

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service
Chickasawhay Ranger District
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LITTLE TIGER ATV TRAIL – CLOSURES EXTENDED

The Forest Service announced today that the closure of the Little Tiger All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Trail in Wayne County has been extended. The trail closed July 7 of 2003 due to seriously degraded trail conditions. District Ranger Robert Lee commented, "We do our best to limit any inconveniences to our visiting public, but in the interest of responsible forest stewardship, interruptions in services to forest visitors will occur at times."

"Only recently have funds been secured to repair the trail", said District Ranger Lee. "We received a \$200,000 grant from the Mississippi Recreation Trails Grant Program which is administered through the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Park that will enable us to proceed with reconstruction of the Little Tiger ATV Trail".

Tentative reconstruction plans include trail relocation, installation of water crossings, the construction of approximately three additional miles, and soil restoration work. The work will be accomplished through a contract later this summer.

The Little Tiger ATV Trail and the immediate area will remain closed to motorized vehicles during the reconstruction. Projected completion date for the project is late fall of this year. The trail will re-open following the successful renovation and mitigation of resource damage.

"When the trail initially closed last year we heard from many all-terrain vehicle riders who offered to help restore the trail", said Lee. "Since then, we have formed a partnership with the South Mississippi ATV Association and other individuals committed to working with the Forest Service to restore the Little Tiger Trail. We have completed three volunteer work days and more are planned in coming months. The value of the donated labor from these dedicated volunteers will help us to match five percent of the grant money received from the state".

Any persons interested in providing voluntary support should contact Kim Smith at [601] 428-0594, or email @ kismith@fs.fed.us.

The Little Tiger ATV Trail is one of three national forest trails in south Mississippi undergoing major rehabilitation. On the De Soto Ranger District, the south end of the De Soto National Forest, Rattlesnake Bay ATV Trail, and the north loop of the Bethel ATV Trail have also been closed for the past year. Renovation of these trails is also funded by the Recreation Trails Grant Program. For more information on the De Soto Ranger District trails, contact Andy Hunter at 601-928-4422.

Nationally, the Chief of the Forest Service is emphasizing a renewed commitment to improving forest health. Unmanaged recreation is one of four threats the Chief has identified as negatively impacting forest health. Degraded ATV trails and undesignated, or rider created trails, are prime examples of unmanaged recreation.

Another of the four threats, the spread of invasive species, is also linked to unmanaged recreation in the forests nationwide. In Mississippi, the rampant spread of Cogongrass is a good example. Due to the moderate terrain of south Mississippi, there are few places four-wheel drive trucks or all-terrain vehicles cannot go for hunting or exploring. Using ATV's in unmanaged remote areas contributes to the spread of this noxious weed.

Responsible riders can help by staying on designated trails, thoroughly cleaning their vehicles after each ride, and volunteering to work with federal and state agencies to maintain trails. The cooperation and support from responsible riders will determine the future of ATV use in the De Soto National Forest, and throughout the National Forests in Mississippi.

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