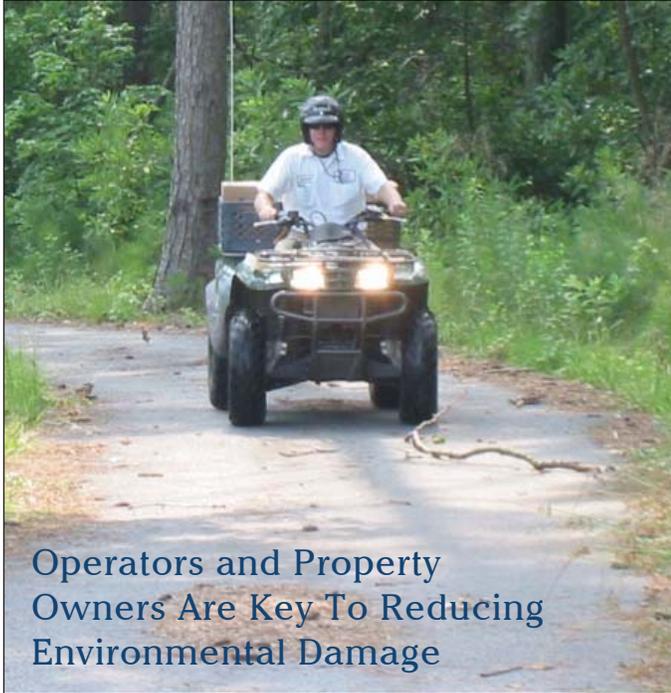# FACT SHEET

Off-Road Vehicles: Impact To Drainage Systems and Wetlands

Operators and Property Owners Are Key To Reducing Environmental Damage

Many people live in York County to enjoy the outdoors. In an effort to get back to nature, All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), Off-Road Motorcycles, and 4-Wheel Drive Vehicles (4WDV) have grown in popularity. With responsible use of these vehicles, users can enjoy the thrill of traveling the backwoods in comfort while still protecting the environment. Improper use can cause significant damage to wetlands and to drainage ways. It destroys the outdoor experience that everyone seeks. Operators of these vehicles have a responsibility to respect the environment. They have a duty to use their vehicles responsibly and with minimum impact to protect our wetland areas from harm.

IMPORTANCE OF OUR NATURAL WETLAND AREAS

Wetland areas are an important part of our eco-system. Wetlands reduce flood levels due to their ability to store rainwater. By controlling runoff, wetlands play an important role in reducing the buildup of sediment in our rivers and bays.

Wetlands enhance water quality by acting as filters. Wetlands often act as buffer zones by temporarily holding floodwaters and filtering materials such as excess nutrients from surface waters. When a wetland is lost, its buffering function is also lost.

RESULTS OF MISUSE

Misuse of ATV's and 4WDV's in the outdoors can cause the following results:

- Destruction of vegetation.
- Loose, unstable soil and sediment buildup seriously impacts fish and wildlife habitat downstream. Ultimately this sediment ends up in the York River and the Chesapeake Bay, negatively impacting fish and crab habitat.
- ATV activity in drainage ditches and flood plains can cause major blockages and sediment problems which can result in flooding during major rain events.
- Excellent breeding grounds for mosquitoes in ruts left behind in wetlands and drainage basins.
- Damage to septic system drain fields could cause disease and harm the oyster crop and other bay life.

WHAT DO RESPONSIBLE RIDERS DO?

There are numerous ways to minimize the impacts of Off-Road Vehicles. Here are just a few recommendations for responsible operators:

- Use only roads, trails, or other areas designated for ATV use, and don't create new trails.
- Obtain permission from landowner for ATV use on privately owned land.
- Stay in the middle of the trail to avoid widening it.
- Avoid riding in wetland areas, on steep slopes or in drainage ways.
- Avoid doing doughnuts in wet areas.
- Moderate the throttle on slick trails.
- Avoid muddy trails, and save them for future trips when they are dry.
- Don't litter.
- Ensure vehicles are properly maintained and not leaking fluids.

LANDOWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

Property owners can be held responsible for environmental damage on their property, regardless of who causes the damage. Landowners can help protect the environment by restricting access, controlling damage, and reporting violators. Federal and State regulations that apply in the case of damage to wetlands, streams and ditches include: the Clean Water Act, the Virginia Wetland Protection Act, and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. If a trespassing rider gets hurt or damages private property, the landowner may be held liable.

As a landowner:

- Restrict unauthorized vehicle access.
- Post "No Trespassing" signs.
- Notify the Sheriff's Department (890-3630) if you see Off-Road Vehicles trespass on private property.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

There are numerous organizations that support both responsible use of Off-Road Vehicles/All Terrain Vehicles and the preservation of our environment.

For more information:

Tread Lightly
www.treadlightly.org/

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
www.deq.state.va.us/wetlands/mitigate.html

Natural Trails and Waters Coalition
www.naturaltrails.org/issues/fieldguide2vehicles.html

Americans for Responsible Recreational Access
www.arra-access.com/arra/home.html

National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council
www.nohvcc.org