



September 9, 2015

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Meredith Hatfield, Chair  
NH Council on Resources and Development  
NH Office of Energy and Planning  
107 Pleasant Street, Johnson Hall  
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Ms. Hatfield:

The Society for the Protection of NH Forests was a strong advocate for the State's acquisition of the Nash Stream property which led to the creation of the Nash Stream State Forest. Our involvement was driven by the significant impacts this area has long had on the regional forest-based economy, scenic forest landscapes, fish and wildlife habitats, and public recreation.

The first Nash Stream Management Plan, adopted in 1995, recognized these traditional land uses and called for the Department of Resources and Economic Development to oversee it with all these uses and needs in mind. DRED amended this plan in 2002 to allow for the establishment of limited ATV connector trails which met all other criteria for such trails on state lands.

As DRED moves forward with the next update of the management plan for the property, we ask the Council on Resources and Development to put a special focus on the question of whether or not to expand ATV use there beyond the one permanent ATV trail authorized on the West Side Road. There are three reasons we believe that CORD should caution DRED on expanding ATV use within Nash Stream State Forest.

First, the State's purchase of Nash Stream through the Land Conservation Investment Program (LCIP) was intended to conserve the ecological integrity of the land, traditional forest management, and traditional public recreational use of the land. ATV use was not among the traditional land uses permitted on this land by prior owners.

Second, current state law requires an ecological review of proposed and provisional ATV trails on public lands. NH RSA 215-A:43 requires DRED to conduct the two-step coarse filter and fine filter review to evaluate any new ATV or trail-bike trail proposal on state-owned property. It is critical for the Department to conduct this review on any ATV use expansion request because such an action goes to the heart of why the State acquired the Nash Stream tract in the first place: to protect the ecological integrity of the working forest in one of the largest self-contained, largely undeveloped watersheds in New Hampshire. DRED should complete the coarse/fine filter review on the northerly trail, and the trail should be discontinued if it fails the RSA 215

review process. In addition, DRED must also apply this test to any new or pending requests for additional ATV trails.

Third, it is unclear if the NH Fish & Game Department has capacity to take on additional enforcement responsibilities resulting from any new ATV trails in Coos County. Unless and until adequate resources are made available to Fish & Game to enforce ATV use on established trails, the State should avoid creating any new ATV trails on state lands in Coos County.

While we recognize the perceived economic benefits that some in the North Country feel are tied to the current ATV network in the region, we are concerned that no objective assessment of both the benefits and costs has been conducted to date. One way to address this challenge is to prepare a master plan for all ATV trails in Coos County, with the participation of all interested parties. This plan would not only identify current and future trail locations, but also identify the resources needed for the State to properly manage the Coos County ATV trail network and fully enforce existing state laws governing ATV use. Such an undertaking would also give an added level of protection to sensitive natural areas and insure that all stakeholders have a voice in the development efforts in the North Country.

Given the ongoing efforts to update the Nash Stream State Forest Management Plan we believe now is time for the lead state agencies to gather all stakeholders and start a process that attempts to optimize the success of ATV recreation in Coos County. We, for one, would welcome such an initiative and would be interested in participating in it. We encourage CORD to do the same.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Leahy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Matt Leahy, Public Policy Manager  
Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests