

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Variance

The variance is required to authorize the designation of Skinner Creek Road as a year round ATV/UTV route. The Master Plan directs the department to establish a connector trail from the existing FRSF ATV/UTV trail to Rusk County. The variance is a change from the plan as it authorizes an ATV/UTV route in lieu of a trail.

Anticipated Primary Benefits of the Proposed Variance:

Create an ATV/UTV connector route by extending the existing 34 mile ATV / UTV trail to local communities and Town Road ATV routes.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts:

Increased mixed motorized use on an existing lightly used State Forest road

Compatibility with Statutes, Codes and Department Policies:

Wis. Admin Code NR45. Wis. Stat. s. 23.116

How the Master Plan Supports the Proposed Variance

Motorized Trails Objective

Provide sustainable, designated snowmobile and ATV trail riding opportunities as part of regional trail networks; and, as is feasible and compatible with other Forest objectives, support the expansion of the regional trail networks. This plan provides for extending the ATV trails by approximately six miles to connect to regional trail systems on the east and south.

Road Management Objectives

Provide a network of roads on the FRSF that meet land management and recreation objectives, while minimizing environmental impacts.

The Public Review Process Used and Description of the Support and/or Opposition to the Proposed Variance and Any Unresolved Issues or Concerns: see addendum B

Addendum A: Road Evaluation -ATV/UTV Route on Skinner Creek Road

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is assess the ecological, economic, and social impacts of designating a three mile portion of Skinner Creek road on the Flambeau River State forest as a mixed motorized use road, authorizing ATV/UTV, in addition to highway licensed vehicles.

Background

There is a large network of ATV trails and routes located within and surrounding the FRSF. The FRSF has an ATV/UTV trail system of 34 miles running north to south with a small loop trail centrally located. The trail system was recently improved and is designated for ATV and UTV use only. The FRSF ATV trail is connected to the Tuscobia Trail to the north which connects to the USFS Dead Horse trail system, which provides significant access east and west. The FRSF trail “ends” at the southern most part at a designated trail head at County Highway M.

The Township of Hawkins, Cedar Rapids, and South Fork in Rusk County, South of the State Forest is mostly in private ownership and includes a number of services and residents. A majority of Town roads have been designated as ATV routes. The Rusk County Forest has one designated ATV trail but the majority of the Town roads within the County are designated as routes. Many of the Town routes are adjacent and within the State Forest.

Currently there is a gap in the regional ATV/UTV trail network of approximately 3 miles to connect the Town designated ATV routes to the south of the forest to the FRSF ATV trail.

Road Evaluation Considerations

1. Address visitor requests for access, including seasonal uses.

The route option was proposed by user groups, local residents and Town Governments. There is a high desire for addition connectors from the south that connect to the FRSF ATV/UTV trail.

2. Are operationally feasible for the department to maintain based on the anticipated level of use.

Skinner Creek was re-constructed in 2015. The increased level of use by ATV/UTV is expected to be low. The road is in a moderately developed condition and well graded with a solid base that can handle the additional traffic. No significant increase in maintenance costs are expected based on the expected use.

3. Do not significantly impact natural resources based on the anticipated level of use.

The route is an existing road used for vehicle traffic and the addition of ATV /UTV will not have significant impacts on natural resources.

4. Are physically capable of supporting the anticipated level of use.

The road is in a moderately developed condition, gravel with a crown and ditch. The road was recently improved in 2015

5. Provide economic benefits.

Creating a connector will provide local economic benefits to the communities south of the forest. Users will have the ability to continue south of the existing FRSF ATV trail where services are located.

6. Are consistent with the property’s legal and policy framework.

The FRSF master plan supports ATV/UTV trails and routes and contributing to the regional network.

Addendum B: Flambeau River State Forest – Skinner Creek Road Route ATV Variance Summary/Overview of Public Review, Sept. 16 – Oct. 6, 2015

Public Involvement

The variance was posted to the FRSF Web page for public review. This document provided an evaluation of ecological, economic and social impacts of designating three miles of Skinner Creek road on the Flambeau River State Forest to mixed motorized use, authorizing ATV/UTV, in addition to highway licensed vehicles.

A public review and comment period was held from September 16 to October 6, 2015. The public was noticed via eGov, an email distribution system, sent to nearly 5,000 subscribers to the topic, “Flambeau River State Forest”. An additional 139 known public and private stakeholders were included in the email.

Public Comment

Three comments were received in support of the ATV route variance. A statewide organization stated that the route will fill a gap in the regional ATV/UTV network extending south of the forest to the surrounding Township routes. Individuals said that the route would add to the local appeal and economy in Rusk County with very little impact on the state forest. They said the route would also give riders a loop to ride from north of Hawkins to Ingram or Glen Flora. One writer hoped the project could take place as soon as possible. Additional road routes were suggested, along with access to river landings and toilet facilities, and opportunity to ride year-round.

One individual objected to the idea of year-round trail use. The comment described the atmosphere of Skinner Creek Road as “serene”, and questioned whether year round opening to ATV/UTV use would increase noise pollution in the area.