

- **Letter from Headwaters Canoe Club**

I am writing out of my profound concern over the DNR's intention to classify the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest as Limited access to off-highway-vehicles (OHVs) with a closed portion within 1/4 mile of the Mississippi River. The DNR has demonstrated a distinct failure to regulate OHV use within the Mississippi River corridor, which has been officially closed for years. They have closed the bridge at Coffee Pot Landing, and the vehicles destroy the signs and run across the river. ATVs have been witnessed riding down the river like it is a wet trail!

My assertion is that 1/4 mile is not a wide enough buffer. At 30 miles per hour, an ATV can reach the river from 'legal' territory in 30 seconds. That just doesn't give our understaffed DNR Enforcement Division a sporting chance! The DNR is also proposing OHV trails crossing the river at Coffee Pot and Stumphges. These are places that OHVs have already devastated, and they are (were) very special places on the headwaters of the Mississippi. They should be restored, not further destroyed!

Over the 17 years of the Headwaters Canoe Club's existence, we have been in contact with many canoeists who travel from all over the world to paddle the headwaters of the Mississippi River. Some plan for years and make it the first major goal of their retirement to paddle from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico. Imagine their disappointment when they find campsites have been closed or destroyed by OHVs! What kind of impression of Minnesota do they bring home after they realize we have transformed the Father of Waters into an ATV playground?

We have worked for years in the River Cleanup program to keep the headwaters of the Mississippi aesthetically pleasing and pure, but if the DNR and the counties are not going to help us protect it, what's the use? Please help us provide legislated direction to the DNR and Hubbard, Clearwater and Beltrami County to keep OHVs out of the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest, except on County and Township Road right-of-ways.