

THE DRIVING FORCE MOTORIZED REC SCOOP

Primer for new ATVers

CATHY LAREAU

Over this spring, I've taken many calls from folks new to ATVers looking for information. Some recently moved here, some have lived here for years but just recently bought an ATV, and some are thinking about purchasing an ATV and they all want to know how to get started. I figured this would be a good week to give some tips on how to get involved in this popular sport.

Before you ride — do all the legal stuff!

Check out the WIDNR website for all the information you need to know about ATV laws, registration and trail pass requirements

As a summary, make sure your machine is registered in Wisconsin, or you have an out-of-state trail pass. If you, or anyone who will be driving your machine, was born on or after January 1, 1988 — a DNR safety certification is required. Drivers must be at least 12 to operate an ATV, and 16 to operate a UTV. Every driver and passenger who is under 18 must wear a DOT-compliant helmet.

Learn where you can and cannot ride.

Sawyer County is made up of 4 different forest systems, connected by road routes. Your best Sawyer County mapping resource is the app Trail Treker — search for it in your phone's app store. This program is currently free to download, then you can purchase individual maps for Sawyer County 'Summer ATV', snowmobiling, and other county's maps for a nominal \$2-\$5 fee.

Our Alliance paper map is widely available at gas stations, bars and restaurants — but it is only printed once



BY CATHY LAREAU

A stop on Rock Lake Road during a summer ride last year.

a year and won't show trail or route changes that can happen after printing.

Apparently, some other states allow riders to run in ditches, because I sure get asked a lot about ATV ditch riding. Here in Wisconsin, including Sawyer County, you cannot ride any road ditch unless it's designated and signed as a trail or route. Shoulders are off limits too. You must stay on a legal trail or the drivable portion of a road route. If your lodging or home isn't on a legal route or trail, you must trailer to the nearest route or trail.

Learn when you can ride.

Our ATV trail riding season in Sawyer County is long — with a few exceptions, trails are open a substantial part of each year. All regularly scheduled trail closures are shown on both our paper map and Trail Treker.

Trails close between March and May for 'spring thaw' to prevent trail damage while frost is coming out of the ground. Each forest entity regulates their own open/close dates (shown on our map) and these dates can change due to weather and trail conditions. Any deviations from the regular open/close dates will be posted

on our Sawyer County Alliance FB page. If you are not on FB, I share our Alliance announcements on my Driving Force Motorized Rec website too.

Many of our winter trails are off limits to UTVs after snowmobile grooming begins — again, the best source to keep up with this will be our Alliance FB page.

Important notes about road routes.

Personally, I do not like road riding but realize how important routes are for accessing trail systems and destinations. Use Trail Treker to make sure you are riding on legal routes.

Learn to identify the different road types; local roads, county roads, and state highways. State highways are off limits unless a segment is specifically signed as an ATV route — there is NO part of Hwy 63 that is open to ride on! You can cross it at intersections, but you can't ride on it.

County roads in Sawyer County are open for ATV use, other than within the Lac Courte Oreilles Indian Reservation (LCO), where only specific, signed routes are open.

Most of our local city, town, and village roads are

open for ATV use — and the few that aren't, still have marked road routes to use.

Be a thoughtful, courteous rider when traveling through our neighborhoods — slow down, turn your music down, watch for pedestrians, stray pets and wildlife.

Above all — stay safe on the road. Your roll cage and beefy equipment may give you the inflated sense that you are protected, but you are no match against a highway vehicle in an accident. If you are not comfortable road riding, choose lesser-traveled roads, or trailer to the trails.

Don't be an idiot by drinking either — call me anytime to discuss this one, and I'll gladly tell you why.

How to find rides.

The most-asked question I get! If folks use Facebook, I tell them to look for North Central WI ATV/UTV Rides, because Gene and Michelle Richardson host many local rides. Once on Facebook, riders can also find many other ATV groups to join. Eventually the new rider will hook up with ATV enthusiasts who enjoy similar riding styles.

Some folks are not on Facebook, which presents more of a challenge — all I can suggest is to get out there and ride, stop and talk to others on the trail, and join a local ATV club.

Although our clubs don't really host that many organized rides, joining puts riders in touch with other ATVers. Visit our Sawyer County Alliance website for a list of clubs to consider.

My Driving Force Motorized Rec Scoop website offers you a deeper dive into all this info and be sure to visit the WIDNR ATV website too. It won't be long and I'll see you out there!