Wharton State Forest

Path Forward

Gaining Concurrence On an Approach

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DEP's Objectives- Developing an Agreeable Approach

- ❖ Work with likeminded Stakeholder groups to develop an approach that is agreeable to the Stakeholders and meets the DEP's objectives

- ❖ Published DEP objectives:

  - ❖ Identify routes currently suitable for motorized access;

  - ❖ Improve enforcement efforts and coordinate Emergency Response to better protect the forest for present and future generations

  - ❖ Focus maintenance efforts

  - ❖ Improve public awareness of impacts of use and of abuse to the forest

  - ❖ Protect endangered species, habitat, and cultural resources.

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Objective 1- Identify Routes Currently Suitable for Motorized Access

❖ Develop agreed upon criteria for road closures- Next slide

❖ Propose three classifications of roads:

    ❖ **<u>Designated</u>**- regularly maintained

    ❖ **<u>Non-designated</u>**- minimally maintained- (i.e clear fallen trees to prevent new go arounds)- consider signs reading "4WD Recommended"

    ❖ **<u>Closed</u>**- all closed roads must be posted

❖ Baseline definition of "road" is if it appears on USGS topographical map as "unimproved road"

❖ Permanent closures must go through a formal process and any temporary closures should have an expiration

    ❖ Develop an official form that covers permanent, seasonal, and temporary closures moving forward.

    ❖ These forms should be on public file and available online.

    ❖ All new proposals, road by road, (not en mass) should be open for a public review period, even if only in the interest of transparency.

Recommend Criteria for Closing a Road

- Roads that are *open*:

  - By default, all roads are open unless they are closed (temporarily or otherwise) according to the standards set below.

- Criteria for Roads to be *temporarily* closed:

  - Based on scientific evidence of measurable impact (i.e. quantifiable observed evidence of impact resulting from motor vehicles, mere observation of a species does not justify closure)

- Criteria for Roads to be *permanently* closed:

  - Any new road created by the forest fire service in the future.

  - Any road created by the forest fire service in the last 15 years that goes through a sensitive lowland or wetland, and is obviously still being used today.

  - Any new road or extension of a road created by illegally driving off-road within the past 10 years- length of time a road has been present must be verified by USGS Topo maps and historical aerial maps

Recommend Criteria for Closing a Road

❖ Criteria for Roads to be *blocked* at certain points:

 ❖ Any road next to a river where people kayak, swim or picnic shall remain open but have posts sunk in the sand to prevent drivers from driving on the river slope or a barrier built at the end of the trail. Barrier should either extend far enough into the woods to discourage go arounds. Should be enough room for at least two cars to park and be able to turn around

 ❖ Where little-used roads have been created in the past that are actually detrimentally blocking a significant stream from it's natural course, then the road shall be removed at the stream. On either side of the stream, a significant parking and turnaround clearing shall be created

 ❖ Where long-existing roads dead-end, two posts shall be erected to discourage any further road creation. If possible, a turn-around shall be created if not already existing.

Objective 2 - Improve Enforcement efforts and coordinate Emergency Response to better protect the forest for present and future generations

- ❖ Leverage groups- act as eyes and ears

- ❖ Publicize how to report:

    - ❖ Party hot spots

    - ❖ Destruction in progress

    - ❖ Maintenance issues- i.e. tree blocking road

- ❖ Post signs (i.e. 1-877-WarnDEP) with information on how to report issues near hot spots- so that anyone with a cell phone knows who to call

- ❖ Leverage cameras in hot spots

- ❖ Push for legal ATV/4x4 parks in order to reduce pressure on state forests

Objective 2 - Improve Enforcement efforts and coordinate Emergency Response to better protect the forest for present and future generations

❖ Focused policing efforts- leveraging inputs from the public

❖ Consider a "Right to retrieve" provision that would allow hunters to retrieve hunting dogs that have strayed into a closed area and are at risk. This should also be permissive for tracking and recovering a wounded animal

❖ Any new fire breaks made need to be posted immediately and should be closed off as soon as possible

❖ Towing companies should have to report every time they have to pull someone out on state lands. This could help the FFS to identify problem areas before they get out of hand

  ❖ These and any reports submitted that can possibly affect response times need to be forwarded to the FFS

Objective 3 – Focus maintenance efforts

❖ Focus maintenance on Designated Routes

❖ Minimal to no focus on non-designated routes

❖ Create living, changing recreational-user feedback form of forest management:

  ❖ Adopt-A-Trail

  ❖ SPS approved but volunteer implemented seasonal closures with a written yearly plan for each individual road

  ❖ Recreational-user partnership in small grant writing and planning for different sub-regions of Wharton

❖ Wharton could/should be divided into different volunteer sub-regions so users can take OWNERSHIP of their maintenance efforts. Example: SJER and IMGC would proudly take on a region of the Atsion/Atco Raceway area

Objective 3 – Focus maintenance efforts

- ❖ Leverage group resources

  - ❖ Clean ups

  - ❖ Posting Signage/Reposting torn down signs

  - ❖ Build/Maintain barriers

  - ❖ Remove fallen trees

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Objective 3 – Focus maintenance efforts

- Expansion of the Enduro MENU plan to include greater firecut mileage IN ADDITION TO established single track connectors (as outline by the CMP and the original MENU training materials). This expansion would:
  - Decrease Sunday enduro road conflicts with other user groups
  - Decrease enduro impact on maintained and unmaintained roads
  - Promote the quality and safety of the enduros held under NJ Special Use Permit (S.U.P.)
  - Allow greater rotation and variations in courses to manage enduro impact in a responsible manner and reduce concentration of enduro S.U.P. activity

Objective 4 – Improve public awareness of impacts of use and of abuse to the forest

❖ Continue to pursue RTP funds year over year for education, which includes brochures

❖ Hold seminars at the visitor center at Batsto to show where we came from, EG damage and road closure, to public forum and cooperation between user groups, forestry, enforcement and DEP. Not just for user groups, but for all visitors to Batsto

❖ Require any 4x4 club that uses any NJ State Forest to subscribe to tread lightly United 4WD Assn. etc, also affiliate OTNJ with Tread Lightly, United 4wd Assn. etc.

Objective 5 - Protect endangered species, habitat, and cultural resources.

❖ Endangered Species-

  ❖ Proposed closures should be based on scientific evidence of measurable impact (i.e. quantifiable observed evidence of impact resulting from motor vehicles, mere observation of a species does not justify closure)

❖ Cultural Resources

  ❖ Use of physical barriers should be used to protect ruins/historical sites (e.g. fences around Harrisville, bollards could be used to project the foundations at Friendship)

  ❖ Where physical barriers are not practical, cameras could be used for enforcement