

Master Plan Variance UTV Pilot Program

Property Name: Black River State Forest (BRSF)

Date Master Plan was Approved: January 27, 2010

Variance to the Master Plan

The following temporary provision is added to the ATV trail section of the master plan (pages 110-113):

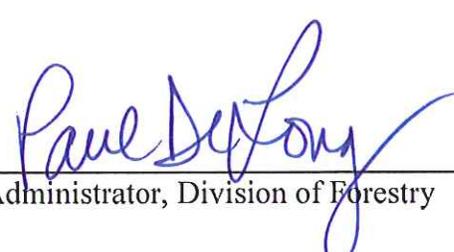
In 2009, the legislature established a utility terrain vehicle (UTV) pilot program which concludes on June 30, 2012. The Black River State Forest is participating in the UTV pilot program. During the period of the pilot program, UTVs will be allowed on **26.2 miles of the summer ATV trails** from:

- May 15, 2011 through October 15, 2011; and
- May 15, 2012 through June 30, 2012.

UTVs will **not** be allowed on the trail system from:

- October 16, 2011 through May 14, 2012.

Approved: _____


Administrator, Division of Forestry

Date: _____

4/13/11

Variance Initiator/Author: Peter Bakken, Property Manager BRSF


Property Manager

Date: 3-24-11

Supporting Approvals:


Regional Forestry Leader

Date: 4/4/11


Program Bureau Director

Date: 4/12/11


Department Master Planning Manager, LF

Date: 4/11/11

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Variance:

Act 175, 2009 establishes a pilot program for testing the feasibility of allowing utility terrain vehicles (UTVs) on ATV trails. The statute directs the Department, in consultation with the Department of Transportation, to conduct a two-year pilot program to investigate the effects of using UTVs on ATV trails and routes.

Under the pilot program the Department (and federal agencies, counties and municipalities participating in the program) may designate an ATV trail or a portion of a trail where UTVs may be used during the pilot program. (Counties and municipalities may also designate ATV routes that may be used by UTVs.) The UTV pilot program shall conclude on June 30, 2012. At the end of the pilot program the Department shall report the results of its evaluation to the legislature.

UTVs are not a specifically authorized use under the master plan; therefore, a plan variance is required to allow UTVs to be used on the BRSF ATV trails as part of this pilot program. The Department interprets UTVs as substantially similar motorized vehicles to ATVs.

Efforts shall be made to inform users where legal and safe public UTV riding opportunities exist. This will be accomplished through providing information to participating counties of UTV participation.

The existing ATV trail has sufficient width to allow two UTVs to safely pass without leaving the trail tread, except for short width-restricted areas such as bridges and wetland crossings where sight-lines are sufficient to allow riders to stop and wait for traffic to clear.

The trail surface is judged to be firm enough to support the weight of UTVs.

The UTV pilot program on the BRSF will be monitored on a periodic basis for impacts and safety compliance.

Anticipated Primary Benefits of the Proposed Variance:

The variance contributes to the Department's participation in the evaluation of the suitability of permanently incorporating UTV use on Department designated and managed ATV trails.

Designated ATV trails on Department lands are often part of regional ATV trail systems. The Black River State Forest ATV trails are an integral part of a region-wide trail network that provides several hundred miles of riding opportunities. Specifically, the BRSF trails connect to both Jackson and Clark County ATV trails. Jackson and Clark Counties have also approved participation in the UTV pilot program. Therefore, with the BRSF participating in the UTV pilot, a regional UTV trail system will stay intact.

Additional Anticipated Benefits:

- Expanded, short-term opportunities for UTV owners to experience using their vehicles on expanded trail miles.
- Additional economic benefit, although likely small, to local communities in the vicinity of the trail.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts:

Unknown. A primary purpose of the pilot program is to evaluate potential adverse impacts.

Because of the high use of ATV trails on the Black River State Forest, conflicts with ATV riders may occur, and safety risks may increase since UTVs are larger and slower than ATVs. There may also be additional physical impacts to the trail surface as the UTVs are substantially heavier than ATVs.

Compatibility with Statutes, Codes and Department Policies:

The UTV pilot program was established by state statute. UTV use on trails within the Black River State Forest is compliant with criteria established by the Department for participation in the pilot program.

Federal Aid Limitations:

None.

How the Master Plan Supports the Proposed Variance:

The master plan designated motorized use and specifically ATV trails on the property (pages 110-113). This pilot is to test whether UTVs are an appropriate shared use on ATV trails.

The Public Review Process Used:

Information was posted on the Black River State Forest master plan webpage beginning on March 2, 2011 (http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/BlackRiver/). The property superintendent emailed interested and affected stakeholders to inform them of the variance and to solicit comments on March 2, 2011. Interested and affected stakeholders who were emailed include: Jackson County, Clark County, Wisconsin ATV Association (WATVA), Black River Falls Chamber of Commerce, Jackson County ATV Club, local state assembly and senate representatives, Friends of the Black River, Black River Forest Trail Foundation, and numerous other interested parties. Comments were accepted from March 2, 2011 through March 21, 2011.

Description of the Support and/or Opposition to the Proposed Variance (including reasons for the various positions taken) and Any Unresolved Issues or Concerns:

Two comments were received, one in opposition and one in favor of the UTV pilot. The first comment was not in favor of the UTV pilot, citing trail damage from existing uses and a preference for more quiet recreation in general. The second comment was from the Wisconsin ATV Association (WATVA). WATVA was in favor of the UTV pilot citing contributions to the local economy from motorized recreation and an appreciation for the DNR and Black River State Forest being open to motorized recreation opportunities based on its increased popularity.