

From: Stewart, Sarah  
Sent: Monday, July 15, 2019 2:00 PM  
To: Tango-Lowy, Torene  
Subject: FW: Reaching out re: North Country recreation

From: John Petrofsky <jpetrofsky@googlemail.com>  
Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2019 8:56 AM  
To: Caswell, Taylor <Taylor.Caswell@livefree.nh.gov>  
Cc: Stewart, Sarah <Sarah.Stewart@dncr.nh.gov>; Cryans, Michael <Michael.Cryans@nh.gov>  
Subject: Re: Reaching out re: North Country recreation

Commissioner Caswell,

Thank you for your response.

My personal exposure to ATVs in the North Country comes from having my property impacted when the town and Bureau of Trails located an ATV "connector trail" on our formerly quiet road. Now I avoid visiting in the summer, and my mother who unfortunately is stuck in the family house, has health concerns about the noise and the dust, and I've seen several neighbors move away or in the process of doing so. That's my personal background and bias on the issue.

My concern as it pertains to your department is the broader economic impact, which I believe has been widely overplayed, and I suspect is actually a net negative. My request broadly speaking is that your department be cognizant going forward of the negative impact that ATVing in its current configuration is having on our economy. Extra care should be taken to make ATVing in the North Country less intrusive, and to promote a broader range of recreational activities. This latter point however, will be difficult as hikers, mountain bikers, wildlife watchers, etc. are deterred by ATV activity. I assume your department is involved somehow with "Bike the Borderlands". It's a great idea, but notice how the biking areas surround, but don't overlap with, the ATVing areas (link at bottom of page). The upper North Country is turning into an area that only ATVers would ever want to visit.

My data to support this comes in three forms: ATV compatibility studies, tax and population data, and finally general anecdotal observations.

Compatibility studies look at the impact of one activity on others, to see if they are antagonistic, complimentary, or neutral. For example, Wisconsin has done a study showing that ATVs are broadly incompatible with other recreational activities (see link and chart at bottom of page). They drive away the hikers, mountain bikers, etc. that help form a broad based recreational tourist economy. If you don't site ATV trails well, you only get ATVers in your town. That's exactly what is happening in Coos county. Not only are we stuck, yet again, with all of our eggs in one economic basket, but the opportunity cost is substantial, because those other recreational markets are each larger than the entire ATV market in dollar terms (various figures online). On top of that, we're driving away life-long residents in an area that can ill afford it. (It stands to reason that, as the Wisconsin study indicates, if people don't want to recreate near ATVs, why would they want to live by them?) A study in Nova Scotia found that permitting ATVs on trails reduced the use of said trails by 48%. Think about how that impacts our rail trails? Everyone but ATVers has stopped using the Colebrook to Canaan trail except very early in the morning.

The second set of data looks at taxes and population, and is a reexamination of the pro-ATV talking points. The ATV boosters point to an increase in Room and Meals tax in Coos county,

but the facts don't support a strong positive impact, when compared to the state or even other counties. (They claim a 30% annual increase over the last 6 years, which is obviously a misinterpretation of the data.)

Since the beginning of 2012, Meals and Room tax has increased 23.5% total in Coos County, while it has increased 36.4% for the state as a whole. The same is generally true in just the June through Aug. time period. For example July 2018 vs. July 2012, Meals and Rooms tax is up 36.5%. This sounds great in isolation, until you look at Grafton County, where it's up 47%. Total employment when Ride the Wilds got going (around 2012), was 12,371 in Coos County. As of 2018 it was 11,798. Down 4.6%.

Six years into "Ride the Wilds", population in places like Stewartstown and Pittsburg continues to decline at about 2% annually. Berlin is also declining when you discount the new prison population. The details are actually worse. Stewartstown, for example, has a median age of 57 (19 deaths and 3 births last year). ATVs have not helped at all, and we've turned over what trails we have to them, so we can't benefit from the nearby mountain biking boom in places like Hereford, PQ, and Burke, VT, or hiking, or anything else. It's short-sighted beyond belief.

My last "data set" is purely anecdotal, but in small towns it's hard to get big sample sizes. We've had this supposed economic miracle going on for six years now, a period with an economic tailwind as we recover from the Great Recession, and in Colebrook there are more empty storefront than six years ago. In Stratford the country store that was explicitly catering to ATVs has shut down, and the pizza place that opened two years ago in Pittsburg is already for sale. ATV rentals and dealerships do fine, and riders are happy, but everyone else, and the economy, suffer for it.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss any of this further, as well as possible solutions, if it helps make a difference. The North Country has so much potential, but it's being squandered. I use to have dreams of moving back to Stewartstown with my business (as a financial advisor, which I can do remotely), and had plans to open another business in addition to the first. To say I'm having second thoughts is an understatement. It's only the fact that I'm the fourth generation to live in Stewartstown (I went to the same grade school as my mother and grandfather), and my love of the land, that keep me clinging to the hope that things will get better.

Table from Wisconsin study:

Full study link:

<https://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/G3880.pdf>

<https://www.bikeborderlands.com/>

If you look at the mountain biking maps in detail you can see how much the bikers and everyone else avoid the ATV areas. In Gorham the mountain biking trails are in the south and west, the ATV trails in the north and east. Further north, the Cohos trail had to be rerouted because of ATV traffic.

On Thu, Apr 18, 2019 at 5:43 PM Caswell, Taylor <Taylor.Caswell@livefree.nh.gov> wrote:  
Mr. Petrofsky,

Thank you for reaching out and I apologize for my slow response. Can you detail a bit more of what you specifically mean by "the ATV issue in the North Country" and what sort of data you have? I am quite familiar with concerns in some North Country communities as it relates to ATV usage but there are many perspectives but certainly nothing I could qualify as a single issue.

Taylor Caswell.

From: John Petrofsky <jpetrofsky@googlemail.com>  
Sent: Wednesday, April 17, 2019 9:58 PM  
To: Caswell, Taylor <Taylor.Caswell@livefree.nh.gov>  
Subject: Re: Reaching out re: North Country recreation

Dear Commissioner Caswell,

I wanted to quickly follow up with you on my email from last month. Would you have any time to speak in the near future?

Thank you.  
John

On Tue, Mar 12, 2019 at 11:40 AM John Petrofsky <jpetrofsky@googlemail.com> wrote:  
Dear Commissioner Caswell,

Sarah Stewart suggested that I reach out to you. My name is John Petrofsky. I'm from Stewartstown originally, although I live in Washington, DC now.

I've been working on the ATV issue in the North Country for about a year now, and have come across a fair amount of data that I wanted to share with you. Would you have any time free to speak at some point in the next few weeks?

Thank you.  
John