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### Pennsylvania DCNR Says Yes To More ATV Trails



#### ATV Staff Report

Big news for Pennsylvania ATV riders. DCNR has announced plans to expand the ATV trails system throughout state forests. Department spokesman Gretchen Leslie said the trail expansion is due to the prolific increase in all-terrain vehicle registrations. Pennsylvania ATV owners pay \$20 every two years to register their four-wheelers. The money, now totaling over a million dollars, goes into a state fund that's earmarked for trail maintenance and development.



"It's not that we're placing that interest group above the needs of others," Leslie said in response to a question by an Audubon Society representative. "But we're recognizing that this is a particularly hot (activity) right now, and we have the responsibility to look at whether we're meeting that need."

Even though State Forest Managers have been directed to look for suitable ATV trail land in remote, already scarred areas (abandoned mine sites or old logging roads), environmentalists are already poo-pooing the proposed new trails. Cindy Adams, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Audubon Society asked "Why should (state land) be used by a few who disturb not only wildlife but other people ... who are simply hiking or hunting or fishing, which is a lot more peaceful?"

However, statistics dispute this and show that there are more than a "few" ATVers in



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Pennsylvania. The state's ATV registrations have risen from about 15,400 in 1994 to the current level of 158,000.

"The department has been a little vague on what they intend to do with ATVs," retired state forester Jim Nelson said. "I know they're getting a lot of pressure from at least one state

representative - Mike Hanna." The Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter's newsletter reports that Hanna, D-Clinton, is drafting a bill to expand ATV use on state lands. Nelson said providing "healthful recreation" is one of the department's responsibilities.

It's our opinion that while more ATV trails inspire awe for some, and flat-out fear for the environmentalists, in the long run everyone benefits. The environment benefits because less people will be riding unregulated bootleg trails and will be riding maintained trails that have been installed in an eco-friendly manner. Regulated trails tend to be safer and more environmentally correct than bootleg trails. And while environmentalists scream that ATV riders disturb wildlife, Pennsylvania now has more deer, coyote, turkeys, rabbits and bear than it did in the 1800's. In fact, the Game Commission is extending most hunting seasons next year to help decrease the numbers.

The ATVers obviously benefit as we'll have more trailheads with less travel time to reach them. Local economies near trailheads can expect an influx of money ATVers bring to businesses.

The fine people at DCNR have clearly made the right decision in enlarging the trail systems. Kudos to DCNR for recognizing the need for more trails. Pennsylvania ranks third in the country for ATV sales and judging by sales forecasts, all-terrain vehicles are going to be around for quite a long time.

Properly installed ATV trails have no measurable impact on wildlife or environment. Properly installed ATV trails will attract thousands of riders. With properly installed trails, everyone wins.

