



So You Want to Build an Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Facility?

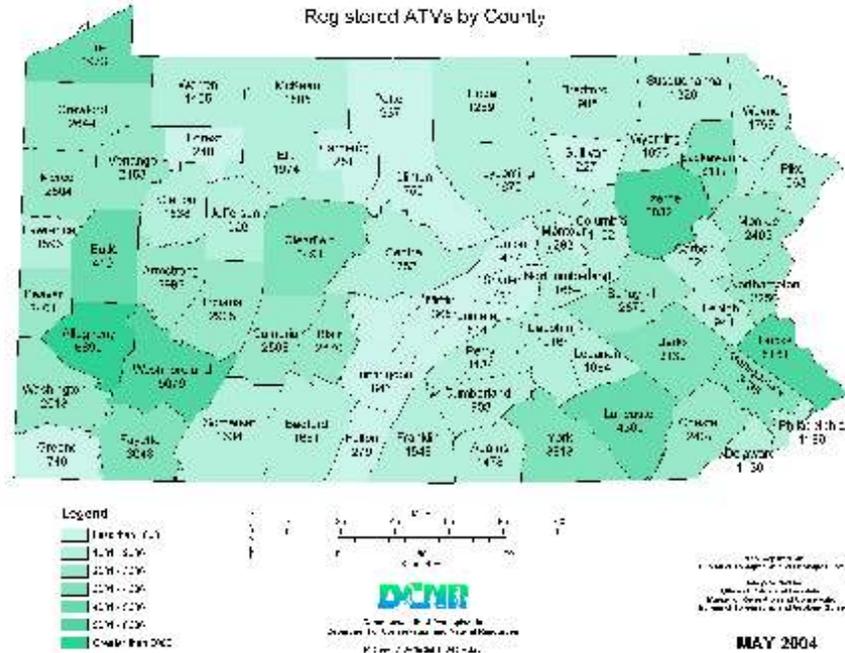
A Practical Guide to Planning and Development



A Resource Guide for Recreation, Parks and Conservation



So You Want to Build an Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Facility?



INTRODUCTION

Off-highway vehicles (OHV) are popular and that popularity is increasing all across the state. For many people, four-wheel drive utility vehicles, off-road motorcycles and dirt bikes, four-wheeled all-terrain vehicles (ATV) and snowmobiles are an important part of their recreational experience.

The steady growth and expansion of the Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) market is adding to the demand. While primarily for family transportation, their high ground clearance make them ideal for off-road use. Dual sport motorcycles designed for both highway use and off-highway recreational riding are now readily available.

Further evidence of the mounting interest in off-road experiences is reflected in the

double-digit sales growth experienced by the ATV industry in the last nine years. In one year, ATV dealers in Pennsylvania sold more than 69,000 units, ranking statewide sales fourth highest in the nation. Households having more than one ATV account for nine percent of the growth rate, and it does not look like the market has matured as yet since a continued increase in sales is expected.

As the number of vehicles has grown, the places to use them have not kept pace. The demand for new OHV facilities is creating a widespread interest by those in both the public and private sectors to meet the challenge. But getting an OHV facility on the ground and operating requires a careful understanding and review on all the essential steps in the process.

Whether you are with an organization thinking about developing an ATV trail or an entrepreneur wishing to build an OHV track or other facility, this guide will help you understand the process in planning for an OHV facility. It covers market identification, inventorying existing facilities and operations, tips on assessing potential sites, developing a business strategy, start-up and operations cost, and ways of gaining support and resources. The guide also includes references and other sources of information that can help you in your efforts.

THE PROCESS

There are many ways of getting your OHV project from idea to reality. The following process highlights some of the key steps along the way.

Know Your Market

While “build it and they will come” succeeded in *Field of Dreams*, this approach often leaves too much to chance even with the best of ideas. One of the fundamental questions that you must answer is “Who will use this facility?” If you are an OHV club, the answer may be simple, but if you wish to make a profit, then that’s a different matter. Is there a target market that you are trying to reach with this facility? Is there a certain type of OHV rider you are trying to attract? Is it to be purely a local attraction or are you looking to draw from a larger area or both? The answers to these and other related questions need thorough examination and assessment. Not only will they be crucial to determine whether there is profit potential but they will also be useful in deciding the type and size of the facility.

The *Entrepreneur's Guide*, available through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, provides some solid advice on the questions above and other topics when undertaking many different business ventures. In discussing the importance of knowing your market, it states:

"An error in the determination of your target market will not only adversely affect all other sections of the



business plan, it will most certainly increase your advertising and promotion expenses. Accurate information about the size of your market and expected market share helps you predict potential income. Characteristics of the target market include demographic profile (age, income, sex, education); business customer (OHV riders); and geographic parameters (location, size, access). Other important information is the size of the market/expected market share; market segmentation (who else is doing what you want to do), customer buying habits (seasonality, quantity, average expenditure)."

While identifying the market is a must for profit-making ventures, it is still important for non-profit organizations to use some of these principles so that the proposed facility will address the needs of potential users. Getting to know your market will provide key information that can be integrated in the design and development of the facility; information that can be critical to its eventual success.

Visit Existing Facilities

Since you are reading this guide, you already see the need for an OHV facility and may have some idea of the existing facilities in your locality, area or region. Build on this foundation by taking the next step and inventory the sites within your projected market area. Your inventory for each site should include the following information:

Location - Where is the facility? What county and municipality(s) is it in? What kind of access is there to the facility? What type of development, if any, surrounds the facility?

Uses - What type of OHV uses are allowed on site? Are the uses compatible with local land use regulations?

Size - How much acreage does it include? What percentage of the land is restricted due to vulnerable environmental resources such as wetlands, streams and steep slopes? If it is a trail, how many miles long is it?

Quality - Does it provide a good riding experience? Why or why not? What is different or special about the facility that adds to the experience?

Demand - How would you rate the popularity of the facility in terms of numbers of riders using it? Is the facility over-utilized or underutilized?

Design - Is there sufficient parking with space for trailers? Are bathroom facilities adequate? What hospitality amenities and services are provided? Does it appear to meet minimum safety requirements? Are key facilities handicap accessible? Is signage adequate?

Operations - How is the facility managed? If applicable, how many employees? What are their functions? What are the fees to use the facility? What are the costs of operation and maintenance? Do they have a business plan?

Problems - Are there any environmental problems or issues?



Are erosion and sedimentation controls working? Have noise levels been annoying to adjacent landowners? If so, how is this problem being addressed? Is garbage disposal

a problem? Are there any pending actions by the municipality(s) or state regulatory agencies relative to non-compliance or violations of local ordinances or state regulations? If so, what are they about?

Rating - On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), how would you rate this facility in comparison to others you have evaluated?

Getting as much of this kind of information, as possible, will help you understand the current state of affairs while giving you meaningful insights on what your facility should and should not include. Visiting a properly designed and constructed trail and talking with the individual or organization that developed the trail will give you invaluable information on the dos and don'ts of trail planning, design, and construction. If it is a private facility, and the owner or manager has marketed the facility well, you can learn how the target market was determined, as discussed in the previous section. How receptive owners and operators will be to sharing some of the more detailed, business sensitive information will vary, but will be worth the effort to learn as much as you possibly can. Talk with local OHV dealers and clubs to get their view on things, as well. The more information you gather at this stage can only serve to enhance the success of your project.

One final note - If there are state-of-the-art facilities in another area, region or in nearby states, they also may be worth visiting. There are always new and innovative ways of doing things and visiting these sites may give you new insights on locating, designing and operating your facility.

Assess Potential Sites

With the information gathered so far, you will have a better idea of the kind of facility needed as well as the type of property and land characteristics which may be required. Selecting the right site is critical and the decision you make can be the difference



between success and failure. In assessing potential properties, consider and evaluate the following:

Size - This depends on the type of facility you are planning to develop. It is recommended that trails be at least 15 miles long and offer a three to six-hour ride. Tracks, loop trails and other specialty facilities may require less land. Depending on where you will be building your facility, a buffer area may be needed. See sound control.

Access - In general, access will be a major factor in determining your service area. Since service area is determined by driving time, not distance, areas accessible by major highways broaden your market reach. Technically speaking, service areas are determined based on the road system, taking into consideration traffic speeds during the

expected periods of arrival and departure. Service areas are often identified in one hour increments. The condition and capacity of local roads to accommodate the kinds of vehicles expected, especially at peak times, is another important element in evaluating access.

Land Use and Other Local Regulations -

In Pennsylvania, zoning and subdivision regulations are within the jurisdiction of municipal governments cities, boroughs and townships as well as counties, in some instances. If you are considering a large tract of land, it may involve several municipalities and, therefore, requiring multiple approvals. Some may have zoning ordinances while others may not. In any event, it is important to check on the local regulations which may apply to the particular property in question and to its use. Depending on the regulations in place, it may restrict or even prohibit the use you have in mind. At the very least, the regulations are very likely to impact the design and development of your facility.

Adjacent Properties - Current and future conditions around your potential site need to be investigated. If you are going into a relatively developed area, landowners of adjacent properties may see your facility as a threat to the use or value of their properties and become impediments to you getting your project approved at the local level. Perhaps there are development projects being discussed or proposed for an adjacent site that would be a detriment to your project. If the municipality has zoning, understand what the permitted, conditional and prohibited uses are of adjacent properties.

Environmental Concerns - Protecting environmental quality will be an important aspect in developing a site. If the site has

wetlands, is in a water supply area, contains rare or endangered species or has easily erodeable soils, site design and development will need to be undertaken to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse impacts. If the property is an old industrial, "brownfield" site or an abandoned stripmine, environmental remediation may be necessary to clean-up any contamination that still exists.

Infrastructure - Whether the site has the necessary infrastructure to support the type



of facility being planned is highly important. If essential utilities are missing such as sewer, water, waste disposal, electricity, and communications, these items may need to be considered with their added costs.

Suitable Terrain - Is the property conducive to designing and developing a facility that offers a good experience for riders? Existing vegetative cover, topography, soils and bedrock all play a role in assessing the development potential of a property.

Sound Control - Sound control is one of the most critical aspects of design and management for the success of the trail. Only distance, solid barriers and control of sound at its source will effectively abate noise. Buffer areas can include entrance

stations, interior park roads, parking lots, park office, and sound barriers. Another method of controlling noise is through regulation. Maximum decibel levels can be enforced. You can also establish reasonable daily riding hours to minimize noise problems with neighboring properties.

Property Disposition - Fee simple ownership or the leasing of a property or a combination of both are options, depending on the type of facility and the receptiveness of current land owners. If public lands are involved, obtaining the necessary approvals and agreements from the administering agency is a must.

To help you in making the right choice, it is advised that you get some professional help from an engineer or landscape architect who has experience in this area. Consider obtaining their services to undertake the design of the facility. Engaging them early on will give them an opportunity to advise you on the best property for what you want to do and will further increase your chances of success. Other professionals or specialists should be engaged as needed.

Develop a Business Strategy

At this point, either you have determined that your idea isn't going to work out or that your concept is, in fact, feasible and viable and that things are moving forward. If the latter, perhaps you have already obtained an option on the property you are interested in or are continuing your search and whittling down the prospects. In either case, the next step is to layout your idea in the form of a business plan. A business plan is a written document outlining a strategy for starting and operating your business venture including development, marketing,

management, operations and financing elements. A good plan is simple, specific, realistic and complete.

Having a business plan is important for several reasons. First and foremost, it will help you take the necessary actions to successfully launch and grow your business. It puts all the essential pieces together in a clear, coordinated and effective manner. Secondly, it will be a basic tool to communicate your business concept and strategies to others. If you are a non-profit organization, the plan will inform the membership and help develop consensus and commitment. Whether you're a for-profit or non-profit, the plan will be very important in gaining community(s) acceptance and support for the project - an essential step that will be discussed further in the guide. Lastly, the plan is a must to secure external funding whether you go to a financial institution, foundation or seek public funds. The plan will answer many of the questions grant and loan officials require in making funding decisions.

Assess Financial Feasibility of Project

More than likely, the total project cost for acquisition, planning, design, development, operation and maintenance and the ability to marshal the necessary funds to cover these costs will ultimately be the critical factor in deciding to proceed with your project. While this key component of the business plan was touched upon above, it is important to single it out here. Sometimes we start out with the best intention of having the best facility on earth only to run into trouble trying to figure out where to obtain the money to make it happen. If funding is a problem, perhaps the scope of the project could be modified to

reduce cost while still maintaining a quality facility. Maybe it is a type of project that can be phased over a 2, 3, 5-year or more period of time and still be successful. Again, with professional help and advice along the way, alternatives could be developed to match available funding with other solutions.

Gain Cooperation and Support

The more cooperation and support from the community, the better your chances of succeeding. Seeking the necessary approvals at the local level to get OHV projects approved can be difficult. The main reason is often that a wary public may not know what to expect and anticipate the worst. Given this, it is important to develop a strategy for taking your project through the public review process. Here are a few tips:

- Get an early “read” on whether your project will create public controversy. If it will, then you need to decide how you are going to approach it. Perhaps you feel you should proceed to seek approvals from the municipality(s) and deal with the issues during the process or, especially if you have time, you can pro-actively engage the public in different ways to diffuse any controversy before it becomes a problem. The remaining tips support the latter approach.
- Remember your inventory work? Many people you spoke with may have had experiences that you can learn from on how to navigate through the process. If this didn't come up then, contact them now and see if they can help you. See what approaches they took to get their community(s) on-board.
- There may be businesses in your community(s) that will benefit economically from your project. With business plan in hand, go meet with these owners to discuss your project and outline ways in which it may help their businesses. If you can convince them of the added value you will bring, their support could be key.
- Talk to county and municipal officials and to leaders of clubs and organizations. Find out what their perceptions are of your project. What are their concerns? How can you address them? Can you address them?
- Find local “champions.” ATV groups and ATV dealers are certainly good allies. Try to find well-respected individuals in the community who are riders or support OHV activities.
- The adjacent landowners may be the most vociferous in their opposition to your project. You may wish to discuss your plans with your neighbors to identify ways to minimize any potential problems they may have with your project. However, no matter what you do, it may not be good enough. Make sure you are prepared to demonstrate to the municipality the specific efforts you will undertake to mitigate the impacts to adjacent landowners.
- Overall, just be prepared. Have all your information together, anticipate difficult questions and be ready with appropriate answers. When you go to meetings, bring some champions with you. Be open and honest about what you're doing. Sometimes it's the misunderstandings that fuel people's opposition.

Obtain Local Permits and Approvals

At this point, it is to your advantage to have retained the services of a highly regarded land use attorney. Often times, having a lawyer with a strong reputation can be enough to eliminate some problems before they begin. The major advantage is that a good land use attorney knows how to navigate through the approval process and to take appropriate legal steps as the situation requires.

With the help of your professionals, you will have everything in order and be ready to proceed with obtaining all the necessary approvals and permits from the local government. Remember, zoning officers and building permit officers are messengers. They are charged with administering the



ordinances and regulations enacted by the governing body. While their duties are specifically defined, they can hinder or help you in the process. Viewing them as obstacles or adversaries will be counter-productive. Accommodate their requests and, if problems arise, there are relief procedures your attorney can advise you to exercise.

Most likely you will need an approved National Pollutant Discharge Elimination

System (NPDES) and an approved erosion and sediment control plan from the local county conservation district. It would be a good practice to contact the Conservation District early in the process to go over your design concept and get their reaction. Again, your professional engineer or land-scape architect will be able to prepare an appropriate erosion and sedimentation control plan for the site and address any issues in obtaining District approval. Refer to page 10 for other environmental regulations, permits and reviews.

Other Tasks

There are certainly many other steps that will need to be taken once you get the “green light” from the municipality(s) in order to make your idea a reality. Our purpose was to highlight those critical elements in the process of planning your project. We hope that this guide will help you in reaching your OHV goals and that your project is successful and is enjoyed by many OHV enthusiasts.

To help you in your research, we have included various references and resource materials from the public and private sectors relative to OHV topics and issues. The following section highlights a particularly useful document that was just recently released from DCNR.

Pennsylvania Trail Design Manual for Off-Highway Recreation Vehicles

A recently published guide that provides very useful information for the planning and design of OHV trails is the [*Pennsylvania Trail Design Manual for Off-Highway Recreation Vehicles*](#). Prepared by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural

Resources, this comprehensive manual is intended for trail enthusiasts, private enterprises, government agencies and OHV organizations and clubs.

If you are beginning your quest to develop an OHV facility, it is strongly recommended that you read the first two chapters of the manual. *Chapter 1 Planning*, describes the planning process including data gathering, engaging the community, understanding the issues, feasibility, creating a vision and finalizing the plan. It walks through each of the important steps in getting a project completed.

Chapter 2 Concept Design, explains that part of the trail planning process when the physical feasibility of constructing the facility is investigated. It includes the inventory of existing conditions, identification of site opportunities and constraints, establishing the physical specifications of the trail and developing the preliminary trail system layout. It also discusses the need to meet user expectations and the permits that may be required.

There are 6 chapters in all encompassing over 140 pages. The other chapters are *Trail Design, Trail Signing, Trail Construction and Trail Maintenance*. To obtain a copy of the manual, call (717)787-7672 or go to web site:<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/publications>

CHECKLIST

For your convenience, we have provided a checklist noting all the components mentioned in the text:

- ___ Know your Market
 - Potential users
 - Demographic characteristics
 - Market area

- ___ Inventory and Evaluate Existing Sites
 - Location
 - Type of facility
 - Size
 - Special characteristics
 - Demand
 - Operations
 - Problems
 - Rating

- ___ Assess Potential Sites
 - Size
 - Access
 - Land use
 - Adjacent properties
 - Environmental Concerns
 - Sound
 - Property Disposition

- ___ Prepare a Business Plan
 - Financial strategy
 - Marketing
 - Management and operation
 - Maintenance

- ___ The Bottom Line
 - Cost
 - Sufficient funds and cash flow

- ___ Gain Local Cooperation and Support
 - Preparation and being pro-active
 - Promoting value added aspects
 - Know the opposition

- ___ Local Approvals
 - Consult with attorney
 - Follow prescribed permitting procedures
 - Get all necessary approvals

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Business Development Sources:

Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) provide other valuable information and services on how to start a business. SBDC consultants help entrepreneurs develop the planning, management, and financial skills necessary to make their businesses succeed. There are 16 centers located throughout the state to help you with accounting, record keeping, business planning, market research, financial analysis, and environmental compliance. In most cases the services are free. For locations of the Small Business Development Center nearest you visit www.pasbdc.org

Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). The mission of this state agency is to foster opportunities for businesses and communities to succeed and thrive in a global economy. DCED has Information on starting a new business or obtaining copies of the Entrepreneur's Guide. Call toll free 1-800-379-7448 or visit their website at www.inventpa.com

Hurdle: The Book on Business Planning How to Develop and Implement a Successful Business Plan by Tim Berry. Topics covered in the book include initial assessment, picking your plan, what you sell, forecasting your sales, the bottom line and many other valuable items. Copies of the book can be obtained at most bookstores and libraries.

On Target: The Book on Marketing Plans How to Develop and Implement a Successful Marketing Plan by Tim Berry and Doug Wilson. The book allows you to develop a marketing plan that will describe your market, plan your strategy, forecast sales, budget expenses, assign responsibility and tell the world. The available software actually builds your outline. Again, contact a bookstore or library for a copy of the book.

Environmental Regulations, Permits, Reviews:

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). DEP is the state regulatory agency responsible for administering state environmental laws and regulations. If your project has potential impacts on air or water quality (non-point) or on sensitive environmental resources, it is very likely that some state regulations will apply and appropriate permits will be required. If you have questions about state non-point water quality regulations, contact the Bureau of Watershed Management, Division of Waterways, Wetlands and Erosion Control at (717) 787-6827. For air quality questions, call the Bureau of Air Quality, Division of Permits at (717)-787-4325. A directory of DEP offices may also be found at www.dep.state.pa.us

To learn if your site is near a public water supply, use the buffering feature in eMap Pa. At the DEP website, www.dep.state.pa.us, enter DEP Keyword "emap pa" and read the help file on "Buffer a New Point" for further instructions.

County Conservation Districts. There are 66 County Conservation Districts established throughout the state. Districts have varying levels of responsibilities for regulating

erosion and control impacts and issuing permits and for regulating stormwater discharges related to construction activities as delegated to them by DEP. Currently, 36 Districts have been given DEP authorization for issuing general permits for water obstructions and encroachments. A directory of county offices can be found on the following website. We recommend them as your first point of contact for non-point pollution information and permits:

www.pacd.org/districts/directory.htm

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)-Bureau of Forestry - Pennsylvania Natural Diversity

Inventories (PNDI) Environmental Review. This inventory identifies rare, threatened and endangered species of animals and plants. This agency will let you know if your facility will be disrupting sensitive areas. Contact the Ecological Services Section at (717) 772-0258.

U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service administers the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) The Act mandates environmental clearances for threatened and endangered species. Such reviews would go directly to their State College, Pa. Office. Phone: (814) 234-4090. Website: www.fws.gov

Public Funding Sources:

DCNR-Bureau of Recreation and Conservation - Grants are available for planning, land acquisition or development of OHV facilities and trails from both the Snowmobile/ATV Fund & Pennsylvania Recreational Trails Program - Phone: (717) 772-3704 or visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us

DCED - Community Revitalization

Program - Grant money is available to non-profits for trail projects. Call 1-800-379-7448 or visit their website at www.inventpa.com The grant application can be filled out on line.

Other PA Sources of Information and Assistance:

DCNR - Snowmobile/ATV Registration and Titles

- Snowmobiles and ATVs owned by Pennsylvania residents and used in the state for recreational purposes must be registered with DCNR. Registration Section at 1-866-545-2476 or Website: www.dcnr.state.pa.us

DCNR - Bureau of Forestry, Recreation

Section - For information regarding snowmobile, ATV, hiking, equestrian and mountain bike trails on state forest land. Phone: (717) 783-7941 or Website: www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry

PA Snowmobile/ATV Advisory

Committee - The Council advises the Secretary of DCNR on chapter 77 of Pa. Vehicle Code including existing and proposed registration, standards, policies, practices, enforcement, fees, and use and operation of snowmobiles and ATVs on public land, Phone: (717) 772-9087 or website www.dcnr.state.pa.us (Select "Councils").

Allegheny National Forest - Trails for ATVs, trail bikes, and mountain bikes. For further information call (814) 927-6628 or visit the website at www.fs.fed.us/r9/allegheny

PA Off-Highway Vehicle Association

- Recognized as the voice of ATV and trail bike communities. Website contains information on membership, meeting minutes, newsletter and special events. www.paohv.org

National References:

American Trails - The organization enhances and protects America's network of interconnected trails of all kinds by finding common ground and promoting cooperation among all trail interests.
www.americantrails.org

ATV Safety Institute/ATV Training - A national organization that promotes ATV safety education and awareness primarily through its *ATV RidersCourse*.
www.atvsafety.org

National Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Conservation Council - The council is an educational foundation that promotes safe, responsible, family oriented off-highway recreation experiences. The website includes contacts, ride guide, library, workshops and much more.
www.nohvcc.org

National Trails Training Partnership - A forum of diverse trail organizations and agencies to improve training opportunities for the nationwide trails community. Website has a calendar of classes, workshops and training sessions. www.nttp.net

Tread Lightly - An organization that educates Americans to be more environmentally responsible when they recreate. TREAD stands for T-travel and recreate with minimum impact, R-respect the environment and rights of others, E-educate yourself-plan and prepare before you go, A-allow for future use of the outdoors-leave it better than you found it, D-discover the rewards of responsible recreation. www.TreadLightly.org

Photographs on pages 3, 4, 5 courtesy of Paragon Adventure Park.

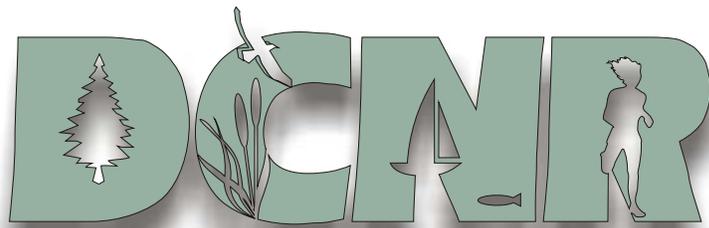
TRAIL ACCESS

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TRAIL OPEN TO
HIKING, A.T.V.'S AND
HORSES

CLOSED AT DARK
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Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Edward G. Rendell, Governor
Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, Michael DiBerardinis, Secretary
Bureau of Recreation & Conservation
