



Stream Team Academy Fact Sheet Series

#1: Tree Planting Guide

#2: Spotlight on the Big Muddy

#3: Lewis & Clark

#4: Missouri Is Number One?

#5: Responsible ATV Use

Watch for more Stream Team Academy Fact Sheets coming your way soon. Plan to collect the entire educational series for future reference!

RESPONSIBLE ATV USE

An Educational Series For Stream Teams To Learn and Collect

Missouri is blessed with an abundance of rural land and sparsely populated terrain in a relatively undisturbed state. The high quality of many of our streams is due largely to these blessings. Missouri residents and visitors treasure the excellent floating, fishing, hunting, hiking, birdwatching, swimming, and other outdoor activities these places offer. An increasing number of people enjoy our outdoors riding on the back of an ATV. Unfortunately, the ease with which these vehicles can climb hills, cross streams, and access distant areas, and the careless behavior of some operators, can spoil these places . . . and spoil the outings of other users.

One of the favorite activities of irresponsible operators is riding through sensitive wet places such as wetlands and streams. While it's easy to understand

how this might be fun, it can be destructive to those habitats and the plants and animals that live there. To prevent this damage, the Missouri law prohibits operation of ATVs in streams with some exceptions (see **THE LAW** box below). In addition, some ATV clubs require their members to complete a course on "responsible ATV use" which they provide.

Some of the impacts from ATV use are obvious. Stream bank and stream bed erosion are likely to occur where tires have compacted or loosened the soil and damaged the vegetation that holds the soil in place. The uprooting of aquatic plants and the increased turbidity (clouding of the water) also tend to be obvious. Plants

(continued on back)

Photo courtesy of National Forest Service



Shown above is a typical example of stream bank erosion at an ATV crossing.

THE LAW

Article 2 of the law (304.013 RSMo) states "No Person shall operate an off-road vehicle within any stream or river in this state, except that off-road vehicles may be operated within waterways which flow within the boundaries of land which an off-road vehicle operator owns, or for agricultural purposes within the boundaries of land which an off-road vehicle operator owns or has permission to be upon, for the purposes of fording such stream or river of this state at such road crossings as are customary or part of the highway system." Violations are Class C misdemeanors that can carry a maximum fine of \$300 and up to 15 days in jail. State, county, and city law officers, and MDC conservation agents (Missouri Department of Conservation) can enforce the law.



provide food, spawning habitat, and shelter for many fish and other aquatic animals. Loosened sediment can be deposited downstream, covering spawning and feeding habitat.

As those of you who have completed any of our water quality monitoring workshops know, riffles are the most productive areas of streams. The high oxygen and light levels and abundance of rocks and crevices provide essential spawning, feeding, and shelter habitat for many fish and invertebrates. Missouri Department of Conservation research showed that an ATV crossing in a riffle significantly increased turbidity and reduced invertebrate populations. Increased turbidity blocks sunlight and inhibits the growth of plants, which are the food of many invertebrates and fish. Invertebrates form one of the bottom

levels in the aquatic food chain upon which many fish such as bass, sunfish, and suckers depend. The study also documented sediment movement and deposition up to 250 yards downstream from the crossing.

Frequently riders are not aware of the damage they may be causing or how to avoid it. Simply informing them may alleviate the problems. To minimize these problems, riders should use established crossings where damage to the bed, banks, and vegetation is minimal, and cross perpendicular to the channel at a very slow speed to minimize disturbance. If your pleas to stop destructive practices are not successful, call your local law enforcement officers. They may be able to convince offenders that we all depend on wise use of our natural resources.

For all of us who enjoy the outdoors, whether we use ATVs or not, the question is "Do we value quality streams and other outdoor places for us and our children and grandchildren to enjoy enough to take responsibility for protecting them?"

ATV Operator's Pledge

- I will respect public and private property.
- I will confine ATV use to designated areas and established trails.
- I will respect the rights of all outdoor users.
- I will not litter.
- I will not operate an ATV in a river or stream.
- I will respect Streamside vegetation and its importance to the stream.
- I will respect all natural areas and minimize my impact.
- I will obey all laws pertaining to the use of off-road vehicles.
- I will always practice safe operation.

If you need more information or have additional questions, please contact Stream Team by e-mail at streamteam@mdc.mo.gov or by phone at 1-800-781-1989 (voice mail). Or visit our website at www.mostreamteam.org.

ATV Trails in Missouri

The designated areas listed below have specific regulations in addition to the state laws.

Mark Twain National Forest (2 areas with designated trails)

Permits required: \$5/day or \$35/year.

Contact: 573/364-4621 or 417/683-4428 or www.fs.fed.us/r9/marktwain/

Finger Lakes State Park and St. Joe State Park

Contact: 800/334-6946 or www.mostateparks.com/

