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Forest Service

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Hoosier NF Highlights

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Natural Resource Damage from Illegal OHV Use on the Hoosier National Forest



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Although responsibly enjoyed by many people, Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV's) are also a major cause of natural resource damage on public lands. Consequently, OHV's are currently prohibited on the Hoosier National Forest and may not be operated on any Forest road or trail, including campground roads. The Forest Service considers OHV's to include four-wheelers, motorcycles, dirt bikes, mopeds, dune buggies, scooters, Segway's, golf carts, and other motorized all-terrain type vehicles. Basically, OHV's are any type of motorized vehicle, smaller than a car or truck that does not have a state-issued license plate.

In addition, off-road use by any type of vehicle, including licensed motor vehicles, is prohibited on the Hoosier. Use of OHV's on officially-designated County Roads may be authorized by ordinance in certain counties located within the Forest boundary. However, these ordinances are county specific, and riders must comply with all legal requirements imposed by the State of Indiana.

Unauthorized OHV use on the Hoosier has become a significant problem in many areas of the Forest. Often illegal riders have created their own roads and trails through the Forest. Forest Law Enforcement officials are cooperating with Indiana DNR Conservation Officers

and local law enforcement to identify and ticket individuals who are riding illegally. Illegal riders can be fined up to \$500 and have their vehicle impounded.

Illegal OHV riding on the Hoosier also costs the Forest Service, and thereby taxpayers, many thousands of dollars in restoration and rehabilitation costs every year. Riders seeking to create an exciting and challenging route frequently choose to drive on steep hills and cross streams, resulting in severe erosion, creation of large “mud holes”, and degraded watershed health. This type of natural resource damage is expensive and time consuming to repair. One such example is located in the vicinity of Huron-Scarlett in northeastern Orange County. Illegal OHV use has significantly impacted this area of the Forest resulting in severe erosion and sedimentation of nearby streams. Installation of gates and barrier posts in 2011, along with increased law enforcement efforts in the area, has substantially reduced the problem, yet the natural resource restoration and rehabilitation effort will take several more years to complete.

Although controversial with some, the prohibition on off-road driving and the use of OHV's of the Hoosier is actually not unusual when it comes to public lands managed as natural areas to provide for outdoor recreation, wildlife habitat or sustainable timber production. Indeed, OHV's and off-road driving are typically prohibited or at least heavily-restricted on almost all state and federal public lands in Indiana. However, there are a number of private and a few public areas in the state where OHV riding is specifically allowed and encouraged. For example, Indiana DNR operates the 3,550-acre Interlake State Recreation Area near Lynnville in Warrick County and the 1,400-acre Redbird State Recreation Area in Green and Sullivan Counties. Both of these areas are located on former surface coal mines. In addition, the Lawrence County Recreational Park, Inc. near Springville offers 60 miles of ATV/UTV trails for both novice and experienced riders alike.

The Hoosier National Forest provides the public with a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. Visitors can use their National Forest to hike, bike, fish, horseback ride, camp, hunt, watch wildlife, view scenery, rest, rejuvenate, and many other things. But please remember that one of the things you may not do, is ride OHV's or drive any type of motorized vehicle off-road.

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Barriers installed to block access to OHVs.



Severe erosion damage done by OHVs in the Scarlett-Huron area.