

Minnesota SAF Off Highway Vehicle Position

The use of OHVs has seen a dramatic increase in recent years. OHVs include off highway motorcycles (OHMs), all terrain vehicles (ATVs), and four wheel drive off road vehicles (ORVs- generally 4 x 4 trucks). These are well defined in Minnesota state statute. ATVs account for most of the increased use. The ATV can be a valuable tool when used in a manner that does not exceed capacity of soils and vegetation to maintain stability and profile integrity. A single ATV on its own is relatively benign with a single pass; however the cumulative effect of repeated passes does represent a major impact to vegetation and the land. The use of aggressive aftermarket ATV equipment increases the chance of accelerated damage.

It would be hypocritical for forestry and related natural resource professionals to oppose all use of ATVs, as they use them on a routine basis. However, we oppose unrestricted use of ATVs on lands prone to damage. The use of ATVs for cross-country travel should be narrowed to the point of near non-existence, with special circumstances by permits only.

We recommend that:

- ATV traffic be allowed on trails that are designed, constructed, and hardened so that off trail impacts are eliminated.
- Trails statewide should be considered closed unless posted open.
- The cross-country use of 4 x 4 trucks and similar vehicles should be prohibited from public forestland unless incidental to resource development or protection activity. These vehicles should be allowed only in special OHV parks designed to prevent off site impacts.
- Funding for enforcement should be dedicated and maintained at adequate levels.
- Permits for special circumstances shall be for physically handicapped persons or big game retrieval (deer, bear, or moose). Special permits issued to landowners and lessees for access to their property should be used only by these individuals.

Accepted by ballot on April 30, 2006 by Minnesota Society of American Foresters