

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Division of Lands & Forests

Bureau of State Land Management, Salmon River Fish Hatchery

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Joe Martens
Commissioner

Chateaugay State Forest Draft ATV Connector Trail Plan

In January 2013, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) received a formal request for an ATV connector link crossing a State Forests for an ATV trail. As part of the evaluation process, the DEC is seeking public comments to the requested connector trail proposal.

The Oswego County ATV Club Inc. has requested to utilize segments of an existing snowmobile trail and abandoned road located on the southern portion of Chateaugay State Forest as part of their club trail system. This trail would provide a connection from Stone Quarry Drive to Dam Road--both roads are open to ATV use by the Town of Orwell. The requested trail sections are located on and near the southern boundary of Chateaugay State Forest in the Town of Orwell, Oswego County. The total length of the requested portion of trail on state land is approximately one mile. Seven-tenths of this is found on the old abandoned Stone Quarry Road and the remaining three-tenths go on and off of state land following the existing snowmobile trail.

Evaluation Process

As outlined in the Strategic Plan for State Forest Management (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/64567.html>), the DEC can authorize ATV use on designated trails or roads on State Forests. The following excerpts are from the strategic plan:

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR STATE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Based on evaluation of past efforts to accommodate ATV use and the many impacts and constraints associated with off road vehicles, the Department will not permit ATV use on State Forests , except:

- *as may be considered to accommodate a "connector trail" through Unit Management Planning or a similar public process; and*
- *on those specific routes designated for use by DEC-issued Motorized Access Permit for People with Disabilities (MAPPWD).*

Connector Trails

In the event another entity is establishing a legitimate public ATV trail system on lands adjacent to a State Forest, and a State Forest is needed to serve as a connecting link, or in the event that a State Forest road or trail could serve to connect already designated ATV trails open to the public, DEC will evaluate and consider the proposal.

Any such trail proposal must comply with state law, department policy and regulations. If it is determined to be environmentally compatible, a connecting trail could be established on the State Forest. This would be dependent on the availability of sufficient funds and support to establish and maintain a sustainable trail.

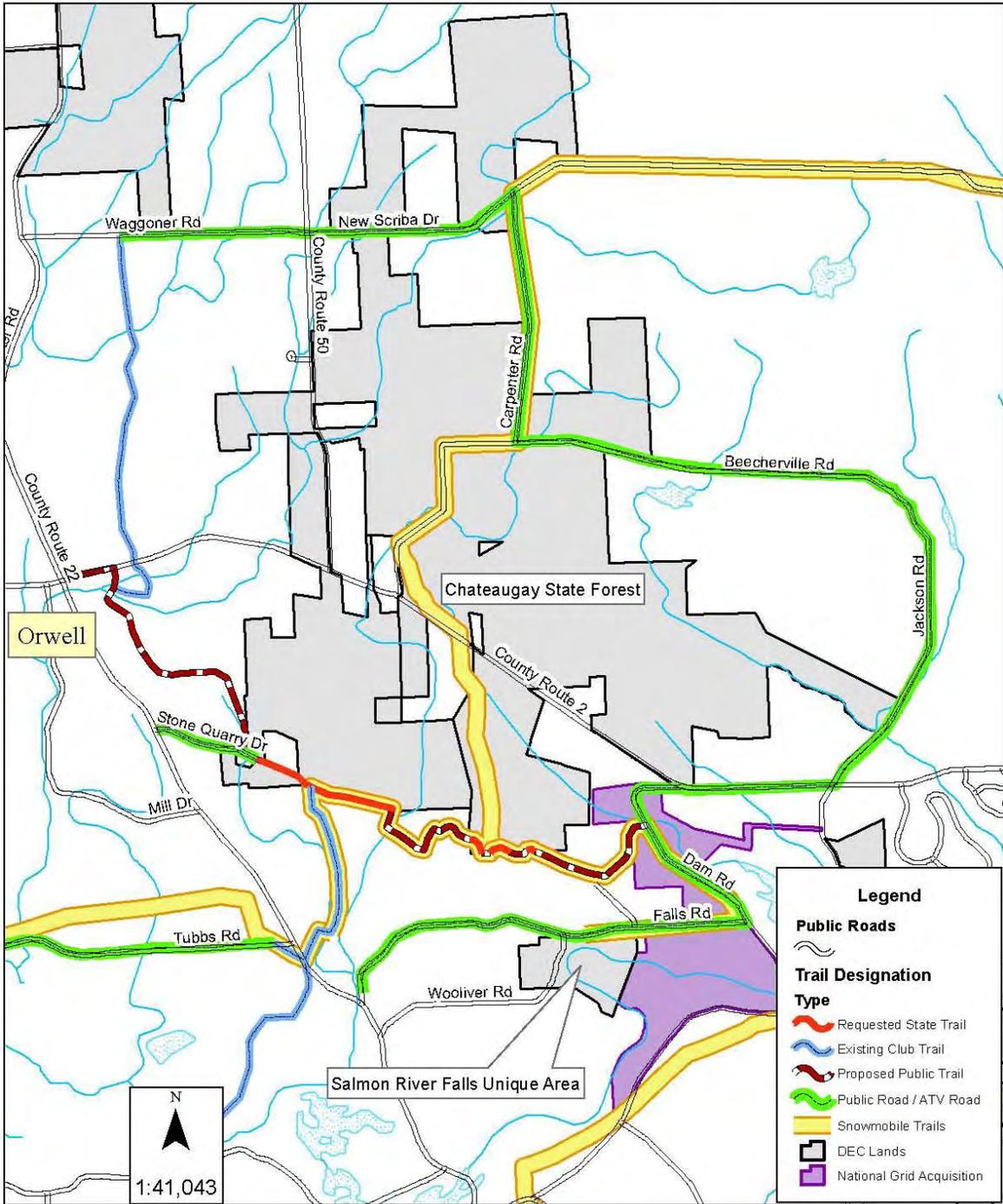
The State Forest based connector trail, if approved, must follow the shortest environmentally acceptable route available. The inclusion of a connector trail in a UMP and the subsequent establishment of any such trail could only occur if it does not compromise the protection of the natural resources of the Unit, significantly conflict with neighbors of State Forests, nor interfere with other established recreational areas. Such designation shall only occur through the amendment or adoption of a UMP or another process which provides similar opportunities for public review and comments and full SEQRA review of the proposed designation.

Connector trails will be monitored to ensure that legal use does not lead to illegal off-trail use within State Forest lands. Should illegal use increase on the State Forest adjacent to any connector trail, that trail will be subject to closure.

To meet the requirement that a legitimate public ATV system be adjacent to the State Forest, the Oswego County ATV Club has agreed to designate portions of its club trail system as public trail, utilizing private lands and towns roads posted for ATV use. The proposal by the Oswego County ATV Club identifies that the proposed public trail would run from the Village of Orwell to Stone Quarry Drive to Dam Road. The remainder of the ATV public trail system consists of designated town roads open to the public and signed for ATV use; they are as follows: Falls Road to Dam Road to County Route 2 to Jackson Road to Beecherville Road to Carpenter Road, to New Scriba Drive and Wagoner Road

The map below shows the requested trail segments on State land in red, the proposed public ATV trail system designated in green (town roads) and hashed red (private lands to be open to public ATV use).

Chateaugay State Forest ATV Trail Request Location Map



DEC will consider compatibility with the Strategic Plan for State Forest Management, and concerns of neighbors and the community. DEC will also evaluate impacts and necessary stipulations for such authorization on state lands. If authorized, the final plan will include the needed stipulations to address concerns for: environmental impacts, compatibility with other uses, safety issues, maintenance needs, preventing illegal off road ATV use, and providing education and needed enforcement.

Natural Resource Protection: If the natural resources cannot sustain continued motor vehicle use by ATVs due to factors such as: soil erosion within the travel corridor or into streams, wetlands or water bodies; impacts of ATV traffic outside the travel corridor; or other adverse impacts, the route will not be opened to public ATV access.

A review of existing natural resource information available to the Department, which includes the Natural Heritage Data Base, State Classified Wetlands, Federal Wetlands inventory, Stream classifications, Archeological sites, State Forest Special Management Zone data, and the State Forests Predicted Richness Overlays PRO's data, has been made. On Chateaugay State Forest there were no occurrences found from this review which intersect or may be affected by the trail, with the exception of where the abandoned town road crosses a mapped federal wetland. In this area the abandoned road crosses a mapped freshwater forested/shrub wetland. The road surface is firm, and there is a short, low lying area which may be flooded during high rain events.

Should this process of evaluation determine that approval of the connector trail can be acceptable to the Department, the trail segments on state forests will have to be filled and hardened to prevent erosion. This work will have to be completed prior to authorization to open the trail. The work will only be authorized through DEC's Temporary Revocable Permit process.

Compatibility with neighboring Private Property: As outlined in the Strategic Plan for State Forest Management, the establishment of this ATV trail cannot conflict with neighbors or state forests. To consider approving this proposal, the Department must not receive notice from affected private landowners objecting to public ATV use on their respective lands. Also, any stipulations that any landowner may request must be evaluated with regard to the request being reasonable and applicable to the entire connector trail.

Compatibility with other public use: Public ATV access must be compatible with other public use of the area as authorized by the Unit Management Plan (UMP). If the connector trail is to be authorized, a season of use will be established in the Final Plan to avoid user conflicts and to protect the resource.

Public Safety: Roads or trails proposed to be open to public ATV use must be safe for the operation of ATVs, including the posting of appropriate signage for speed limits, stopping, caution and curves. If authorization is acceptable, the Final Plan will establish the road surface standards to be maintained, or rehabilitated and maintained. The plan would also establish required signage standards to be maintained in the authorization.

Illegal off-road ATV use: Reasonably feasible measures to prevent illegal ATV use off the proposed route must be identified and effectively implemented.

Education and Enforcement: Management actions involving public ATV access must also address the need for monitoring, education and enforcement. All public ATV access routes, whether remaining open or being closed, must be monitored on a periodic basis for compliance with the management action. Efforts must be made to inform users where legal and safe public ATV riding opportunities exist. These would be outlined in the Final Plan and would be accomplished through providing adequate signage, unit brochures and maps, and increased enforcement patrols.

SEQR:

Evaluation of a proposed ATV trail outside of the Unit Management Planning process must go through the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process. This will include preparing the Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) and subsequent paperwork to those findings for the impacts to State Land.

Next Steps:

This is a separate process from the development of the Eastern Lake Ontario Unit Management Plan (ELOUMP). Decisions made in this process will be incorporated into the ELOUMP.

The Department will take the following steps before a Final Plan or determination will be made public.

- Review public comments and prepare recommendations with accompanying Environmental Assessment and draft Final Plan/Determination
- Release Final Plan

Comments to the Proposed ATV Connector Trails consideration may be submitted to: NYS DEC, Attn: Daniel Sawchuck, Salmon River Fish Hatchery, 2133 County Rte 22, Altmar, NY 13302 or by email to: djsawchu@gw.dec.state.ny.us. Comment must be received by: July 8, 2013.