

Memo

To: Sarah Stewart, Commissioner - Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

From: Will Guinn, Administrator - Forest Management Bureau

CC: Brad Simpkins, Director - Division of Forest and Lands

Date: June 13, 2019

Re: Southern Connector OHRV Trail Proposal - Tech Team Review

Commissioner Stewart,

The Nash Stream Forest Tech Team reviewed the Milan Trail Huggers ATV Club request for the Southern Connector Trail as outlined in the 2017 Nash Stream Forest Management Plan. I have four concerns I would like to see addressed prior to and during the three-year probationary period if this trail proposal moves forward:

1. Solid data on the number of OHRVs currently utilizing the Westside Trail is needed to determine the actual increase in usage that will result from opening the Southern Connector. To address this:
 - a. The Bureau of Trails shall place counters on the Westside Trail the season prior to opening the Southern Connector for public use to establish a baseline.
 - b. The Bureau of Trails shall place counters on the Westside Trail during each of the three probationary years.
 - c. The Bureau of Trails shall provide a report on the numbers annually to the NSFCC and CORD.
2. Condition and maintenance of the Nash Stream Road needs to be monitored weekly and repaired as needed. There is potential for the formation of a berm on the gravel road at the 90-degree turn onto the Westside Bridge. This road is shared access for camp owners, hikers, anglers, and forests management activities. The DFL spends approximately \$5,000 annually grading this road and does not have additional funds for further maintenance, nor does it wish to spend the funds on maintenance only to see the road promptly degraded in this area.

3. The hill on the far side of the Westside Bridge has a significant grade almost immediately after crossing the Nash Stream. Currently this former access road has a stable cover of grasses and other vegetation, similar to what used to be present on the entire Westside trail prior to the use of OHRVs. Water bars or some other form of stabilization/erosion control must be installed according to BMPs if this trail is permitted.
4. There are no assurances that allowing OHRV use on this portion of Nash Stream Road will not lead to significant illegal OHRV traffic further into Nash Stream Forest along Nash Stream Road. The road is open to vehicle traffic and cannot be gated. "No OHRV" signs will stop the responsible users, but the rogue riders could do significant damage to the road/interior of the property as well as generate significant negative feedback to the agency from the other users of the property in these areas mentioned above, many of whom are anti-OHRV already.

Finally, There is a question of ownership and permission on a portion of the town(?) road between the Nash Stream Forest property and the turn onto the gated road to Cloutier's pit that would need to be resolved prior to this trail proposal moving forward.

These are my individual concerns, and requirements for this trail proposal. Regional forester Maggie Machinist may have additional concerns. I also recognize that other agencies on the Tech Team may have concerns regarding other resources that preclude further consideration of this trail all together.

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

To: Sarah Stewart, Commissioner
CC: Phil Bryce, Director, Brad Simpkins, Director
From: Chris Gamache, Chief, Bureau of Trails
Date: June 14, 2019
Subject: Southern Connector OHRV Proposal, Nash Stream Forest Tech Team

Commissioner Stewart,

The Milan Trail Huggers Association, the local OHRV club in Milan and Stark, submitted a proposal to the agency to establish a Southern OHRV Connector Trail. This trail proposal was submitted during the public process for the Nash Stream Forest Management Plan update and is noted in the approved plan as a proposal that could be reviewed and discussed for future incorporation into the Forest.

The Nash Stream Tech, originally put together to make technical reviews and provide substantive, data driven, input to DNCR for the Management Plan update, met last week to review the proposal. When originally proposed to the agency the request was to use an existing gravel road, cross and existing bridge over Nash Stream and then use an existing snowmobile trail to connect the West Side Road to Nash Stream Road. After submission it was determined that the use of the snowmobile trail for OHRV use would likely not pass the Course/Fine Filter Criteria reviews, and that updating this snowmobile trail for OHRV use would be more impactful than using Nash Stream Road, an existing gravel road.

The Bureau of Trails supports the request from the club, and feels the shared use of the existing gravel road would be the best alternative for this OHRV connection. We anticipate there would be increase in OHRV traffic on the West Side Road (a previously approved OHRV route), predominantly on the southern end.

This proposal does not include any new trail construction within Nash Stream Forest, and would limit all use to existing gravel roads on the DNCR property. The Bureau of Trails would anticipate that some degree of reinforcement/armoring would be installed on the grade just west of the Nash Stream bridge and that water bars or diversion devices would be installed to help keep water from shedding particulates toward Nash Stream. We are unaware of any documented instances of pollutants entering watersheds/wetlands further downstream from OHRV trails.

The Bureau of Trails would plan to install a trail counter (magnetic counting device which

records when a vehicle motor passes overhead, and is more reliable for OHRV counting than traditional Infra-Red beam counters) to determine the existing level of OHRV use on the West Side Road. The counter would be installed just west of the West Side Road intersection of the Bordeaux Trail; the trail is currently a loop destination and riders coming in the south end would be anticipated to continue north and only pass the counter once, and if approved it would be anticipated that most of the OHRV traffic would travel through this southern trail to abutting trail systems.

The Bureau of Trails, based on our previous experience managing gravel roads for vehicle and OHRV use, would anticipate that we would need to grade this section of road 1-2 times per riding season and we would contribute funds to the Forests & Lands existing grading contract for the Nash Stream Road.

The club, as part of their proposal, has committed to installing additional signage on Nash Stream Road to direct riders to the designated OHRV route, and discourage the illegal use further up Nash Stream Road. DNCR Forest Rangers currently patrol this road and we would not anticipate a need for additional patrolling due to this proposal. Currently, illegal use on the road is predominantly from existing camps in the Forest and we would anticipate that future illegal use would be mostly from this group. The NH Fish & Game Department awards an enforcement grant to the Forest Rangers to assist with OHRV patrols. The NH Legislature has passed legislation, this session, to increase fines for unauthorized (no landowner permission) riding from \$74.40 to \$243.

Based on input we listened to during the Tech Team review we feel that the majority of the issues were based on assumptions and perceptions. We agree that OHRV traffic would likely increase in Nash Stream Forest if this connector was approved, however we not agree that it would increase to a point that all other uses would be precluded

Previous studies have been done in Nash Stream Forest, in regards to noise, bird habitat, water quality and turbidity. These studies were done when the first OHRV trail, West Side Road, opened for use 16 years ago. Members of the Tech Team have stated they do not believe these were valid because they did not do them, however when asked if they would be performing any studies we have been told they have no time or funding to perform studies.

Based on the process performed by DNCR, and input received, during the Nash Stream Management Plan we believe this is a reasonable request and that if approved it would not significantly increase the Bureau's work load in Nash Stream Forest.



New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau

Division of Forests & Lands - DNCR
172 Pembroke Road, Concord, NH 03301
(603) 271-2214 www.nhdfl.org

To: Commissioner Sarah L. Stewart
Via: Brad Simpkins, Director Forests & Lands
From: Sabrina Stanwood, Administrator
Date: June 11, 2019
Subject: Proposed Southern Connector OHRV trail at Nash Stream Forest

The Milan Trail Huggers ATV club submitted a request for the Southern Connector OHRV trail at Nash Stream Forest in 2018. The trail would utilize an existing segment of the Nash Stream Road and the West Side Bridge over Nash Stream.

On June 20, 2018, NHB ecologist Pete Bowman inventoried a section of the forest along the West Side Loop Trail that would be impacted by the proposed new trail. The primary forest type is the *sugar maple - beech - yellow birch forest*. The trail also passes close to small beaver wetlands supporting a **drainage marsh - shrub swamp system**. No rare plants or exemplary natural communities were identified.

On June 6, 2019, Pete Bowman and members of the Nash Stream Management Plan Technical Team met on site to discuss the trail proposal, observe the site, and review the coarse and fine filter criteria. Team members walked across the West Side Bridge and up the trail to the intersection with the West Side Trail.

The remaining portion of the proposed trail will be inventoried by NHB staff during the week of June 17-21, 2019. The results of that remaining survey will be reported and submitted to the Nash Stream Citizens Committee the following week.

If the trail is approved, this will cause an increase in the volume of OHRV traffic. NHB is concerned that an increase in the volume of traffic will increase sediment and pollutants (e.g. oil and gasoline particles) runoff into the natural communities and wetlands along Nash Stream as well as the stream itself. An increase in sediment and pollutants negatively impacts the ecological integrity of the natural communities and wetlands along the trail, as well as water quality. An increase in OHRV traffic will also increase the likelihood of invasive plant species spreading into Nash Stream forest. This reduces the ecological integrity of the forest.

It is important to learn more about the current volume of OHRV in Nash Stream forest. NHB recommends collecting data on OHRV use during statistically significant portions of the OHRV seasons and working closely with the Technical Team during planning and collecting of that data.

Thank you,
Sabrina

Memo

To: Brad Simpkins, Director
From: Margaret Machinist, North Regional Forester
CC: William Guinn, Administrator – Forest Management Bureau
Date: June 14, 2019
Re: Southern Connector ATV Trail Proposal- Nash Stream

The Tech Team was tasked with reviewing a request from the Milan Trail Huggers for a new section of OHRV trail known as the Southern Connector. During this on site review, we evaluated the course and fine filter criteria in the field and had discussion about the proposed trail.

As the manager of the property, the north region has several concerns regarding the trail.

- 1) Currently, the trail on the West Side of Nash Stream is a loop trail from the north Stratford system. If the southern connector is approved, the West Side trail and Bordeaux Trail would become a corridor trail making it a through trail and part of the larger system. There would certainly be an increase in the usage of the trail, however, it is difficult to predict what this increased usage would be. Based upon my experience with other corridor trails there could potentially be a dramatic increase in usage. Unfortunately, not having good data it is difficult to make comparisons, but trails such as the Kelsey Notch Trail have significantly more ATV use. There have not been trail counts performed on the property since the OHRV Trail was first established in 2002. It is important to establish baseline data for comparisons, should the trail be approved.
- 2) Another concern is the safety of having shared use of pedestrians, OHRV's, vehicles, logging equipment as well as dump trucks on the Nash Stream Road. There are many recreators that currently use Nash Stream including hikers, bikers, horseback riders, etc, ; having an increase of traffic on the road has the potential for accidents to increase. Last year, there was an accident with a vehicle and a dump truck at the intersection of Amos Emery Rd and the road that leads into the Cloutier Gravel pit. Although, adjustments to the line of sight have been made, if approved, the intersection would also be used by ATV's increasing the potential for conflicts.

- 3) The proposed trail is planning on utilizing a mile and a half of existing gravel road. This plan decreases the amount of impact of trail construction and limits the amount of maintenance overtime. However, once off of the Nash Stream road and onto the first section of the West Side there is the potential for increased erosion and sedimentation. Currently this portion of trail is only used by management vehicles and snowmobiles in the winter. The road is stabilized by vegetation. Opening up this portion of trail to OHRV's would eliminate the vegetation on the road surface and could lead to erosion. Runoff from this section of road would lead directly into Nash Stream. Proper BMP's would have to be installed and maintained overtime so that sedimentation into the stream would not occur. There would also be additional maintenance to the main road if the trail was opened.
- 4) Another concern about opening up the main road into Nash Stream Forest to ATV's is the potential for increased illegal use of Nash Stream road further north. Currently, the OHRV traffic is on the West Side separated by two gates. Due to the fact that the Nash Stream Road is open to vehicular traffic, there would be no way to put up a gate to stop OHRVs from travelling north into the heart of Nash Stream. There is already illegal use on the Nash Stream Road and not having a gate or blockade of some kind could exacerbate this issue. Some of the camp owners have expressed concerns as well about the potential for increased illegal traffic going up the road.
- 5) Nash Stream Forest is one of the most remote state reservations. People visit Nash Stream for the quiet and to enjoy the wilds of this 40,000 acres parcel. Allowing OHRVs on the main road and entering the gate would change the user experience for the many visitors to this property. Though there is no way to quantify this however, it would change the "feel" of Nash Stream. These unique remote experiences are becoming less and less as there is an increase in recreation all over the northern parts of NH.
- 6) Lastly, it is unclear if this trail is necessary. Traffic from the north is already connected to Groveton and eastward toward Milan. There is gas within 5 miles to Groveton and east in West Milan. I understand that it may be more convenient, but don't understand why an additional trail is needed.

Machinist, Margaret

From: Doperalski, Mark
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2019 8:36 AM
To: Guinn, William
Subject: RE: Tech Team Review of proposed Southern Connector Trail

Hi Will,

We have no concerns regarding archaeological resources.

Mark

Mark Doperalski
State Archaeologist
NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
Division of Historical Resources
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From: Guinn, William <William.Guinn@dncr.nh.gov>
Sent: Friday, June 7, 2019 12:35 PM
To: Machinist, Margaret <Margaret.Machinist@dncr.nh.gov>; Magee, John <john.magee@wildlife.nh.gov>; Staats, William <William.Staats@wildlife.nh.gov>; Doperalski, Mark <Mark.Doperalski@dncr.nh.gov>; Bowman, Peter <Peter.Bowman@dncr.nh.gov>; Savage, Clinton <Clinton.Savage@dncr.nh.gov>
Cc: Stanwood, Sabrina <Sabrina.Stanwood@dncr.nh.gov>; Simpkins, Brad <Brad.Simpkins@dncr.nh.gov>; Gamache, Christopher <Christopher.Gamache@dncr.nh.gov>; Oehler, James <James.Oehler@wildlife.nh.gov>; Boisvert, Tracey <Tracey.Boisvert@dncr.nh.gov>; Zboray, Andrew <Andrew.Zboray@dncr.nh.gov>; Timmins, Dianne <Dianne.Timmins@wildlife.nh.gov>
Subject: Tech Team Review of proposed Southern Connector Trail

Hello NSF Tech Team,

Just a reminder, please get me your individual comments regarding yesterday's on-site review of the proposed Southern Connector Trail at Nash Stream Forest by Thursday, June 13th.

These comments will be provided to the Nash Stream Forest Citizen's Advisory Committee for review and use in their recommendation to either deny the trail proposal or move it forward to CORD for further review.

Thank you.

-Will

William T. Guinn, Administrator

Machinist, Margaret

From: Magee, John
Sent: Wednesday, June 12, 2019 9:57 PM
To: Guinn, William; Machinist, Margaret; Staats, William; Doperalski, Mark; Bowman, Peter; Savage, Clinton
Cc: Stanwood, Sabrina; Simpkins, Brad; Gamache, Christopher; Oehler, James; Boisvert, Tracey; Zboray, Andrew; Timmins, Dianne; Normandeau, Glenn; Smith, Jason; Decker, Scott; Magee, John
Subject: Re: Tech Team Review of proposed Southern Connector Trail

All: my comments are below. Please note that I have included my direct supervisor, Scott Decker, the Inland Fisheries Division Chief, Jason Smith, and Executive Director of NH Fish and Game Department, Glenn Normandeau, on this email.

Although some vital information (current number of OHRV trips, projected number of trips) is not known, we can say with certainty:

- 1) Many anglers fish in Nash Stream Forest for the relative solitude and quiet.
- 2) The Nash Stream Restoration Project, begun in 2005 as a partnership between Trout Unlimited, NHFGD, and the Division of Forests and Lands, has been very successful in increasing the population of wild brook trout and the overall individual size of wild brook trout in the mainstem and tributaries. The Project received \$1.4 million in funding (not including costs to NHFGD for staff), from local, state and federal sources including NHFGD, NHDES, USFWS and the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund. It has tremendous support from local anglers and angling organizations. Because of the success of the Project, it was recently named as one of 10 Waters to Watch by the Fish Habitat Partnership, a national partnership of fish and wildlife agencies. It is one of the largest river restoration projects in the northeast U.S.
- 3) The current level of OHRV use has a negative impact on the angling experience in the mainstem of Nash Stream, albeit a relatively small impact. OHRVs are clearly heard from a number of places in the mainstem of Nash Stream.
- 4) The proposal will increase the number of OHRV trips on the existing OHRV trails and on a one mile section of the Nash Stream Road.
- 5) An increase in the number of OHRV trips will increase the negative impacts to anglers in the mainstem of Nash Stream and possibly tributaries if OHRVs are audible in those tributary locations. Specifically, this is because more anglers will be able to hear the larger numbers of OHRVs.

My recommendation during our site visit is that necessary data on the current number of OHRV trips in Nash Stream Forest and on trails nearby, including the dates and times of trips, be collected for at least 2019 before any change in OHRV use in Nash Stream Forest is proposed. This information is necessary to make an informed decision on any proposal. I think that, before any counters are placed, the Technical Team should be given time to provide comments on the locations of them and the time period for their deployment. Furthermore, it is impossible to quantify the impact to anglers because the level of solitude, quiet and changes to those are not quantifiable attributes of the angling experience.

As I said during our site visit, Nash Stream Forest has many traditional uses, and OHRVs are not one of them. Additionally, it is generally acknowledged that OHRVs tend to impact the existing traditional uses due to sound levels, whereas certain uses such as angling have no impact on other traditional uses of the Forest. As we look

to balance the existing and potential uses of the Forest, I think we should strive to minimize the impacts from any one or combination of uses. An increase in OHRV trips will not accomplish that.

John

John Magee, M.S., Certified Fisheries Professional
President, Northeastern Division of the American Fisheries Society
Fish Habitat Biologist
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From: Guinn, William
Sent: Friday, June 7, 2019 12:34 PM
To: Machinist, Margaret; Magee, John; Staats, William; Doperalski, Mark; Bowman, Peter; Savage, Clinton
Cc: Stanwood, Sabrina; Simpkins, Brad; Gamache, Christopher; Oehler, James; Boisvert, Tracey; Zboray, Andrew; Timmins, Dianne
Subject: Tech Team Review of proposed Southern Connector Trail

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Thank you.

-Will

William T. Guinn, Administrator
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Please note new phone number.

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

Intra-Department Communication

TO: Jim Oehler
FROM: Will Staats
Wildlife Biologist

DATE: June 6, 2019

SUBJECT: Southern Connector Trail

On June 6 a number of us from the technical team met at Nash Stream State Forest to perform a preliminary assessment of the southern connector trail proposal. We drove the route starting from Cloutier's gas pumps to the west side road junction and then walked from the west side bridge to the cattle gate.

Maggie Machinist walked us through the course and fine filter criterion. There was considerable discussion on a number of issues. The following are a few thoughts regarding wildlife and other issues with this proposal:

1. Under the fine filter criterion concerning wildlife and habitat there appears to be no wildlife issues for this trail proposal which will utilize the existing road for approximately a mile in length. There could be raptor nests we are unaware of but without a survey it is unknown if they exist and the most likely raptor nesting near the trails would be goshawk.
2. While the trail is only slightly a mile in length we can't say with certainty how much this will increase traffic on the west side trail system as it funnels riders to the gas pumps. This increased traffic on the west side system could have a greater impact on existing wildlife use in the habitat that these trails bisect.
3. Prior to the proposal moving forward a number of us felt that there should be more base line data regarding usage on the current trails. Trail counters should be set up to determine current use on the trails to establish this bench mark.
4. Several of us questioned the need for the trail. While greater access to gas might be convenient for riders, gas is currently available in both Groveton and Stratford accessed by the existing trail system.
5. There will be interactions between ATVs and hunters and fishermen that are using the property and these will be difficult to quantify. These groups will encounter ATVs on the road traveling in and out on this mile section. I am not sure at this time what the overlap will be during the early fall hunting seasons. There is currently no way of determining if this dual use will diminish the quality of the experience for hunters and fishermen traveling to this State property. The same can be said for hikers and other user groups. I think we really need to hear from these user groups.

6. Finally there was considerable discussion on trying to determine a threshold for trail use that might be cause for further concern. If ridership goes up 20, 30 or even 50 % on the existing trail system as a result of this proposal what impacts will this have over current levels? At what point is there too much or should action be taken?
7. Given the uncertainty around some of these questions it could be argued that it may be wise to delay proceeding with this proposal until further information can be gathered.

Cc: Maggie Machinist
Mark Ellingwood
John Magee
Glen Normandeau