



PA Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee Meeting – December 8, 2021

Comments on the Northcentral PA ATV Initiative Pilot Program

Senator Yaw and the members of the Pennsylvania Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee:

My name is Walter Nicholson, President of the Susquehanna Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Our chapter and the Lloyd Wilson chapter which has signed on to these comments represent over 500 local members, most of which live in Lycoming County, Clinton County and surrounding areas. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to you on the Northcentral PA ATV Initiative, and particularly on the proposed ATV trail connector in the Tiadaghton State Forest.

The mission of Trout Unlimited and our local chapter, founded in 1964, is to

- Preserve our clean, cold water resources for future generations to enjoy in the natural, wild state,
- Protect the habitat, water quality, and ecological diversity of our most pristine watersheds,
- Restore streams impacted by past natural resource extraction activities (eg. coal mining, timbering, poor land use practices), and to
- Pass along these values to the next generation.

Given our stated mission, we come to you today to voice our concern that the proposed extension of an ATV trail connector in the Tiadaghton State Forest, and more particularly, the proposed route down the forestry road along Trout Run, tributary to Pine Creek at Cammal, will result in the degradation of a currently protected and restored high quality cold water stream. As is well known, this wild and scenic stream has suffered in the past from deforestation and legacy erosion and sedimentation impacts of an old forestry road running immediately along its banks. Recognizing this problem, the Bureau of Forestry has appropriately closed the middle three miles of the road to vehicular traffic for many years. This wise policy decision has resulted in more vegetative cover and a substantial reduction of erosion and sediment after storm runoff events which, in turn, has significantly helped to restore stream habitat for aquatic macroinvertebrates and wild brook trout and reduced the volumes and loadings of sediment and the resulting particulate phosphorus discharges to Pine Creek.

The opening of Trout Run Road and other forestry roads which are located very close to sensitive high quality cold water streams for the purpose of intrusive and high-impact ATV recreational use is ill-advised, and will, no doubt, result in additional water quality pollution and ecological habitat destruction. (Please see published literature references below.) The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) is required by the Pennsylvania Constitution in Article 1, Section 27 to protect the natural resources of the Commonwealth for future generations. Allowing a back-sliding of environmental protection of wild restored high quality streams for the sole purpose of increasing opportunities for ATV dirt trail travel and dubious economic benefit is clearly against the constitutional mandate for the DCNR to conserve and protect the clean water, air, and natural scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment for the benefit of all the people.

The Tiadaghton State Forest was not identified in the Fiscal Code amendment of 2020 as being part of the required Regional ATV Pilot Program, and so we feel it appropriate to go on record as respectfully requesting to the DCNR that

- The ATV trail connector from Potter County down to Haneyville not be considered for implementation before and until the analysis of the full ecological and environmental ramifications of the pilot program is completed;
- The presently gated three mile section of Trout Run Road not be opened to any motorized vehicular traffic, including ATVs and UTVs due to its close proximity to the stream and lack of vegetated forest floor buffer zones to absorb and mitigate storm runoff;
- Any potential routes considered for ATV travel in Tiadaghton State Forest be kept as close to PA Route 44 as feasible, and limited to areas as far away as possible from streams and low-impact, non-motorized scenic recreation trails (e.g. Black Forest Trail and connecting trails), and
- The currently closed old Lebo Vista Road from lower Trout Run Road up to the Lebo Vista not be considered as an ATV trail due to its steep, winding, narrow, and dangerous condition, and high potential for safety and erosion and sedimentation problems;

Please know that the Susquehanna Chapter's position on this issue is not about liking or not liking ATVs, nor against ATVs as useful vehicles on private property or when driven legally on suitable designated trails. The issue is primarily based on the fact that the Fiscal Code amendment of November 2020 was passed and signed into law without appropriate transparency and public input. As such, it has now put the public and the PA DCNR in a reactive mode, working to catch up on how to minimize the damage from the legislatively-mandated ATV trail development scheme, and to do the Commonwealth's constitutional responsibility to protect its natural resources.

Pine Creek Valley and its nationally-recognized scenic and pristine tributary streams and watersheds are now used by increasingly large numbers of people who benefit the local economy, but who also cherish the quiet solitude for hiking, fishing, nature walks, non-motorized biking and sight-seeing that this area already provides. The PA Legislature and DCNR need to now act proactively to prevent the degradation of the environment and infringement on the right to quiet enjoyment of those users from intrusive and detrimental ATV traffic. Otherwise, the DCNR and law enforcement agencies will be dealing with the trouble and costs of a great deal of after-the-fact policing and damage mitigation which could have been avoided.

Thank you very much for the opportunity for our conservation organization to present our comments and for your consideration of how to responsibly make public policy and legislation to preserve our scenic watersheds and wild cold water resources for all of the people to cherish and enjoy.

Documented studies and scientific paper bibliographies on impacts of ATV traffic on forest environments can be found in the following publications:

USDA Publication 08231811-SDTDC, December 2008, *Effects of All-Terrain Vehicles on Forested Lands and Grassland*, found at <https://www.fs.fed.us/t-d/pubs/pdf/ATV/08231811L.pdf>

USGS Open File Report 2007-1353, *Environmental Effects of Off-Highway Vehicles on BLM Lands*, found at <https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2007/1353/report.pdf>

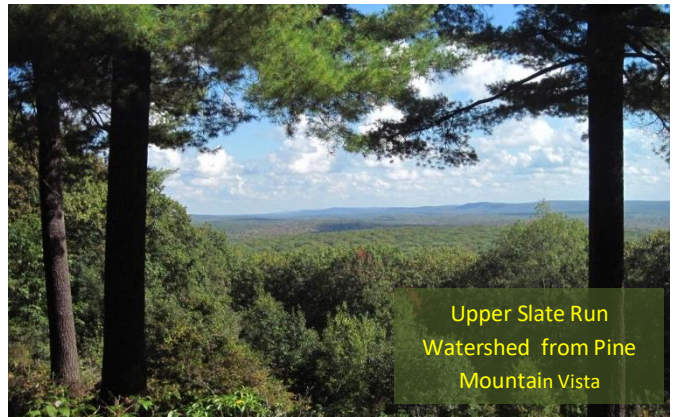
Internet searches can readily produce a large number of images, websites, and blogs from ATV user and promotional groups which demonstrate ATV users having fun while causing environmental impacts and erosion, including some on PA DCNR State Forest Lands:



The Pine Creek Valley Watersheds East of PA Route 44 – Very Special Places to Protect



Pine Creek Valley from Hemlock Mountain on the Black Forest Trail



Upper Slate Run Watershed from Pine Mountain Vista



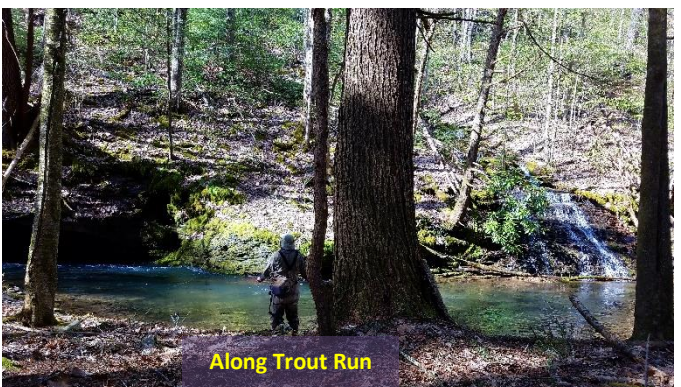
Manor Falls in Slate Run Gorge



Slate Run near Red Run



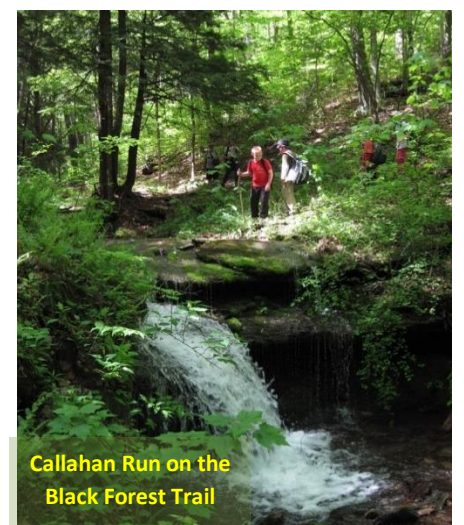
Trout Run



Along Trout Run



Cedar Run at Tumbling Run



Callahan Run on the Black Forest Trail