

The Berlin Sun

Nash Stream Forest committee will consider ATV connector trail

By Barbara Tetrealt
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LANCASTER — The Nash Stream Forest Citizens Advisory Committee has opened the door to adding a 1.2-mile Southern Connector ATV Trail to the forest on a trial basis.

After a detailed presentation by Larry Gomes of the Milan Trail Huggers ATV Club, and a robust public discussion, the committee voted last Tuesday to ask the Nash Stream Technical Team to come back with a proposal that addresses concerns about the impacts of the trail while providing for a probationary period.

Even if the committee approves the proposal, it still requires approval by the N.H. Council on Resources and Development.

Gomes explained that the proposed trail would connect the existing West Side Trail to the Percy Gas Station, allowing ATVs traveling from North Stratford through Nash Stream to make a quick detour off the trail to get gas. He said the connector would be a major improvement. Gomes said it would also be safer by eliminating the need for some ATV riders to carry extra gas.

Most of the proposed connector would use the Nash Stream Road and Gomes said the club would take steps to control erosion and prevent a berm from developing at the turn into the West Side Trail. He said the club would also put up signage directing riders to OHRV trails and specifying roads and trails that are closed to them.

Maggie Machinist, state regional forester on the 40,000-acre Nash Stream State Forest, said the technical team for the forest reviewed the proposal and has some concerns. Those concerns included the possibility of erosion, safety issues with shared use of road, increased maintenance needs, illegal riding on other roads in the forest and law enforcement. She noted there is no baseline data on existing ATV use in the forest.

Machinist also said there is concern that increased ATV use in Nash Stream Forest will change the feel and experience of what is one of the state's most remote properties. She said \$1.4

million has been invested in restoring Nash Stream for native trout and the noise of ATVs may compete with the experience anglers are seeking.

Machinist said the team also questioned if the proposed trail is in line with the management vision for the tract, which calls for it to be a “model of environmentally sound public land stewardship.” The vision calls for growth of high quality wood, protection of the natural qualities and integrity of the land, and continued public access.

Gomes provided a four-page response to the tech team comments, stressing that the ATV club is willing to take steps to reduce erosion and address concerns. He noted Nash Stream Road is open to all types of registered vehicles including cars, motorcycles, dirt bikes and logging trucks that travel closer to Nash Stream than the connector would. But he said the club would consider lowering speed limits and planting evergreens to reduce noise impacts.

Committee member Jeff Lougee, representing the state’s environmental organizations, asked Machinist if the technical team had a recommendation. She said the team, which includes various state agencies, was split on the proposal.

Machinist noted ATV use was not part of the original vision for Nash Stream State Forest. When the management plan was updated in 2002, the revision allowed for a 7.6-mile ATV connector trail on the West Side Road. A 4-mile Kelsey Notch Road was added four years ago as a pilot ATV trail to connect to the Ride the Wilds Trail system. It continues to operate on a provisional basis while data is collected for a final determination.

Director of Forest and Lands Brad Simpkins said the updated management plan approved in 2017 allows consideration of the Southern Connector trail.

Jamie Sayen of Stratford said there is no data on the ecological impact of ATVs in Nash Stream. He said ATVs on the forest are a disaster for biodiversity and said he will recommend at the next management plan update that no ATVs be allowed on Nash Stream. Sayen said there is inadequate law enforcement for the ATV use that currently exists, and allowing additional use will only exacerbate the problem.

Gomes said more than 95 percent of ATV trails in Coos County are on private property and the clubs work to make sure there are no impacts. He also pointed out that Nash Stream is publicly owned.

“It’s public land for public use,” he said.

Clint MacDonald of Stratford suggested the committee establish very specific criteria for the trail and require the club to post a performance bond.

Rodney Monahan said an ATV trail runs across his property in Stratford and he finds the riders to be very respectful. He said he has more trouble with snowmobilers.

Committee member Glenn Normandeau, executive director of N.H. Fish and Game, said his staff is “100 percent” opposed to the Southern Connector trail. He said he believes the more trails that get developed, the more conflicts.

Committee member Kevin Evans, representing forestry, said he feels the committee needs base line data showing impacts especially on the stream.

Gorham selectman Michael Waddell, representing the Coos County commission on the committee, said his town has struggled with the issue of ATVs and has shut down some roads to them. But at the same time, Waddell said ATV tourism has become a big part of the North Country economy.

“It’s made a huge difference in our economy,” he said.