



Pittsfield State Forest: Trail Planning and Rehabilitation

Summary

DCR is initiating a planning and design process to rehabilitate and improve the Pittsfield State Forest trail system for multi-use (motorized and non-motorized) recreational access and resource protection. During the process, DCR will close approximately 20 miles of the currently designated ATV and motorcycle trails in the Forest for the 2010 season to protect rare species and sensitive wetland resources. Approximately 14 miles of Pittsfield State Forest's ATV and motorcycle trails will remain open for those uses for the 2010 season. The trail system is scheduled to open to recreational ATV and motorcycle use on Saturday, May 29, 2010. To maximize rider safety and enjoyment and minimize degradation of the remaining trails from overuse during the closure period, DCR will institute an ATV and motorcycle recreational use permit system for Pittsfield State Forest. A maximum of 50 rider permits will be issued through Pittsfield State Forest headquarters each day.

Background

Pittsfield State Forest encompasses more than 10,000 acres in the Towns of Pittsfield, Hancock, and Lanesborough and offers more than 100 miles of trails to a wide variety of users, including hikers, cyclists, equestrians, Off Highway Vehicles, (OHV's), and snowmobiles. While all trail activities impact the landscape, the 34 miles of popular multi-use motorized trails have suffered heavily from more than 40 years of recreational use with limited investment in trail maintenance or resource protection. Today, many of these trails present dangerous conditions for both motorized and non-motorized users and negatively affect plant, animal, and wetland resources.



A Sustainable Multi-use Trail System

DCR's Motorized Recreation Facility Assessment Policy states, "recreation activities should not diminish the resource beyond the capacity of maintenance and operating systems to protect, restore, and sustain them." DCR believes Pittsfield State Forest can offer a trail system that is safe and enjoyable for a wide range of users and also provides appropriate protection for the Forest's sensitive natural features. Achieving such a balance requires an investment in planning, design, and construction and a new approach to managing motorized recreation in the future.

The planning process will begin in the spring of 2010 with the completion of DCR's Motorized Recreation Facility Assessment process. This policy and process were developed in 2007 by DCR in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders from the OHV community, environmental advocates, law enforcement officials, and others to ensure that motorized recreation trails are safe and enjoyable for riders and sited to minimize negative environmental or community impacts. As provided in the policy,

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS · EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600
Boston MA 02114-2119
617-626-1250 617-626-1351 Fax
www.mass.gov/dcr



Deval L. Patrick
Governor

Timothy P. Murray
Lt. Governor

Ian A. Bowles, Secretary, Executive
Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Richard K. Sullivan, Jr., Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

DCR would engage the local community and trail enthusiasts during the assessment and all future trail planning processes.

Following a positive assessment process, DCR would initiate a thorough trail system design process with the goal of creating a safe and sustainable multi-use recreational trail system with appropriate connections to the Forest's campground, day use facilities, and scenic features.

DCR estimates that the planning, design, and reconstruction of the 100+ mile trail system could exceed \$4 million. The agency is exploring various state and federal funding sources to complete the process. One potential source of future funding may be the Off Highway Vehicle Program Fund, currently being considered in the legislature. If approved, this fund would direct a portion of OHV registration payments to improve OHV enforcement, including improving the system of legal trails available in Massachusetts.

2010 Season

In order to protect recently identified resource areas, DCR will close approximately 20 miles of OHV trails that affect protected habitats, rare species, or other regulated resources. DCR has identified approximately 14 miles of OHV trails that may remain in use during the planning process. This change will require installing adequate barriers and signage along the trail system to guide users and producing appropriate maps and education materials to inform them. DCR will be preparing the revised trail system during the months of April and early May and plans to open the system for recreational ATV and motorcycle use Saturday, May 29th 2010. (Memorial Day weekend), Given the popularity of the Pittsfield ATV and motorcycle trails and the reduced trail mileage for those activities this year, DCR plans to introduce a rider permit system to maintain use levels that protect rider safety and user enjoyment. DCR plans to issue 50 permits per day to maintain safe and sustainable user levels. These permits will be available through the Pittsfield State Forest headquarters and will be reservable in advance. Additional details of the permitting process will be posted on www.mass.gov/dcr/recreate/orv.htm The agency has invited representatives of the user community to assist in development of the permitting system to ensure that it minimizes inconvenience for the many recreational users who visit the forest for ATV and motorcycle recreation from across Massachusetts and New England.

DCR recognizes that this change for the 2010 season will be inconvenient for many who have enjoyed motorized recreation activities at Pittsfield State Forest. We also believe reinvestment in the Pittsfield State Forest trail system has been overdue and will allow for more enjoyable and environmentally sustainable recreation in the future. For further information about this change and the planning process at Pittsfield State Forest, please contact Gary Briere, DCR's Recreation Bureau Chief, at gary.briere@state.ma.us.