

Oil Region National Heritage Area OHV Trail Feasibility Study



Photo credit courtesy of Venango County official website www.co.venango.pa.us



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Acknowledgements



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OIL REGION ALLIANCE (ORA) STAFF

John Phillips II, President/ CEO

Kim Copley-Harris, Project Manager, Recreation Specialist

ORNHA OHV FEASIBILITY STUDY STEERING COMMITTEE

John Bartlett, Retired, Conservationist

Bob Felmlee, Business Owner, World of Wheels

Bill Hards, Business Owner, ATV Enthusiast

Luke Kauffman, Manager, Two Mile Run County Park

Mike Klavec, Business Owner, ATV Enthusiast

William 'Bill' Moon, Mayor, Oil City

Jason Ruggiero, Executive Director, Venango County Regional Planning

Scott Vogel, ATV-Traction Venango County Chapter

WITH THE COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION OF

Two Mile Run County Park Staff

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR)



PROJECT CONSULTANTS

LAIRD LA, PLLC

Stiffler McGraw, Inc.

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Executive Summary

Purpose of Study and Key Findings

The Oil Region Alliance's (ORA) focus on building Business, Industry and Tourism has led to the desire to explore how the region can tap the soaring interest in motorized recreation, capitalizing upon the commonwealth's second largest industry – Outdoor Recreation. (Agriculture remaining as #1). This study is focused largely upon Venango County, with principles and findings that can be applied and relevant to address recreation trends that can tap this multi-billion dollar recreation industry right here within the entire Oil Heritage Region.



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ORA has undertaken this study in response to a growing awareness, request, investment in motorized recreation among residents within the region.

Concerns

Those who had concerns most often cited accessibility, maintenance, overcrowding, safety, and trespassing, which were identified by 20% or more of respondents.



<https://mudslinger.rumbleon.com/plan-atv-trip>

The study considers several key factors:

- Unprecedented interest, investment in motorized recreation utilizing All Terrain and Utility Vehicles (ATV/UTV) within the region;
- The decreasing snowfall required to support snowmobile trail touring and growing interest in alternatives for outdoor recreation that extends throughout the year;
- Emerging technological and mechanical advancements that accommodate trail exploration in large groups and as families; Maximized diversity, equity and inclusion can be achieved through motorized recreation by extending recreation years of younger and older participants, no gender biased and accommodates people of all ages, abilities and endurance levels;
- Recognition of the massive economic value that is leaking out to other states that already provide motorized community connector trails and large scale community connector heritage and touring trail systems (WV, KY, TN, VA, MI, ME, etc.); The Oil Region can serve as a recreational hub that can attract visitors from surrounding states.

Opportunity and Demand for ATV/UTV Trail System

The COVID 19 pandemic has brought to light an exponential increase in investments in motorized recreation and an imbalanced provision of legal places, trails and facilities to enjoy this mode of outdoor recreation. The region is blessed with many miles of bicycling rail-trails, has a snowmobile trail network, but has a serious deficiency in both snowfall and trails for ATV/UTV. The ATV/UTV trail riding season can be managed as it is throughout the commonwealth year round with exceptions that alleviate conflicts with hunting seasons.

The level of interest and demand for a large scale county wide (and beyond) ATV/UTV Trail System has been largely supported through feedback attained through a robust public involvement process, citizen

survey and key person interviews. The majority of people engaged in these discussions appreciate the rich heritage and environmental context of the forests, riparian corridors and agricultural landscapes present in northwest Pennsylvania. They also appreciate the need to invest in, protect and enhance these resources. Most people expressed that they enjoy the many opportunities for diverse outdoor recreation experiences. Throughout the process, the majority expressed their interest and support in exploring the potential to develop a large scale motorized recreation trail system within Venango County and the entire northeast PA region. Several people pointed to example trail systems that they have visited in other states as excellent models of what could be pursued and implemented right here.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study revealed that most people choosing to participate in the process believe that a motorized trail system can operate through the majority of the year with careful planning, respect for natural resources, location and development of sustainable trails. Nearly everyone engaged recognizes the growing interest and investment of regional residents as well as the massive economic development that can occur through support of the trail system in the form of existing and new businesses, services, restaurants and lodging provisions.

The study revealed that people desire exploration of long range community connector trails that link resources, businesses, services, vistas and destinations. The study also revealed that most ATV/UTV enthusiasts prefer riding on natural trails in forested areas rather than riding on paved or gravel roads – although short segments of paved roads that lead to resources is acceptable.

The study revealed that careful planning and development of a large scale community connector system will require the entire collective cooperation of community and municipal leaders as well as private property and business owners.

The study revealed that there exist many opportunities to identify and delineate trail corridors that can be located on a combination of existing public easements, former railbeds, utility easements, county owned lands, state forest and state game lands, gravel roads and possibly short segments of paved roads where connection to services is made possible.

The study confirmed that this is a highly desired form of outdoor recreation, most regional participants are current riders and over half reporting 15+ years of riding experience, yet ATV/UTV trails are among the most underserved and underdeveloped trail systems within The Commonwealth.

The study confirmed that there exist numerous funding sources that are established specifically for this type of outdoor recreation. ATV Registration Fund and the Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) generate monies that have been legislated to be invested in motorized recreation. Similarly, fund raisers, private foundations and corporations also provide potential match and grant source monies.

The study has produced Key Recommendations – summarized as follows:

- ORA, Venango County and regional OHV enthusiast led organizations need to explore further, pursue and invest in developing a county and region wide interconnected community trail system by working with local municipalities, county/state leadership and private property owners;
- All interested and supporting parties need to rally in the form of a Regional (or Countywide) Alliance, Coalition or Authority to develop a regional Trail System and cooperatively pursue the economic development potential that can revitalize hope and opportunity for bolstering financial, business, tourism and recreational opportunities within the region;
- A Regional OHV Trail System can be arranged, which will minimize concerns such as trail sustainability, environmental impacts and noise by capitalizing upon the opportunity for private properties, state lands and municipal leadership to cooperatively develop and maintain a network of motorized recreation trails;
- Advocate for RULWA reform that will legally and financially protect private property owners who are willing to grant access and easements for motorized trail conveyance and use.