

Senator Roger Breske, Chairman  
Special Committee State Trails Policy  
September 23, 2006

Dear Senator Breske,

My husband Alan and I enjoyed talking with you at the Plum Lake Town Hall, September 18<sup>th</sup>, Monday, as you made your circuit of northwoods public forums.

As Chairman of the Wisconsin Legislative Council Special Committee on State Trails Policy, you will have the opportunity to influence ATV trail development.

My husband and I live in Vilas County, presently the **only** northwoods county without ATV trails. The majority of Vilas County citizens have passionately and loudly rejected two attempts to build ATV trails. In the 2004 referendum vote, 2/3 of our voters defeated ATV trails in our county forests, and in 2005 a large number of residents throughout Wisconsin, by petition, letters and testimony at public forums, defeated a proposed loop trail in the Northern Highland American Legion (NHAL) State Forest. "People will protect what they love." Aldo Leopold

Please consider, while it is still possible, saving Vilas County public land as a refuge for our threatened wildlife, for silent sport enthusiasts, for family campers and bike riders, and for the majority of users (80%) who simply wish to enjoy and study nature.

Without ATV trails the NHAL State Forest attracts 2.2 million visitors a year. (Yellowstone National Park attracts 3.2 million visitors with 10X the acreage.) All of these people seek the rare pleasure of peace and beauty in undeveloped lakes and forests. The value of nature, without motor noise in the background or buildings on every foot of lake shore, increases with the rapid rise of northwoods development.

Without ATVs Vilas County takes in more tourist dollars than any other northern county. Many Vilas County citizens and I feel that the future growth of our economy depends on preserving the health of our lakes and forests. You, Senator Breske, have helped us in our campaign to control Aquatic Invasive Species.

ATV trails promote forest fragmentation, the spread of invasive plants like Garlic Mustard, and cumulative, long-term damage to trees and soil. These forest trees filter the water that keeps our lakes clean.

Vilas County does not block access to the thousands of ATV trails in the U.P. of Michigan. In fact Vilas County has a private trailhead in Land O' Lakes that connects to the U.P. trails. Oneida County has ATV trails that connect to 60+ miles of trail in Parrish Highlands, Langlade County, and 40+ miles of trail in Harrison Hills, Lincoln County. Iron County to our West has developed over 200 miles of trail connecting Mercer to Hurley to Saxon Harbor and continuing into the large trail systems in Ashland and Bayfield County. I count over 6000 miles of ATV trails and **routes** in Wisconsin. The demand for more trails by ATV advocates does not seem based on present trails being

overcrowded. I believe a scientific, statistical count of ATV traffic on major trails would show most trails are uncrowded, as I have observed in Iron County.

The 300,000 registered ATVs do not correlate with crowded trails. 1/3 of ATVs are registered for utility use only (Jeff Prey WDNR SCORP Report 2005-2010). Of the remaining 2/3rds, according to Jeff Prey, many are used for hunting and ice fishing rather than trail riding. Jeff Prey determined that 23% of Wisconsin's Outdoor Recreation Participants drove off-road ATVs. He arrived at this inflated percentage by asking people, "Did you drive an ATV off road in the last year even one time?" Many people who didn't even own an ATV had to answer, "Yes".

Presently ATV groups have pressured the DNR to explore the construction of an ATV intensive use park which would include other 4-wheel drive off hi-way vehicles. They hope for 2,000 to 7,000 acres of land. If this comes to pass the value of this land as a watershed will be lost, affecting quality of both ground water and surface water in that area. In exchange for this giant park, ATV advocates refuse to reduce pressure for more state trails.

Again we balance nature against a destructive force. ATV history clearly shows that their trails have significant, negative impact on our public lands. The citizens of Vilas County feel it is time to mitigate some of this damage and tip the balance, this time, to favor nature's ecosystems.

What kind of world do we want to leave our children? Do we want to teach them the sanctity of all life; that our forests are not sterile playgrounds but a living community? Do we want to promote healthy, outdoor exercise that improves fitness?

Please consider keeping Vilas County free of ATV trails. Our county still offers large areas of unfragmented land connected to wildlife corridors. Use Vilas as a control by which to compare counties that have ATV trails. When Vilas County continues to flourish, it will prove that preservation of nature is important.

Sincerely,

Sue Drum, Secretary Northwoods Citizens for Responsible Stewardship (NCRS)

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