

FORESTNET PODCAST #004

Transcript

CHANCEY: Welcome to ForestNet. I'm Gary Chancey, Public Affairs Officer for the Wayne National Forest. Today on the show, we will talk about a new forest order that went into effect on Thursday, January 13 on the Wayne National Forest located here in southeastern Ohio.

Joining me here today to talk about the order is Jo Reyer, Forest Supervisor for the Wayne National Forest. Also, we have DeVela Clark, District Ranger for the Athens Ranger District and Tim Slone, District Ranger for the Ironton Ranger District. Welcome to all three of you today.

Jo, I understand the order imposes new alcohol restrictions and requires riders of off-highway vehicles to wear certain pieces of protective equipment when riding on the Wayne National Forest's 134-mile designated OHV trail system. So what is the Wayne National Forest trying to accomplish with this new forest order?

REYER: You know, Gary, after talking with OHV users, law enforcement, emergency responders and our own employees, I realize that the opinions about the order will be strong and varied, both in support and opposition. But this will help reduce the number and the severity of off-highway vehicle accidents and help bring the forest in line with the safety requirements of other trail providers.

CHANCEY: Now, could you explain the part of the order where the Forest Service is requiring visitors to actually wear a helmet and eye protection before riding the forest OHV trail system?

REYER: Yes, it does require riders operating or riding an off-highway vehicle on the forest to wear eye protection and a helmet that meets the U.S. Department of Transportation safety standards. Requiring helmet use moves us closer to achieving the forest's safe and legal OHV strategy and the commitment we made to the public in the 2006 forest plan to strive to provide a safe recreation experience.

CHANCEY: The second part of the order includes an alcohol restriction. Could you tell us more about that part of it?

REYER: Yes. Possession of alcohol won't be permitted while riding an OHV on the Wayne. The ban also includes no possession of alcohol within 100 feet of the center line of designated OHV trails and certain access roads and with 100 feet of the cleared edges of OHV trailheads. The order includes the Monday Creek OHV trail system on the Athens District and the Hanging Rock, Pine Creek and Superior trails systems on the Ironton District.

CHANCEY: Thank you, Jo. Now, do you see this order hard to determine on the ground?

REYER: We have good maps on the website and they'll be posted at the trailheads to go with the order. I realize it would be easier to enforce an area closure, and we looked at that. We found that to get definable boundaries, we end up with a much larger area and that seemed too restrictive for our visitors. So this is a compromise, and though most of the boundaries won't be signed on the ground, we will add signage case by case as needed.

CHANCEY: And of course, at the time of this podcast recording, trails are closed on the Wayne National Forest until April 15. But how does the forest plan to enforce the new forest order?

REYER: In the first six months, we'll be emphasizing educating the public about the closure and during that time, violators would generally receive a verbal or a written warning during that time. Law enforcement officers have the discretion to give a warning notice or a citation.

CHANCEY: Could you please share the amount of the citations in the event one is written?

REYER: Generally, it would be \$175 to \$325 for helmet violations and \$125 for alcohol violations. Court magistrates could increase these amounts, for example, for repeat offenders.

CHANCEY: Thank you, Jo. Now, let's turn now to DeVela Clark. He's the district ranger for the Athens Ranger District. DeVela, welcome to the show.

CLARK: Thank you.

CHANCEY: You're responsible for managing the Monday Creek trail system. Now, you depend heavily on the Ward Township Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department to be the first responders in the event of an accident on the trail system there. Tell us what information they provided to the forest supervisor to help her determine the need for the forest order.

CLARK: Well, Gary, I'd just like to start by just recognizing that OHV use can be a dangerous sport if it's not done properly. And as you know, from time to time, unfortunately, we have accidents on our trail system. And as you mentioned earlier, we have an agreement that's been in place for well over 10 years where we've worked with the Ward Township VFD as our first responders in those events.

Since 2005, we took a look at how many accidents we had had on the system and we talked with the VFDs to take a look at what was the cause of the serious accidents. So since 2005, we've had about approximately 95 injuries that required them to respond, and of those 95, about one-third of the accidents were serious in nature. And after looking at that, we had – the majority of the injuries were a direct result of people not wearing helmets and alcohol use.

CHANCEY: We've actually had situations where the air ambulance had to come down and pick up people, is that correct?

CLARK: That is correct. We've had many people that had to be life-flighted.

CHANCEY: That's serious accidents.

CLARK: That's correct.

CHANCEY: So, some access roads like Coe Road and Company Road on the Athens Ranger District are included in this order, is that correct?

CLARK: That is correct.

CHANCEY: So could you explain what portion of the roads are actually impacted?

CLARK: OK. On those roads, Company Road is one of our most heavily used areas. Once you come up that road, it's well-defined off of Highway 33. There's a sign that says the Monday Creek Trailhead. As you come up the first portion, about the first two-tenths of a mile of that road is under township jurisdiction, so we have no jurisdiction along that road. You'll come up and you'll pass the trailhead off to your right and there'll be a gate. And right at that gate there'll be signage letting people know that from there on, that's the access road that we have jurisdiction over to enforce this new order.

It's a paved road. You come on up and you'll see the trailheads as you come up. There will be facilities there. There will be toilets, there'll be bulletin boards with the order posted on it and signage in the area. So it's well-defined on the ground.

CHANCEY: So DeVela, give our listeners a visual description of a trailhead and how visitors may be impacted by this order in those areas.

CLARK: OK. I'd just start by when an individual gets a permit, they'll receive a map with that permit and on that map, it's well-defined where trailheads are located. There will be symbols on the map showing where these are on the ground. So as you come out, you check your map. You come up, there'll be signage out on the highways leading individuals to these areas. Some of the roads in some cases are gravel. Some are paved.

Once you come up, you'll see the facilities that I just described briefly earlier, a restroom facility, bulletin boards, access into the trail. These are areas where the trails connect and it's pretty much a parking area.

CHANCEY: Now, what kind of activity is actually – some people do – they do camp in a trailhead area, is that correct?

CLARK: That is correct.

CHANCEY: And they unload their vehicles.

CLARK: They unload and they'll camp right there adjacent to or within the parking area. It's kind of on a first-come, first-served basis.

CHANCEY: Some folks may be impacted by this order where they've normally may have brought alcohol with them.

CLARK: That's correct. In the past, people have, when they are camping, a lot of people will tend to, if they're done riding, they'll have a beer or alcoholic beverage. In the past, that was allowable, but now due to the new order, you're not able to possess any alcohol within these trailhead areas.

CHANCEY: And that's whether it's open or –

CLARK: Open or closed, correct.

CHANCEY: Thank you for clarifying that for me. Thank you, DeVela. Now let's talk with Tim Slone, district ranger on the Ironton Ranger District based out of Pedro. Tim manages the Hanging Rock, Pine Creek and Superior OHV trail system in the southern part of Ohio. Tim, tell us about some new trails on your district. I understand you've added them in the last few months.

SLONE: Yes, Gary, we have added approximately 13 new miles of trail this past summer. That trail system or this 13 new miles connects to our north ATV trail system, which is Pine Creek and then travels south then to County Road 522. We do have some other projects related to these 13 miles of new construction, such as completion of a trail bridge on 522 and we have some signing along the new trail and at trail intersections. The bottom line is, we hope to have all these projects completed, including the bridge, so that we can open this new section of these new 13 miles of trail that connects to our Pine Creek trail system. And that leaves approximately six miles left in the future that remains to be constructed that will actually connect our north and south trail systems.

CHANCEY: OK. That's great. So, it appears you're investing – or the Forest Service is actually investing – in new trails on your district as well as helping keep up the maintenance of these trails as well. Is that correct?

SLONE: Yes. We've done a lot of work over the last few years. We've worked with folks such as Ralph Kline and the Community Action Organization there in Ironton to apply for various grants. We've also invested a little over \$1 million over the last 10 years with the help of the state through their recreation and trails program funding. And in addition to that, the forest last year was able to utilize nearly \$1.5 million of dollars that were received through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

CHANCEY: As we move on here, which access roads and trailheads are actually being impacted on the Ironton Ranger District?

SLONE: Well, it would include all of our trailheads, Gary, like Wolcott and Lara (sp?) and Hanging Rock and Telegraph. And then it would also affect our newest parking lot, which has not opened yet. It's part of that new construction we were talking about, and we'll call it Superior Parking Lot. It also includes our primary road that leads into the Hanging Rock trailhead and there's three spur roads off that road, and the order includes those as well.

CHANCEY: So, Tim, how does the forest plan to inform trail riders about the new order?

SLONE: We have several different things planned, Gary. We have of course a news release. We hope to put out several of those with your help. Signs at our trailheads primarily on the bulletin boards. And we're doing sort of a team effort in reaching out to our local community leaders and trying to inform them of what to expect with this new order. So, we are doing several different things to help get the information out there and we will make ourselves available as well in the future if we had user groups or other groups that are interested in having us attend a meeting or something to explain the order better.

CHANCEY: In closing, is there anything more either one of you would like to add about the new forest order?

REYER: I just want to encourage people to continue to enjoy riding the Wayne's ATV trails. Our many thousands of visitors include families with children who are the future of the sport. We want this to be an exciting and yet safer experience for all of them.

CHANCEY: All right. Thank you, Jo. Now, the public is invited to visit the forest website for more information on the forest order that restricts alcohol and also requires riders to wear a helmet and eye protection while on the Wayne National Forest ATV trails. The forest order and maps are both available there for downloading.

We thank Jo Reyer, forest supervisor for the Wayne National Forest, DeVela Clark, the district ranger for the Athens Ranger District and Tim Slone, district ranger for the Ironton Ranger District.

Until next time, I'm Gary Chancey for ForestNet.

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