

Frequently Asked Questions: Trail Review of the Foot Hills State Forest.

What is this project?

In 2005, the DNR completed a forest classification and road/trail designation for the Foot Hills State Forest. This first process, commonly referred to as “Phase 1,” classified the Forest as “limited” for recreational motor vehicle use. A limited classification means off-highway vehicles (OHVs) may use only forest roads and trails designated to be open for their use. Trails were also designated during Phase 1, but the DNR was limited to only existing routes. The DNR made a commitment to come back and review the designation made during Phase 1 and is now fulfilling that commitment. This project is only reviewing trail designations and will *not* change the limited classification.

What is included? What is not included?

Motorized and non-motorized trails are included in this project. Motorized trails include all-terrain vehicles (ATV), Off-highway motorcycles (OHM) and off-road vehicles (ORV). Non-motorized trails include a variety of other trail uses. The DNR may also designate areas where the hunter-trapper exemptions do not apply. Roads, campgrounds, snowmobile trails and changes to the forest classification are not included in this review.

What trails currently exist within Foot Hills State Forest?

Existing trails within Foot Hills State Forest includes the Spider Lake Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Trail System as well as the Hiram and Cut Lake Cross-Country Ski Trails. The Spider Lake OHV Trails includes approximately 11 miles of trail open to ATV, OHM and ORV as well as approximately 15 miles of ATV and OHM trail. The Cut Lake Ski Trail includes approximately 16.5 kilometers of trail and the Hiram Ski Trail includes approximately 8 kilometers of trail.

What are the benefits of designated trails?

Designation ensures the trail will receive funding for maintenance, signage and mapping. In addition, within limited forests such as Foot Hills, OHVs must stay on roads and designated trails only.

How are the trails funded? How are they maintained?

Designated OHV trails are funded through the dedicated OHV accounts. Money in these accounts comes OHV registration fees and a portion of the unrefunded state gas tax. The DNR may also work with local clubs who may be interested to add the new trails to the Grant in Aid System. Non-motorized trails may have dedicated funding accounts or be funded through general appropriation money. The current OHV trail system within the Foot Hills State Forest is maintained by DNR-Parks and Trails. If needed, the DNR may partner with local government units and clubs to assist with maintenance.

What are the desired outcomes for this project?

The DNR has developed a set of general desired outcomes for Phase 2 projects. The desired outcomes include:

- Closing unsustainable trails;
- Connect trails to other destinations and local communities;
- Provide for a variety of experience levels;
- Provide for a variety of uses-both motorized and non-motorized;
- Avoid ecologically sensitive areas; and
- Address major safety concerns and user conflicts.

How will the public be involved?

The DNR values public input throughout this process. During an initial 30-day scoping period, we encourage members of the public to submit your comments, ideas and suggestions to the DNR. Once a draft plan is completed, there will be a 60-day public review period followed by a public meeting where you may submit comments on the proposed changes. All public input will be read and considered.

What resources are used to Layout the trails?

The DNR uses many resources to ensure trails are coincide with the environment. The DNR's [Trail Planning, Design and Development Guidelines](#) manual provides trail construction information for all trails, the National Off-Highway Conservation Council's [Great Trails](#) manual provides trail construction information for OHV. Use of these manuals helps guide trail designers to develop trails that are environmentally sustainable, which are also more cost effective to maintain and typically more enjoyable for the user. Trails will be routed to avoid sensitive environmental areas whenever possible. If a trail must cross a sensitive environmental area, appropriate measures will be taking to reduce the impact to the area.

Before designation, all proposed trails will be subject to a rigorous DNR interdisciplinary review. This will include checking trails against the National Heritage Information System (NHIS) data for potential conflicts with state listed threatened and endangered species, field checks where necessary and, if necessary, formal environmental review.

Additional questions/comments?

For additional information, please contact Joe Unger, OHV Planner, Parks and Trails Division, MN Department of Natural Resources at 651-259-5279 or joe.unger@state.mn.us or Dave Schotzko, Area Supervisor at 218-308-2367 or david.schotzko@state.mn.us.

Comments may be submitted to: Joe Unger, Parks and Trails Division, 500 Lafayette Rd, St. Paul, MN 55155, or email to foresttrailplanning.dnr@state.mn.us.