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### Making Tracks, Making Enemies

Based on the NY Times report of January 2, 2004 by Jason Tanz. For the complete article, go to:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/02/automobiles/02ROAD.html?ex=1074048372&ei=1&en=95a4d313b3dfdfae>

In her two years as chief ranger at the Wharton State Forest, Carmel Capoferri has seen her share of illegal activity. She has stumbled upon dead bodies and recovered stolen cars. But one group of criminals plagues her most: - drivers of all-terrain vehicles.

Driving A.T.V.'s, the lightweight, heavy-horsepower thrill machines that have exploded in popularity the last decade, is forbidden on any state-owned land in New Jersey. Still, Ms. Capoferri said "I've probably caught an A.T.V. on every road in this park." A quick pass through the preserve revealed a hill riddled with beer cans and A.T.V. tracks, the deep ruts digging into the soil and exposing the fragile roots of white and scrub pines. . .

Another front has opened in the land-use war. For more than four decades, greenies and gearheads have been battling in parks, courts and state houses across the country over off-roading on public lands. But factions among off-roaders, a group that includes A.T.V. riders, four-by-four enthusiasts, snowmobilers and motorcyclists, are also squaring off.

One off-roader's attitude: "I think my right to go where I want should not be hampered by the whims of somebody else that wants to leave the world looking like it was 40,000 years ago, If I'm out there just playing around, and I'm not hurting anybody or anything, I don't care what the sign says."

Meanwhile, over the last few decades the popularity of off-roading has exploded. Americans bought 847,000 ATVs in 2002, up from 447,000 four years before. And with that increase in numbers, many officials said, has come a related increase in illegal activity - fences demolished, signs torn down, off-limit areas traversed and public drunkenness. While some of this may be because of ignorance, some law enforcement officials say a growing rebelliousness among off-roaders is the chief culprit.

Last May, Tracy Stites, a conservation officer for the Division of Fish and Wildlife of the New Jersey Environmental Protection Department, responded to a complaint by a farmer in Fairfield Township that ATV-ers were driving through his hay fields. When Mr. Stites stepped out of his car and signaled to one ATV-er to stop, he said, the driver plowed into him, breaking one of his legs and tearing two ligaments. . "When it's an ATV issue, we've learned that we can't go out alone," said Ms. Capoferri, the New Jersey ranger. "Many of us have been assaulted."

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Editorial comment: There is also a battle for the trails in Pennsylvania, there are 2,535 MILES of illegal ATV trails in our State Forests. DCNR should utilize the ATV Restricted fund to block trails and rehabilitate the damage. If you wish to express your comments on this situation, contact your State Representative at The Pennsylvania General Assembly or DCNR. Comments may be directed to ForestCoalition@aol.com, Subject: Comment on # 409

Yours in conservation,

R. Martin  
Coordinator