

FACT SHEET



Alaska Department of
**NATURAL
RESOURCES**

Division of Mining, Land and Water - April 2015

OFF-ROAD TRAVEL ON THE NORTH SLOPE ON STATE LAND

A land use permit, issued by the Division of Mining, Land and Water (DMLW), is required for all off-road travel on all state land on the North Slope. 11 AAC 96.014(b)(1) The Northern Regional Office of the DMLW issues these permits. These permits are issued for a maximum term of five years and they contain stipulations intended to avoid damage to the tundra vegetation and ecosystem. They also require that if any damage to the tundra does occur, the damaged area must be rehabilitated to the satisfaction of the DMLW. The permits are issued for either summer tundra travel (July 15 until freeze-up), winter tundra travel (freeze-up until break-up), or both. Note that, in order to avoid significant tundra damage to the seasonally super-saturated soil/tundra environment, no off-road travel except for true emergency situations is permitted for the period from break-up until July 15 due to saturated soil conditions and migratory bird nesting.

WINTER OFF-ROAD TRAVEL

The DMLW Northern Regional Office actively monitors snow depth and soil temperatures throughout the winter season to determine when to open the tundra to general off-road travel. Monitoring stations are located within four tundra opening areas: the Western Coastal, the Eastern Coastal, and the Upper Foothills and the Lower Foothills of the Brooks Range. The tundra is opened to off-road travel in the Coastal areas when the soil temperature at a depth of twelve inches reaches -5 °C and when there is six (6) inches of snow on the ground. In the Foothills areas, tundra opening occurs when the soil temperature reaches -5 °C and when there is nine (9) inches of snow on the ground. The date of tundra opening has ranged from as early as November 4 to as late as January 27. Once the tundra has been opened in the winter, there are no restrictions on the type of vehicles that may operate on the tundra under a permit. In years of limited snowfall, the tundra may be opened conditionally with specific operating restrictions.

The tundra is closed when it appears that thawing conditions have resulted in snow that will be too soft or too limited to permit travel without resulting in damage to the tundra. Off-road vehicle operators are then notified and given 72 hours to move their vehicles and other equipment off of the tundra and onto the road system.

SUMMER OFF-ROAD TRAVEL

Permitted summer tundra travel is limited to vehicles that have been tested and approved by the DMLW. The purpose of vehicle testing is to determine which vehicles can operate on the tundra during the summer without causing damage to the tundra. Vehicles are approved in the configuration tested; for example, a vehicle tested with a payload of 1000 pounds would be limited to that payload when operating in the field. A vehicle tested and approved with smooth tracks would require retesting if the vehicle is to be operated with wheels or cleats.

The following general stipulations apply to all permits issued for summer tundra vehicles, excluding airboats:

1. Operations shall be restricted to dry uplands whenever possible.

2. The crossing of wetlands shall be kept to an absolute minimum.
3. The crossing of ponds, lakes, or the wetlands immediately bordering these areas is not authorized.
4. Minimum radius turns shall be avoided where possible.
5. Multiple passes over the same area shall be kept to a minimum.
6. All operators shall be made familiar with arctic vegetation types to ensure compliance with the above.
7. The state reserves the right to limit, restrict, or require retesting of vehicles at any time.
8. Incidents of damage to the vegetative mat and follow-up corrective actions that have occurred shall be reported to the DMLW within 72 hours of occurrence. The DMLW will determine if additional rehabilitation actions are required of the permittee.
9. Vehicles cannot carry more payload than was carried during the certification test.

The following stipulations apply to permits issued for summer airboat use only:

1. Only airboats with a plastic coated bottom and prop with four or more blades are approved for tundra travel.
2. Use of airboats will be limited to spill drills, exercises, and actual responses.
3. Use will be limited to transportation of the boat across land in order to access a water body for use in a spill drill, exercise, or actual response. Use for ferrying passengers or equipment is not authorized.
4. Airboat operators shall make every effort to minimize the negative effects airboat operations may have on wildlife.

SUMMER APPROVED VEHICLES

The following vehicles have been tested and approved for permitted **summer** tundra travel. For specific information regarding the approved payload limits and other restrictions, or for scheduling a tundra travel test, please contact the DMLW.

1. Argo 8 I/C with smooth tracks.
2. Argo 6X6 Frontier 580 with Supertracks.
3. Argo 8X8 Avenger 750 HDi with Supertracks.
4. Roller-driven vehicles equipped with large, bag-type tires (ex. Rimpull)
5. Haggland Bearcat with smooth track configuration.
6. Tucker Snocat with smooth track configuration.
7. Tucker-Terra Sno-Cat model 1600 with smooth track configuration.
8. Tucker Terra 2000 with smooth track configuration.
9. Pisten Bully 100 Trail with smooth track configuration.
10. Pisten Bully 400 Trail with smooth track configuration.
11. Polaris Ranger 800 6X6 configuration with smooth tires (maximum payload, including passengers, is 1,200 lbs).
12. Polaris Ranger 800 6X6 with smooth tires and plastic smooth-bottom sled (maximum payload is 2,101 lbs in vehicle and 1,000 lbs in sled).
13. Kubota RTV900 with Litefoot tracks (payload, including passengers, must be under 500 lbs).
14. Kubota RTV1100 with LiteFoot tracks (payload, including passenger, must be under 1595 lbs).
15. Lindsey Snow Walker (used only during pre-packing operations).
16. Airboats (for use in spill drills, exercises, and responses only).

*** Please contact the DMLW about restricted/conditional summer tundra travel of direct-drive vehicles equipped with large, bag-type tires (ex. NOV rolligon).

TUNDRA DAMAGE REPORTING

All incidents of tundra damage must be reported to the DMLW within 72 hours of occurrence. Reports should include the date, time and location of the damage occurrence, the size of the area impacted and what caused the damage. When appropriate, reporting should also include the steps that will be taken to rehabilitate the area and an explanation of how the company plans to prevent such damage in the future.

USE OF UNAPPROVED VEHICLES IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In emergency situations, such as a catastrophic oil spill, unapproved vehicles may be authorized in clean-up operations if the response will be expedited and the addition of unapproved vehicles will prevent further environmental damage from the event. For example, if a catastrophic spill occurred near a river, heavy equipment such as bulldozers may be effective in preventing oil from flowing into the river. In this example, the resulting damage to the tundra by heavy equipment may be minor compared to having large amounts of oil enter the water. The use of vehicles that are not allowed for summer tundra travel is limited to situations that will result in a significantly increased rate of oil spill clean-up.

An attempt to get verbal approval from the DMLW must be made before unapproved vehicles are used in an emergency response. If verbal contact cannot be made, the intent to use heavy equipment for spill response must be included when reporting the spill on the DMLW statewide spill report number (907) 451-2678. Justification for the decision to use unapproved vehicles must be supplied to the DMLW in a completion report. The DMLW will determine when the "emergency phase" of an incident is over and when unapproved vehicles must be replaced by vehicles approved for summer tundra travel. **All incidents of tundra damage resulting from the use of both approved and unapproved vehicles must be remediated to the satisfaction of the Division of Mining, Land & Water.**

USE OF UNAPPROVED VEHICLES FOR SPILL DRILLS AND EXERCISES

In limited circumstances, unapproved vehicles for summer travel may be used in spill drills or spill training exercises, under an appropriate permit. Pre-approval from the DMLW is required and authorization will be considered on a case-by-case basis. **Any damage to the tundra caused by these, or by approved vehicles, must be rehabilitated to the satisfaction of the Division of Mining, Land & Water.** Use of heavy equipment not approved for off-road travel will not be authorized for use in drills and training exercises.

For additional information contact:

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Division of Mining, Land & Water
3700 Airport Way
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

Northern Regional Office
Phone: (907) 451-2740

North Slope Office
Phone: (907) 659-2830