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DNR Promotes Safe and Responsible Use of Michigan's ORV Trail System

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Michigan is known nationwide for its extensive off-road vehicle (ORV) trail system. More than 3,200 miles of designated trail routes and 2,198 acres of scramble areas are located throughout the state on state- and federally owned forest lands.

Within Michigan's designated trail system, 24 percent are designated and maintained for motorcycle use only, 50 percent are designated for motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and 24 percent are designated as ORV routes -- open to ORVs of all sizes, including trucks, motorcycles and ATVs.



In addition to the designated ORV trail and route system, thousands of miles of state and national forest roads in the Upper Peninsula are open to ORV operation.

But it's a new state law that allows northern Lower Peninsula counties the option of opening the far right portion of their roads and/or streets to ORV travel that is the biggest change in state ORV policy since the early 1990s.

Under the new law, only counties located in the northern Lower Peninsula and Upper Peninsula may open their roads to ORVs. This includes Mason, Lake, Osceola, Clare, Gladwin, Arenac, Bay and any county north of those counties. Huron, Midland and Isabella counties are not included. State and federal roads and highways are not included.

"It is important for all ORV enthusiasts to know they may not legally operate their ORV on a public street or road until the county, city, village or township approves a specific ordinance that allows it," said Steve Kubisiak, recreation and trails program coordinator for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. "We encourage all riders to contact the counties direct to determine the status of local ordinances."



Kubisiak said the new law also voided previous agreements the DNR had with local governmental units in Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Montmorency, Iosco and Ogemaw counties that authorized existing state-designated trails to use county roads in order to connect trails together.

"We are working with the counties to reestablish these routes so trail users will know exactly where they may safely and legally ride their ORV, particularly for those visitors who wish to ride into town to purchase fuel, food or find a place to stay for the night."

To assist ORV riders even further, the DNR has improved the quality and availability of [ORV maps](#), which can be accessed on the DNR's Web site at www.michigan.gov/dnr under Recreation, Camping & Boating.

"These maps accurately represent the current trail system and will help riders to stay on the trails," Kubisiak said.

Designated scramble areas include the Black Mountain Scramble Area in Cheboygan County, St. Helen Motorsport Area in Roscommon County, Bull Gap Hill Climb in Oscoda County, Silver Lake

State Park in Oceana County and the Mounds ORV Park in Genesee County.

[Michigan's ORV trail program](#) is 100 percent user pay, funded exclusively from ORV licenses fees. An ORV license is required when an ORV is operated on public trails, roads, designated scramble areas and frozen public waters. The fund is protected by the state constitution and may be used only to pay for trail maintenance, new trail development, law enforcement, safety education, and restoration of damage caused by illegal ORV use on public lands. A small percentage also is set aside for administration.

The ORV trail maintenance program in Michigan is carried out by nonprofit clubs and public agencies that receive grants from the DNR. These trail sponsors are responsible for grooming, signing and brushing the trails.

"We rely on these partnerships to accomplish all of the on-the-ground work done by the groups who apply for and are awarded grants," Kubisiak said. "Proper maintenance of the designated trails is a vital component of the program."

The DNR spends approximately \$1.6 million each year on the maintenance of existing designated trails. In addition, the DNR annually spends about \$400,000 on restoring damage caused by illegal ORV use.

"Riding ORVs off designated trails and roads on public lands is illegal and can seriously damage the environment," Kubisiak said. "Riding through streams and wetlands can tear up the stream bed, river bank or wetlands, causing loss of habitat for fish and other aquatic wildlife species."



Riders should only cross streams where there is a bridge or culvert, he said.

"Illegal hill climbs are another major problem," Kubisiak added. "Some riders just can't resist the temptation to test their machines by climbing hills. This activity is okay if done in a designated riding area or trail where the impacts can be monitored and managed, but it is illegal otherwise. Illegal hill climbs create ugly scars and erosion on the forest landscape and can jeopardize future legal riding opportunities on public lands."



Riders and other forest recreation enthusiasts who observe illegal ORV use are encouraged to call the DNR's Report all Poaching hotline at (800) 292-7800.

To help riders better understand what is safe and responsible riding and what is not, the DNR has published [The Handbook of Michigan Off-Road Vehicle Laws](#), which is available from DNR Operations Service Centers and most ORV dealers. The publication also may be found online at www.offroad-ed.com/mi/handbook/laws.htm.

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