



**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Timothy D. Schaeffer, Executive Director**

**Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee
Informational Meeting on Tiadaghton State Forest ATV Pilot Connector
Williamsport, Pennsylvania
December 8, 2021**

Good Morning Chairman Yaw, Chairwoman Comitta, and members of the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee. Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today to provide input on the proposed Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) ATV Regional Trail Connector Pilot (ATV Pilot).

My name is Tim Schaeffer and I am the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (Commission), the state agency dedicated to protecting, conserving, and enhancing the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and providing fishing and boating opportunities.

The Commission is responsible for the management of the Commonwealth's aquatic resources on behalf of all Pennsylvanians. While the development and promotion of outdoor recreational opportunities is generally supported by the Commission, impacts on existing aquatic resources and associated recreational angling opportunities must also be considered.

Pennsylvania streams support robust wild trout populations that provide for significant recreational angling opportunities and economic activity. The DCNR State Forest Lands support abundant Eastern Brook Trout populations as the predominantly forested landscape provides for exceptional habitat and water quality. The conservation of Brook Trout populations aligns with the Commission's Strategic Plan and the Strategic Plan for Management of Trout Fisheries in Pennsylvania, as well as DCNR's State Forest Resource Management Plan. Eastern Brook Trout are also a Species of Greatest Conservation Need identified in the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan. As such, wild trout populations residing in northcentral Pennsylvania must be considered in future expansion of All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) use on DCNR lands.

Existing ATV opportunities developed for the 2021 season have been reportedly successful. To date, the Commission has not been made aware of substantial impacts to high-quality aquatic resources or recreational angling opportunities. Expansion of the ATV Pilot should continue in a manner that minimizes impacts to our high-quality aquatic resources and avoids impacts to recreational angling opportunities. The following comments are provided to assist DCNR in developing ATV opportunities while minimizing potential impacts to our aquatic resources and maintaining quality recreational angling opportunities:

- Utilization of existing road and trail infrastructure

The Commission encourages the further expansion of the ATV Pilot to continue to utilize existing road and trail infrastructure to the greatest extent practicable. The development of new road and trail infrastructure could lead to increased erosion and sedimentation, reduced riparian vegetation and buffering capacity, and Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) impacts at road and stream crossings. Utilization of existing infrastructure will reduce operation and maintenance costs for DCNR while minimizing the potential for additional aquatic resource impacts. Funding that may have been allocated to develop new road and trail infrastructure could be used instead to upgrade existing infrastructure to make ecological improvements.

- Avoid routes along stream corridors and minimize road and stream crossings

Given the linear nature of both road and stream systems, it is impossible to develop routes where the two will not intersect. The Commission recognizes this fact and encourages the development of routes that minimize travel along the stream corridor and limit the number of road and stream crossings. Routes that parallel stream corridors increase the potential for erosion and sedimentation inputs into our streams if there is not an adequate riparian buffer between the road and the stream. Reducing road and stream crossings minimizes potential for AOP impacts and reduces access points for those ATV users that might stray from the trail. Reducing contact between the road/trail system and stream systems will minimize the potential for unauthorized use of the stream corridor by ATV users as well as minimize overall aquatic resource impacts.

- Sound Erosion and Sedimentation (E&S) controls and siting in areas with reduced erosion potential

Due to the increased travel volume associated with the allowance of ATV travel on DCNR Forestry roads and trails, it is imperative that sound E&S controls be implemented on roads open to ATV travel. This is especially true in areas with increased erosion potential like steep slopes and trails without improved surfaces. Where steep slopes cannot be avoided, measures should be taken to stabilize the surface and manage the stormwater to minimize sediment inputs. Roads and trails that are suitable should be considered for the placement of Driving Surface Aggregate (DSA) to reduce dust and sedimentation resulting from increased travel volumes. Trails with dirt or unimproved surfaces that are suitable for snowmobile travel

during winter conditions will not always be suitable for ATV travel, especially during wet weather conditions. Therefore, the Commission recommends that designated ATV trails on State Forest Lands continue to only be open from the Friday before Memorial Day through the last full weekend in September. This will reduce erosion and sediment by avoiding use during the wettest months of the year and limit impacts to more sensitive watersheds. Increased attention to E&S controls as road and trail routes are considered will also help limit impacts to our aquatic resources.

- Enforcement-related needs

The Commission continues to have concerns over law enforcement associated with the ATV Pilot. It has been reported that law enforcement conflicts with the 2021 ATV Pilot were relatively minor, and we hope that continues. However, with the expansion of the ATV Pilot, it is expected that the trail systems will see increased use and the potential for increasing law enforcement conflict. It is recognized that many ATV-related law enforcement conflicts result from unauthorized use of public land and would exist with or without the ATV Pilot program. Regardless, increased use of the trail system will increase the potential for users to stray from the trail and substantially impact our aquatic resources. As such, adequate law enforcement capacity is needed to respond to increased use by ATV riders. Additionally, it was reported by Commission staff that trails were well marked to ensure users adhere to authorized routes. The Commission encourages the continued use of adequate signage to prevent unauthorized ATV travel in potentially sensitive areas.

- Avoidance of Wilderness Trout Streams and Class A Wild Trout Streams to prevent conflicts with anglers seeking wilderness or high-quality wild trout angling

Wilderness Trout Streams and Class A Wild Trout Streams represent the best of Pennsylvania's wild trout resources. These are recreationally important and biologically sensitive resources. The Commission created the Wilderness Trout Stream program in 1969 to preserve the potential for anglers to experience a wild trout angling experience in a remote, natural, and unspoiled environment where anthropogenic disruptive activities are minimized. Stream sections included in this program qualify for designation as Exceptional Value under Chapter 93, which represents the highest level of protection from the Department of Environmental Protection. In 1983, the Class A Wild Trout Stream designation was established and is a science-based designation that recognizes the unique and special resources of a strong, sustainable wild trout population that can support a high-quality recreational fishery.

Many Wilderness Trout Streams and Class A Wild Trout Streams in northcentral Pennsylvania may overlap with areas considered for ATV trail development. ATV travel undoubtedly has the potential to adversely impact the ability to experience a wild trout angling in a remote, natural, and unspoiled environment. For example, the noise from ATVs can be heard for long distances depending on the terrain. As such, routes that travel within audible range of Wilderness Trout Streams should be avoided.

Overall, expanded riding opportunities for ATV users will likely continue to grow. Ensuring that riders stay on designated roads and trails is imperative for this pilot program from the Commission's perspective. Development of sound policy and guidance and avoiding ecologically sensitive areas will help ensure that expanded ATV use in northcentral Pennsylvania limits the impacts on important wetlands, streams, riparian areas, and those seeking recreational angling opportunities in remote settings.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I welcome any questions.