



DEP NEWS RELEASE

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Chris Christie, Governor
Kim Guadagno, Lt. Governor
Bob Martin, Commissioner



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 4, 2015

Contact: Lawrence Hajna (609) 984-1795
Bob Considine (609) 292-2994
Caryn Shinske (609) 984-1795

NEW JERSEY PARK SERVICE PREPARES TO LAUNCH MOTORIZED ACCESS PLAN FOR WHARTON STATE FOREST IN HEART OF PINELANDS *NEW BROCHURE AND MAP DESIGNED TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE RECREATION*

(15/P65) TRENTON – The New Jersey State Park Service is preparing to launch a Motorized Access Plan to protect the environment and encourage responsible use of Off-Road Vehicles, or ORVs, in Wharton State Forest, located in the heart of the Pinelands National Reserve.

The Motorized Access Plan, or MAP, consists of a driving map that delineates a nearly 225-mile network of sand and other unimproved roads that is open to motorized vehicles, as well as a colorful and information-packed brochure that highlights Wharton’s ecological treasures and explains the long-term damage that can be caused by improper off-roading.

“Wharton State Forest is unique in that it provides an extensive network of sand and gravel roads, remnants of the area’s rich history, that provide up-close access to secluded rivers, quiet forests, beautiful wetlands and sites of former villages and towns,” said Richard Boornazian, the Department of Environmental Protection’s Assistant Commissioner for Natural and Historic Resources. “The MAP program will ensure continued access to these features while educating the public and making sure the region’s sensitive ecology is protected.”



Washington Turnpike, Wharton State Forest

“As part of this effort, we are more clearly marking routes that are not intended for vehicles but are meant for the enjoyment of hikers, horseback riders, bicyclists and nature enthusiasts,” said State Park Service Director

Mark Texel. “The DEP has carefully studied the route that has been designated for motor vehicles to ensure protection of threatened and endangered plant and animal species.”

“The Pinelands Commission supports DEP’s efforts to encourage the public’s informed use of the Pinelands,” said Nancy Wittenberg, Executive Director of the Pinelands Commission. “We

are pleased with DEP's continued actions to address activities that result in negative impacts to Pinelands resources."

The Park Service expects to begin implementing the plan – the first of its kind in the state – by late summer. Brochures and maps will be available at the Batsto Village Visitor Center, located off Burlington County Route 542, east of Hammonton, and at the Atsion Recreation Area, located off Route 206 in Shamong, Burlington County.

At 125,000 acres and sprawling over much of Burlington County and parts of Camden and Atlantic counties, Wharton State Forest is by far the largest unit in the State Park System. The State Forest protects rare plants and animals, some found nowhere else in the world. It also encompasses some of the most remote areas in New Jersey.

Over the years, some ORV operators have utilized trails not intended for vehicle use to access ecologically sensitive areas, damaging plants and habitats for wildlife and leaving ruts and gullies in wetlands and sandy areas.

Off-Road Vehicles are legally registered pickup trucks, Jeeps and similar vehicles equipped with four-wheel drive capabilities and special tires that enable them to access rugged terrain. All-Terrain Vehicles, also known as quads and three-wheelers, as well as unregistered dirt bikes, are not permitted in Wharton or on other state-owned lands.

"All told, State Park Police and Division of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Officers patrol some 200,000 acres in the heart of the Pinelands," Director Texel said. "While enforcement of regulations protecting these areas remains important, the brochure that accompanies the Motorized Access Plan will promote responsible recreation, while helping to promote the forest to new visitors. It is our expectation that the vast majority of visitors will follow the Motorized Access Plan and come to understand its importance in protecting this special place for future generations."

"The Motorized Access Plan will enhance our enforcement capabilities and make emergency response actions, including wildfire response, much more efficient," Texel added.

The development of the brochure, map and route was funded by a \$600,000 federal grant that is also helping the Park Service to make repairs to roads, including filling in deep gullies that have formed. Many vehicles have to go around these gullies, resulting in unintended widening of existing roads into forested habitats.

Wharton provides habitat to some 300 bird species, nearly 60 reptile and amphibian species, and more than 90 fish species. The DEP lists 43 animals as threatened or endangered, including the Pine Barrens tree frog, timber rattlesnake, and pine snake.

The State Forest also boasts some 850 species of plants, including wild orchids, sedges, grasses and insect-eating plants. Rare plants include the bog asphodel, swamp pink and Pine Barrens gentian. The predominant trees are the pitch pine, various oak species, and Atlantic white cedar.

The latticework of roads and paths through the State Forest were primarily built in the 18th and 19th centuries to connect villages that supported a variety of industries, including iron-making,

glassmaking, timber and agriculture.

A downloadable version of the brochure will be available soon. To view the Motorized Access Plan map, visit: http://www.njparksandforests.org/parks/maps/wharton_map_web_version.pdf

For more information on Wharton State Forest or to download the free New Jersey State Parks and Forests mobile phone app, visit: www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/parks/wharton.html

###