

# NEWS RELEASE



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**ADIRONDACK COUNCIL CALLS ON ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY TO REVIEW  
SHORTCOMINGS, MAKE MAJOR REVISIONS TO ATV TRAIL PLAN  
*Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement Lacking Details, Contradicts Itself***

CANTON, N.Y. – The Adirondack Park’s largest and most influential environmental organization today called on St. Lawrence County and its consultant to revise the Generic Environmental Impact Statement they drafted for the proposed Multi-Use Recreational Trail System in the county.

“This legally required study is far from being the in-depth environmental analysis we had expected from St. Lawrence County,” said Adirondack Council Legislative Director Scott M. Lorey. “The good news is that it is only a draft, so the authors can go back and fix the obvious flaws we have identified before issuing final permission for trail work to begin.”

The official comment period for this Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS) ends today. A portion of the proposed trail system is inside the Adirondack Park.

“This is really the county’s answer to rampant, illegal all-terrain vehicle use on existing county-owned trails,” Lorey explained. “We support the county’s plan to try to keep ATV traffic confined to a trail network. But the county must realistically count the costs of officially opening these lands, and large sections of roads, to ATVs. There will be damage to wildlife habitat, to water quality and to the public trails and roads involved. You don’t get that impression from this current draft of the impact statement.”

**Among the deficiencies pointed out by the Adirondack Council are:**

- No details on the harm expected to local wildlife and native plants;
- Contradictory predictions about the fate of endangered Indiana bats known to live in the area;
- Little recognition of the role ATVs play in spreading invasive species;
- No details about the costs of repairing damage to, policing or maintaining, the trail system;
- Conflicting predictions about expected trail use and resulting revenue to the county;
- The authors seem not to take their responsibilities seriously, in that they refer to the impact statement as “just a formality.”

“This impact statement is much more than a formality,” said Lorey. “State law requires the county to complete a detailed study and find ways to avoid serious damage to the environment. The Adirondack Council has successfully sued Lewis County for failing to conduct a thorough review of the environmental costs of its ATV trail system. We are prepared to do it again if we need to.”

On another point of law, Lorey also noted that the plan fails a significant test regarding the state Vehicle and Traffic Law. In general, ATVs are not allowed to share roads used by cars and trucks. Exceptions have been allowed for short spans of road (one-eighth of a mile or less) that directly connect two legal riding trails. St. Lawrence County’s plan uses many miles of roads and in some cases connects roads to one another.

Lorey noted that the plan lacked any information on potential impacts to entire classes of wildlife, including amphibians, terrestrial invertebrates and songbirds. In one place, it notes that there are Indiana bats known to live near the trail system that would be present around the trails at elevations of 900 and below. In another, it claims the trails are outside the area inhabited by the federally-protected endangered species, so no impacts would occur.

“Well, which is it?” Lorey asked. “Are the bats there or not?”

Similar confusion exists with regard to tourism and ridership. In one place, the draft says the county can expect “an influx of tourism dollars.” It compares St. Lawrence County to a 2006 study of Tug Hill that estimated ATV-related spending at \$35 million, with a chance to increase that figure to \$49 million with a 25 percent increase in ridership, spurred by a new trail system.

However, when asked to determine the impact of new trails on vegetation, the DGEIS calls it only “the modest increase of use expected with this action.” (p. 14). It says further that “although some increase in ridership may result from this action, increased tourism is expected to be incremental and should not result in significant demands for growth in services.” (p. 52) “The majority of trail users will be local residents.” (p. 50)

“Again, they can’t have it both ways,” Lorey said. “They predict lots of new riders and money when estimating revenues, but discount new riders when predicting environmental damage. Which is true?”

The Adirondack Council supports portions of the DGEIS, including the county’s efforts to avoid wetlands and water crossings. However, more needs to be included about how to handle invasive species.

One ATV carrying an insect could wreck the County’s entire logging industry,” stated Lorey. “One sprig of an invasive plant could colonize miles of trail. We believe there must be better planning for when, not if, invasives are found. Having a rapid response system already in place is vital to stopping invasive species from spreading.”

Finally, there is no assessment of the financial costs to the taxpayers. The document simply lists potential items needing funding, including “materials, maintenance, policing, construction, inspection and emergency response personnel.” (p. 56)

“The taxpayers deserve better than that,” Lorey said. “ATV riding is the most destructive recreational activity in the Adirondack Park today. If St. Lawrence County wants the taxpayers to support this dangerous and destructive activity, it owes the public an explanation of what those costs will be.”

Founded in 1975, the Adirondack Council is dedicated to ensuring the ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park, through research, education, advocacy and legal action. Adirondack Council members live in all 50 United States.