

Gifford Pinchot National Forest ATV and Snowmobile Road Use Frequently Asked Questions

Key Statement

Forest Service roads remain open to legally-licensed vehicles operable on all roads in the State of Washington. ATVs do not fit this definition and must remain on designated trails and in areas specifically designated for their use in the Motor Vehicle Use Map or MVUM, which is available free at all forest offices and online at <http://1.usa.gov/I4ZIDK>.

All Forest Service roads closed by one foot of snow to wheeled-vehicle travel are open to over-snow vehicle use, though seasonal motorized access closures and other forest order closures do apply.

Questions and Answers

With the new state law, is it now legal for ATVs and other vehicles not licensed for all road types to be operated on Gifford Pinchot National Forest Roads?

The new state law Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1632 (ESHB 1632) does not allow general operation of wheeled ATVs on all public roads in the state even if they are licensed. By Forest Service policy, roads designated as “Open to Highway Legal Vehicles Only” are open to motor vehicles licensed under state law for general operation on all public roads within the state. Therefore wheeled ATVs are not highway legal vehicles under Forest Service policy. The bill has no direct effects on policies or access decisions for public lands. The MVUM displays roads and trails where ATVs are currently legal to operate.

Where can snowmobiles be operated legally on Forest roads?

Roads not formally closed by forest order (the majority by seasonal closure designation) are made legal for snowmobile use by the forest’s “closed by snow” convention. This convention states, “A road is considered closed to wheeled motorized use when there is one foot of snow.” Being considered “closed” in this fashion, snowmobile use on forest roads is then authorized.

Do the winter wildlife closures apply to snowmobiles, and if so can we use the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) to share this information with our visitors?

Winter wildlife closures and other seasonal closures are for ALL motorized use including snowmobiles and all other motorized over-snow vehicles. The MVUM would show a closure to wheeled motor vehicles, but does not show it as open or closed to snowmobiles.

The forest cannot make the connection between snowmobile use and the MVUM, since the MVUM specifically does not address or govern snowmobile use. Gifford Pinchot MVUM pg. 2: “This map does not display non-motorized uses, over-snow uses...” As it regards restrictions on motorized vehicle use, a table in the front shows the restricted periods of formally closed

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roads highlighted on the maps. This information is of use to snowmobile users, but cannot be used to officially govern their activities.

Are seasonal closures affecting snowmobiles represented anywhere besides the MVUM?

The Forest is looking into production of a map and complimentary information, including this FAQ, directly addressing this issue to share with visitors.

Can ATVs converted for use over snow be used on forest roads?

The forest allows operation of motorized over-snow vehicles (such as converted ATVs), including snowmobiles where not specifically prohibited by law or special order (ie, winter wildlife and other motorized vehicle closures, designated Wilderness, and designated groomed snowmobile trails). "Snowmobiles" can be operated on designated groomed snowmobile routes (many are forest roads) designated specifically for this use. Groomed snowmobile routes are closed to all other wheeled and over-snow motorized use. "Snowmobile" is defined as having skis in the front and a single rear track. Converted ATVs and 4WD do not fit this definition and are not legally operable on groomed routes.

Where can snowmobiles be used in the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument?

Snowmobiles may be used on all Forest Service roads when closed by snow. Snowmobiles may be operated in areas outside the restricted access area or areas closed by forest order. This means State Route 504 and the climbing corridor on the south side of Mount St. Helens are closed to snowmobiles.

Is camping allowed at Snoparks?

Yes, with a valid Washington State Snopark Pass. Passes from other states are no longer accepted in Washington.