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## Illegal ATV riding now out of control

To the Editor

They run up and down stocked trout streams, damage crops on farmland, rip out fencing and gates on public lands, intimidate landowners who try to stop them, ride on our public roadways. These trespassers have had virtually free-rein, despite Act 68 of 2001 (the ATV law).

**Claim: If you give us more legal trails, the trespass will stop.**

Fact: Legal trails have engendered more trespass. A DCNR study of 7-11-2000 stated that there was no correlation that legal trails diminished illegal riding. In fact, the seven state forests with ATV trails had an average of 50 more miles of illegal motorized trails.

**Claim: ATVs will be the economic salvation of rural Pennsylvania.**

Fact: The economic benefit of hunters, hikers, anglers and wildlife-watchers is far greater than the economic impact of ATV riders. Our forests can't be all things to all people. The vast majority of people who visit our state lands go there for the beauty and tranquility, not as a playground where they can rip up the land. Economic salvation? Only if you're talking about after they drive out the hunters, hikers, anglers and wildlife-watchers — the very folks who are the big money-makers for Pennsylvania's tourism industry.

**Claim: We need town-to-town ATV access.**

Fact: The 2004 PSU study ATV Riders and Their Needs found "There was little desire for multiple day trips involving a variety of overnight spots."

Allowing ATVs on public roadways gives them corridors for trespass — easier access to the private lands they covet. In addition, PennDOT studies (2000-2006) show that 10 percent of all on-road ATV accidents involve drugs/alcohol.

Encouraging these unlicensed, uninspected (uninsured?) motor vehicles on public roads is a dangerous and foolhardy move. An ATV is not a second car.

**Claim: We wish to “encourage the better use of existing ATV trails and promote legal, safe ATV operation” (DCNR press release July 2007).**

Fact: Building “Strategic ATV Corridors” to township roads might be legal, but in 28 percent of ATV crashes on Pennsylvania roads, the drivers were under 16. The youngest “driver” was 9. The largest single age group of ATV drivers involved in accidents on public roads was the 15-year olds. ATVs do not handle well on hard roads; why encourage more accidents?

**Claim: It’s only a few bad apples.**

Fact: Illegal ATV riding in state forest lands is “out of control,” according to Terry Brady, state Department of Conservation and Recreation deputy press secretary.

Present laws are obviously ineffective. Instead of rewarding bad behavior by building over \$2 million of new trails and access corridors to public roadways, DCNR should demand a quid pro quo: “Clean up your act, then we will reward you with more trails.”

DCNR has provided 227 miles of well-designed, relatively safe ATV trails in sacrificial areas of seven state forests. The Strategic Corridor plan would “expand riding terrain” by over 300 miles by providing a little over eight miles of connectors. That “expanded terrain” would be on public roadways.

DCNR’s plan to allow exits from three state forests to public roads is ill-conceived and a threat to public safety. Tell your state legislators to support HB 2043 and SB 1096. Ask for amendments to include impoundment and forfeiture of the vehicles. It’s the only way we can even start to halt the damage.

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Coalition