

CLEAR AS MUD?



MICHIGAN DNR OHV RULES EXPLAINED



Signage on the DNR route or trail makes it easy to know if you are on the right path.

Nothing gets a Facebook group discussion heated up like a post about the MI DNR ORV/OHV license and pass sticker program. Confusion and misinformation abounds and this leads to arguments and personal stories about being harassed by local law enforcement. Taking all that into consideration, the DNR website is a great tool to clear up the confusion. The site states in black and white what the requirements are for your vehicle, and this article will directly address the secretary of state licensed vehicles we off-road, overland and camp with and in.

Please note that this article addresses only the MI DNR routes and trails. There are many County, State and National forest roads to enjoy that have their own rules.

ORV PERMITS AND LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

Type of vehicle	Designated ORV trails (for vehicles 50" in width or less)	Designated ORV routes passable by conventional 2-wheel drive passenger vehicle	Designated ORV routes not passable by conventional 2-wheel drive passenger vehicle and scramble areas	Frozen surface of public waters
Street-licensed ORV	both	neither	both	neither
Regular ORV (not street-licensed)	both	both	both	ORV License
Street-licensed motorcycle	both	neither	both	neither
Off-road motorcycle (not street licensed)	both	both	both	ORV License
Off-road, street-licensed motorcycle	both	neither	both	neither
Street-licensed truck or passenger vehicle	not permissible	neither	both	neither

Looking at the table above, an SOS licensed vehicle only needs a permit and pass when on "designated ORV routes not passable by a conventional two-wheel drive passenger vehicle and scramble areas." This is possibly where the confusion starts. Scramble areas are easy to identify like Silver Lake, Drummond Island or St. Helens. Scramble areas also can require MI recreation passes and there are signs that clearly indicate that they are in fact, scramble areas requiring permit and pass. No argument there. But what is this "not passable by a conventional two-wheel drive passenger vehicle" B.S.?

ORV ROUTE VS. TRAIL

ORV TRAIL SYSTEM

There are three designated types of trails, including:

- Motorcycle-only trails maintained at a 24" width.
- ORV trails maintained at a 50" width.
- ORV routes maintained at a minimum 72" width or greater.

Note: Some ORV routes have a restriction to 65" width or high-ground clearance. See trail maps for locations.

What is the difference between a designated ORV route and a designated ORV trail?

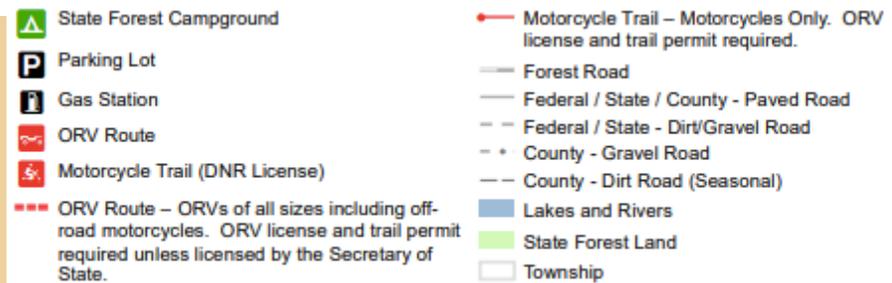
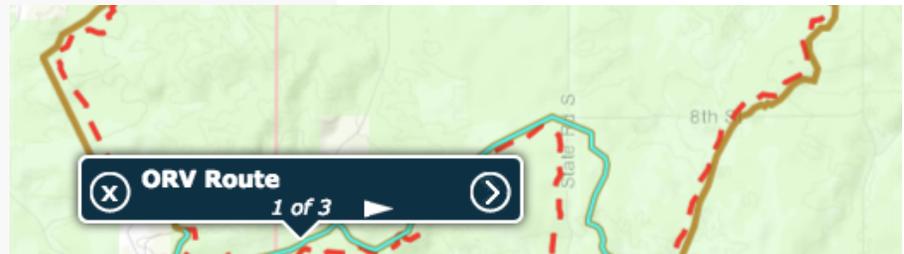
A designated ORV route means any road that has been properly signed on the ground by the DNR for ORV use. A designated ORV trail means a path or way capable of travel by a 2- to 4-wheel vehicle not more than 50 inches in width and properly signed on the ground by the DNR for ORV use.

GOING TO THE SOURCE

To clear up the confusion, let us take a look at a DNR ORV route and check the map provided for clues.

The top right photo is a screenshot of the MI DNR ARCGIS interactive map. Zoom in to see the route in question, here we chose Tin Cup, and click on the route line. A clickable pop-up appears (second screenshot) and will bring you to a page with map links.

When you open the map, you will see the full trail (notice the Jeep on the thicker line in the third screenshot? A clue!) At the bottom is a legend which clearly states the permit and pass requirements for the route (in the fourth photo.) Here is your hall pass, your get-out-of-jail-free-card. On every ORV route map I have ever opened up, the legend clearly states "ORV Route- ORVs of all sizes... ORV license and trail permit required **unless licensed by the Secretary of State.**" Of course, if you opened the motorcycle or atv trail map, you'll see those rules. The cool thing is these maps are geo-enabled pdfs, available on Avenza so you can track yourself, see where you are in real time without cell signal and if in the teeny tiny chance a DNR officer doubts the legality of your location, you can show him the info straight from the DNR's own source.



So there you have it. The DNR website states there are only three types of trails, and the one for SOS vehicles is an ORV Route, very easy to identify. Every DNR ORV map has a legend which CLEARLY states if it is a Route and what is permissible. There is signage on the trails and routes. So what is with the confusion? Word of mouth, misunderstanding and hearsay are the main culprits. These screenshots were taken from the MI DNR site and confirmed by a DNR officer in the Marquette office (sorry to burst your bubble but he said that all the ORV Routes by design are passable by a 2wd passenger vehicle.) I also had a lengthy convo with an officer on the Bill Nicholls Trail. We were passing from opposite directions, stopped to chat about the

repairs from the Father's Day floods in 2018. He never asked to see my stickers despite the convoy behind me. If we were breaking the law, he would have written six tickets that day. So why aren't permits and passes required for SOS licensed vehicles? Maybe because there are private property and residences on some of the routes, you could hardly require people pay to go to their own property. Maybe because hunters and loggers use them? To those who are still convinced they need to buy the license and pass for ORV Routes because it's "insurance" or they feel like they want to contribute, or it looks cool, go right ahead. But at that point, plan a trip and go to a scramble area to get what you actually paid for. I hear Drummond Island is nice!