

PA Senate Briefing on Tiadaghton State Forest ATV Pilot Connector

December 8, 2021

Testimony by Cynthia Bower for the Pine Creek Preservation Association

My name is Cynthia Bower. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am a member of the Pine Creek Preservation Association and will be providing testimony for PCPA.

PCPA has over 1100 members, a majority of which reside in five townships representing approximately forty percent (40%) of the Pine Creek watershed. Over fifty percent (50%) of the entire watershed is comprised of State lands, including the Tiadaghton State Forest.

Since 1978, PCPA has worked with government entities and other organizations to develop conservation plans. Most recently, "Pine Creek Valley - Early Action Recommendations," a 2005 report done for DCNR, features an overwhelming message: "that protection of the character of Pine Creek is critical. The people that live and work here want to keep it a special place" – one in which they can find peace, solitude, clean air and water, and a vast, healthy forest ecosystem away from traffic, noise, and the effects of development. The overarching recommendation was for "a low impact, low volume, high yield tourism model one traveler at a time."

In 1985, DER and now DCNR was mandated to register ATVs and develop ATV trails. In 1986, DER was mandated to approve two hundred twenty-two (222) miles of ATV trails that had been created primarily by ATV users. Subsequently, the eighteen (18) mile Haneyville ATV Trail System, Tiadaghton State Forest, was developed, questionably adjacent to the Miller Run Natural Area. In 2001, DCNR imposed a moratorium on development of new ATV trails on State land.

In July and August, 2021, I walked six-and-one-half (6-1/2) miles of the Haneyville system and documented forty-four (44) mudholes, forty-eight (48) trail bypasses, and one-hundred-and-nine (109) areas of trail destruction. These included deeply rutted, wet and eroded areas, some of which were two-and-a half (2-1/2) feet deep; trail widening from six (6) to twenty (20) feet; running water in the trail ruts; and areas of multiple bypasses. In some places, the original trail was all but impossible to identify. This type of activity causes further devastation to the integrity of the forest as the trails fragment what had been undisturbed ground; promotes invasive species; compacts the soil; and fills the air with roar, dust, and exhaust. There are miles of this degradation at Haneyville.

Nonetheless, more mandates in 2018 and 2020 required DCNR and PennDOT to "implement the full Northcentral Pennsylvania ATV initiative and create a network of ATV trails connecting Clinton County to the New York border. . ." and to establish a Regional ATV Pilot Program for State Forests and Parks.

These mandates are open-ended, with no real constraints to trail development or evaluation of environmental and safety impacts to the forests, the communities they pass through, or the public at large. Economic development and the desire for speed and distance

seem to be the driving factors. But in the nearly twenty (20) years the Bloody Skillet ATV Trail in the Sproul State Forest has been in use, ***not one commercial business is visible today in either of the gateway communities of Orviston or Monument.***

The Central Mountains ATV Association's website has a map of existing and proposed ATV trails throughout Northcentral Pennsylvania. "Revised 4/2021," the map shows "Proposed Connector data provided by Larson Design Group and PaDCNR." The proposed trails – just those for the Tiadaghton State Forest from Haneyville to Slate Run – would be devastating. Marked sections of Lebo Road and Trout Run Road have been closed to vehicular traffic for many years. Trout Run Road closely parallels an Exceptional Value stream through a wild mountain hollow. Lebo Road is narrow and steep. ATVs in this area would cause unprecedented damage. Likewise, ATV use on Slate Run and Manor Fork Roads would be detrimental to the quality of the forest experience. Who or what is to keep ATVers from traveling off trail to the many other roads and trails throughout the State Forest? Has money adequately been allocated to police and maintain trails wherever the ATVers might decide to go, authorized or not? What is the real, long-term cost of this Pilot Connector and of ***all*** DCNR ATV trails?

We believe ATV trails to be contrary to a healthy forest ecosystem and to the rights guaranteed under Article 1 Section 27 of our State Constitution. For these reasons, PCPA opposes the Tiadaghton State Forest ATV Pilot Connector.

Cynthia Bower
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