

LETTERS

Time to reconsider ATV access on roads

To the editor:

Let me first say that I am not against ATVs, or opposed to off-road trails. However, it's becoming clear that we have a problem, and it is time to close our roads to ATVs.

When ATVs were allowed on state and local roads five years ago, the goals were reasonable. The move was billed as a short-term action to allow access to trails where absolutely necessary, and as a stopgap until actual off-road trails were secured. The presence of ATVs on our roads has proved more negative than anyone thought, and it's time to reverse the policy.

The actual impact has been a far cry from what was expected. Lifelong residents now have to put up with sometimes hundreds of ATVs driving by during a weekend, few adhering to the speed limit, not to mention increasing problems with trespassing and damage to private property.

I have neighbors in their 60s and 70s who no longer sit on the front porches of the houses in which they were born, because there is too much dust and noise from ATVs. The peace and quiet that attracted many second home owners to the region is gone, and it's increasingly common to hear stories of people thinking of leaving. Even on lakes, people are selling.

ATVs are displacing other traditional recreational activities, like hiking and mountain biking. Other people don't want to be around them. This has its own economic impact. Consider that the market for biking in New Hampshire is roughly seven times as

large as that for OHRVing, and the market for hiking about 10 times larger. Consider that we are keeping these activities (which are underdeveloped in the North Country) away from our towns by allowing ATVs free reign. Far from being a boon to the economy, the current policy is limiting our opportunity.

There are a handful of business owners who think ATVs are helping. They are mostly ATV rental owners and ATV tour operators. In places like Gorham and Pittsburg there are businesses that are thriving, without ATVs having direct access. In some cases these business are actually doing better than those on the trails.

In fact, there are local business owners who feel that ATVs are hurting them economically. These people feel that ATVs drive away the tourists that have been coming to the North Country for generations. They are too afraid to speak out.

Why? To give you just one example, a campground owner in Pittsburg recently refused to allow ATVs access to his property. His property was immediately vandalized, resulting in several thousand dollars in damages. Following this thuggish attempt to intimidate, he closed his land to snowmobiles too, and understandably so! No one wants to deal with physical threats, so fewer people have spoken out. People are afraid. Never mind the economic discussion. Is this who we have become as a community?

The longer this goes on, the LESS likely people are

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to allow ATVs on their private property. If you have had very poor experiences overall with ATVs for five years on public roads, why would you allow them on your own land? Allowing ATVs on roads is undermining the long-term goal of having a trail system in the woods!

More enforcement is not the answer. There are simply too many areas to patrol, too few Fish and Game officers, and we need them elsewhere.

Things have gotten out of hand, and it's time to take a step back. There must be common sense solutions. We can have ATVs off roads and in the woods, without destroying our neighborhoods, other economic drivers or even the ATV trade. ATV clubs and the concerned community might even work together on finding off-road trails, but it is past time to close all roads to ATVs.

John Petrofsky
Stewartstown

LETTERS

OHRVs should be used on trails not roads

To the editor:

Citizens of Coos County, the OHRV season is here. Like anything, there are pros and cons to the use of OHRVs. The main selling point for their use is that they bring tourists and economic development to the area. The problem is that these machines, which are designed for use off-road, are on our local roads and in our neighborhoods. In some areas it is not uncommon to have 500 of these machines go through residential neighborhoods per day. This adversely affects the quality of life for these property owners who live in northern New Hampshire because of the beauty, scenery, wildlife and serenity of this area.

The solution does not lie with prohibition but with a sensible compromise between the people who pay their taxes to support the state and local government and the small minority who come up here to ride their machines and enjoy our beautiful state. When the state laid out the trails at Jericho Park, space was left between them so that the noise and dust would not effect the other riders. It is not too much to ask that the same courtesy be extended to property owners.

Like most things, the vast majority of riders are

considerate and follow the rules but the ones that do not have a huge impact on the quality of life for the property owners that border the trails. Fish and Game and the local police are charged with policing this sport. However, both are underfunded and short staffed. New Hampshire has the belief that if you use something you should pay for it. Currently the fees paid by the owners of these machines go to Fish and Game and the OHRV clubs, nothing goes to the Town Police. Asking the local police to increase patrols will only increase the taxes on the people who are already impacted by the use of these machines. Instead, we should be increasing the costs to the riders by having them pay for registration of their machines and having them put a real license plate on their machines. This would help to pay for the enforcement and make it easier to report violators.

We, the citizens, need to make our voice heard by our local Board of Selectmen and by our legislators to get these machines off our streets and onto the trails where they belong.

Thank you,
Al Rossetto
Northumberland