



**For immediate release  
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**DCR COMPLETES INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF  
OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE USE AND CLOSES ONE STATE FOREST TO OHV USE**

BOSTON - The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has completed the first phase of analysis of nine state forests under a new policy that received conditional approval by DCR's Stewardship Council at its February meeting. The council affirmed and directed DCR to begin applying its new criteria for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use this season while also moving forward to develop an enforcement plan for such uses on state land.

Through this process, DCR has concluded that one property, Georgetown-Rowley State Forest, will no longer be open for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use.

For more than a year, a working group composed of state officials, trail users, scientists, land management organizations, and others has advised the agency on OHV use in state forests, helping develop the new siting criteria for determining where the vehicles will be allowed. In addition to noting characteristics that would prohibit OHV use, the criteria also include provisions for safe and enjoyable trail riding areas. The new criteria consider the presence of wetlands, important plant or animal habitats, forest reserves, trail mileage, and other factors.

"We are grateful for the time and commitment the working group has put into studying OHV use in our state forests and developing this new policy," said Priscilla Geigis, acting commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. "Their efforts have produced measurable criteria to determine where OHV use should be allowed to protect the environment and allow for safe and sustainable riding."

Based on the new criteria, DCR officials have determined that OHVs will no longer be allowed in Georgetown-Rowley State Forest. Applying the new policy, officials found that Georgetown-Rowley, in the northeast corner of the state, includes extensive wetlands, is relatively small at 1,100 acres, and provides only five miles of designated OHV trails. The forest also is an important habitat for an animal species that is protected under the state Endangered Species Act and is likely to be harmed by continued motorized trail recreation.

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Until now, OHVs have been allowed in nine state forests: Beartown State Forest, F.Gilbert Hills State Forest, Franklin State Forest, Freetown/Fall River State Forest, Georgetown-Rowley State Forest, October Mountain State Forest, Pittsfield State Forest, Tolland State Forest, and Wrentham State Forest. Under the first-level criteria, however, Georgetown-Rowley will not reopen for motorized trail recreation when the riding season begins on May 1.

The other eight properties have passed the first-level assessment, and DCR officials will begin applying the second level criteria, which involve a more detailed assessment. This may result in the closing or rerouting of additional trails in various properties in the future. In the meantime, OHV use will continue to be allowed in the eight state forests where it is currently permitted.

Also, DCR is now beginning the process of developing the enforcement plan required by the Stewardship Council. Whereas enforcement of OHV laws and regulations involves the Legislature, multiple law enforcement agencies, and stakeholders such as environmental interests, land management entities, and motorized recreation enthusiasts, the agency is developing a process that encourages participation by these and other diverse interests.

Meanwhile, the Massachusetts Environmental Police plan to increase their OHV enforcement efforts throughout the Commonwealth this spring. To prevent OHV operators who formerly used Georgetown-Rowley State Forest from moving to other locations where OHV use is also prohibited, Environmental Police will increase patrols in nearby areas, including the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife's Crane Pond Wildlife Management Area in Groveland, Georgetown, Boxford, and Newbury.

The season for Off-Highway Vehicle use begins May 1 and continues through late November. Vehicles must be registered in Massachusetts, and must weigh less than 1,000 pounds. For more information on OHV registration, contact the state Division of Environmental Law Enforcement at 617-626-1610.

To read the new OHV policy, visit: [www.mass.gov/dcr/recreate/ohv\\_policy.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/recreate/ohv_policy.pdf).

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