

Former Bowater lands to be open to ATVs



The former Bowater lands will now be open to ATVs. (The Canadian Press)

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All-terrain vehicle riders are celebrating the unexpected news the former Bowater lands in Nova Scotia will soon be open for recreational use.

In December, the Nova Scotia government bought a large tract of private forest land that belonged to Resolute Forest Products Ltd. Now the province controls more than 220,000 hectares of woods and lakes in province's southwestern region.

News the gates will soon open came out at an ATV association meeting on Wednesday night.

Most members of the Safety Minded ATV Association said they thought the land would be off limits.

"We all thought about selling our bikes, getting rid of our fishing gear and everything else," said Rob McNair.

Instead, the director of enforcement for the Department of Natural Resources delivered a pleasant surprise and announced vehicles will be allowed in the area as long as they stay on roadbeds.

"We're comfortable now that we're ready to open these gates and allow people to enjoy this oasis that's in their backyards," said John Mombourquette.

The gates were built by the paper company to keep the public out. Now the huge swath of land near Halifax will be open for motorized recreation. The same applies to two other large properties as well.

"It's great news. We come here thinking it's going to be all doom and gloom, thinking we won't be able to drive our bikes back there and now we got positive reinforcement," said McNair.

"We can drive our bikes back there now. It's fantastic."

Wetlands and ecologically sensitive areas will be off limits to ATVs, something the association is promising to respect.

"It's our land, it's Crown land, and it's up to us to be stewards of it and be part of the process of making it safe in there and maintaining. This is some of the best news we've heard for a while for the residents of Nova Scotia," said association member Mike Mariott.

While the reaction is mostly positive, there are some concerns about litter, careless fires and break-ins at private camps.

The gates are expected to open at the end of the month.