

**TESTIMONY – State Trails Policy Committee, Friday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, Merrill**

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Thank you for allowing me to speak before this committee.

I believe there is a greater need than more ATV trails on public land.

“There is a need to protect and enhance our natural resources: our air, land and water, our wildlife, fish and forests and the ecosystems that sustain all life.”

These, as you know, are the opening lines to the Mission Statement of our DNR.  
To me, they express a wise, long-term view.

People come to our northwoods to live and vacation because our forests are still healthy and our lakes unpolluted.

My husband and I live in Vilas County, which has more natural lakes than any other Wisconsin county. Our lakes are cleaned by a vast network of wetlands which are also essential habitat to a rich population of aquatic life; all very vulnerable to motorized recreation.

In Vilas County we are fortunate to have the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest. People with vision established this forest in 1925, to protect the headwaters of 3 major rivers, the Wisconsin, the Manitowish and the North Fork of the Flambeau. Vilas economy revolves around the 2.2 million visitors who come each year to the state forest seeking solitude and peace, undisturbed by ATVs, which are still illegal. 2.2 million visitors without ATVs! (Yellowstone National Park, with 10 times the acreage and hosts only 3 million visitors per year.)

The Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Plan, known as the SCORP report for 2005-2010, groups participants in outdoor recreation into 8 categories which add up to 100%. Only two of these groups, or 15% of outdoor participants, use motors, such as boats, ATVs or snowmobiles. The other 6 groups, or 85% of Wisconsinites, prefer non-motorized recreation.

This large, non-motorized user group can not co-exist with ATVs.

As this committee decides where to place trails on our besieged land, please consider, above all else, that public land is an important barrier to continuous human development and degradation of essential wild habitat.

Please consider the growing concern of all people for the health of our land and its vital resources.

Please remember that ATVs come with a well-documented history of severe impact on the environment.

Unlike snowmobiles, ATVs enter the forest in the spring and summer, when the plants and animals are reproducing and rearing their young. This is also the time when a large number of people are present seeking solitude and a respite from motor noise.

Unlike snowmobiles the scars ATVs leave on the land do not melt away with the snow.

Currently there are over 6,000 miles of ATV trails and routes in Wisconsin. The routes, usually town roads, must be counted because they account for over half of the miles traveled in most trail networks. 6,000 miles – twice the distance from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast.

Public lands are a commons, open to all. If we are to save these commons there must be a limit on the rights of individuals to damage the land and by so doing supercede the common good.

It seems to me that the majority of Wisconsinites, your constituents, care deeply about conserving wild land.

To think that our forests and lakes could be compromised to meet the recreation needs of one sport, is appalling.

As you set trail policy, please do not site ATV trails near any of our fragile forests and lakes.

Thank you for listening.

*Aue Drum*

*11/10/06*