

Wharton State Forest Visitor Use Map Comments 2024

It is my view that *only the routes included in “Map 9” should be considered for use by motor vehicles*. However, some routes depicted on map 9, should be removed because they substantially impact public safety, recreational trails, and wildlife habitat.

All motorized routes chosen for inclusion on a visitor map must not conflict with any of the standards of the CMP. I am especially concerned with the impact to wildlife habitat that motorized use can cause.

The major criteria for the evaluation of routes on “Map 9” was the following:

1. Does the route conform to the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan, per the Pinelands Commission 2017 Wharton State Forest Resolution?
2. Does the route directly affect known endangered or threatened species populations or habitat?
3. Would the route create a substantial user conflict? For Instance: is there an existing hiking/biking/horseback trail, camping area, or natural area?
4. Is the route enforceable and accessible by emergency services and police? Could a standard four-wheel drive Park Police vehicle regularly patrol and/or deliver emergency response services in the area.

The following routes listed on “Map 9” should be excluded from use by motor vehicles in the final draft of the “Visiting Vehicle Use Map”. Many routes excluded from motor-vehicle usage could be reasonably **designated as multi-use hiking/biking/ or horseback riding trails.**

1. Washington-Quaker Bridge Rd (1.45 miles to exclude)

Between Mount (39.685284,-74.605852) and Washington Turnpike (39.683484,-74.577638) should be excluded from motor vehicle usage.

Rationale: This path presents a risk to public safety and habitat if motorized use is allowed and thus should be designated for hiking/biking/ or horseback riding only unless fully restored for motor vehicle travel. There are multiple, deep depressions caused from overuse of motor vehicles in this area and multiple tracks extending into the forest from motorized vehicles attempting to avoid the depressions in the original track.

2. Bulldozer (2.9 miles to exclude)

Between (39.723184,-74.668671) and (39.743368, -74.624080)

Rationale: This area does NOT appear on the Pinelands Commission 2017 maximum vehicular basemap for Wharton State Forest. This route does not conform to the Comprehensive Management Plan and presents a risk to

public safety and emergency responders. The name of the route itself implies that it was created in a haphazard fashion without necessary permits or approvals from the Pinelands Commission or the State Park Service/NJDEP.

3. Whitehorse (2.76 miles to exclude)

Between Batona Camp (39.782266,-74.629368) and Birches Route (39.813122,-74.614305)

Rationale: This area contains several major populations of threatened and endangered species. The habitat quality in this area is among the highest in the State Forest and fragmentation within the geography should be minimized. User related conflict in this area would also be minimized as unauthorized motor vehicles routinely wander throughout the Batona campsite and on sections of the Batona trail.

4. Lower-Forge High Crossing / Hay (3.52 miles to exclude from motor-vehicle usage)

Between High Crossing (39.766583, -74.642068) and Quaker Bridge Sandy Ridge(39.721552,-74.632722)

Rationale: This route cuts across numerous streams and wetlands without proper culverts/ bridges/ or causeways. It also crosses one critical habitat paleo-dune with observable damage from motor vehicles. The numerous depressions and stream crossings present a risk to public safety and to water quality.

5. Hawkings Low Road (1.98 miles to exclude from motor-vehicle usage)

Between Hawking's Bridge (39.713964,-74.566313) and Tuckerton Rd (39.688666,-74.582921)

Rationale: This route is redundant, with the Hawkins High Road within 1,800 feet and both intercepting at the same location. Additionally, the Low Road runs along the existing Tulpehocken trail and removing motor vehicle traffic would lessen user conflict in this area.

6. Eleanor Adams Road (0.9 miles to exclude), **Eleanor Adams Feed Strip** (2.9 miles to exclude), **Piney Pond Feed Strip** (0.8 miles to exclude)

Eleanor Adams Rd (39.679109, -74.584568 to 39.675648,-74.569023)

Eleanor Adams Feed Strip (39.677807,-74.582754, to 39.665192,-74.567502)

Piney Pond Feed strip (39.662755, -74.609809 to 39.664550,-74.593191)

Rationale: None of these "feed strip" paths appear on the Pinelands Commission 2017 map and are therefore ineligible to appear in a vehicle map for Wharton State Forest under the Comprehensive Management Plan. Additionally, there are multiple critical habitat sites for

Northern Pine Snake in this area. **The term feedstrip implies that these routes were created for deer hunting food-plots, not public travel with motor vehicles.**

7. West Mill Fireline (6.5 miles to exclude from motor-vehicle usage)

Between Route 206 (39.699704, -74.752357) and Batsto-Pleasant Mills Church (39.641375, -74.661514).

Rationale: A portion of this route is claimed by the Town of Hammonton adjacent to Route 206 and has a gate authorized by the town council to limit the path to pedestrian, bicycling, and horseback riding only. Additionally, there is a long-closed bridge that has fallen into the river at the Pleasant Mills Church. Easement rights in this area are unclear through the church grounds and throughout other private property adjacent to route 206. **This route should not be included on any vehicle map of the State Forest and should remain for hiking, biking, and horseback riding purposes.**

8. Unnamed (0.79 miles to exclude from motor-vehicle usage)

Between Route 206 (39.721946,-74.737875) and the CNJ railroad bed (39.730827, -74.743693)

Rationale: This route has multiple depressions and crosses through multiple streams and wetlands without the necessary culverts, bridges, or causeways. This route poses a risk for public safety as well as a threat to water quality.

9. Grassy Pond Road (1.24 miles to exclude) and a portion of an unnamed route section.

Grassy Pond Road (Between Seaf Weeks (39.637879, -74.560679) and Ridge Road (39.650924, -74.544384))

Unnamed route section between 563 (39.639699, -74.560066) and Ridge Road (39.644148, -74.540637)

Rationale: This path traverses through one intermittent pond without appropriate bridges or causeways and multiple paleo-dunes. ORV damage to these sites has been observed in aerial imagery and on the ground field checks. These are critical habitat areas for state threatened species.

10. Maja Leek Field Road (0.44 miles to exclude from motor-vehicle usage)

Between Ridge Rd (39.635562, -74.524937) and Old Wading River Maxwell Rd (39.639478, -74.518362)

Rationale: This route crosses a major tributary of the wading river and through an Atlantic White Cedar Forest. Beavers have begun to use the old roadbed as a means to dam the stream and create a pond. This ponding is killing many of the Atlantic White Cedar trees in this stand. The roadbed should be removed and natural stream flow should be restored to save the cedar stand in this area.

11. Wood Lot Road (0.9 miles to exclude from motor-vehicle usage)

Between Jackson Rd (39.787110, -74.783320) and Atsion Rd (39.775042,-74.778298)

Rationale: This path is heavily grown over and no longer suitable for motorized vehicles. It is redundant to old Atsion road and should be removed from the vehicle use map as it is no longer appropriate for public travel.

12. Old Wading River Maxwell Road (1.93 miles to exclude from motor-vehicle usage)

Between the Wading River riverbank at (39.663230, -74.534610) and Maja Leek RD 39.639575, -74.518453)

Rationale: This route has a large stream running through it with no culvert or bridge. It is completely impassable to the visiting public and to law enforcement and emergency services. This is an unenforceable route.

13. Ridge Road - (2.42 miles to exclude from motor-vehicle usage)

Between (39.643886,-74.540206) and (39.619786, --74.508304)

Rationale: This second of route has multiple impassable streams and water crossings. This route

cannot be accessed by EMS or regularly patrolled
by Park Police.