

SF #1324 Rationale for Requiring Access to Signed Trails Only

Currently, all trails north of Highway Two are open unless posted CLOSED. This means any illegal or user created trail, once made, can be used by other riders, resulting in increased habitat fragmentation and spread of invasive species deeper into our forests. If it looks like a trail enforcement cannot stop this new unofficial trail from being used. If CLOSED signs are torn down, these areas can also be accessed, and damage can result. This makes it very difficult for a Conservation Officer to monitor for proper usage of our trail systems. SF #1324 would change this for better management and monitoring. All trails should have signs indicating that they are the proper routes open for this use.

SF #1324 states that trails must be posted, to be accessed.

- If there is no sign, a trail cannot be used.
This helps:
- users know where they are
- to cut down on illegal trail use
- to protect closed forests
- to facilitate the duties of Conservation Officers

In 2022, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) hired consultant SE Group to conduct a survey of stakeholders about Off Road Vehicle (ORV) and All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) use for the DNR statewide master plan systems for these vehicles. The SE Group compiled a list of stakeholder answers regarding these uses now posted on the DNR website. (1)

According to the DNR, in this survey response in August 2022,
“improvement of marked routes greatly reduced illegal off trail riding .”
 In the same survey, Dealerships and Businesses stated that,
“trails need more signage and enforcement.”

SF #1324 would address both of those statements by requiring all trails to be signed for access.

SF #1324 will also help protect Closed Forests.

Unlike the current situation, north of Highway Two, under SF #1324, even if a Closed Forest sign were removed, the area would still not be accessible. If there is NO sign, there is NO access.

SF #1324 would also help Conservation Officers carry out their duties. If a user is on a trail that is not signed, the Conservation Officer may write a citation. As noted by retired DNR Conservation Officer for enforcement, Jeff Birchem, in his written testimony for SF #1324, without signs, enforcement and protecting these closed areas is impossible. (2)

Conservation officer numbers are at the level they were in 1940. With expanded duties and an average patrol area of 650 square miles, this commonsense measure will help Conservation Officers identify and better manage illegal trail riding to help preserve and protect our forests and wildlife habitat.

(1) <https://engage.dnr.state.mn.us/minnesota-all-terrain-vehicle-master-plan>
 see Key Stakeholder themes (146KB pdf)

(2) see pdf in file: SF #1342 Retired DNR Conservation Officer - Testimony