

Wharton Motorized Recreation Plan
Motorized Recreation Stakeholder Meeting
October 22, 2015

Ideas/Thoughts/Questions/Concerns raised during meeting

Use of the word “preservation” versus “conservation.” We should use “conservation” as “preservation” is more of a purist term – stay away because it sends the message of not being open.

Pinelands Commission – a fuzzy regulatory boundary between access and recreation. We believe Pinelands Commission has more liberal views than DEP.

Who makes up the Natural Areas Council? It should be a more diversified board.

Green Acres owns golf courses – marinas – the DEP does provide recreation for other purposes.

Set up a council for the forest. Four representatives of motorized recreation on Trails Council should be on it – one for 2-wheel – one for snowmobile – one for ATV and one for 4-wheel drive user groups.

Title 39 – Motorized Trails Council – feels they’re not being used appropriately.

Provide NRT grant information.

We should never be at the finish line before presenting a plan. The forest is living – data/habitat changes – would like the State to work better with the user groups to report information. Communication has to be better.

Form a group for motorized recreation working committee – “Friends of Wharton.”

Forest Fire Service versus State Park Service – division of labor – would like a breakdown.

The motorized recreation organization – enduro plans have timing restrictions on when they can and cannot be held. We recognize we are held to a higher standard. But we do provide volunteer support – in 2009 process of approving enduros changed and in 2013 the clubs and AMA met with DEP and offered to provide expertise. No follow through.

Enduro/dual sports are here - but 4-wheel drive users – why are there not more of those groups in the room?

In 2011 – 13 NJ Trail Lovers Coalition formed and instant communication took place. Enduro management plan – it has broken down in Trenton. From 2012 to now – only three endures. Enduro trails in Comprehensive Management Plan – hundreds of volunteers want to clean up Atsion.

Under the current dynamic – there needs to be a relationship with all users. There are only a couple of lightning rods – we need to have a clear agenda.

Motorized recreation groups are a vast resource DEP is not using.

Topo map of roads – that should be the basis we are using.

Fire cuts – go back and plant trees and ride at your own risk signs or “unmaintained” signs – or do seasonal closures.

We do not want the roads closed. Jemima Mount is okay to remain closed but no roads that were closed this year.

Wharton State Forest is manageable. Feel that the forest is not damaged.

Inventory of federal western lands under Bureau of Land Management – renewable energy development and inventory all “routes” and “trails”.

Law enforcement/laws:

Groups need to police themselves.

Publishing our criteria and set up a way to report.

Education:

Massachusetts specifically has signs for jeep vehicle weight limits – legally non-maintained roads – we should do the same.

Pre-defined criteria and be transparent about it – such as threatened and endangered species.

Volunteers – we want to volunteer. They will help put signs up. But with seasonal closures of roads – DEP must educate why.

Public wants to know the closing of roads is not an arbitrary decision by DEP.

Create a “docent” program for responsible motorized recreation.

Additional Comments from Stakeholder meeting

1. Identify routes currently suitable for motorized access;
Please reword this as: “Identify the routes that should not be used. Otherwise they will remain unsigned and opened and used at your own risk.”
2. Improve enforcement efforts and coordinate Emergency Response to better protect the forest for present and future generations;
Please reword this as: “Please assist the Forest Service by reporting any destructive activity and encouraging others and their children to enjoy and tour the Wharton Forest in motorized vehicles or any other means. The Forest Service here to help you explore, enjoy and facilitate your access to this Forest.
3. Focus maintenance efforts;
Please situate pipes under the roads that have extreme flooding; remove the “Keep out” signs; remove any fallen trees over major access roads; remove trees that have been deliberately cut to block access.
4. Improve public awareness of impacts of use and of abuse to the forest,
I recommend that the DEP keep a log of all animals harmed by motorized access.
The DEP needs to provide quantitative data on any ruling that prohibits public access to include source data related to the access means and a means to support such data in the face of challenges. Lacking such justification the DEP is seen as being run by personal opinions without consideration for its duty toward recreation.

5. Protect endangered species, habitat, and cultural resources
See question 4

In addition to items 1-5, please note the following:

Because the Wharton Forest forces an enduro route to jump on and off roads while entering and exiting fire cuts we must, of necessity, convolve the enduro rules with the road access topic.

1-Any open road should be usable in an enduro.

2-In order to facilitate access for all road users, the enduro club users should be encouraged to stay on the narrow single track trails, as well as fire cuts, and off of the main roads and two track woods roads to the maximum extent possible. This improves safety for all parties and minimizes interference between user types.

3-Please explain why it is ok to run ditches (fire cuts 7 feet wide) running parallel thru the woods every 600 feet, burning everything, then telling the enduro community that, in the same area containing existing enduro trails, they cannot use the trails for environmental reasons. Please use quantified, supported justifications. Hand waving doesn't count. The more trail we use the less mutual road use interference.