

[October 11, 2006]

Dear Committee Members,

Mr. Bates' well crafted letter speaks to the issue that I raised at the last meeting (October 9) regarding evaluation of the first proposed ATV trail connector. We must be assured that the policing of the trail by established authorities and by users is adequate to protect the resources of the trail corridor. This is why I recommended that we establish an evaluation methodology to determine if protective criteria are met after the trail is open and what changes can be made to correct the problems. Instead, the decision was made to move on to search for another trail corridor in an area that will be even more contentious.

I believe that further "behavior changes" in the ATV community will be necessary in order for the sport to gain greater acceptance in the community as a whole. I believe that the offenders in the ATV community are a minority of riders. The problem, however, is that even one machine can do an incredible amount of damage. I have witnessed some positive change in recent years: The amount of damage along our highways from ATV use seems to have decreased. Another example: I recently led a group of hikers on a five day walk on the North Country Trail in Ashland and Bayfield counties. The last time I did this hike there were numerous places where ATVs had illegally trespassed on the trail. This time there was virtually no ATV footprint.

Most of us remember the difficulties that the snowmobile community experienced in the past. Many of these problems have been resolved, especially with regard to landowners. Snowmobiles, however, have a far lesser impact on the ground than ATVs. When the snow melts, the footprint of the snowmobile trail mostly disappears. The challenge of an environmentally sustainable ATV trail is much more difficult but not impossible. I believe we need to proceed carefully and prudently to get the job done right. If we go too fast, we will cause more alienation and, ultimately, fail in our mission.

Denny, please feel free to share my comments with the rest of the committee.

Dave Phillips

----- Original Message -----

From: "John Bates" <jbates@nicolecollege.edu>

To: <maddavie@charter.net>; <drumsa@centurytel.net>;

<Paul.DeLong@dnr.state.wi.us>; <John.Gozdzialski@dnr.state.wi.us>;

<Robert.Dall@dnr.state.wi.us>

Sent: Wednesday, October 11, 2006 8:49 AM

Subject: letter to Dennis Leith regarding placement of an ATV trail in a

wetland complex

>I am CC'ing a letter to all of you that I sent this morning to Dennis

>Leith. Thank you for taking the time to read it.

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> John Bates

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> 10/11/06

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> Dear Denny,

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> I hope you are well and enjoying your retirement - I'd enjoy the chance to

> sit and talk sometime!

>

> Today though I'm writing specifically about the ATV trail that has again
> been proposed to run on the old railroad surface along Hwy. 47, as well as
> along Sandy Beach Road. As you know, on either side of the railroad tracks
> and Sandy Beach Road lays extensive wetlands, most of which are sedge
> meadow or a sedge/bog complex. I live right across from the railroad track
> along Hwy. 47, and hike it regularly with my wife and dog, so know the
> site very well. And we on occasion bike and hike along Sandy Beach Road.
> We also paddle the Manitowish River extensively, and I lead trips on the
> river every year.

>

> I must utterly disagree with the potential placement of an ATV trail
> anywhere near wetlands, and in particular these wetlands. I've seen many
> times how ATV riders leave the trail to experience the joy of mud in our
> wetlands, which they fail to recognize as a biological community. Twice
> this summer we've seen ATV riders illegally on the Hwy. 47 railroad track
> going into the wetlands and just chewing them up. This is, of course, not
> isolated incidents, but rather a long standing resume item for ATV riders.
> They like mud. We see them as they go by our house just about every day as
> they head up into Iron County to ride, and see them return with their
> machines absolutely caked in mud. Again, this is not a few folks, but the
> rule rather than the exception. This is not hyperbole on my part, but
> fact. I would encourage any members who doubt this statement to come sit
> with us someday along Hwy. 51 and watch the trailers heading south in
> order to form their own opinion.

>

> The DNR's first command, as you know far better than I, is to protect and
> enhance natural habitats. The placement of an ATV trail anywhere near
> wetlands is simply a recipe for environmental degradation. If an ATV trail
> has to be placed somewhere, it should only, ONLY, be placed in uplands in
> areas that have no significant ecological designation by the Department.
> As you know, the Manitowish wetland complex was listed as a high priority
> area in the biological inventory done by the state for the master planning

> process. The river is a high priority area as well, and is designated as
> an Outstanding River by the state. To have ATVs crossing the river
> anywhere is, again, an invitation to riders to test out their machines in
> the river bed or along a shoreline.
>
> I respect your ability to work with diverse people to reach reasonable
> compromise regarding use of the state forest lands and waters. This is not
> reasonable. There is very little law enforcement ability available through
> our wardens to oversee this proposed trail, again as you well know. And to
> expect the ATV associations to somehow police all their trails 24/7 is a
> pipe dream. No organization can reasonably suggest they have the
> capability to do so, including those of us who paddle, ski, or engage in
> any recreational activity.
>
> Please share this letter with your stakeholders group, and seek a
> reasonable alternative to placing a trail in sensitive wetlands. Their
> destruction to whatever degree would also greatly harm the case ATVers are
> trying to make for themselves, and put in jeopardy their uses elsewhere in
> the state forest.
>
> I would be happy to join a hike along the railbed and along Sandy Beach
> Road if that would help in any manner for your members to see the quality
> of these wetlands and to imagine the negative scenarios that could arise.
>
> Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.
>
> John Bates, Manitowish, Iron County