventoried state land routes are depicted on planning maps. Informal, local-use route on private lands, were not inventoried and are not depicted on the DNR draft or final maps.

Every effort was made to maintain existing vehicular access, subject to the proposed forest classification, environmental constraints, and land ownership considerations. The Planning Team sought to connect vehicular routes where possible, and carefully weighed all options and alternatives. Team members also attempted to physically separate potentially conflicting recreational uses (motor versus non-motor)

wherever possible. This was accomplished by recommending designation of non-motorized trails and Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use, and seasons of operation, where appropriate. This plan presumes that forest users (motorized or non-motorized) are, for the most part, law-abiding and respectful of trail rules, regulations, and sign postings.

By any measure, implementation of this plan represents a net reduction in legal motor routes available for vehicular travel on state lands in the planning area, especially during the non-hunting summer season. All existing and newly designated travel routes will be mapped and signed appropriately. These routes, and these forests, will also be the focus of stepped-up enforcement during the implementation period as forest users adjust to changed motor vehicle use regulations. Finally, should assumptions prove incorrect or use conditions change substantially, forest classifications can be re-evaluated, and road/trail designations revisited, at any time.

COMPILATION OF COMMENTS

Written comments were received from 54 persons or groups between May 14 and August 1, 2007. The list includes:

1. Anonymous
2. Anderson, Kevin
3. Anderson, Tom & Yvonne
4. Babcock, Barry W.
5. Bair, Linda
6. Baso, Monica; Menahga Conservation Club
7. Berscheid, Joe. D
8. Borah, Verlyn
9. Borah, Yvonne
10. Carleton, George
11. Dorff, Lance
12. Downing, Mary Theresa
13. Driscoll, John
14. Enberg, Eric
15. Feld, Ralph
16. Felton, John
17. Frey, Karen
18. Frey, Michael B.
19. Hanninen, Thomas (19)
20. Hansen, Don
21. Kraig Hinkemeyer
22. Jehs, Randy & Becky
23. Jennen, Peter M.
24. Johnson, Michael
25. Klein, Jeffrey
26. Kluender, Howard
27. Kolle, Ernest
28. Krosch, Ryan
29. Martin, Dave
30. Mattison, Willis
31. Maynard, Roy
32. McDonald, Kevin
33. Mikelalla
34. Motschenbacher, Brent
35. Myers, Mason & Gwen
36. Nelson, Bryce
37. Norton, Matt; MCEA
38. Ortman, Dave, Debby, and Family

39. Rupert, Greg
40. Spindler, Richard
41. Stowers, Dale
42. Stukel, Alyssa
43. Stukel, Michelle
44. Stukel, Tawnia, Matt, Alysa, & Michelle
45. Thilmony, Parker
46. Thompson, Gary
47. Tomperi, Kari
48. Trieber, Jeff
49. Umphress, Karen
50. Umphress, Tom
51. Valois, Cheryl & Brummit, Bruce
52. Wallner, Alan
53. Wallner, Lizzie
54. Wenthold, Tami

Public comments were sorted and distributed to members of DNR's West Central Forests planning team for their evaluation and response. Copies of the comments were also shared with cooperating partners where relevant.

Written comments have been transcribed and are presented below; oral comments submitted at the two public meetings were similar in form and content to the written comments. The transcription process maintained the content of the comment to the extent possible. Greetings and closings were not transcribed. Minor effort was applied to correct spelling and grammar. Misstatement of fact in the body of a comment was not corrected. There may be some errors due to illegible handwriting or typing errors by the transcribers. The comments are listed in alphabetical order by the last name of the person submitting the comment.

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| 1 Anonymous |
| 1a ATVs should not be allowed anywhere but private property! Never on public property! |
| 2 Anderson, Kevin |
| 2a I have read the proposal, and although I agree that trails must remain managed to protect the environment. I also feel that by limiting the OHV trails there will be more harm done to the small amount of available trails left to use. We are talking about a very large piece of land here with more than enough area for everyone to enjoy their outdoor activities. By limiting our available riding areas those areas will then get torn up faster and we will look even worse to the environmentalist and worse yet cause more damage to the trail system and the environment. |
| 2b The Managed designation is by far the best compromise for all parties involved. This way if the DNR feels the trails are too wet or have been used too much they can close them down. I realize the same is true with the limited designation except to me the limited definition puts us one step closer to closed. Whereas with the managed designation, the trails can still be managed the same way but were 2 steps away from closed. |
| 2c Thanks for considering my thoughts. And I just want to say I don't know too many OHV riders that are not concerned about the health of our State forest land. We are very much environmentalist in our own way and do not want to damage the forest. But the more limitations that are put on where we can ride the more damage that will be done. |
| 3 Anderson, Tom & Yvonne |
| 3a We are speaking against the closing of the majority of trails at Smoky Hills State Forest. |
| 3b We understand that only about 8 miles of trails would be left. |
| 3c We enjoy riding the road that goes around the forest and the trails that cut across the forest. |
| 3d Our ages are in the 60s and we bought our 4-wheelers in 2004. We have ridden the trails about six times a summer during the past 3 years. We ride during the week and would like the trails available for year around use. |
| 3e The trails at Smoky Hills State Forest are fantastic for riding and are not overused or abused. |

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| <p>Since we live 30 miles from the forest, we trailer our ATVs and then ride the trails 3-4 hours per trip. That is no small drive! We also drive to Silver Bay, MN, about twice a year to ride our ATVs. That trip is 260 miles away.</p> |
| <p>3f It is really nice for people in this area to have a place to ride. The Smoky Hills State Forest seems not abused and not overly used. We would like the opportunity to continue to use this area.</p> <p>If this is not possible, we would like another area within 30 miles to ride. Besides individual enjoyment, the riding also impacts the economy.</p> |
| <p>4 Babcock, Barry W.</p> |
| <p>4a As an avid canoeist who has paddled the Crow Wing and Shell Rivers on numerous occasions I am familiar with this area. Please eliminate the proposed OHM trails on the west side of the Crow Wing River.</p> |
| <p>4b This area has a long history of horse use and 51 miles of OHM trails is extremely excessive for this relatively small forest.</p> |
| <p>4c It is also inappropriate to offer permits for OHM races on horse trails - it is wrong to allow one use to displace another.</p> |
| <p>4d Restricting OHM trails to the east side of the river without adding mileage will do much to preserve the traditional uses in this forest. Staging areas should also be confined on the east side of Crow Wing River.</p> |
| <p>4e I applaud the DNR for keeping these motorized trails away from the historic Crow Wing River but please review the proposed trails near Finn Lake as there are wetlands in this area that are of special concern to us.]</p> |
| <p>5 Bair, Linda</p> |
| <p>5a It is with sadness that again I see the DNR bowing to the wishes of the motorized community. Huntersville has been a haven for horseback riders, canoers, and other quiet recreation. You seem to misunderstand the actual number of these machines that actually use the public trails and how damaging that minimal number really is. No, you do know but choose to not stand up for the resource and instead go after the almighty dollar.</p> |
| <p>6 Berscheid, Joe. D</p> |
| <p>6a While I understand the DNR's reasoning behind the shortened Huntersville OHM season, maybe there is room for a modified seasonal plan. I'm thinking of a schedule which would be as proposed (Memorial Day to Labor Day). But then during the hunting months of September and October, OHM usage would be allowed on a portion of the trail system, or perhaps, a time of day restriction? A suggestion would that OHM use is allowed only from 10:00am to 2:30pm during Sept and Oct. Maybe, OHM are allowed only on weekdays, etc? The fall months are such very nice times to ride, and it would be very much appreciated to have even a small window of allowed OHM use.</p> |
| <p>6b I would like to suggest that the Huntersville OHM season reopen after a suggested date of 12/15 (or whenever Muzzle Loading Deer Season is over) and then stay open until the spring thaw. The recent low snowfalls allow for OHM riding on the milder days in the winter.</p> |
| <p>6c A general comment regarding ATV and OHM trails not related to this classification process.... When the OHM trails are marked, at the trail entrances, please mark the trails with the brown signs which state the trails are closed to motorized usage except for OHMs. This will make it clear that these trails are NOT for ATV use. The red little motorcycle signs do not clearly state the trail is only for OHM use.</p> |
| <p>7 Baso, Monica; Menahga Conservation Club</p> |
| <p>7a This comment is being sent from the Menahga Conservation Club to address concerns about the trail designations for the Huntersville State Forest. The Menahga Conservation Club has been in existence for close to 60 years. Our group is made up of citizen volunteers. We have supported numerous conservation and recreation projects in the Menahga area over these years. We have taken a special interest in the Shell River from the out let of Lower Twin Lake to the confluence of the Crow Wing River. We have adopted this section of the Shell River to monitor and try to protect it much like a lake association monitors and protects a particular lake. We have worked with the Initiative Foundation and the Wadena County Soil and Water Agency to create a working plan for monitoring and protecting the Shell River. The Shell River runs along the northern edge of the Huntersville Forest.</p> |

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| 7b Representatives from our group were at the recent meeting in Menahga. We were very discouraged to learn that the Huntersville Forest will have 51 miles of trails designated only for the off highway motorcycles as well as 3.6 miles of joint ATV/OHM trails. It appears that the DNR Trails Division has given in to the "big business" and "money talks" pressures that come from the manufacturers who make these machines and the groups that can afford to ride these machines. |
| 7c It was an eye opener for some one from small town America to see the actual lobbying done when the DNR was thanked for these trails and then additional requests were made about "more trails would be better, horse trails are rough to ride motorcycles on, what about easements through Potlatch or private property for extending and connecting trails, and unhappiness expressed about the riding season being limited to the dates between Memorial Day and Labor Day." |
| 7d This group was also told that they can get special permits to use the horse trails for racing events. |
| 7e These motorcycles have nothing in common with recreating in nature. They are about speed, racing and noise. |
| 7f This forest has been traditionally used for hunting, horse back riding, camping and canoeing. |
| 7g Now we are told that there will also be two staging areas developed to cater to the vehicles that bring these machines in to the forest. |
| 7h We were told at the meeting that these motorcycle trails were allowed in this forest because it was determined that it could handle the abuse because it is sand country. It would seem to us that this exactly why you would not want to have this kind of activity going on in this forest due to the slower recovery time when damage is done to it. |
| 7i Of particular concern are all the trails to the east of Finn Lake. This is a low wet land area full of marshes. We were told the OHM trails were purposely set away from the Crow Wing River, yet they run close to other small bodies of water in the forest. |
| 7j We were told that state forests closer to the metro area have been closed to motorcycles due to the saturation of use issue. We have also heard the horror stories of places like the Spider Lake area destruction and restoration needed there. It appears that the Huntersville Forest has been offered up in exchange for this saturation of use problem. |
| 7k We are concerned about how these machines affect the soil and water; wild life population and quality of hunting; and in addition the noise pollution. In spite of what some one from the DNR has determined, our local residents know that this area can not handle the abuse that comes with these motorcycles. |
| 7l We were told that the DNR has been given the mandate that they "must" provide places for off road vehicles to operate due to the greater increase in the registrations for these machines versus other types of recreation. It is appalling that this is what is driving your decisions. Buying these machines is a choice like any other. Just because you can afford to buy one does not mean our state has to sacrifice our natural resources to give people a place to ride them. |
| 7m 51 miles designated for OHM's in one small forest seems exorbitant and spells a recipe for disaster. |
| 7n We agree with the proposed classification of limited use trails in the Huntersville Forest. |
| 7o We are asking however that you reconsider and reduce this huge number of miles set aside for OHM-only use in the Huntersville Forest. |
| 7p We are recommending that the OHM trails be removed from west of the Crow Wing River which would be a significant reduction in the number of miles offered up. |
| 7q The miles to the east of the river should not be increased. |
| 7r The staging areas should also be moved to east of the river. |
| 7s We are questioning who is in charge of setting the guidelines for how many OHM's can be at meets or in the forest at any one time, and how many meets can be held in a year in the forest and if it will be open on an every weekend practice track basis. It looks like a huge safety issue the way the trails circle around like spaghetti noodles on the map in terms of even keeping riders safe from each other colliding. It is one thing to have a limited number of events just as the organized horse trail people do two times a year and another if the trails are made accessible for practice runs. The horse trails would be trashed if they had 200-300 horses riding in the forest every weekend. Perhaps the forest on the east side of the river can handle it a couple of times a year, but not all the time. |
| 7t Moving the OHM-only trails to the one main area to the east side of the river would keep these trails confined and containable for policing and monitoring. |

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| 8 Borah, Verlyn |
| 8a I would like more ATV trails in Smokey Hills State Forest because there are fewer miles compared to walking trails. |
| 9 Borah, Yvonne |
| 9a I would like more ATV trails available at Smoky Hills State Forests. |
| 9b Also we're limited to times when we can ride [and]... |
| 9c ...[and] fewer miles in comparison to walking trails. |
| 10 Carleton, George |
| 10a Please help us put a hold on more till there is some control on the current mess. As you know another kid died yesterday south of Remer. Economic development is not more funeral homes, does any current politician care about life or campaign money? Thanks for your help. I know the DNR is swamped and you have excellent officers. Thanks. |
| 11 Dorff, Lance |
| 11a ATVs are an excellent form of entertainment. |
| 11b There are only 8.5 miles of designated ATV trails in the Smokey Hills State Forest and 270,000 registered ATVs in the state of Minnesota compared to 15,000 registered 12 years ago. Considering the substantial increase in the use of ATVs, there is an obvious need for an increase in the amount of designated trails. |
| 11c There are 7.6 miles of designated non-motorized/walking trails in Smokey Hills State Forest when the whole forest can be used for walking. |
| 11d The northern section of Smokey Hills State Forest that is closed to motorized vehicle travel has severely restricted access to the other trail systems and hampers game retrieval. |
| 11e I am against the seasonal closure of trails especially in the fall and winter, these are the most opportune times to ride ATV. There are no bugs, there is less dust, it is cooler out and is the most beautiful time of the year. |
| 11f In conclusion there is very little trails to ride especially in this area there is an obvious need for more trails. |
| 12 Downing, Mary Theresa |
| 12a Please consider carefully the long-term consequences of unrestricted ATV use. The tires tear up the plants and leaves they pass over, destroying habitat and leaving the soil exposed to erosion. |
| 12b Posting the trails that are accessible for ATVs is a better strategy than posting those that are not for ATV use: when the latter posting system is used, the signs often disappear. In addition, any time an ATV leaves any trail, it has created a new trail. Since that "trail" is unmarked, it is open to all ATVs that follow. |
| 12c Please consider that the forests are our legacy and should be preserved for future generations. Even those of us who don't get into them as often as we'd like see them as a wonderful asset, a place for restoring some peace when freeways and offices become too frantic. |
| 13 Driscoll, John |
| 13a As I understand it the trails are noted as "unit trails." This is a problem because unit trails are by definition created and maintained by the DNR. As a single-track motorcyclist, I like trails that are about 30" wide. DNR equipment makes trails much wider than this. I'd much prefer the trails be maintained according to the DNR Trail Planning, Design, & Development Guidelines on page 6.3. |
| 13b I also read the NW section of the forest is to be designated for horses only. There are so few OHM riding areas, I'd hate to lose any more ground. Could it possibly be left as multiple use trail? |
| 13c The concept of riding season from Memorial Day to Labor Day would exclude many good riding days. I can understand having them closed during deer hunting season, (with rifles), but that's much later than Labor Day. |
| 13d The proposal also says the forest would be open for Enduro Special Events. I'm a member of the Twin Cities Trail Riders and we don't ride Enduros. We hold "Trail Rides" where we encourage families and friends to ride the trails at a leisurely pace. I would much prefer to see the language say the forest would be available for special use permit events. |
| 14 Enberg, Eric |
| 14a I'll make this short, my sons and I don't hunt any more. |
| I think the DNR says a lot, when it states, "The trail is open unless posted closed." |

Everything about hunting has become too complicated. In the past my sons and I loved to grouse hunt, but it's almost impossible to find an undisturbed public area. Our old hunting grounds have lost their special appeal. Increasingly our nation's hunting is becoming restricted like Europe--if you can afford it, it's available.

Hunting manual restrictions are burdened with complications. More and more it reminds one of a legal text from a law school.

I think industry has allowed us to hang ourselves. It seems the only thing we can do well in this country is sit on our ass. The children are glued to computer games, TV, and anything else with an electronic screen having finger manipulation. Unfortunately there aren't too many hunters in this bunch that appreciate a walk in the forest or fisherman who thrill to the flash of a trout concealed by the ripples of a snag.

Bill, you haven't been given an easy job and I know your decisions are encumbered by politics, industry and the threat of unemployment. The real-estate companies are doing a very effective job of cutting up traditional hunting areas and populating those once hidden fishing spots. Our natural world is under attack like never before and the public resists the concept of a finite earth.

You don't know me, but I wish you the best. You've been given a difficult task with little satisfaction, because you understand better than anyone what lies in the future.

15 Feld, Ralph

15a Need to add trail north of #2719 and south of #2598.

15b Need to add trail east of #2559.

15c Would like to see the trail that lies South of Don Hansen 40 acres be put on the map as a trail so when the River Valley Enduro Riders work on the trail that we could use this as a access to get on the trails.

15d I would like to see that the trails be open from May 1st - Oct 1st. Our season for riding is very short already and going from Memorial weekend - Labor Day is just to short.

15e As far as the horse trails north of north of CTY RD 18 and West of CTY RD 25. We put those trails in. I would like see the trail be used for BOTH horses and motorcycles.

15f There is a 5 mile section of trails that is down by Huntersville Campground. This trail is south of the road going as if you were driving to the campground. We as a club (RVER) would like to see that trail get opened up for use also if possible.

16 Felton, John

16a One point is that restricting the period when OHM use is permitted to Memorial Day to Labor Day is too restrictive. Closing trails because of poor conditions on a day by day basis seems appropriate, otherwise singling out a group of users this way is unfair.

16b Designating such a large section for the exclusive use of one user group like that proposed for the equestrian users at the expense of other is also unfair. The state has many areas where OHM use has been restricted in favor of horse riding.

16c Designating OHM trails as "unit trails" to be maintained by the DNR using typical machines would widen the trail just to let the maintenance equipment in to maintain the trail. This would reduce the enjoyment of riding on the trail. OHM trails should be kept as narrow "single-track" trails. Users are better suited to maintain these trails either on foot or by bike.

16d Instead of the language permitting "endure special events," the language "Special Use Permits" would allow organized trail rides and other uses that may be proposed in the future.

17 Frey, Karen

17a I support the DNR's proposal to offer more than 50 miles of so-called single-track OHM-only riding opportunities. After discussing with my sons and nephews, I understand a few changes could be made to the proposal to improve upon those opportunities.

17b The open riding season should be extended.

17c There should be a trail connecting the single-track sections on each side of the Crow Wing River.

18 Frey, Michael B.

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| 18a | I support the DNR for recognizing the unique OHM riding opportunities available in the Huntersville State Forest and I commend the department for proposing more than 50 miles of OHM-only trails. I feel this offers OHM enthusiasts ample recreational opportunities in addition to recognizing other forest users such as horseback riders. |
| 18b | I have a few ideas that I feel will enhance the OHM-related opportunities. One is to extend the use period to May 1 through November 1. |
| 18c | Another is to create a legal trail linking the proposed single-track on each side of the Crow Wing River. |
| 18d | The DNR should also continue to permit the annual enduro event and the trail ride. |
| 18e | Finally, the DNR should also be open to the consideration of Grant-In-Aid trails at some point in the future. |
| 19 Hanninen, Thomas | |
| 19a | I agree with the way it stands that motorcycle use in Huntersville forest be from Memorial Day to Labor Day [and]... |
| 19b | ...[and] that the eco-sensitive areas be looked at and no OHV be allowed. |
| 20 Hansen, Don | |
| 20a | Extend time period for OHM trails from May 1 st to Sept. 30 th . |
| 20b | The horse trail should be dual purpose for OHM, these trails were put in and maintained by the River Valley Enduro Riders. |
| 20c | The OHM trail needs to be connected in many areas, so all 51 miles can be used. |
| 20d | If the horse trail remains for horses only, keep it open for special use for OHM enduro event. |
| 20e | I live north of Route ID # 2564, the RVER CLUB does all the trail maintenance from that location, it would be nice if Route ID # 2564 could be connected to Route ID # 2966 for ATV use. This would help our group to exit my place to maintain OHM trails. |
| 20f | The trail is missing between Route # 2533 to # 4979. |
| 20g | Forest minimum maintenance roads, ATV trails, and forest system roads, are not compatible with each other, we need to show some kind of a link so ATV people know. |
| 21 Hinkemeyer, Kraig | |
| 21a | My name is Kraig Hinkemeyer, I am the president of the River Valley Enduro Riders. I would like to make a few comments on the proposals of the trails in Huntersville State Forest. I understand that you need horse trails in the forest and don't mind that you are designating the northwest trails for that purpose, but I hope that you will allow us to use them for our enduro as we are the ones that put all of those trails in. |
| 21b | I would like to ask that trail 2564, east from 5905, to its northend be classified as an ATV trail. This trail is used by our club members to access the trails from Don Hansen's place when we are up there working. |
| 21c | There are some non-designated trails that we would like to use for our event but we would need to put in some connecting trails. How would we go about getting permission for that? |
| 21d | I would like to see the riding season expanded from May 1 st to Oct 1 st . I would like to point out some trails that were not on the maps that you had at Menahga. On the west end of 2533 just to the east of the minimum maintenance road is a trail that runs north to 4979. Between 2719 and 2598 there is a trail that runs the full length east and west. Just to the east of 2559 there is a trail that runs north and south. |
| 21e | Last, we may be interested in doing the grant and aid trail work. I would like some information on this so we can think about it. |
| 22 Jehs, Randy & Becky | |
| 22a | We spend most weekends as a family and one of our favorite activities is for wheeling. We own 4 and depending where we ride depends on what we drive. Smoky Hills is one of our favorites in mind during your considerations. We are out looking at nature, enjoying the sights and fun activity together. |
| 23 Jennen, Peter M. | |
| 23a | What I would like to see: OHM specific trails. No shared trails with ATVs or other OHVs. A trail's dual wear path from ATV's |

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| <p>makes it difficult to ride a motorcycle on.</p> |
| <p>23b Trails open during non-hunting seasons. During warm winters with little snow, it is nice to be able to go riding. Early spring riding (before the vegetation is filled out) is also nice. It is a good time to maintain trails because of the cool temperatures and missing bugs.</p> |
| <p>23c I know there is concern for nesting birds. My experience has been that OHM operation is not very disrupting to wildlife. Back in "the old days" I have ridden through areas while hunters were in the area (this was on a week day). Our group of OHM riders talked with the hunters and cooperated with them as to not disturb their hunting. The hunters were afraid we were going to scare all of the birds away. Our group saw grouse and deer on our second pass through the area! OHMs had been riding those trails all summer and the animals know we come in quick and leave quick. We are not perceived as predators. Predators sneak in. Consider all of the birds that nest in roadway ditches. I live in the country and my kids used to have a go-cart that they would ride around our yard. In town, I have seen ducks nest in the bushes next to buildings and have huge riding mowers pass by them within two feet of their nest twice a week and they hatch. I have seen multiple deer on numerous occasions watching the kids, less than 100 yards from our yard, on that go-cart (which, by the way, would back-fire often!). I am not saying that wildlife are not startled when a few OHMs pass, I'm just saying a few passing OHMs does not drive wild life out of the area.</p> |
| <p>24 Johnson, Michael</p> |
| <p>24a Need a trail system to keep 4-wheelers on the trails. Wisconsin has a GREAT system and supports the trails. Colorado has a trail system through the mountains. We need something to keep 4-wheeling alive and stay in our state. Most just want a place to ride.</p> |
| <p>25 Klein, Jeffrey</p> |
| <p>25a I am writing this letter in support of opening the Off-highway Motorcycle Trails in the Huntersville State Forest. In response to the proposal released by the DNR I would suggest the following changes:</p> <p>Trails should be listed as Grant-In-Aid trails, not unit trails. I am concerned that unit trails will not be able to be maintained adequately by the DNR.</p> |
| <p>25b The northwest section should be designated as a shared trail between OHMs and horse riders. My reason for this is that the River Valley Enduro Riders put in that trail and it isn't fair to them to ban them from that area.</p> |
| <p>25c I also think the trails should be open from April 1st through the start of the hunting season. The area trails are sustainable for use in wet conditions like toward the end of winter and beginning of spring or late fall.</p> |
| <p>26 Kluender, Howard</p> |
| <p>26a I am writing in regards to the Smoky Hills state forest ATV trails. As a member of Woods & Wheels ATV Club and as a concerned private citizen, I feel you should have State Forest Land Classified as "managed." There are many reasons for a classified "managed" status.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Under current law the DNR still has the authority to close a forest trail if a serious problem develops. 2. It will keep open many trails for the enjoyment of all ATV riders. Those trails are a way to see the natural beauty of the state forest lands. There has been many times when I have been riding when I have seen deer, grouse, and have stopped to watch them. They do not run into the next county to get away from those terrible ATVs. Many times as you ride down those trails you see deer tracks going right down the trail – deer do use them as a path to walk on. ATV riding is not all about tearing up the land and going through mud. 3. As a hunter I am in full agreement on the regulation of ATVs during deer season, but can not see any reason not to be able to ride the rest of the time. Fall with the turning of the leaves can be one of the most beautiful times of the year. Grouse do not fly miles away, but only go a short distance and are only on the trail in one spot for a short period of time. Why can walkers, bird watchers, etc. enjoy the state forest lands & not someone on an ATV that is riding responsibly. 4. Riding "managed" does not mean riders can have free will to do anything that they so wish to do. When rules about staying on the trails and speed and safety are obeyed all the trails can be enjoyed by everyone. Don't let a few bad riders ruin it for all ATV riders. |

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| <p>5. Another thing to think about. Class 1 ATV riding is allowed in road ditches – is that not [?] state owned land? What is the difference having ATV tracks on trails in the road ditches to trails in state forest lands away from traffic. Have you ever watched ATV riders riding on the ditches when driving down the road? We all have. Is that less disturbing than using a cell phone? Think about it. Does not reasoning on all these matters apply not only to Smokey Hills state forest lands but also to all state forest lands? Safe and responsible ATV riding is the responsibility of all riders whether on an ATV, OHM, ORV, or a car.</p> |
| <p>Please keep State Forest lands classified as managed as all of us can enjoy the beauty of Minnesota.</p> |
| <p>27 Kolle, Ernest</p> |
| <p>27a I am an ATV owner and enjoy the Smoky Hills State Forest near Detroit Lakes. In the last 10-12 years my wife, brothers, and friends have enjoyed leisurely riding thru the forest spending 4-5 hours, putting on 12-22 miles. It's a wonderful way to enjoy God's beautiful creation.</p> |
| <p>27b I understand the DNR would like to eliminate some of the ATV trails and make walking trails. We haven't been there during hunting season, but we've never seen a person walking, only some ATV riders. With the many acres of Smoky Hills State Forest, the trails for riding take up very few acres.</p> |
| <p>27c We live in the city of Moorhead, wondering, where can we ride and enjoy riding our ATVs? With my arthritic condition – having had one complete knee replacement and other knee very painful – walking is very difficult.</p> |
| <p>27d I'm considering a different ATV. It's a Polaris Ranger RZR, same width as a standard 4-wheeler, sitting side-by-side, with steering wheel and foot throttle. It is easier to drive and better vision for the second rider. It weighs 945 lbs. And listed in the Class II category. I would greatly appreciate it, if this Class II vehicle can also ride on the trails.</p> |
| <p>28 Krosch, Ryan</p> |
| <p>28a I bear hunt in and around the Huntersville State Forest. Although this is not a heavily hunted area for bear it is well within bear zone 45 and has several bear hunters in it. My fear is that closure of trails will greatly limit access for bear hunting and bear baiting. Yes, a bear bait can be made next to the road but it is much more effective to bait far from main roads via access from a trail or old logging road. Many articles have been written regarding the DNR's concern for a growing and expanding bear population and a lack of hunters buying licenses.</p> |
| <p>28b My questions: Will old logging roads be included with the trail designations?</p> |
| <p>28c Will the "limited" classification pertain to county owned land?</p> |
| <p>28d Will game wardens allow access by bear hunters during the bear season and baiting time to use 4-wheelers to bait and hunt?</p> |
| <p>28e I support preservation of our state forests but please do so without limiting some of their intended recreation purposes which includes bear hunting. Most bear hunters hunt in the northern 1/3 of the state which I believe is classified as mostly managed which allows for more options for access. I believe some exceptions for hunters retrieving big game in September have been made to the new restrictions but keep in mind bear baiting takes place in August - October and is a key part to bear hunting success. I hope that exceptions are made for bear hunters and baiters on the use of state forest trails. There are only about 13,000 bear hunters and about 100 bear guides as compared to 100's of thousands of deer hunters. I think exceptions for a small group of hunters is warranted and will create little negative impact on the forests and help reach the DNR goals for bear hunting in MN.</p> |
| <p>29 Martin, Dave</p> |
| <p>29a I am writing about the Off Highway Motorcycle (OHM) Huntersville trail use area. I have four off highway motorcycles that are registered with the MN DNR. I am happy to live in Minnesota where DNR supports off highway motorcycles and I am allowed to ride in state forests and public riding areas. Key OHM points that I would like to advocate for Huntersville are:</p> <p>Single-track trails are best maintained in a manner not to make them wider than 24 – 34 inches. This not only has less environmental impact on the area, but makes for better riding.</p> |
| <p>29b The northwest section of Huntersville has approx. 17 miles of trails that were mostly created by OHMs and I want to ensure OHM use of these trails in the future.</p> |
| <p>29c Continue to allow special use permits for trail rides as well as enduro special event permits.</p> |
| <p>29d Keep the current April to November trail schedule, since some of the best riding is in the spring</p> |

and fall when foliage is low.

29e According to the MN DNR off highway "Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines," page 62-63, the impact width of OHM single-track trails is less than any other trail use including walking and bicycle trails. OHM riding brings additional revenue to the state and is a great family event shared by many environmentally conscious people. I thank you for your support to advocate for OHM usage at Huntersville and other public areas in Minnesota

30 Mattison, Willis

30a Thank you for your letter of May 14th and your email announcing the availability of the MDNR's draft recommendations for vehicle use of State Forest land in the West Central, South Unit planning area. As you acknowledged in your letter, I have previously provided comments in the West Central planning process. My primary concerns in my previous comments centered on MDNR's disproportionate allocation of State Forest acreages in favor of motorized sports over silent users of these public lands and MDNR's failure to provide a credible trail riding compliance plan that included a proactive enforcement protocol.

The MDNR draft plan not only fails to adequately respond to comments it received regarding disproportionate allocation of acreages of State Forest land to motorizes sports and the glaring lack of a compliance enforcement plan the MDNR fails to acknowledge having received these comments on these topics.

MDNR staff has an obligation to the interested public to acknowledge substantive comments provided regarding the draft forest classification plans and to provide a reasoned response to these comments in subsequent public documents and meetings. The MNDR's draft plans released in May of this year contain only brief phrases with key words such as "support for closed or limited", "concern for sensitive resources", "enforcement, safety, and off trail travel" and "motor versus non-motor conflict". These phrases and key words are ostensibly offered by MDNR staff as their summary and "response" to public comments received on the plan.

These passing acknowledgments not only fail to properly characterize the depth and breadth of the widely held concerns of reviewers but work to diminish the validity of the MDNR's public involvement process. By broadly categorizing comments in this manner the MDNR gives the reader the impression that public comments on earlier drafts of the plans were relatively inconsequential and required little or no response or counter argument let alone require any substantial revision or amending of the planning documents.

30b MDNR staff has stubbornly failed to acknowledge the incompatibility of ATV/OHV recreation and nearly every other use of State Forest lands including hunting. MNDR staff blithely mentions receiving comments about motor versus non-motor conflict without acknowledging that it would be in the public interest to for the MDNR to recognize and lay out strategies to minimize these obvious user conflicts. To the contrary the MDNR plan appears to increase incidents of user conflict by sanctioning rogue trails which heretofore were not legitimate and allowing ATV's and OHV's access to nearly every corner of State Forest Land in the planning area.

30c The MNDR's plan for adjacent and commingled motorized and non-motorized areas in state forests displays either ignorance or blatant disregard for the user conflict and for the obvious solutions to the conflict. Separation of non-compatible uses with reasonable buffer zones between these designated areas is a simple, reasonable and readily implementable solution.

30d The motorized/non-motorized conflict on state land has much in common with the issue of cigarette smokers interfering with non-smokers when commingling in public areas. After many attempts to provide separate designated smoking areas for smokers state policy makers have finally come to accept the obvious fact that smokers and non-smokers simply cannot occupy the same space or even adjacent spaces without the non-smoker suffering serious adverse impacts. *Absolutely Smoke free* public spaces have been found to be the only valid solution to the smoker/non-smoker conflict.

30e Legitimate user conflict reduction should take the form of separation w/ reasonable buffer zones between incompatibly uses such as ATV/OHV users and all other uses which can loosely be categorized at "silent" uses. Silent uses include hiking, biking, berry picking, bird watching, nature appreciation, solitude seeking, hunting (the vast majority of hunters do NOT use ATV's) camping,

horse back riding, cross country skiing, snowshoeing etc. The draft plan was revised to include small portions of the Smoky Hills State Forest as generally closed to ATV traffic but this is misleading as well because all government sponsored roadways, forest service roads and minimum maintenance roads would still be open to ATV/OHV use. In order to provide silent users with equal opportunities to enjoy their sport on a level commensurate with that being presented the motor sports public more areas must be designated as *ABSOLUTELY ATV/OHV Free Zones.*]

30f The separate areas for motorized and non-motorized use should be sized in recognition of the small fraction of Minnesota's population represented by motorized users of public lands, If it can be shown that only five percent of Minnesotan's own and operated ATV/OHV's on state lands the MDNR might reasonably be justified in setting aside 10% of total state forest acres for the motorized sports. A doubling of the population percentage to land area percentage (from 5% to 10%) could be defended by arguing that the motorized users traverse greater distances per unit time than silent users. Further justification could be found in the need to provide reasonable buffer separation between the incompatible users warranted the excess area. It could reasonably argued that the draft plan for the subject planning area offers 100% accessibility to the motorized user while providing 0% for unimpacted (by motorized users) non-motorized use.

30g During the MDNR public meetings held earlier this month in Detroit Lakes, I asked the MDNR staff present if there was any law, rule, policy, executive order or other instruction from any superior authority that required, urged or directed the MDNR to allocate the preponderance of State Forest acreage to motorized uses over non-motorized uses. I wanted to know if there was some fundamental driving force that propelled the MDNR to map out state land areas for motorized use in percentages that exceeded the percentage of Minnesota's population that participated in the sport on state forest land. MDNR staff indicated that no such law, rule, order or policy that dictated this disproportionate favor to the ATV riding public. Private conversation with MDNR staff following the public meetings provided insight into thought process that has lead to this misallocation of public land use. MDNR staff thinking seemed to follow this line of logic. Since the ATV riding public has self-appropriated large portions of state land for their exclusive use over the years when there were no rules governing their use on state lands, the MNR is now reluctant to tell the ATV riding public (and that motorized sport lobby in the state) that they have over-stepped their bounds. MDNR staff cannot seem to find the courage or resolve needed to tell the ATV riders (and their lobby) that they may have to accept reduced areas on public lands that, space wise, are more in keeping with the percentage of the state population the ATV riding public represents.

This is a shameless admission that the MDNR staff is presently not capable of properly managing state lands entrusted to their care. It is a confession that the MDNR staff is no longer using sound natural resource and recreation management principles in addressing recreational challenges. Simply put, it is clear that the pleas of a small percentage of the state population represented by ATV/OHV enthusiasts, bolstered by the industry backed lobby is sufficient to sway career natural resource managers to compromise the integrity of the forests and the legitimate rights of silent users of the forests. I stand ready to listen to any reasonable, social or natural science based alternative rationale the MDNR can present to the contrary. (Correction: Please make this response in writing) Please answer the simple question: "Why should motorized users be allocated and allowed to impact such disproportionately high percentage areas of state forest when the vast majority of state forest users are non-motorized?"

30h One further observation needs to be made here regarding the MDNR's summary of comments received on preliminary plans. Obvious by it absence were any mention of MDNR having received complaints from ATV/OHV advocates that the preliminary or draft plans provided too few miles of trails or too small an area allocated to motorized sports. This would seem to indicate that the MDNR has more than satiated the demand for motorized access to the state forest system. I would contend that the MDNR has done so at the expense of and to the exclusion of the non-motorized users of the forest. This has not and I believe cannot be justified.

30i With regard to compliance and enforcement of "on-trail" riding requirements of trails designated in the draft plan I refer you to my previous comments on this issue. Remember, what we tolerate, we promote. MDNR has tolerated off-trail riding in the past and in doing so has promoted it. This off-trail riding has reaped copious bounty for the ATV riding public in the form of "inventoried" trails that now are being upgraded to designated trails. In the future, it can be reasonably predicted that off-trail riding will continue beyond that allowed by the hunter/trapper/leecher exemptions. Even the exemptions will

provide tempting opportunities for the adventurous trail rider to stray from the designated trails. A draft state forest motorized recreation plan without a compliance/enforcement component is deficient.

30j Because my comments regarding the need for a enforcement/compliance strategy in the draft plan I have simply cut and pasted my recommendation here below.

“For each forest, trail or other identifiable management unit of state forest (mostly described by its sensitivity to adverse impact to the environment or user conflict potential) specific, numbers of tolerable “off trail” violations would be established, published and posted. The tolerance limits would have to be expressed in very objective terms. For example a tolerance limit might be stated as: “No more than “x” number of off-trail excursions would be allowed per unit distance (i.e. per mile or per 100 yards etc.) of trail per unit time (i.e. per month or season). These would be very hard to establish and by nature they would be somewhat arbitrary. Then, a system of compliance monitoring via, inspections and tabulation of the violations would need to be established for each management unit. Records would need to be kept and reports filed.

Then, the even tougher part follows. A pre-established enforcement mechanism would need to be developed and implemented. This mechanism would, again, need to be well publicized in advance so everyone knew the consequences of “intolerable” off-trail violations. The mechanism could include an escalating scale of responses to violations exceeding the tolerance limit such as:

- A. Posting warnings on the trail head indicating that violations have been occurring and continued violations would result in temporary or permanent closure of the trail.
- B. If the warnings are ineffective, temporary closure of the trail would be tried w/ reopening closely monitored to determine whether the temporary closure was effective in bring the using public back into compliance with the tolerance limit.
- C. If A and B above were ineffective in curbing the violations, permanent closure would follow w/ posting and publication of the course of action, what activity forced the action and warnings that other trails could be closed as a result of continued violations there or elsewhere w/in the management unit.

This “on-trail riding incentive” (or “off-trail disincentive”, if you will) policy, once established, places the responsibility for long-term trail health and availability directly on the using public. Doing so would go far in instituting a peer monitoring program that would encourage users to police themselves because they are aware of the “abuse it, you lose it” program. It would be in their own self interest as well as the public interest for them to confront abusers and/or effectively report abusers in order that the abusers be identified and prosecuted.”

30k In closing, I do commend the MDNR staff for changing the format for public involvement from the open-house to a combination open house/forum format. The forum portion of the most recent meetings provided the public dialogue and listening opportunity I was advocating in my previous comments. Thank you for that.

31 Maynard, Roy

31a I am an active off-road motorcyclist and am writing about the new proposed rules for Huntersville State Forest.

Currently the northwestern section is designated for horses. I propose this section be available for off-road motorcycle use also.

31b Trails listed as unit trails are maintained by the DNR but are excessively wide when all we require is single-track trails.

31c We would also that the current request for special use permits not be limited to “enduro” but kept open for special use such as trail rides like those sponsored by Twin Cities Trail Riders.

31d I would also request to broaden the time frame for keeping the trails open beyond Memorial Day and Labor Day.

32 McDonald, Kevin

32a Please understand the volume of ATV and the amount of miles they put on when marking trails. A good full day ride is about 40 or 50 miles. We rarely drive in the summer due to the bugs, heat, and

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| dust. Spring, fall, and nice winter days are best for riding. |
| 32b Walking trails should not be thought about as equal needs – there are far fewer numbers and a long day of walking would be 5-8 miles. |
| 33 Mikelalla |
| 33a I wholly support classifying these lands as limited. I have recreated there a number of times and am very concerned about damage caused by off road vehicles, and the establishment of new trails. |
| 34 Motschenbacher, Brent |
| 34a As an avid snowmobiler and ATV rider, I am very disappointed in the proposal of land usage for ATVs in Smoky Hills State Forest and others. |
| 34b If you are not gonna let us use the forest for recreation then the forests should be closed to all walkers cross county skies and hunting. |
| 34c I am sure the state would like to lose all license fees from ATVs, snowmobiles and hunters. |
| 34d I ride a lot of trails in Minnesota most of trails I see messed up are from pickups not ATVs. |
| 34e Also if you are not gonna let us ride ATVs on trails why do we need to license them and can we be refunded? We have lost enough trails that snowmobile money and ATV money has paid for (Heartland Trail one good example). Bike riders and walkers in these forests should have a permit to do so also. Most of us people who use these trails work all the time so we cannot make the meetings you have, and the people against us have more time to think of these they don't like and cannot afford. |
| 35 Myers, Mason & Gwen |
| 35a We understand that the DNR has been working very hard since the Legislature charged it with reviewing Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use in all state forests and reclassifying these forests as either "limited" or "closed," or "managed" north of Highway 2. Many of the DNR recommendations have been excellent, paying close attention to the potential for environmental damage in a variety of ecological conditions, and for this, thank you. |
| 35b However, we were sorry to learn of the DNR's recommendations for Huntersville State Forest, a forest traditionally used for hunting, horse back riding, camping and canoeing. The plan for 51 miles of trails designated only for the off highway motorcycles (OHMs) as well as 3.6 miles of joint ATV/OHM trails does not fit with the traditional uses of this forest. |
| 35c Citizens have been told that the DNR has been ordered to provide places for off road vehicles to operate, due to the increase in the registrations for these machines. This is appalling. Buying these machines is a choice like any other. Minnesotans are not obliged to sacrifice our natural resources to give people a place to ride them. Fifty-one miles designated for OHMs in one small forest seems exorbitant and spells a recipe for disaster. |
| 35d While we agree with the proposed classification of limited use trails in the Huntersville Forest, we are asking that you reduce the number of miles set aside for OHM-only use. Specifically, the OHM trails west of the Crow Wing River should be removed, which significantly reduces the number of miles offered up. |
| 35e The miles to the east of the river should not be increased. |
| 35f The staging areas should also be moved to east of the river. |
| 35g Please consider the majority of citizens near this forest and the majority of citizens in Minnesota and protect Huntersville State Forest for the hunters, horseback riders, campers and canoeists who have used the forest for decades. |
| 36 Nelson, Bryce |
| 36a Winter OHM season in Huntersville – I agree with a spring thaw & hunting season closure. However, we would like to see the OHM trails open for winter use.] |
| 36b Dual purpose use of horse trails with OHM. We developed that system & feel there is not a conflict with dual use. |
| 36c Reclassification of non-designated routes...need more ATV mileage & quality trail in Smoky Hills & Two Inlets. |
| 37 Norton, Matt; MCEA |
| 37a In general, the Project does a good job on two of four forests providing some land where the majority non-motorized, traditional outdoorsmen and women can find places to go to hunt, hike, etc., and avoid the annoyance and interference caused by OHVs. The Two Inlets and Smoky Hills State Forests (SFs) provide Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use (traditional use |

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| <p>areas) amounting to 45% and 42% of total state land within those forests, respectively.</p> |
| <p>37b While these are a good start, these two areas are not generous enough in scale to serve the non-motorized majority, which in scale is far larger than the public land trail-driving OHV population, as is discussed in more detail, below.</p> |
| <p>37c Moreover, the other two forests should also have such areas established but offer none in the draft plan.</p> |
| <p>37d Specifically, with the least amount of editing to the Huntersville SF proposal, non-motorized areas could and should be established on the southeast and to the northwest of the two masses of OHM trail.</p> |
| <p>37e In the case of Lyons SF, the entire forest is largely devoid of trails, has no existing forest System Roads, and should simply be designated closed in its entirety. That change would go a long way toward evening out the amount of state forest land in this Project that is proposed for traditional and off-road driving uses.</p> |
| <p>37f The DNR should not be misled to believe that the current figures for total registrations represent a number of riders who demand roads and trails on public lands, much less on the state forest lands, specifically. It is a mistake to consider anticipated growth in motorized recreation without first putting the current level of activity in perspective. The great preponderance of OHV riding in Minnesota is ATV riding, as 91% of all registered OHVs are ATVs. As a group, OHV users represent a small subset of the state's population. According to the 2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey of Minnesotans, a January 2005 report commissioned by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources, ATVer off-road is a pastime practiced by a relatively small 10% percent of Minnesotans, and all ATV riding activity in Minnesota accounts for just 1.8% of the recreation days in the state, annually. See electronically-attached document: "OutdoorRecreationSurvey2004_report.pdf," Tables 7 and 8, at pp 28-29.</p> |
| <p>37g If 10% of the Minnesota population climbs onto an ATV in the course of the year, only about 5% every ride on public lands. According to the July, 2001 study prepared for the DNR by John P. Genereux, titled "An OHV Recreation Planning Tool Based on: A Survey of Resource Managers; and A Survey of [OHV] Riders in Minnesota" (hereinafter, "DNR's Genereux Study"), "<u>over one-half of the ATVs registered for recreation in Minnesota are not being used in [public] forests.</u>" DNR's Genereux Study at p. 55 (emphasis added). Accordingly, though 250,320 ATVs were registered at the end of 2006,¹ less than 125,000 are likely used on any public forest lands. Part of the reason for this drop is that many owners of OHVs do not want to ride on public lands, and ride instead on private lands. The Genereux study found, in fact, that most of those who do ride in state forests have other places where they could ride: "<u>74% of ATV riders own or rent land where they can ride ATVs and other OHVs.</u>" <i>Id</i> (emphasis in original). Of course, some ATVs are used by more than just the owner, which explains why it is possible to reconcile the Genereux data (only ~125,000 ATVs are ever ridden on public land) with the 2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey of Minnesotans (10% of Minnesotans ever ride an OHV). Taken together, the data suggest that 5% of Minnesotans may ride an ATV on public lands in the course of a year, and that they share some of the 125,000 ATVs that are ever driven on public lands.</p> |
| <p>37h Most of those who do ride on public lands do so for very limited purposes, and only a few times a year, at most. A fairly small minority of riders accounts for the bulk of all ATV riding. The ardent recreational riders are a smaller subset of the small minority of Minnesota citizens who ride OHVs on public lands. When total riding activity is measured, measures often fail to account for the fact that the riding activity is not uniform across the riding population. Again, according to the DNR's Genereux Study, "<u>10% of all ATV owners accounted for 57% of all forest riding on ATVs....</u> In other words, 60% of the riding was being done by 10,000 ATV riders." Since registered ATVs have not quite doubled in number since the Genereux data were collected, it would be generous to say that as many as 20,000 ATV enthusiasts account for 60% of all public-lands ATV riding in Minnesota. <i>Id.</i> at p. 55 (emphasis in original).</p> |
| <p>Rather than a monolithic group demanding vast networks of roads and trails throughout public lands,</p> |

¹ According to DNR figures, there were over 250,320 registered ATVs in December, 2006, excluding ATVs registered for agricultural uses only, and ATVs used exclusively on private lands. See electronically-attached document, titled "DNR total registrations through 2006.pdf"

the population of OHV riders is split into at least two groups and is far less categorical in its desires. According to the DNR's Genereux Study, there are perhaps 20,000 hard-core riders who claim to speak on behalf of a much larger group of OHV owners, and who have very great expectations of what the public forest system owes them and their machines. A second group, larger than the more extreme motorized advocates, is still just half the size of the total number of registered ATVs because – again, according to DNR data – half of the registered OHVs are never ridden on public lands. This larger group is far less emphatic or single-minded than the rider clubs. Furthermore, most of those in this larger group who do drive OHVs on public lands do so infrequently, often for hunting or utilitarian reasons.

37i Even among hunters, who are somewhat more likely to ride ATVs than the overall Minnesota population, the vast majority remain non-motorized. A super-majority (78%) of Minnesota's 475,000 deer hunters do not use an ATV in any way when hunting, according to the most recent Minnesota data available, a January, 2002 survey report conducted for the DNR by Responsive Management, titled, "Minnesota Deer Hunters' Opinions and Attitudes Toward Deer Management" (2002 DNR Deer Hunter Survey), at pp. 15-18.² Only 21% of deer hunters use an ATV in some way, with the most common primary use (50%) being for the retrieval of a deer carcass from the kill site to the hunter's home or vehicle, and the second-most common use (33%) being to get to and from hunting areas.

The same pattern is seen in Minnesota's population of small game hunters. According to DNR data from 2001, only 13% owned an ATV, and though that number is likely to have increased somewhat in the interim, it is clear that the great majority of small game hunters do not own an ATV. Source: DNR Jan. 2001. Unpub. Data. Bureau of Information, Education & Licensing, St. Paul, MN 55155.

37j According to best information available, therefore, OHV users of Minnesota public lands are not a monolithic group with identical interests and desires for recreational trails on public lands, despite the contrary message demanding public lands trails put out by the organized rider clubs. As a group, OHV users represent a small subset of the state's population, and many of those riders seldom ride on public lands. Those who occasionally ride on public lands represent about 5% of the Minnesota population, according to one state-funded study, but most of those OHV users drive for very limited purposes a few times a year. The most ardent recreational riders who make the greatest demands for access to more roads and trails on public lands form a subset within a subset, and amount today to perhaps 20,000 hard-core riders, statewide.

The DNR should not exaggerate the demand coming from the motorized community by making the mistaken assumption that all registered OHV owners want the public lands roads and trails desired by the most ardent OHV club members.

37k While OHV driving is many times more popular and publicly available than it was 10 years ago, the growth in those registrations is slowing. Rather than increasing exponentially, it appears that OHV driving is approaching a point seen with snowmobiles, where the number registered each year fluctuates but has generally stabilized. This is one reason why, rather than planning for a vast expansion in the amount of OHV driving, DNR should be planning for and paving the way for a rationalization and greater effective management over the amount of OHV traffic, rather than attempting to inflate OHV traffic levels on state forests. See electronically attached document, "ATV Registration Trends.xls". The rate of growth in OHV registrations has been dropping steadily since 2002, with growth dropping to 5% in 2006, the lowest rate of growth in more than 10 years. OHV registration growth will likely continue falling, perhaps becoming negative within the next decade or sooner.

37l "There is a need for places where public lands provide core habitat that is not regularly disturbed by recreational machines, places spared from massive intrusion of convenience-oriented sportsmen." Richard Eggert, "Fish and Hunt the Backcountry." In Minnesota, this latent need is large, and those who suffer it wish that it would be met.

In Minnesota, statewide recreation measured by number of participants is predominantly non-motorized (26:74 motorized:non-motorized yearly; 21:79 motorized:non-motorized non-winter

² Document electronically attached as 2002 Report - Minnesota Deer Survey.pdf

recreation only). Measured by number of recreation visitor days, recreation statewide is again predominantly non-motorized (31:69 motorized:non-motorized yearly; 28:72 motorized:non-motorized non-winter recreation only), according to Superior National Forest figures assembled from state and federal data for Echo Trail Forest Management Project scoping tour.

While non-motorized uses represent the great majority of outdoor recreation, the great majority of lands are managed to allow motorized recreation. Statewide, across all ownerships and all management categories (i.e., including all WMAs, state and federal parks, federal Wilderness Areas, etc.) the ratio of public lands management with regard to OHVs is 76:24 motorized:non-motorized. *Id.*

37m Less than 5% of Minnesota State Forest Lands that have been through the DNR's OHV management decision process are proposed to be or have been decided to be "Closed" to ATVs; 96% of the state forest acres in DNR Division of Forestry management are located in state forests that provide thousands of miles of forest roads, minimum maintenance roads (typically former logging roads) and designated trails for OHVs. In addition, since legislative changes made in 2005, thousands more miles of undesignated trails are also legally ridden by ATVs on most state forest lands north of U.S. Highway 2, as the DNR has chosen to place most (56% of the forest acres reviewed by DNR thus far) into the most heavily-motorized, "open unless posted closed" management category. DNR data compiled by MCEA for 29 State Forests reviewed by DNR between July 2003 and August 2006; full data to explain summary data are available upon request.³

37n The general public is not satisfied with the severe imbalance in public land management with regard to OHVs. This level of dissatisfaction can be gauged by suggestions of opening up still more areas that have long been off-limits to OHVs, like state parks. In a DNR document titled "2001 Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey Summary Report," survey data are reported on Minnesotans' views toward ATVs in state parks, and arguably other park-like settings. There was not much treatment of OHV use in the survey, but one question directly on point asked about the provision of opportunities, presumably in or near to the parks, for OHV riding. No other proposal was so strongly opposed by Minnesotans. Seventy-five percent of Minnesotans are opposed to providing more OHV riding opportunities in state parks (61% vehemently so), whereas only 8 percent favor such a proposal, for a ratio of 7.5:1 opposed. When looking only at those who strongly oppose and strongly support such an idea, the contrast is still starker (61% strongly opposed and 4% strongly supporting), for a ratio of 15:1 opposed.

How much do you support or oppose each possible management action being taken for the parks?

(oppose/support scale: 1=strongly oppose, 2=mildly oppose, 3=neither oppose nor support, 4=mildly support, 5=strongly support)

| Possible management action | Average "oppose/support" response | Oppose/support response | | | | | Don't know (percent) | Total (percent) |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| | | Strongly oppose (percent) | Mildly oppose (percent) | Neither oppose nor support (percent) | Mildly support (percent) | Strongly support (percent) | | |
| RESPONSES OF ALL PARK VISITORS | | | | | | | | |
| • Provide more opportunities to ride off-highway vehicles (e.g., motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles). | 1.7 | 61 | 14 | 13 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 100 |

Moreover, the strong opposition is not limited solely to park-like settings, but presumably should be extended to include such areas on state lands as developed campgrounds and other places where OHVs are presently prohibited or the traditional uses conflict with OHV use. A more general statement of public dissatisfaction with the overwhelmingly OHV-motorized bias on public lands can be read in the DNR's last general purpose public satisfaction survey. There, again not surprisingly, the single most disagreed-with statement was, "The DNR should establish more sites on public land for motorized

³ State forests proposed to be in the state-defined "Managed" category (routes open unless posted closed) include: Beltrami Island, Bigfork, Blackduck, Cloquet Valley, Grand Portage, Sturgeon River, totaling 705,000 acres of land currently in DNR Division of Forestry management. Twenty-nine forests totaling 1,265,432 acres have been reviewed and of those, 25 totaling 1,211,984 acres have been proposed to be managed for some form of OHV recreation, leaving just 53,448 acres in four state forests (plus generally small pieces of many others) proposed to be "closed" to OHVs.

off-road vehicle recreation.” See electronically-attached document titled, “DNR-Awareness satisfaction Survey Results.pdf” at p. 4 and Appendix Table 4.

37o The vast majority of all Minnesotans who recreate on public lands do so in traditional, non-motorized fashion. Most among this majority seek a high-quality outdoors recreation experience. Many people are being imposed upon and pushed out of public lands that they heretofore enjoyed, by the saturating effects of OHVs, which now are inescapable across many parts of the public lands base in Minnesota.

38 Ortman, Dave, Debby, and Family

38a We oppose ATVs, OHVs, HLVs, OHMs, ORVs being allowed access to ANY public lands within the entire state of Minnesota.

38b If the DNR is going to allow them access to public lands they should at the very least be designated "limited."

38c ATVs and other forms of motorized vehicles are an assault on our public lands. We have personally witnessed how destructive ATVs are on public lands in Hermantown, the City of Duluth and surrounding areas. They cause huge ruts, erosion, impacted soils, destruction of riparian zones and wetlands, and cause air and noise pollution.

38d ATVs were originally designed to be used as a utility vehicle not a recreational vehicle.

38e Opening more areas to motorized traffic will only increase violations, cause more environmental destruction and further destroy the very land that the DNR is supposed to be preserving for future generations.

38f Enforcement is a joke. The ATVs we have observed either don't have readable license plates, they are covered in mud or they go by so fast you can't read them. The DNR can't enforce existing laws how do you plan on enforcing these laws with more trails, more motorized users and users coming in from other states?

38g What we don't understand is that the DNR doesn't seem to realize that there are other users of our public lands: hikers, bird watchers, nature lovers, herpetologists, botanists, phenologists, entomologists, meteorologists, mushroom collectors, and others. How will opening these areas up to motorized use affect their outdoor experience?

39 Rupert, Greg

39a I am writing to urge you to consider long term sustainability on our public lands as they regard to ATV use. Maintaining water quality, functioning ecosystems and limiting careless activity that results in erosion should be given careful consideration.

What individuals want, for their own recreational agendas, especially when it results in damage to the common property of the public, should carry little weight.

Assuming that you are in a position of stewardship of our commons, I urge you to limit the use of motorized recreation on state forests.

Where is it written that owe Polaris [etc] customers, public land to ruin?

39b I personally believe that we are set up for a major problem with invasive noxious weeds, and the evidence is apparent, all over the state.

I noticed that spotted knapweed is spread all over in places in north central MN, where it was not apparent in 2001. How can increased use of ATVs be justified in light of their effects in this regard?

Who will pay for this, the cost of this behavior is being externalized on to the general public, but it can not likely be fixed once we crap it up with these weeds.

39c I recently attended a town hall meeting by the DNR here in Rice Lake Township, St Louis County, regarding the Cloquet Valley SF, and the process that the DNR was pushing was despicable.

Getting people to argue for 2 hours about whether a sign should say "open" or "closed," while the decision has been made to turn over the commons to cretins is reprehensible.

The two plans offered by the DNR are no different in trail mileage, and this admitted, by one of your

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| colleagues. This is not honest brokering by a public entity. It is quite reprehensible, actually. |
| 39d I hope that you have the integrity to make long-term decisions on the Smokey Hills & Two Inlets SF, and anywhere else that you can effect, with sound decisions. |
| 40 Spindler, Richard |
| 40a I am against all use of OHV in state forests except for emergencies, for law enforcement to do their job, or if used in timber harvesting. |
| 40b These vehicles [e.g., ATVs] disturb the serenity of the forest and destroy the land itself |
| 40c Knowing that this is not possible, we need to protect riparian areas, e.g. those along rivers, streams, marshes, and lowlands. In addition, no vehicles should be allowed off trails that are not designated by the state forest management plan. Finally, all vehicles should stay away from hiking trails. |
| 41 Stowers, Dale |
| 41a From the damage I've seen to the uplands and lowlands in the Walker, Backus, and Pine River areas of Cass County it is my contention that all ATV and OHV travel in public lands should be banned totally. The ATV organizations say they can police their own ranks through education, etc. Sounds good until you go to a state forest and see the unrestrained damage being caused by the ATVs, then you know that it's just all talk so they can keep on tearing up the landscape. Just do the state forests and all public lands a favor and ban all ATV use on 'em. |
| 42 Stukel, Alyssa |
| 42a I am 13 years old. I love the Huntersville riding area for OHVs so much. I would like the ability to ride on these trails for more than just the summer and get more land there. |
| 43 Stukel, Michelle |
| 43a I am 12 years old. I love the Huntersville trails. They are really cool. They are not too easy by not too hard. They are one of my favorite trails. |
| 44 Stukel, Tawnia, Matt, Alysa, & Michelle |
| 44a We have some comments on the proposed trails in the West Central Forests – South Unit, specifically Huntersville State Forest. We would like the ability to do Grant In Aid trails instead of having unit trails for the forest. |
| 44b Also, these OHM trails should be setup as one-way trails. The one-way trails should be built according to Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines, which the Minnesota Department of National Resources has published on page 6.2. |
| 44c Currently, there are no connector trails between the two main OHM trail sections on the map. Connector trails would be very helpful to have and make the riding experience more enjoyable. |
| 44d The forest should also allow special use permits along with “enduro special event” permits. |
| 44e The trails should be open longer than Memorial Day to Labor Day, as September through October are some of the best riding months of the year. |
| 44f We do like the fact that the horses will have a small section of separate trails. And we do not have any issues with sharing trails with the horses. |
| 44g Thank you for your time and consideration of our ideas. Our family really enjoys the trail ride and enduro that are hosted in Huntersville. This is our major family activity starting in May and ending in November. We go all over Minnesota to ride different trails. We are excited that they will be open for us to ride at other times. |
| 45 Thilmony, Parker |
| 45a I attended the forest review meeting in Menahga, mainly regarding Huntersville State Forest. I live in Detroit Lakes and have been using Huntersville Forest for many years on my OHM. I have in the past been part of the R.V.E.R. and personally helped make approved trails and maintain them. I want to make the following comments: Since OHMs are not allowed to ride in ditches, connector trails in the ditches should be added. |
| 45b Huntersville Forest should be open year round for OHMs. The best riding is in spring and fall. The foliage during mid-summer makes it difficult to see. There are also people who use the trails in winters with little snow. I fully support spring closures for frost. |

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| <p>45c 17.9 miles of trails are designated for horse; based on "historical use." The only reason horses are there is because OHM clubs have built and maintained these trails. This is a pattern the DNR must stop. Examples: Pillsbury Forest; Zumbro Falls – Thielman; Gulch Area – Paul Bunyan. I am not against the horses using the forest with a special use permit a couple of weekends per year.</p> |
| <p>46 Thompson, Gary</p> |
| <p>46a Trail 3449 has always been a good route to ride and avoiding dusty Smoky Hills Road for a short distance.</p> |
| <p>46b I feel that a lot of the places we can ride in the summer time in the Smokey Hills are very dusty trails and can be rode at high speeds and most ATV riders prefer winding, narrower trails for slower speed riding to enjoy the scenery.</p> |
| <p>46c I guess the most important thing is for riders that we do not end up with a season to ride. I am hearing we are not wanted in the woods during hunting seasons, which starts with bear hunting the first of September and deer hunting the end of the year. We are limited in the winter with snowmobile trails and in the spring with the thaw so that would only leave summer when we have hot dusty and buggy conditions when the majority of riders prefer not to ride.</p> |
| <p>47 Tomperi, Kari</p> |
| <p>47a I attended the meeting held in Menahga regarding the trail proposals.</p> <p>I understand that the intent is to try the trails as inventoried as they already exist but I am concerned there are too many trails as is for dirt bikes and OHVs. 51+ miles are excessive and more should be closed especially in the pothole areas of the forests.</p> |
| <p>47b Huntersville State Forest was commented as just "jackpine sands" but that should be a strong heads up that those sands are very vulnerable and maybe only jackpines can become established. I have worked on many projects in Wadena County as the Water Resource Technician and I know that it is very difficult to establish vegetation in the "sands" found in Wadena County. I currently struggle with vegetation re-establishment on Spirit Lake because of sugar sand. Just look in the ditches to see the loss of vegetation from ATV's. Once your network of trails has damaged the soil cover, I am concerned that it will propagate into large sandy patches of nothing. I have seen research where the Sahara desert was once lush vegetation but once the vegetation cover was removed and due to lack of rainfall the sands took over.</p> |
| <p>47c With the current drought and lack of rainfall the forests in Huntersville and Lyons as well as the others in the west central group are extremely stressed and as we have lost many acres of jackpines to the jackpine beetle, is it fair to risk a state forest for a recreation type that is so destructive.</p> |
| <p>47d I read a recent article that the DNR is concerned that fishing and hunting are declining so they will loose permit fee dollars. It was interesting to note that a different clientele is emerging with non-intrusive activities like bird watching and nature hiking becoming more common. It is critical to re-evaluate the funding structure of the way the DNR finances their infrastructure and remember there are over 6 million citizens of the state with the belief the DNR is "protecting our natural resources for everyone..." not just for a limited few which I feel the DNR believes is a potential future funding source from ATVs and OHVs and their strong company lobbyists.</p> |
| <p>47e With my above concerns I feel more trails should be closed in Huntersville and Lyons and others and then if the users show common sense and respect for the trails and they still prove a need, then use the current system and post them to give them more after they have proven themselves and not before because it is much easier to protect than restore a natural resource.</p> |
| <p>48 Trieber, Jeff</p> |
| <p>48a Thank you for the e-mail as a pre-ponent of off road riding and a out of state competitor.</p> <p>I would first like to thank you for allowing the enduro races at Huntersville, in addition in a four year period I have watched my son of 19 5/5/88 rise from a C class rider 4 years ago to a highly competitive AA rider competing in the top 20 of the US.</p> |
| <p>48b In addition I am very active in preparing trail for competitions in WI and MN and our philosophy is low impact to the grounds around us. We travel the 5 state area and I have yet to see anything that disregards this mentality. In most cases the impact of an enduro will allow the land to heal with in one year. I can state this due to the following. I privately own 160 acres in western WI with 9 miles of trails, my son and the top 5 riders of MN ride here bi weekly the trail with some help is never a problem.</p> |

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| <p>48c Again I would like to thank you for your response and your continued effort to allow my son to be an athlete; he works very hard at this. In 4 years he has gone from novice to #3 in the state of MN for enduro. Again 19 no alcohol no drugs!!!!</p> |
| <p>49 Umphress, Karen</p> |
| <p>49a Please use this letter as formal comments to the West Central South Unit of the Forest Planning Process.</p> <p>In regards to Huntersville State Forest, the off-highway motorcycle riders community is pleased that the DNR has proposed approximately 52 miles to be designated as OHM only trails.</p> |
| <p>49b I feel that there is a severe lack of single-track trails in Minnesota. Because of this and the fact that we have already lost too many trails that were created by the OHM community to other users groups.</p> |
| <p>49c I would like to continue to have OHM access to the trails in the Northwest section of Huntersville State Forest that were created by an OHM club. I am proposing that this section of trails be classified as multiple use.</p> |
| <p>49d I was riding that single-track section Huntersville State Forest this weekend with a couple of other riders and we came across 2 horse-back riders. They could hear us coming and they moved off the trail to let us by. We happened to meet the horseback riders later that day and talked with them. There was no concern on their part of meeting OHMs on the trails. They also noted that it was a long, twisting section that was maybe too long for them and that they preferred other trails in that section better.</p> |
| <p>49e The map for the proposed trail designation does not include connector trails. Since an OHM can not legally ride in a road ditch unless it is part of a designated trail system, it is important to include the connector trails between the sections of forest and Huntersville so that motorists can easily get from one section to another. I also support the addition of putting staging areas in the forest, but this will also require that the sections of trail be fully linked to one another.</p> |
| <p>49f In regards to the limited season of OHM riding in Huntersville State Forest, I do not agree with shortening the season to end at Labor Day. Some of the best riding can be done in September and October when the weather is a little cooler.</p> |
| <p>49g I am not sure how the shortened season will mitigate user conflicts. While I was in Huntersville this weekend, there were many canoeists, tubers, and the horseback riders already mentioned. We did not experience any user conflicts with any of these activities. After we finished riding, we walked down to the river and cooled off. People asked us if we have been riding and we told them we had. Nobody expressed any displeasure with the fact there was riding in the forest and shunned us as motorized recreational users in any way.</p> |
| <p>49h I do not see any way that having the season for OHM riding shortened will affect user conflicts. I believe the season should continue to the standard OHV season of Nov 1st. If you are worried about hunter conflicts, then you would need to shut down all types of recreation in the forest. There are as many possible user conflicts between hunters and horseback riders, hikers, canoers, and normal use of forest roads as there would be with hunters and OHM riders.</p> |
| <p>49i As a technical correction in the proposal, please change the wording of 'Enduro-type' events to "Special Use permit" events. My OHM club has held 4 trail rides in Huntersville State Forest. These are "Special Use permit" events, but are non-competition events.</p> |
| <p>49j I also believe the single-track trails should not be designated as DNR unit trails. The best way for a single-track trail to be created and maintained is by walking the trail. In the past, the DNR staff has preferred to use larger machines for creating and maintaining trails that than fit down a single-track trail. This causes the trails to be widened and straightened. We have seen this most recently in the Paul Bunyan State Forest where the DNR used heavy equipment on some single-track trails, which are no longer single-track. I would like to avoid this in Huntersville and in all state forest single-track trails.</p> |
| <p>49k In conclusion, we would like to thank the team for including the designation of single-track trail in Huntersville State Forest. I hope that the DNR will continue to find opportunities to add single-track trails as part of the forest classification process in other state forests as well.</p> |
| <p>50 Umphress, Tom</p> |
| <p>50a I represent over 3500 Minnesota off-highway motorcyclist members of the Amateur Riders Motorcycle Association (ARMCA). ARMCA is also known as District 23 of the American Motorcyclists</p> |

Association, a nationwide motorcycle rights organization.

As off-highway motorcyclists we would first like to thank you and the designation team members for looking at the Huntersville State Forest as an opportunity to provide "single-track" riding opportunity in the state. We feel that the opportunities for single-track riding in MN are few and the ones that we do have seem to be dwindling or being lost to wider trail users and equestrian trails. So, this is an exciting proposal to us.

We do have a few concerns/changes that we would like to raise with the current proposal.

50b We would like the verbiage of "Enduro Type" events changed to "OHM Events." There is also a history of Trail Rides in this forest and we want to make sure that they are given the same consideration during special use permit requests as the Enduro events are.

50c We would like to see the North West section trail designations changed from Horse Trail to Horse/OHM trail. We believe that there is a history already established of multiuse between horses and OHMs in this forest and do not see a reason to build in a divide. OHM riders already feel that they have lost 100's of miles of OHM rider created trails and whole forests to horse trails.

50d We would like to see the season start and end dates removed from the plan. We feel that an opening date for the riding season is better dictated by seasonal on ground conditions. The soil types in this forest may very well provide for an earlier opening date. We also feel that Labor Day is way too early to close the season. There are many high quality riding days through September and into October as the temperatures become cooler and the bugs start to die off. One of our member clubs has put on rides in this forest in late September in the past.

50e We are concerned with the lack of connector routes between the different OHM trails proposed. With the currently proposed map one would have to load up and trailer their machine just a few miles down the road to ride another section. Connector routes need to be established.

50f We feel that a connector route to the facilities in Huntersville would be a positive attribute to the system and the community, i.e. camping and eating facilities.

50g We believe that trail 2994 and the non-designated routes in the northeast section should become designated routes.

50h We would like to make sure that the OHM rider community is involved in the maintenance of the OHM trails. We are concerned that the DNR does not fully understand "Single-Track" trails and may widen them up to much too easy maintenance.

Again, thank you for looking for single-track riding opportunities in the state and please keep us informed of the progress in the Huntersville State Forest. Please do not hesitate to call on us if we can be of any help in the process.

51 Valois, Cheryl & Brummit, Bruce

51a Our concern is the connection via township road from the south portion of the Smoky Hills to the north portion...we live on that township road, and 4 wheelers treat it as if it is part of the trail...spinning in circles and riding 4 abreast at times...with excessive speeds around blind corners and on hills...it is total insanity and inanity.

Something must be done about that section...the township road should be posted at 30.

51b I'm advocating for extremely limited use of ORVs in the Smoky Hills State Forest. We've already had damage from the irresponsible ones...the township road we live on (Guyles Road) and also Old Mill Road connects the Two Inlet/Wolf Lake/Smoky Hills trails...and the speed limit is 55 mph...blind curves and hills...with highway vehicles/logging trucks, etc...make it extremely dangerous. At the very least, these two township roads should be marked as special consideration roads and posted at 30 mph.

51c I'm appalled in this time of war in the middle east, increasing dependence on foreign oil, a call for decreasing carbon emissions which may be directly affecting global warming/weather patterns...that we all don't find it a bit unpatriotic and anti-American to be opening new trails and encouraging more off road use...or any at all. These forests are for public use...why not, in the spirit of free enterprise and entrepreneurship, limit ORV use to private lands? Allow folks to make money off the machines and their use...and confine them to courses controlled by private interests...instead of making it a public

nuisance and burden upon all taxpayers to clean up, enforce and repair the damage from the use of these machines on public lands.

51d Danger to the safety of other land users because of vehicle speed, steep terrain, sharp curves, slippery or unstable trail surfaces, and/or limited visibility; and excessive noise, which, in close proximity, may result in physiological effects on animals and humans, or may induce anxiety, altering animal behavior patterns, and which, in most circumstances, seriously degrades the solitude of wild areas for other users. These are problems here that should be taken into consideration. ORVs should conform to air and noise pollution standards the same as highway vehicles.

52 Wallner, Alan

52a First I want to thank you in advance for your support. I have recently engaged in the sport of dirt biking with my children. We are advocates of safety and respectful riding and work diligently to ensure dirt biking maintains a good reputation so it can be around for the future.

In regards to the proposed changes I would like to make a couple of requests.

It states that trails will be maintained (listed) as unit trails. I would propose instead that the trails be maintained by clubs with brush cutters and by walking. This will help trails continue to be minimally invasive and respect wildlife trails.

52b In addition I propose that the funding to help maintain trails come from grants and aid rather than tax dollars.

52c In regards to the Northwest section of trail by Huntersville, this originally was created by motorcycles and is a great area for younger riders. I have enjoyed many hours with my children riding those trails. It would be a tragedy if we are not allowed to ride those trails because it is to be converted 100% to equestrian trails.

52d Please keep Special Use permits in effect for trails. This allows us to keep trails rides active. These are great family events. If changed to "Enduro special events" we will lose the most casual family ride.

52e Please, please, please keep the OHV trails open from April 1 to November 31. We love to ride as much as we can. Memorial Day to Labor Day will significantly shorten the season and hurt a wonderful family pastime for the Wallners.]

In conclusion, these issues are critical to the future of a great sport in Minnesota that has continually been attacked and down-scoped over the years. Please act on behalf of dirt biking in Minnesota. Myself and my family thank you.

53 Wallner, Lizzie

53a First off, so you know, I'm writing in regards to the proposal of change dirt bike trails to horse riding only. I am 16 and my Dad got me into dirt biking last year and Huntersville was the place I first started. I am a very respectful rider and would like to continue riding there.

I also think that the trails should be DNR maintained and created as they have so far by means of walkthroughs and sweepers.

54 Wenthold, Tami

54a My name is Tami Wenthold. I own and operate a Bed & Corral for horseback trail riders in the Huntersville Forest area north of Cty. Rd. #18 on 189th Ave. I am also a member of the Menahga Conservation Club.

Several members have expressed concern over the proposed trails for motocross motorcycles in the Huntersville Forest. I have a major concern over the amount/mileage of trails that are proposed for the motorcycles in comparison to the amount of miles designated only for horseback riders. I know there has been "enduro" type trails in the forest that are used, but not to the degree that is being proposed.

54b One of the areas that will be soon be designated for motorcycle trail riding is directly across the road from my Bed & Corral and in an area that is used by my guests for a shorter trail ride in the evening after arrival or a morning of their departure. One of the most repeated phrases by my guests is the quiet they enjoy while staying at our Bed & Corral – the whine of an enduro engine is not the type of "background" one would like to relax while enjoying the great scenery.

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| 54c With the proposed trails being sited in Huntersville and the closure of trails in other forests - the quantity of riders will increase. |
| 54d The closures in other forests have been greatly due to the destruction of the land that enduro riding causes. |
| 54e The Huntersville soil is sand and is even more fragile with less abuse versus other types of soil. |
| 54f Minnesota State Forests are used by the public for recreation - enduro type riding is considered racing and should be done on a track that is made to take the abuse! |

RESPONSE TO TOPICS RAISED IN PUBLIC COMMENTS

Related comments were grouped together into topics prior to developing the agency response. Some topics are of a general nature (e.g., State Forest Management Objectives, Preferred Motor Vehicle Use Classification) while others are forest- or site-specific. Comments that expressed a concern or opinion not directly pertinent to the classification, road and/or trail designation, or Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Route Use designation, were assigned to the miscellaneous category.

A succinct summary of each group of comments is prepared. This is followed by a list of commenters expressing the topic or issue. The agency response to the comment is then presented. Reviewers are invited to view the listing provided above for the full text of each comment.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Classification

Summary of Concerns

The commenters understand DNR has been working hard since the legislative change in 2003. Many recommendations have been excellent. [Comment: 35a]

Response. Comment noted.

Summary of Concerns

Comments were offered providing general support for application of the managed or limited classification for the forest lands in the planning unit. [Comment: 3b, 33b, 38b]

Response. Comment noted.

Enforcement – Compliance Strategy for Off-trail Operation

Summary of Concerns

Off-trail abuses will still occur under the draft plan because it was sanctioned in the past. Even legal off-trail travel will result in temptations for abuse. An “abuse it, you lose it” strategy to monitor and enforce the general prohibitions on off-trail travel is provided. Other general comments on enforcement were provided. [Comment: 30i; 30j; 38f]

Response. Comment noted. Off-trail operation of motor vehicles is strictly prohibited except for certain approved instances under the provisions of M.S. 84.926.

The Department is committed to providing the resources necessary to effectively monitor and enforce the recommendations offered in the final plan. The first step in this commitment came through requiring Division of Enforcement representation on all planning teams. This participation is reinforced by consultation with area Conservation Officers on local enforcement issues that can be addressed at the planning stage. Enforcement was one of many factors considered in the classification review, and specific road and trail designations, for all DNR Forestry-administered lands in the planning unit.

DNR concurs that a monitoring and enforcement mechanism should be in place prior to a completed forest’s effective date. The DNR Division’s of Enforcement, Forestry, and Trails and Waterways have

specific monitoring responsibilities for designated roads and trails; non-designated routes are also subject to evaluation as the need arises. Staff are also responsible for closing user created routes as offered in the most recent Directions Memo, that states “[c]losure of a route, whether existing or user created, is warranted anytime serious public safety issues exist, or whenever and wherever substantial erosion, rutting or vegetative damage threatens surface water or wetlands;” Martinson, 2007. The Department can alter its management prescriptions as warranted at some future date.

The DNR recognizes the need for additional enforcement effort as the OHV management framework in State Forests changes from “open unless posted closed” to “closed unless posted open.” The Department also recognizes that the vast majority of motor vehicle operators have every intention to operate in a legal manner. Still, it is anticipated that it will take several years to change rider habits and behavior. Public information and education campaigns will also be used to inform motor vehicle users of the changed rules. In recent years new Conservation Officer positions focusing on OHV enforcement have been created and the amount of OHV dedicated funds allocated for enforcement have increased. Annual OHV monitoring and enforcement plans are developed to focus efforts on areas with heavy OHV use, resource damage, or visitor conflict.

OHV dedicated funds have also been allocated for grants to local law enforcement agencies since 2005. The County Sheriff can apply for these OHV enforcement grants to reimburse personnel and equipment costs related to OHV enforcement. The grant funds are based on the acreage of public lands, waters, and wetlands in the county and the number of registered OHVs that list the county as the location of “most use.” OHV enforcement is a shared responsibility between DNR Conservation Officers and local law enforcement. The DNR focus is on state forest lands and state laws and regulations (registration, age of operator, safety). Compliance with ordinances or rules governing the use of county lands is the often the focus of local enforcement efforts. Any licensed peace officer can enforce laws related to trespass and OHV operation on public highway rights of way.

DNR appreciates the effort applied in the development of the specific recommendations for closing non-designated routes. Department staff with responsibility for developing monitoring and enforcement protocols have been supplied with the information.

Environmental, Social, and Economic Effects of OHV Use

Summary of Concerns

These comments focus on the environmental, social, and economic effects – both positive and negative – related to OHV use. Environmental impacts mentioned include soils and wetlands; nesting birds; noise; and air pollution; because of these negative attributes, oppose OHVs operating on state forest lands. Positive effects mentioned include the enjoyment provided by well-developed and -maintained trails; and the economic effects related to outdoor recreation based tourism. [Comment: 1a, 2a, 2c, 3a, 7k, 7l, 11a, 12a, 23c, 29e, 34e, 38a, 38c, 38d, 38e, 39a, 39c, 40a, 40b, 40c, 41a, 47c, 48b, 51c, 51e, 54d, 51d]

Response. The DNR acknowledges that all recreational trail use carries with it the potential for unintended environmental effects. With proper trail alignment, design, construction, and regular maintenance, the DNR believes that it can provide sustainable roads and OHV trails on State Forest lands. This involves the use of stable, naturally shaped, engaging, and narrow OHV trails that encourage relatively slow travel and highlight natural features. Hardened trail treads will be employed where native soils cannot resist displacement and trails will be located to minimize disturbance to surface water, wetlands and other sensitive natural features. Regular trail monitoring, maintenance, and enforcement are intended to help ensure that trails do not fall into disrepair or generate unacceptable social or environmental impacts. The planning team considered environmental impacts when designating roads and trails for motorized use.

While the DNR is concerned with the economic effects of its decisions, economic impacts are not a primary factor considered when making forest classification and road/trail designation decisions. Natural resource and social impacts were more important factors in developing the classification and designation proposals.

Funding

Summary of Concerns

These comments focus on funding mechanisms for public access infrastructure and competing interests for both motorized and non-motorized types of recreation. Comments ranged from “Non-intrusive activities like bird watching and nature hiking” are trending up to loss of trails paid for by “snowmobile and ATV money.” Economic aspects were also noted. [Comment: 34c, 34d, 34f, 47d]

Response. DNR agrees that it is necessary to secure stable, reliable, and equitable funding sources for non-motorized recreation opportunities. For example, the Minnesota Legislature recently provided \$400,000 to fund non-motorized recreation and created the Minnesota Horse Pass Program. Grant In Aid opportunities are currently available for x-country skiers, and the model may be applicable to other activities. OHV-related recreational opportunities will continue to be funded through dedicated accounts.

While the DNR is concerned with the economic effects of its decisions, economic impacts are not a primary factor considered when making forest classification and road/trail designation decisions. Natural resource and social impacts were more important factors in developing the classification and designation proposals.

Hunting

Summary of Concerns

Bear hunters can be adversely impacted by forest classification, especially if it affects bear baiting over the period from August to October. Exceptions should be made for this small group of hunters to allow good forest access. [Comment: 28a, 28d, 28e]

Response. The *managed* classification is no longer available for any State Forest lands located south of US Highway 2. Unless proposed for a *closed* classification, forests will be classified as *limited* where operation of OHVs is restricted to designated forest roads and trails that are signed “open” to motorized use. Cross-country travel is prohibited subject to special big game hunting and trapping exceptions. For bear hunters, the applicable exceptions to the cross-country travel ban are:

- hunting or constructing hunting stands during October is allowed; and
- retrieving harvested bears in September and October is allowed.

All State Forest lands in the West Central Forests – South Unit are located south of US Highway 2, thus only the *limited* classification is available for team consideration. Bear harvest on State Forest lands will have to operate within the constraints afforded under current law. The Planning Team has attempted to provide a network of forest roads and trails designed to accommodate the range of public access needs in the study area, including bear harvest.

Summary of Concerns

Hunting has become too complicated. It has changed a great deal. [Comment: 14a]

Response. Comment noted.

Incompatible Recreational Uses / Conflicts

Summary of Concerns

Comments were submitted expressing the need to separate incompatible to segregate non-motorized from motorized forest users. Buffer zones are necessary to provide silent users with high quality experiences commensurate with those provided to motorized recreationists. [Comment: 30b, 30c, 30d, 30e, 37o, 38g]

Response. Conflicts between motor and non-motor recreation users do occur. The DNR manages State Forests within the policy guidelines established in state statutes. The statutory policy for State Forests is *multiple use, sustained yield* management of forest resources. State forests are actively managed to provide a range of goods and services, including outdoor recreation. State Forests are not, by statutory definition, designated wilderness or solitude areas. They host a mix of commercial, industrial, and resource management activities that are generally inconsistent and incompatible with wilderness or a “solitude-like” experience (e.g., timber harvest, motorized recreation, wildlife habitat manipulation, mining, prescribed fire, tree planting, fuelwood and bough harvest, etc).

State Forests are roaded and accessible, and have traditionally hosted a mix of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. The multiple use management policy does not require that all uses be allowed on every acre of forest land. It allows a mix of management emphases across the State Forest system. Imposition of solitude buffers is unworkable in such a mix land uses, where the size, shape, and irregular configuration of state forest lands, especially when other key infrastructure such as arterial roads and traditional travel routes are present. State parks, and other DNR management units such as Wildlife Management Areas, State Trails, and Scientific & Natural Areas, have different statutory management policies and provide better opportunities to achieve “solitude-type” experiences.

Comment 30e notes that the proposed Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use is not absolutely ATV free. The observation is correct in that public access is afforded principally by forest roads that are open to both HLVs and OHVs. However, significant miles of hunter walking trail are proposed where motorized use will not be present, even in the fall big game hunting and trapping season. This area currently supports a mix of motorized and non-motorized recreation, which is customary for most state forests. Designating the Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use reduces motorized access significantly on these acres, thus partially satisfying demands for less exposure to motorized activity.

Inventory

Summary of Concerns

Will old logging roads be included with the designations? [Comment: 28b]

Response. Yes. Most of the proposed minimum maintenance road designations are used for various types of forest management, including logging.

Miscellaneous

Summary of Comments

DNR should maintain the status quo until all current issues have been addressed. [Comment: 10a]

Response. Comment noted. The applicable law requires DNR to change the current *managed* classification to *limited* or *closed* for the state forest lands located within this planning unit.

Non-Native Invasive Plant Species

Summary of Concerns

These comments focus on the role of OHVs in the spread of invasive species and in the creation of niches likely to be colonized by invasive species. [Comment: 39b]

Response. The DNR acknowledges that OHVs can serve as vectors for some non-native invasive species and that OHV use can create openings that can be colonized. Human activities other than OHV use (e.g. timber harvest, other motorized and non-motorized recreational activities, transport of firewood, highway maintenance) also spread invasive species. Non-human vectors (e.g. wind, water, wildlife) are also involved.

The DNR has developed an Invasive Species Handbook and related Operational Order 113 to help control nonnative invasive species. The plant species mentioned in the comments are classified as noxious weeds that are well established in Minnesota. The DNR will:

- monitor and manage invasive species in high exposure/risk areas (storage areas, gravel pits, trails); and
- educate hikers and users on OHVs, mountain bikes, or horses to stay on the trails to minimize spread into natural areas.

Planning Process Questions & Comments

Comment Summary

The draft plan should have acknowledged and responded to comments submitted during pre-planning, especially on the lack of a compliance enforcement plan and disproportionate allocation of state forest acreages to motorized uses. DNR's summaries fail to properly characterize the depth and breadth of reviewer concerns, thus invalidating public involvement in agency processes. [Comment: 30a]

Response. The Department's statewide forest classification review and road/trail designation process affords two opportunities for public input. The first opportunity is the more informal of the two. It allows the public, especially those individuals who use the state forest lands in the planning unit, to provide forest-specific information for the team to consider as it develops its formal recommendations. The second opportunity is prescribed by rule for forest classification where the Commissioner is to describe how the comments were considered in the classification decision.

The DNR Team and cooperating partners considered information provided in the first-round comments and open houses in developing the recommendations for forest classification and road/trail designations. One example of team responsiveness to the public input received is the proposed designations of Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use, coupled with proposed hunter walking trails, to provide improved non-motor recreation opportunities and limit potential off-trail impacts in Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forest. Another example is the set of proposed ATV-OHM trail designations in all four forests, which are offered to provide better quality loop-type riding opportunities. All minimum maintenance road designations are offered to ensure that future public access is commensurate with historic levels of access.

The comment is correct in that the draft plan did not provide a Department response to the early input. This is not required and no Department commitment to do so has been offered. Responses however have been prepared for comments submitted during the formal public review and comment period from May 14 thru August 1, 2007.

The comment is also correct that the Agency uses content analysis to summarize public input in the development of an agency response. This is a recognized means of organizing a range of opinions or information around a common theme. Even though summaries are often used, typically the Response to Comment document includes the original comment and identifies the commenter, thus documenting the actual comment itself.

Regarding the lack of recognition of the need for a compliance enforcement plan and pattern of disproportionate allocation of motor versus non-motor recreation opportunities, these are issues of statewide policy not directly applicable to the Planning Team's charge. Perspective on both issues has however been provided to the planning team in a series of Directional Memos (2003, 2004, 2005, 2007-08). The team takes this policy guidance and applies it to the specific circumstances of the state forest lands under their review.

Summary of Concerns

The commenter appreciated the format of the public meetings held in Menahga and Detroit Lakes. [Comments: 30a; 30k]

Response. The Department welcomes the comment. The format is being used statewide to meet the public meeting requirements for the forest classification review and trail designation processes.

Recreational Demand Trends

Summary of Concerns

Comments cite a number of studies or surveys, and/or offer opinions, on the relative demand for and supply of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. Motorized interests are not complaining, so they must be satisfied with process outcomes. One commenter noted systems in Colorado and Wisconsin are good; a trail system is needed to keep ATVs on trails. [Comment: 26a, 30f, 30g, 30h, 34b, 37f, 37g, 37h, 37i, 37j, 37k, 37l, 37m, 37n]

Response. The DNR considered the relative availability of various types of outdoor recreational facilities in and around the West Central Forests – South Unit when developing proposals for forest classification, road/trail designations, and Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use. A variety of historic non-motorized uses are acknowledged, which resulted in proposed designation of both horseback (in Huntersville State Forest) and hunter-walking trails (in Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests). Non-motorized recreation is also supported for approximately 13,000 acres of state forest land in Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests, where the big game hunting and trapping exceptions afforded by M.S. 84.926, subd. 2 & 4 are not in force. In the general area, there are designated non-motorized trails for a variety of activities including hiking, cross country skiing, horseback riding, bicycling, and hunting in Crow Wing State Park, Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area, Pillsbury State Forest, Paul Bunyan State Trail, county and city parks, and WMAs. There are also designated snowmobile and ATV grant-in-aid trails in Becker and Crow Wing County and designated trails for ATVs, OHMs, and ORVs in the nearby Land O' Lakes and Foot Hills State Forests.

State forest lands are typically more utilitarian oriented and more open to motor vehicle use than other types of DNR administered lands. All routes, whether designated or not, can be used for non-motorized recreation. Non-designated routes on state land are available for non-motorized use but are not signed, mapped, or managed and there is the possibility of encountering motor vehicles being operated under the hunting and trapping exceptions on non-designated trails. Neither state statutes nor DNR policy set a standard for the percent of forest land to be allocated for motorized or non-motorized uses or minimum distances for separation of motorized and non-motorized uses.

The DNR considers recreational demand surveys and studies when making forest classification and road/trail designation recommendations but does not use formulas or set goals based on the percent of population participating in various activities when designating recreational trail uses. Resource conditions, location within the state, and types and distribution of existing recreational facilities are other factors that were considered.

Regarding assertions of lack of complaints from motorized interests offered in Comment 30h, the Department is engaged in access planning for all State Forest lands statewide. To the degree that motorized access, either for HLVs or OHVs, is warranted under the decision criteria offered in M.R. 6100.1950, subp. 2, this may or may not satisfy the range of public access interests.

Signing

Summary of Comments

Posting trails that are accessible to ATVs is a better strategy than posting those only closed to use. Under the latter strategy, signs disappear and when an ATV leaves a trail, it has created a new trail that is open to future use. [Comment: 12b]

Response. Comment noted. Because all forest lands in the West Central Forests – South Unit are located south of US Highway 2, the limited classification is the only available option that allows motor vehicle use on state forest lands. Under the limited classification, general operation of motor vehicles is

restricted to signed forest roads and trails except for certain big game hunting and trapping opportunities. DNR has recommended a limited classification for the four state forests located in the South Unit.

Trail Experience

Summary of Comments

Comment was offered regarding what features constitute a desirable ATV trail experience versus a hiking experience. [Comment: 32a, 32b]

Response. The Planning Team is charged with evaluating an inventory of existing routes and recommending the set of forest road and trail designations that provides the greatest opportunity for sustainable forest access. The comment offers perspective similar to that considered by the team.

Value of State Forests

Summary of Comments

Forests are a legacy that should be preserved for future generations. They are a wonderful asset. [Comment: 12c]

Response. Comment noted.

FOREST-SPECIFIC COMMENTS – HUNTERSVILLE

Areas with Limitations

Summary of Comments

This forest should have an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use. With very little editing, these areas could and should be established on the southeast and to the northwest of the two masses of OHM trail. [Comment: 37c, 37d]

Response. The comment correctly notes that the draft plan does not propose an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use for Huntersville State Forest. M.S. 84.926, subd. 5 allows the Commissioner to designate areas where the big game hunting and trapping exceptions under M.S. 84.926, subd. 2 & 4 do not apply. In considering whether such areas should be provided as offered in the comment, it is noted that no motorized trails are proposed for either location, with motorized access provided through a series of proposed minimum maintenance forest roads open to both HLVs and OHVs. Regarding non-designated routes, none are present in the northwest area while very few routes occur to the southeast. What this means is that although not explicitly “non-motorized,” under a limited classification for this forest, motor vehicles would be generally restricted to the forest roads while very few non-motorized routes are open under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions. It is true that ATVs may operate off-trail in both areas, but most activity will occur during the big game firearms season when other recreational uses in the forest are low. When considering other factors such as the distribution of DNR-managed lands, potential boundaries, and the ability for the forest to sustain off-trail travel by ATVs under the hunting/trapping exceptions, the recommended action is not warranted.

Connector Routes

Summary of Concerns

Concerns were raised that connections were needed for motorcycles on specific routes, or that connectors were needed for different areas of proposed OHM trails. The “east” and “west” OHM trail areas should be connected. Connectors are needed to ensure that all 50+ miles can be used. [Comment: 17c, 18c, 20c, 44c, 45a, 49e, 50e, 50f]

Response. Regarding specific routes, the commenters correctly note that the proposed set of OHM trail designations shows breaks at some locations. Some of these are artifacts of the GIS’s layering of ownership data or where the inventory crosses into private lands. The former will be rectified during

actual implementation while the latter will be addressed through minor reroutes or negotiated easements. Regardless of source, the system of designated OHM-only trails will not exhibit dead ends.

Regarding greater system connectivity, DNR agrees that Grant In Aid trails can provide greater continuity, especially in providing a connection between the “east” and “west” areas with proposed OHM designations.

Forest Classification

Summary of Concerns

Support is offered for the limited classification. [Comment: 7n]

Response. Comment noted.

Summary of Concerns

Will the classification apply to county lands? [Comment: 28c]

Response. Yes, the proposed classification will apply to county-administered lands within the state forest statutory boundary.

Grant In Aid

Summary of Concerns

DNR should be open to considering Grant In Aid Trails in the future. Information on this should be available. [Comment: 18e, 21f]

Response. Grant In Aid proposals will be considered on a case-by-case basis consistent with Department policies. Information on DNR’s Grant In Aid Program can be obtained at Division of Trails & Waterways Area Offices located across the state.

Motorized User Groups

Summary of Concerns

Members of the group were at the Menahga public meeting; the group is disappointed to learn about the 51 miles of OHM trails and 3.6 miles of ATV/OHM trails. The DNR Trails Division has given in to “big business” from manufacturers and people who can afford these machines with these recommendations for Huntersville State Forest. [Comment: 7b]

Response. Comment noted. The statewide forest classification review and road/trail designation process is public and open to anyone interested in the process.

DNR Planning Teams are to consider the existing route inventory and the types of uses it can sustain on a forest-by-forest basis. Huntersville State Forest exhibits significant miles of single-track route that result from historic use by OHMs and for horseback riding. The team’s recommendation for designation of both OHM and horseback trails, along with some ATV/OHM trail, recognizes the historic uses of this forest and the opportunity to expand recreational the recreational opportunities, both motorized and non-motorized.

Noise

Summary of Concerns

Comment 54b indicates that noise generated by OHMs is “not the type of ‘background’ one would like to relax to while enjoying the great scenery.” The proposed OHM designations are across the road from the Bed & Breakfast, very near to a short horseback trail used for brief rides. [Comment: 54b]

Response. DNR agrees that OHM operation on the proposed set of trails will generate noise beyond that typically present in this forest. It should be noted that all machines are required to have mufflers whose

performance meets or exceeds State Noise Standards; DNR Conservation Officers are responsible for enforcing these standards. Although State Noise Standards will not be violated, it is expected that some forest users may characterize the OHM engine sound as “annoying,” especially as a function of low current ambient noise levels. While acknowledging this potential for annoyance, the levels are not expected to constitute a nuisance.

The Department will monitor forest conditions for the entire set of recreational trails, including noise considerations, and will consider changes in management when warranted.

OHMs – Purpose

Summary of Concerns

One comment was offered stating OHMs have nothing in common with recreating in nature; they are about speed, racing, and noise. Another noted that OHM racing should be done on a track that is made to take the abuse. [Comment: 7e, 54f]

Response. Comment noted. Motor vehicle use on state forest lands is governed by Minnesota statute and rule. The proposed forest classification and forest road/trail designations are consistent with Minnesota law.

Public Meeting

Summary of Concerns

Seeing DNR lobbied and thanked (for the OHM-only trails) was eye opening. Various additional requests were made on DNR. [Comment: 7c]

Response. DNR is required under both statute and rule to receive comments from the public on its proposed classification review and road/trail designations. This opportunity is afforded to all interested parties.

Route-specific Recommendations

The following route-specific recommendations were offered for consideration:

1. There is a 5 mile section of trails south of the road accessing the Huntersville Campground. The RVER Club would like to see these trails opened to use if possible. [Comment: 6f]

Response: The routes in question are located in Sections 18,19, T138N, R33W and include both single- and dual-track treadways. The team did not propose an OHM-only trail designation in this area as a means to provide separation between motorized and non-motorized (i.e., canoeing) recreationists. However, because some of the wider routes could sustain motorized use, the draft plan recommended for them to be designated as minimum maintenance forest roads. The remaining balance of single-track routes will retain a non-designated status, but both the minimum maintenance forest roads and non-designated routes are available for consideration for inclusion in a DNR special events permit. Because historic OHM access in this area is still possible for special events, no change is provided.

2. Need to add trail north of #2719 and south of #2598. [Comment: 15a, 21e]

Response: The indicated route was not captured during the inventory review. If present, it will be considered non-designated and thus be available for use under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions and special events. No change is provided.

3. Need to add trail east of #2559; it runs north and south. [Comment: 15b, 21e]

Response: The indicated route was not captured during the inventory review. If present, it will be considered non-designated and thus be available for use under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions and special events. No change is provided.

4. Desirable for a connector route between #2564 and #2966. [Comment: 20e]

Response: The DNR team agrees that the suggestion has merit and recommends DNR Forestry to pursue negotiations to secure the required access.

5. A trail is missing between #2533 to #4979. [Comment: 20f, 21e]

Response: The route in question abuts a town road and is a non-designated route. Because horseback riding is already a permitted activity along the corridor, it is not proposed for designation. Future use by OHMs could be negotiated under a DNR special events permit. No change is provided.

6. Route #2564 should be designated as an ATV trail to provide access to private property. This location is often used as a staging area for trail maintenance conducted by volunteers in the state forest. [Comment: 15c, 20e, 21b]

Response: The DNR team agrees that motorized use can be sustained on the route in question. The route has been assigned status as a designated minimum maintenance forest road.

7. Route #2994 and routes in the northeast section should become designated routes. [Comment: 50g]

Response: Route #2994 has two elements; one is a short loop and the other is route along the road ditch. The DNR team considered designating the short loop as horseback trail, but determined it was not of sufficient length or recreational value to warrant designation. It essentially duplicates access already available at this location that is provided by routes #2574 and #2543. Although not designated, the route is available for all non-motorized uses, including horseback, or for consideration for special events under that type of permit. Because the other component is road ditch, it does not warrant designation as a recreational trail.

Regarding routes in the northeast section in general, the planning team weighed by benefits of additional trail designations and determined that public access is sufficiently provided by the local road network in concert with the proposed minimum maintenance forest roads. Non-designated routes are available to the public for non-motorized recreation as well as for motorized access under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions. All of these routes are also available for consideration for special events.

The area in question also contains single-track route that is not proposed for designation. The team debated the merits of additional designation, especially in the vicinity of the Huntersville WMA. When balancing the range of interests in that part of the forest, including potential hunting conflicts and enforcement issues, the mix of designations was determined to provide an enhanced OHM experience over current conditions while limiting the potential for other recreational conflicts. As previously noted, all of these routes are available for consideration and use under a DNR special events permit.

Sensitive Areas

Summary of Concerns

Eco-sensitive areas should be looked at. [Comment: 19b]

Response. DNR Teams are directed to consider a number of factors, including the potential for ecologically sensitive areas, to be affected by public access under the proposed forest classification and road/trail designations. This occurred for Huntersville State Forest consistent with Department direction.

Signs

Summary of Concerns

OHM trails should be signed so that ATV operators will know not to use them. The brown signs do this better than the little red ones. [Comment: 6c]

Response. The Department is investing considerable effort in developing an improved system of signs to direct users of where or where not to ride. The new signing scheme will be used in this forest.

Single-track Designations – Maintenance

Summary of Concerns

Several commenters referenced the need for users to maintain trails to OHM-specifications. Concern was offered that DNR did not have the equipment or expertise to maintain motorcycle trails. Instead of designating unit trails, DNR should consider a Grant In Aid system. [Comment: 13a, 16c, 25a, 29a, 31b, 44a, 49j, 50h, 52a, 52b, 53a]

Response. The Department recognizes that maintenance of single-track trails is more specialized than that associated with wider trails. Even though these routes are designated as “unit” trails, the agency intends to enter into maintenance agreements with user groups to ensure that the specifications necessary for a quality single-track riding experience are maintained.

Single-track Designations – NW Corner of State Forest

Summary of Concerns

Comments were offered criticizing DNR for proposing to designate horseback trails to the NW part of the forest, especially since these trails were “created” by OHM user groups. These trails should be either OHM-only trails too, which still would be open to horseback use, or should be dual-designated as both horse and motorcycle trails. It is unfair for these trails to be converted to horseback trails, thus excluding future use by motorcycles. [Comment: 13b, 15e, 16b, 20b, 23a, 25b, 29b, 31a, 36b, 44f, 45c, 49c, 50c, 52c]

Response. The Planning Team considered the historic pattern of OHM and horseback riding, as well as the relative connectivity of DNR forest lands, in developing its recommendations for trail designation. In terms of the allocation of horseback trail miles to the NW corner of the forest, this area has a strong history of horse riding (e.g., horse camp). The DNR-managed lands in the NW corner are also separated from the rest of the forest by a large band of private lands and the Crow Wing River. Considering this history of use and lack of connectivity, as well as the potential for user conflicts and safety concerns, separating the uses as proposed seems a reasonable compromise.

No change is proposed at this time. The Department takes the opportunity to note however that dual-use proposals, as well as Grant In Aid connections, could be considered in the future once the system is in place. It should also be noted that all routes, whether designated or not, are available for consideration under a special events permit.

Single-track Designations – Proposed Locations & Staging Areas

Summary of Concerns

Comments were offered about eliminating the proposed OHM-only trail designations from the east side of the river; this step can better preserve historic forest uses and reduce the total miles available. Monitoring and enforcement could also be better achieved with OHM trails only on the east side of the

river. Comment was also offered to eliminate the OHM trails on the west side of the river. Staging areas are a concern; these should be located on the east side of the river. [Comment: 4d, 7g, 7p, 7t, 35d, 7r, 35f]

Response. DNR's Planning Teams are to consider the available route inventory and determine what uses can be sustained. The inventory in Huntersville State Forest is somewhat unique statewide in that significant miles of single-track route are present. The single-track inventory is generally concentrated in three parts of the forest, two of which are west of the rivers and one is east. The inventory west of the rivers was allocated for designation to horseback and OHM-uses respectively, while those miles east were provided as OHM trails. It should also be noted that a portion of single-track inventory east of the river is proposed to remain non-designated; this is to provide a buffer to that reach of the Crow Wing River.

The comment is correct that staging areas will be required in the forest. Although the locations have not been selected, these will be located on DNR-managed lands in consultation with user groups.

Single-Track Designations – Proposed Mileage

Summary of Concerns

Comments of support and opposition were offered to the proposed 50+ miles of single-track OHM trail designation offered in the draft plan. Some individuals thought this was too much designation for such a small forest while others thought more routes could be designated. Conversely, comment was offered that more horseback miles should be offered. [Comment: 4b, 7m, 7o, 17a, 18a, 35c, 47a, 49a, 54a]

Response. The Planning Team considered the distribution and available mileage of single-track routes in reaching the recommendations in the draft plan. The 50 or so miles of designated OHM-only trails constitute the minimum miles thought necessary to provide a weekend-type visit to this forest. Similarly, the 17+ miles of horseback trail was thought to be enough miles to provide a quality horseback riding experience. Given how the single-track miles are distributed, especially now that industrial forest lands in the forest are not available for public use, the amount miles provided for both uses is reasonable.

Regarding the comment that more horseback miles should be provided, it should be noted that it is permissible for horses to be ridden on forest roads and trails in this forest. OHMs and ATVs are limited to designated forest roads and trails only; non-designated routes are not typically available as is the case for horseback uses.

Also see the *Response to Single-Track Designations – NW Corner of State Forest*.

Single-Track Designations – Use Levels

Summary of Concerns

One commenter noted DNR does not understand the actual number of the machines and how damaging that minimal use is. A second noted that with the proposed designations, along with closures in other forests, the quantity of riders would increase. [Comment: 5a, 54c]

Response. The Department agrees that providing designated single-track riding opportunities for horseback and motorcycle users will likely result in increased use over current conditions. The entire system will require maintenance, enforcement, and monitoring to ensure that sustainable trails are achieved.

Single-Track Trails

Summary of Concerns

DNR is thanked for considering the single-track trails in Huntersville State Forest as an opportunity to provide designated riding opportunities. Many trails have already been lost. [Comment: 49b, 50a]

Response. The historic pattern of public use in Huntersville State Forest has produced a significant inventory of single-track routes. The DNR Team considered the mix of motorized and non-motorized uses that could be sustained on this existing network of trails. The result is the proposed 17+ miles of designated horseback trails and 50+ miles of designated OHM-only trails. The Department will monitor all uses in this forest and recommend changes in management if deemed necessary at a future date.

Soils

Summary of Concerns

The OHM trails have been allowed because the sandy soils “could handle the abuse.” This is exactly why we want to have this kind of activity because of the slow recovery time. [Comment: 7h]

Response. DNR agrees that disturbed sites exhibiting the types of soils found in this state forest can take longer for vegetation to re-establish than with other soil types. However, it should be noted that all proposed road and trail designations are on pre-existing routes that will be subject to future maintenance and monitoring. DNR recognizes that some non-designated single-track routes may require site-specific actions to stabilize soils or restore vegetation. This will be accomplished via established best management practices deemed applicable to the conditions at the site(s) in question.

Summary of Concerns

The “jackpine sands” in Huntersville should tell DNR to be concerned about future vegetation loss. Based on professional experience, it is difficult to re-establish vegetation on the soils in Wadena County. Sugar Lake and the road ditches are good examples of the problems that can come from ATVs. Once the network of trails has damaged the soil cover, it is possible that large patches of “nothing” will propagate. Research supports this contention. [Comment: 47b, 54e]

Response. DNR agrees that treadways will require routine maintenance and monitoring to avoid new vegetation losses along the designated road and trail corridors. Re-establishing cover on sandy soils requires the appropriate seed mixes, with the sites being protected from disturbance until the seedlings thrive. Thought must be given to the potential for invasive, non-native species to become established under these conditions as well.

As previously noted, all proposed designations are on existing routes now available for public use, both motorized and non-motorized. Under a limited classification, the mileage generally available for motorized use decreases from current conditions.

Special Event Permits

Summary of Concerns

A number of comments addressed whether special event permits would still be permitted under the limited classification and road/trail designations. Concerns were offered about the future availability of the designated horseback trails for OHM special events. Other comments requested that language in the draft plan be modified from referencing only “enduro-type” events. Concerns over the frequency of special events was also noted. [Comment: 4c, 7d, 7s, 13d, 16d, 18d, 20d, 21a, 21c, 29e, 31c, 44d, 48a, 49i, 50b, 52d]

Response. The comments correctly note the Commissioner may sanction special events on forest trails. Such events are managed through a permit administered by the DNR Division of Forestry. Implementation of the final plan does not change how special events will be considered for Huntersville State Forest. Permit applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. All trails, whether designated and non-designated, can be nominated for use in a special event.

Regarding the “enduro-type” event reference in the draft plan, the final plan will be modified to reflect the concern.

Support/Oppose Recommendations

Summary of Concerns

These commenters stated support or opposition to the recommendations for designation of single-track trails as contained in the draft plan. [Comment: 19a, 43a, 44g, 48c, 49k]

Response. Comment noted.

Traditional Forest Uses / User Conflicts

Summary of Concerns

Comments were submitted indicating concern, or lack of concern, for the set of proposed single-track designations. The forest has been traditionally used for hunting, horseback riding, camping, and canoeing. One comment indicated the new OHM-only designations would not fit with the traditional uses of the forest. Two other comments noted no conflicts between OHMs and other forest users. Another comment noted that forest roads and ATV trails are not compatible, with some kind of linkage necessary. A self-described "avid canoeist" raised concern and recommended elimination of trails on the west side of the Crow Wing River. [Comment: 4a, 5a, 7e, 20g, 35b, 49d, 49e]

Response. DNR acknowledges that the proposed set of single-track designations, both for OHMs and horseback uses, will alter the historic pattern of recreational in this forest. Although the pattern of use will change, the forest has a long history of use by a range of recreational interests, both motorized and non-motorized. The forest is also somewhat unique in that its use history has resulted in a single-track route inventory that can sustain off-highway motorcycle and horse use. The Department recognizes that once the recommendations become effective, recreation in the forest will need to be monitored, including potential user conflicts, to see if modifications to the management scheme are warranted.

Trail Seasons

Summary of Concerns

A number of comments were provided regarding the appropriateness of the proposed season of use applied to the designated OHM trails. Most comments thought the OHM season should be expanded, especially into the fall after Labor Day, but ending it before the start of the firearms deer season. Others advocated a winter season or a year-round season. DNR's rationales offered for the season, in particular mitigating motor/non-motor conflicts, hunting conflicts, and noise, were also questioned. A few commenters supported the proposed seasons, with some offering minor modifications or expansions. [Comment: 6a, 6b, 13c, 15d, 16a, 17b, 18b, 19a, 21d, 20a, 23b, 25c, 29d, 31d, 36a, 42a, 44d, 45b, 49f, 49g, 49h, 50d, 52e]

Response. The Draft Plan proposed a Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend operating season for OHM-only trails in Huntersville State Forest. Designated forest roads and other ATV-OHM trail would not be subject to the season.

The operating season is offered to mitigate the potential effects from implementing a new, destination-type OHM trail riding opportunity in this forest. Although all existing routes are currently available for use under a *managed* classification, use levels are relatively light outside OHM-related special events because this is not a designated system. Historically, absent designated trails, little or no direct management occurs (e.g., signing, brush removal, etc.) other than maintenance associated with OHM special events, thus limiting the attractiveness of the trail system for general recreation.

Use levels however are expected to increase with the proposed OHM-trail designations, thus increasing the potential for impacts to other forest users and natural resources in terms of frequency and duration of OHM-related forest visits. Forest users that could be affected by OHM use beyond Labor Day include: horseback riders, hunters (both big and small game), and canoeists. Natural resource concerns include fire dangers, trail density concerns for nesting birds, and damage to soils in wet springs. The potential for

noise to affect all people using the forest, including canoeists and nearby residences, was also a consideration.

Because the statewide process is a desktop exercise, the proposed season is seen as a starting point for management in this forest and no change is proposed. Once the OHM trails are established and better information becomes available, the prescribed season issue may be revisited by the Department. It should also be noted that the Minnesota Legislature has directed the Department to establish statewide OHV use seasons for State Forest lands. Depending on the outcome of this exercise, the season prescribed for Huntersville State Forest may or may not require modification to comply with this legislation.

Regarding a winter-use season, the Planning Team believes this is feasible and should be considered in future management of this state forest.

Wetlands

Summary of Concerns

Please review the motorized trails proposed near Finn Lake. Wetlands in this area are a concern to us. [Comment: 4e, 7i]

Response. The Department appreciates these comments. All proposed designations are subject to site-level review, including the potential for wetland impacts. If a route cannot sustain the designated use(s), then it will be closed and proposed for future undesignation.

FOREST-SPECIFIC COMMENTS – LYONS

Area with Limitations

Summary of Concerns

The Lyons State Forest should have an Area with Limitations established but none is offered in the draft plan. [Comment: 37c]

Response. The comment correctly notes that no Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-Designated Trail Use is proposed for the Lyons State Forest. M.S. 84.926, subd. 5 allows the Commissioner to designate areas where the big game hunting and trapping exceptions under M.S. 84.926, subd. 2 & 4 do not apply. DNR teams consider a number of factors regarding these designations, including resource sensitivity (e.g., soils, vegetation, topography, water-related features), existing and projected hunting patterns, and enforceability. For the Lyons State Forest, public access for all purposes is expected to remain light and is provided primarily by a series of minimum maintenance roads and some ATV/OHM trail designation, with the balance left non-designated. The non-designated routes should be able to sustain HLV, ORV, and ATV use as allowed under M.S. 84,926, subd. 4 and off-trail travel by ATVs under subd. 2 should also be sustainable. Although walking hunting does occur, DNR does not propose to designate hunting walking trails in this forest. Finally, the pattern of DNR ownership does not afford an easily definable boundary for such a designation if proposed. These factors taken together indicate the basis for designating such an area for this forest is not supported.

Classification

Summary of Concerns

One commenter noted that the forest is largely devoid of trails, has no existing system forest roads, and thus should be closed in its entirety. This change would “go a long way toward evening out the amount of state forest land in this Project that is proposed for traditional and off-road driving uses.” [Comment: 37e]

Response. Comment noted. DNR’s recommendation for a limited classification reflects consideration of the criteria in M.R. 6100.1950, subp. 2. When taken as a whole, motor vehicle use can be sustained on these forest lands under the “closed unless posted open” policy for trails in a limited forest.

Regarding “evening out” lands assigned for traditional and off-road driving uses, state forest lands are typically more utilitarian oriented and more open to motor vehicle use than other types of DNR administered lands. All routes, whether designated or not, can be used for non-motorized recreation. Non-designated routes on state land are available for non-motorized use but are not signed, mapped, or managed and there is the possibility of encountering motor vehicles being operated under the hunting and trapping exceptions on non-designated trails. Neither state statutes nor DNR policy set a standard for the percent of forest land to be allocated for motorized or non-motorized uses or minimum distances for separation of motorized and non-motorized uses.

FOREST-SPECIFIC COMMENTS – SMOKY HILLS

Area with Limitations

Summary of Concerns

One commenter noted that in general the proposal does a good job on providing some land where the majority of non-motorized, traditional outdoorsmen and women can find places to go hunt, hike, etc. and avoid OHVs. 42% of the land in Smoky Hills is provided as an Area with Limitations. While a good start, this amount is not generous enough to serve the non-motorized majority. [Comment: 37a, 37b]

Response. Comment noted. Regarding the allocation of state lands to “serve the non-motorized majority,” state forest lands are typically more utilitarian oriented and more open to motor vehicle use than other types of DNR administered lands. All routes, whether designated or not, can be used for non-motorized recreation. Non-designated routes on state land are available for non-motorized use but are not signed, mapped, or managed and there is the possibility of encountering motor vehicles being operated under the hunting and trapping exceptions on non-designated trails. Neither state statutes nor DNR policy set a standard for the percent of forest land to be allocated for motorized or non-motorized uses or minimum distances for separation of motorized and non-motorized uses.

Summary of Concerns

Comment was provided on how the proposed Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use has severely restricted access to the other trail systems and hampered game retrieval. [Comment: 11d]

Response. Comment noted. The Department agrees that adoption of a limited classification in conjunction with an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use alters motorized access from patterns currently available under a managed classification. Although motorized access afforded under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions is no longer available (M.S. 84.926, subd. 2 & 4), this part of the forest is not “non-motorized.” Rather, a network of forest roads is available for the public to use; most of the routes capable of sustaining motorized use have been proposed for minimum maintenance road designation. This change in access is also mitigated by the designation of walking hunter trails to provide an improved walking experience; these trails are also available for any non-motorized recreational activity.

Regarding game retrieval, the comment is correct that retrieval of big game using ATVs is not allowed in an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use.

Class II ATVs

Summary of Concerns

One commenter indicated thought of purchasing a Class II ATV in the future. Allowing these vehicles on the trails would be appreciated. [Comment: 27d]

Response. All state forest roads are open to Class II ATVs. Use of Class II ATVs on designated ATV/OHM trails will be made on a case-by-case basis. This offered, it is likely that most or all of the designated ATV/OHM trails in Smoky Hills State Forest will be open to Class II ATVs. Refer to future trail

maps and signage once the forest classification and road/trail designations become effective in January 2009.

Classification

Summary of Concerns

Comment was offered detailing the need to have State Forest Lands classified as managed. [Comment: 26a]

Response. The DNR is prohibited by law from retaining a managed classification for State Forest lands located south of US Hwy 2. Only a limited or closed classification may be applied. All state forest lands within the Smoky Hills State Forest are located south of US Hwy 2.

Future Decisions

Summary of Concerns

It is hoped that the Department has the integrity to make long-term decisions that are sound for this forest. [Comment: 39d]

Response. Comment noted.

Proposed Trail Mileage

Summary of Concerns

Several commenters offered concern on the amount of trails being “closed” and the desire for more ATV trails. Only 8.5 miles of ATV trails are offered. Others noted there are more “walking trails than ATV trails,” which serves as the basis for more ATV trail designations. [Comments: 3a, 3b, 8a, 9a, 9c, 11b, 11c, 11f, 36c]

Response. The commenters correctly note that the change from the managed to a limited forest classification will result in a reduction of routes generally available for motor vehicle use. Potential retention of the managed classification is not an option for Smoky Hills State Forest because it is located south of US Hwy 2. The reduction in routes available to general motor vehicle use occurs because non-designated routes are typically not signed “open” to motor vehicles, which is a requirement for such use in a limited forest [i.e., trails closed unless posted open]. Only formally designated forest roads and trails, both motor and non-motor, will be signed in a limited forest.

ATVs are a permitted use on both forest roads and designated ATV trails. Although the miles of trail available for general use declines under the plan, the combination of forest roads, both system and minimum maintenance, and proposed ATV/OHM trail designations affords good public access in this forest. The DNR Planning Team expended considerable effort to provide loop-type riding experiences, especially with proposed future connectors, to address some of these concerns. Given that non-designated routes are still available under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions outside the Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use, little change in hunting-related motorized access occurs under the plan. It should also be noted that even in the Area with Limitations that a substantial degree of motorized access is still retained through proposed minimum maintenance forest roads.

When considering the range of uses of this forest and the resource base, the planning team believes that public access is balanced in a sustainable manner.

Quality of Forest/Trail Experiences

Summary of Concerns

A number of persons commented on the enjoyment they receive from ATV riding in Smoky Hills State Forest. Benefits include nature watching and being with family. Some individuals drive 30 or more miles to recreate in this forest. [Comment: 3e, 3f, 22a, 27a, 27c]

Response. Comment noted. The proposed set of forest road and ATV/OHM trail designations are designed to provide quality user experiences on existing routes where motorized use can be sustained. All routes are available to non-motorized recreation.

Summary of Concerns

One comment indicated enjoying riding the road that goes around the forest. A second notes summer rids are on dusty trails that can be ridden at high speeds; most ATV riders prefer winding, narrower trails for slower speeds to enjoy the scenery.

Response. Comment noted. The purpose of this planning exercise is to evaluate the existing route inventory and make route-by-route determinations of what uses can be sustained into the future. Because most of the routes were created with timber or other natural resource management purposes in mind, and not with quality recreational trail experiences as the goal, it is understandable that user desires for a higher quality experience are not being satisfied. Opportunities for higher quality experiences will have to be realized outside the current planning process.

Seasons

Summary of Concerns

Several commenters expressed concern over potential operating seasons. One person was opposed to seasonal closures in fall and winter; these were optimum times for riding. Another noted that with spring closures, snowmobiles in winter, and hunting in fall that the only time to ride was the “hot, dusty” and “buggy” summer when the majority of riders prefer not to ride. Another person just noted they were limited when they could ride. [Comment: 3d, 9b, 11e, 46c]

Response. Neither the draft or final plans propose an operating season for OHVs beyond those time periods already prescribed by law. The 2007 Minnesota Legislature has directed the DNR to develop seasons for OHVs. If such seasons are developed and approved, they will be applied to OHV operation as required at that time.

Walking Trails

Summary of Concerns

The plan proposes to eliminate some ATV trails to make walking trails. Although not there during hunting season, the commenter has never seen anyone walking but only ATV operation. With the many acres present in Smoky Hills State Forest, the trails for riding take up very few acres.

Response. The comment correctly notes that routes currently available for motorized use are proposed for non-motorized designation as hunting walking trails. In developing the plans, the Planning Team considered whether designation of an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use was warranted. When considering potential resource sensitivity to off-trail travel by ATVs engaged in lawful big game hunting and trapping, as well as historic Division of Wildlife management in the forest for walking hunter opportunities, such an Area with Limitations was proposed in conjunction with non-motorized recreational trail designations. The Division of Wildlife will maintain these routes for hunter (and any other non-motorized) use.

Although these trails will not be available, both plans recommend many miles of minimum maintenance forest roads that will be available for ATV use.

Township Roads

Summary of Concerns

Concern was offered regarding riding on township roads connecting the northern and southern parts of the state forest. Specifically, Guyles Road and Old Mill Road are cited as dangerous. Speed limits should be applied. [51a, 51b]

Response. The DNR Commissioner has authority over motor vehicle use on state forest lands only. Motor vehicle use on public road is regulated by the public road authority, which is the town, city, or county unit of government responsible for that roadway. Regarding OHV operation generally, they should not be operated in an unlawful or unsafe manner. Enforcement of applicable operational requirements lies with the jurisdiction where the activity occurs.

FOREST-SPECIFIC COMMENTS – TWO INLETS

Area with Limitations

Summary of Concerns

One commenter noted that in general the proposal does a good job on providing some land where the majority of non-motorized, traditional outdoorsmen and women can find places to go hunt, hike, etc. and avoid OHVs. 45% of the land in Two Inlets is provided as an Area with Limitations. While a good start, this amount is not generous enough to serve the non-motorized majority. [Comment: 37a, 37b]

Response. Comment noted. Regarding the allocation of state lands to “serve the non-motorized majority,” state forest lands are typically more utilitarian oriented and more open to motor vehicle use than other types of DNR administered lands. All routes, whether designated or not, can be used for non-motorized recreation. Non-designated routes on state land are available for non-motorized use but are not signed, mapped, or managed and there is the possibility of encountering motor vehicles being operated under the hunting and trapping exceptions on non-designated trails. Neither state statutes nor DNR policy set a standard for the percent of forest land to be allocated for motorized or non-motorized uses or minimum distances for separation of motorized and non-motorized uses.

Future Decisions

Summary of Concerns

It is hoped that the Department has the integrity to make long-term decisions that are sound for this forest. [Comment: 39d]

Response. Comment noted.

SCATTERED DNR STATE FOREST LANDS – CLAY COUNTY

No comments submitted.

SCATTERED DNR STATE FOREST LANDS – DOUGLAS COUNTY

No comments submitted.

SCATTERED DNR STATE FOREST LANDS – OTTER TAIL COUNTY

No comments submitted.

SCATTERED DNR STATE FOREST LANDS – POPE COUNTY

No comments submitted.

SCATTERED DNR STATE FOREST LANDS – TODD COUNTY

No comments submitted.

SCATTERED DNR STATE FOREST LANDS – WADENA COUNTY

No comments submitted.