

State of Vermont

Department of Fish and Wildlife
Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
Department of Environmental Conservation



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Scott Johnstone, Secretary, Agency of Natural Resources

FROM: Ed Leary, Operations Director
Chair, ANR Board of State Land Stewardship

DATE: January 3, 2001

SUBJECT: Report from ATV Committee and Response to Legislature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Leary".

At the December 14, 2000 ANR Board of State Land Stewardship meeting, Board members reviewed and discussed the ATV Environmental Impacts Report, the development of which was required by statute. The Agency's ATV Committee coordinated an exhaustive search of the literature on the environmental impacts of ATVs, which was performed by the University of Vermont. It is clear that the research compiled by the Committee documents numerous natural resource and recreational conflicts stemming from ATV use, and there is no reason to believe that research in the Northeast would lead to different conclusions. By this memo, the Board would like to convey their recommendations for any response to the Legislature.

The Board unanimously agreed with the Committee's recommendation that the existing ANR regulation regarding ATV use should not be legislatively or administratively relaxed. Such a change should not be considered unless and until there is a sufficient knowledge base to assess whether Vermont's public lands can accommodate ATV use and demonstrated broad-based public support for opening public lands to such use is evident. Currently, there is insufficient data to assess whether Vermont's public lands can even accommodate the environmental impacts associated with existing non-motorized and snowmobile usage, not to mention proposed ATV use.

Additional data on environmental impacts are lacking for the northeastern area, specifically for the effects of ATVs on soils, water quality, air quality, and conflicts with other users. Pages 29 to 31 of the Report go into further detail of the suggested research needs. This research would need to be conducted before any legislative or administrative changes to the current regulation is contemplated.

In addition to the research outlined in pages 29 to 31 of the Report, the Board suggests the need for demonstrated public support for the use of ATVs on public lands before moving ahead with authorizing any ATV trails. Current data, though not conclusive, strongly suggest there is not a broad-base of support for opening up public lands to ATV use. A 1997 survey of 790 Vermonters conducted by UVM's Center for Rural Studies as part of the public involvement process in developing the Agency's new Lands Conservation Plan found that a full two thirds of respondents (67.%) felt that providing opportunities for riding motorized vehicles such as ATVs on state lands was unimportant or inappropriate. A follow-up survey of Vermonters should be done which explores this issue in greater detail. Until such time that there is substantial scientific evidence and public support for opening Vermont's public lands to ATVs, the Agency should work with ATV dealers to inform buyers that public land is off limits to ATV use.

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cc ANR Board of State Land Stewardship Members