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Nash Stream OHRV Trail On Hold

By Barbara Tetreault

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STARK — A revised proposal for a Southern Connector OHRV Trail on Nash Stream State Forest is on hold because it lacks permission from one private landowner on the route.

ATV groups have been working for several years to connect the existing West Side Trail at Nash Stream to the Percy Gas Station in Stark, allowing riders traveling from North Stratford to make a quick detour off the trail to get gas.

Forest and Lands Director Patrick Hackley said the new trail has much less impact on the state forest than the proposal put forth two years ago. He said it has support from all but one of the 14 landowners whose property the proposed trail crosses.

“So, this new option, while less distance on the forest, is currently 'on-hold' until the clubs can secure full landowner support,” he said, in an email conversation.

But ATV use on the Nash Stream State Forest continues to be controversial, with some noting that the original management plan for the 40,000-acre tract did not allow ATV use. When the management plan was updated in 2002, the revision allowed for a 7.6-mile ATV connector trail on the West Side Road. The 2017 update allows for the consideration of a southern connector.

The Nash Stream Citizens Advisory Committee met last month to discuss the proposed Southern Connector Trail, which would allow access to the existing West Side and Bordeaux Trails. The West Side Trail is seven miles in length, the Bordeaux Trail is 2 miles long.

Clint Savage of the N.H. Trails Bureau told the committee the revised connector trail eliminates shared use of the main road in Nash Stream and reduces the overall length of the trail on the forest from 2 miles to 1,700 feet, according to the minutes of the meeting.

Committee member Jamie Sayen of Stratford asked Savage if the bureau had permission from the landowners for the proposed ATV trail. Savage said they have permission from all but one of the 14 private landowners involved. Sayen argued the state should not go forward with consideration of the proposal and until all approvals are obtained. He also said private landowners should not be pressured to allow the use of their property.

Committee member Michael Waddell of Gorham urged the N.H. Trails Bureau to continue working with landowners. He noted it was a long and arduous process to get the Appalachian Trail finalized.

Margaret Machinist of the N.H. Division of Forest and Lands said the proposed connector is currently a winter snowmobile trail. Committee member Kevin Evans noted there is a big difference between a snowmobile trail and an OHRV trail because of erosion and sedimentation risk. Savage said they are working to address those issues.

Govatski said there was agreement at the meeting on the need for a review of the impact of ATV use on the existing trails on the 40,000 -acre tract.

“These impacts can be environmental, social, or economic. We all agree this should have been done many years ago.” he wrote in an email.

Speaking as part of the technical team, which includes representatives from N.H. Fish and Game, National Heritage, Bureau of Trails, as well as Forest and Lands, Machinist told the committee there is concern about current OHRV use in Nash Stream as well as the increase in traffic that the proposed thru trail would bring. According to the minutes, she recommended surveying vernal pools in the area, looking at potential impacts to wildlife as well as possible sedimentation in Nash Stream. Machinist also recommended ORHV counters on the proposed trail, the entire West Side Trail, and on trails outside the forest to study local traffic patterns. There is no database of ATV use in the state forest.

The committee voted to recommend an environmental assessment and monitoring of the West Side and Bordeaux Trails as well as the section of the proposed Southern Connector within the forest. Govatski said if a formal proposal is made for the connector, then the assessment would look at the entire route. Hackley said the assessment will be performed by an outside consultant paid for by the ATV clubs.

Sayen made a motion that no further work be done on the southern connector until all landowners approved the trail but his motion failed.

The other existing ATV trail in Nash Stream, the Kelsey Notch Trail is a 4-mile trail approved back in 2015 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.