

Minnesota Trails Assistance Program commonly called Grants-in-aid (GIA)

What is The Minnesota Trails Assistant Program, commonly called Grants-in-aid (GIA)?

It is a grant program to provide money to a city, township or county to partner with volunteers and reimburse those volunteers to construct and maintain trails. There is GIA for

- all-terrain vehicle (ATV)
- off-highway motorcycle (OHM)
- off-road vehicle (ORV) recreation
- snowmobile, and
- cross-country ski trails

This partnership between the state, local government units and trail enthusiasts provides high quality outdoor recreation and stewardship as well as economic benefit to local communities by visitors coming to great local trails.

Where does the money come from?

Money for the grants comes from dollars collected from trail users, vehicle registration, trail passes and other trail user related fees.

How it works

Volunteers (commonly a Club) apply through counties, cities or townships for a grant to provide a trail for the public. Applications are sent to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources division of Parks and Trails.

What about liability

State law encourages the use of land by the public for outdoor recreation. Covered are personal injuries or property losses on grants-in-aid trails except for conduct that would entitle a trespasser to damages against a private person. Liability is limited to \$1 million for GIA trails and other outdoor recreation activities. Insurance is reimbursable up to GIA program guidelines. MN statutes chapter 3.736 4h, 466.03, and 604A.20 -27 all aid in the limiting of liability for trail use.

Who does what?

Roles and responsibilities vary across the state and between sponsors and clubs. The DNR urges the use of agreements between a county, city or township and a volunteer club. Agreements provide clear roles and responsibilities. Contact the DNR for general guidance on roles.

What about trails already funded by GIA?

GIA is not a competitive grant program. A club in the grant program can apply and get money each year. Sponsors work with the same clubs on the same trails for years. Careful consideration should be given before switching clubs on a trail when no maintenance or program problems on the trail are noted by the DNR. Many trails take years of relationship building with private landowners and public land managers by clubs.

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What about new trails?

The DNR will help Clubs and Sponsors to develop new off-highway vehicle trail proposals that are both fun and environmentally sustainable. New off-highway vehicle trail proposals can be sent in to the DNR at any time.

How are new trails reviewed to involve the public and ensure environmental concerns are addressed?

New trail projects cannot start until required environmental review is complete. If the environmental review process identifies detrimental environmental effects, project modifications or additional mitigation will likely be required. The DNR will provide:

1. Public notification and a 30-day comment period or;
2. Sponsors may hold public notification or a comment period that meets the DNR's intent.

Some trail development projects may require preparation of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW).

Off-Road Vehicle Trail Proposal

The Duluth Off-road Association is interested in a short two or three mile 10-foot-wide hand cut trail for use by registered off-road vehicles (ORVs) such as modified jeeps on public lands. The trail would be closed to all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and off-highway motorcycles (OHMs). In 2014 there were 3,248 registered ORV's in the state with 33 ORVs registered in Carlton County. The proposed trail will only be able to be traversed by a part of the currently registered ORVs that are modified for rocky trail travel.



Figure 1. Off-road vehicle (ORV) on rocky trail

The location and terrain in Carlton County provide an opportunity to construct a unique trail rated “more to most-difficult” experience. The location and alignment will be selected to avoid sensitive areas along a ridge of exposed bedrock common to the area. This exposed rock provides challenge and durability. The trail is proposed to be open year-round during daylight hours except for temporary closures during spring thaw, heavy rains and the firearms deer season.

The Duluth Off-road Association will be responsible for all construction and maintenance with technical support from DNR Parks and Trails. All permits will be in place before construction. DNR and local enforcement can patrol the trail after it is in place.