

## *The Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society*

February 27, 2023

Honorable Senators and House Representatives,

RE: MN Chapter of The Wildlife Society comments on SF Bill #1324

On behalf of the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society (MNTWS), we are writing in support of Bill SF #132. This legislation provides common sense measures for managing motorized recreation on our public state forests for all users of public lands. Our primary interests revolve around motorized impacts on wildlife populations and/or wildlife habitat and we view this bill as a means to minimize or mitigate these impacts.

MNTWS is a non-profit professional society of scientists, managers, educators, students, technicians, planners, consultants and others who use science-based management and conservation to help sustain wildlife populations and habitats. Our guiding policies include **1.** supporting and promoting conservation of biological diversity, not only for wildlife but because human quality of life and survival depend upon it, **2.** opposing activities that jeopardize threatened and endangered species populations and **3.** supporting restoration of critical habitats. We believe SF Bill #1324 will facilitate achievement of our above three guiding principles.

If MNDNR moves forward with their three Master Plans as they intend, SF Bill #1324 is necessary to ensure that these Plans for Off-Road Vehicles (ORV), All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV) and Off-Highway Motorcycles (OHM), as well as \$13 million allocated by the legislature to motorized sport trails are planned and implemented in a sustainable fashion. Guiding legislation such as SF #1324 needs to be in place prior to any significant expansion of motorized recreation.

MNTWS acknowledges that *managed* motorized recreation is a legitimate recreational use of our public lands. However, *unmanaged* motorized recreation (which this bill intends to curtail) can and does cause extensive and long-lasting adverse impacts to wildlife populations and habitat.

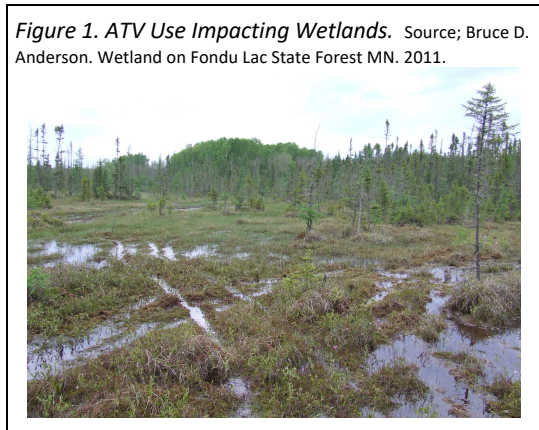
Following is our rationale as to why we support SF #1324.

### Wildlife

The direct and indirect effects of Motorized recreation is well documented and cannot be overstated. As pointed out in Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHCA) Cumulative and Universal: ATV Impacts on the Landscape and Wildlife their review of the scientific literature concluded that impacts of ATV use are cumulative, universal, and can be achieved by low intensity traffic over short time periods. BHCA also highlights that motorized recreationists can have a disproportionately high impact on land and wildlife resources because of their ability to impact a far greater number of acres over shorter time periods than

more traditional forms of recreation (Meadows 2008). Repeated ATV use can result in cross-country travel resulting in physical destruction of habitat (Meadows et al. 2008). Direct impacts to the land from ATV use will have indirect effects on a much larger spatial scale (Ouren et al. 2007). The increase in scale impacts wildlife populations, by impacting habitat, reducing habitat effectiveness, the productivity of preferential foraging areas, and species fecundity and survival.

Nicholson also shows that alterations in animal behavior may result in displacement from preferential habitat, increases in home range and daily movement patterns (Nicholson et al. 1997) and Naylor found reductions in the time spent feeding, and increases in daily travel time (Naylor et al. 2009). Increases in the size of summer home range and increasing daily movement can detrimentally impact energy budgets that are critical for building fat and energy reserves (Cole et al. 1997). A National Park Service study showed that as much as a 70% reduction in the size of an area in which predators can hear their prey (Barber et al. 2009). A North Carolina University study concluded that increased noise in forests meant songbirds nesting there laid fewer eggs and were less likely to successfully raise all of their chicks. Human-generated noise could be affecting male mating songs, especially in forests where they tend to sing at lower pitches. The female birds could have more difficulty hearing male birdsongs through low-frequency human noise.



These are but a few of the negative impacts motorized recreation can have on our wildlife heritage. It is critical that the MNDNR conduct a thorough analysis on the potential or actual effects increased motorized recreation will have on wildlife populations.

#### Evaluation of Cumulative Effects in ATV Master Plans

Through their Master Planning, the MNDNR needs to analyze the aggregate and connected effects between expanded motorized recreation and other stressors to wildlife and their habitat which together, cumulatively diminish wildlife values. Other stressors to our wildlife include corporate agriculture, urban and rural housing sprawl, expanding invasive species and forest insects/disease populations, mining, and unsustainable timber harvest on public and private lands. An expanding network of motorized trails provides a vector for invasive plants and urban and rural sprawl particularly sprawl adjacent to public lands increases the likelihood of illegal motorized use. Similarly, increased timber harvest and associated roads resulting from the Sustainable Timber Harvest Initiative will prompt more motorized recreation above and beyond existing conditions. A robust analysis is particularly needed to assess the potential effects of an expanded motorized recreation network on Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCNs). There are now over 346 wildlife species identified as Species of SGCN's compared to 292 SGCN species in 2005; a 18% increase in number of listings.

#### Need for Additional Motorized Recreation Trails-Demand

Millions of dollars in increased funding have been allocated to motorized recreation in the last two years. Moreover, the MNDNR is developing 3 Statewide Strategic Master Plans for motorized trail systems; one each for All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVS), Off Road Vehicles (trucks and jeeps) and Off Highway Motorcycles.

Is this necessary? Recognizing the adverse impacts to wildlife from RMV use, MNTWS questions the need for expanded access for RMV's on our public lands in the first place. *Current* recreation opportunities on public lands favor motorized recreation over non-motorized recreation despite past surveys showing

that the majority of Minnesotans favor non-motorized recreation. Consider that according to a Minnesota Recreation Survey, 89% of Minnesotans participated in non-motorized forms of recreation such as hiking and biking compared to 10% of participants who favored or participated in ATV riding. In terms of use (user days), 36% of all recreation user days (128 million user days) involved non-motorized activities versus 2% of all user days (6.5 million user days) involved ATV activities. Hunters have asked the DNR to expand the extent of non-motorized hiking trails (hunter walking trails) on DNR administered lands. Many hunters and recreationists are frustrated with lost opportunities to experience solitude because of the increasing frequency ATV thrill-riders, and the increasing habitat and trail degradation.

Need for Additional Motorized Recreation Trails-Supply

As described above, Minnesotan’s favor non-motorized over motorized recreation. Does the availability of public lands open to non-motorized recreation vs. motorized recreation align with those public expectations? It does not.

When looking at motorized vs non-motorized use in terms of road/trail mileage on state forests and county lands, there was an imbalance between motorized and non-motorized opportunities with motorized roads exceeding non-motorized roads/trails from between 2:1 to 5:1. Upon National Forests there is more equity with a ratio of .6:1 on the Superior National Forest and 1.4:1 on the Chippewa National Forest.

Between 2003 and 2008, the DNR classified all 58 state forests as limited, managed or closed with regard to motorized use. As part of this process the agency inventoried over 12,000 miles of forest routes. On the inventoried routes that were not designated or closed, motor vehicle use is permitted in forests classified as managed and prohibited in forests classified as limited or closed. Review of DNR state forest websites revealed roughly 8,500 miles/trails (designated and non-designated) were open to motorized recreation contrasted with an estimated 4,000 miles designated for non-motorized use.

The ratio of motorized to designated non-motorized roads/trails on county administered lands where information was available was 5:1 (2150 miles motorized vs 300 miles non-motorized). Actual mileage and ratios may differ, but such information could not be found or accessed. This ratio of 5 to 1 is assumed to reflect county administered land *acres* affected by motorized use.

Upon National Forest lands, following implementation of the Superior Forest Travel Management Rule 1600 miles of roads/trails out of about 4200 miles outside the wilderness were open to ATV’s. On the Chippewa National Forest 1486 out of 2625 miles of roads/trails were open to RMV use (59%). This represented a motorized to non-motorized ration of 1.4:1. The comparison between motorized and non-motorized availability on selected public lands where data was available is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Road/Trail Mileage Comparison of Selected Public Lands Open and Closed to Recreational Motorized Vehicles (RMV’s) on Lands Generally Open to Motorized Use.				
Land Ownership	Total Miles (Inventoried or Actual Total)	Open RMV’s (Designated or by default)	Closed RMV’s	Ratio of Open to Closed
State	Miles	Miles	Miles	Ratio
State Forest	12,000	8,500 (70%)	4,000 (30%)	2:1
WMA’s (estimate)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Estimate 1:1
County				
County Lands	2500	2150 (86%)	350 (14%)	6:1
Federal				
Superior NF	4200	1600 (38%)	2600 (62%)	.6:1
Chippewa NF	2525	1486 (59%)	1038 (41%)	1.4:1
<b>Total (rounded)</b>	<b>21,200</b>	<b>12,700 (60%)</b>	<b>8,000 (40%)</b>	<b>1.5:1</b>
<b>Percent</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>NA</b>

In summary, MNTWS questions the need and legitimacy of expanding the motorized recreation network across the state. This is contrary to what most of the public is seeking in their recreation experience-most are seeking a non-motorized experience. However, the availability of a non-motorized experience is disproportional-the majority of our public land is open to motorized recreation. In view of this disparity, is it worth further jeopardizing what remains of our wildlife heritage? Rare species habitat (quantity and quality) is diminishing and expanding motorized recreation disturbance will only enhance that diminishment. If the MNDNR pursues motorized recreation master planning (which they will), it is vital that SF Bill #1324 be introduced and passed.

Sincerely,

Bruce D. Anderson  
Past President-MN Chapter of the Wildlife Society  
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