

Guide to the ATV and UTV Laws in Michigan

In all national forests in Michigan, motor vehicles can be used only on roads, trails, or areas that are designated as open. This applies equally to ATVs and UTVs. You should also familiarize yourself with these tips for riding on federal land. With a valid ORV license, you can operate an ATV or UTV on the frozen surfaces of public waters in Michigan. However, you are limited to operation at the minimum speed necessary for controlled forward movement if you are within 100 feet of another person, an ice fishing shanty or an area cleared for ice skating.

It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV in or on the waters of any stream, river, marsh, bog, wetland, swamp, or quagmire, unless you are driving on a bridge, culvert, or similar structure. It is also unlawful to ride along stream banks or shorelines.

Where you can Operate an ATV or UTV in Michigan

Wherever you are permitted to ride, you are required to stay on the designated roads and trails. Leaving the trails can damage the environment and constitute a criminal violation.

[You are permitted to ride on private land only with the express permission of the landowner.](#)

State Forest Land in Michigan has thousands of miles of roads open to ATV and UTV use. You are required to possess an ORV license to use such road. For Michigan, the rules on riding in State Forest Land vary by region as follows.

- **Upper Peninsula:** ATV and UTV operation is generally permitted on designated trails and forest roads in the Upper Peninsula unless posted as closed.
- **Lower Peninsula:** ATV and UTV operation is permitted on all designated trails, designated areas, and designated routes (forest roads that are designated for ORV use) in the Lower Peninsula.
- **Statewide:** ATV and UTV use on designated trails is limited to vehicles with an overall width of 50 inches or less (look at these links to see what ATVs and UTVs fit these dimensions). Off-trail or off-route operation outside of a designated area is prohibited except for hunters operating an ATV or UTV at speeds of 5 mph or less for the purpose of removing deer, bear, or elk.

In Michigan's State Game Areas, located primarily in southern Michigan, ATV and UTV use is specifically prohibited. ATV and UTV use is also prohibited in all state parks and recreation areas except in designated areas of Silver Lake State Park.

Required ATV and UTV Equipment in Michigan

- **In Michigan, all ATV and UTV operators and passengers are required to wear a helmet.** We always recommend this O'Neal helmet as a super high-quality helmet at a budget price.
- If your helmet is not equipped with a face guard, you are required to wear goggles. Another great recommendation for top-quality goggles at a budget price is this pair from Oakley.
- If you have a UTV, you can forego the helmet requirement if you are wearing a seatbelt and the UTV has a roof meeting safety standards. We of course recommend you still wear a helmet.
- A braking system in good working condition that operates by either hand or foot.
- A throttle system designed to return the engine speed to idle automatically and immediately when pressure is released.
- A U.S. Forest Service-approved spark arrestor.
- A muffler in good working condition.
- Every passenger must be seated in seating designed and manufactured for a passenger.

- If the ATV or UTV is operated during the hours of one-half hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise, it must display a headlight, taillight, and brake light.

Note, the above requirement for a helmet is waived if you are riding on a state-licensed game bird hunting preserve at a speed of 10 mph or less or if you are an invited guest or family member of the landowner when riding on private property and you are at least 18 years of age (or 16 with parent's permission to ride without a helmet). You are required to Title and License your ATV or UTV in Michigan?

Youth ATV/UTV Requirements in Michigan

- **Youth riders under the age of 16 must complete a safety education requirement.** The safety education certificate must be carried by the operator at all times he or she is operating an ATV or UTV.
- No one under the age of 16 may operate any 3-wheel ATV.
- No one under the age of 10 may operate an ATV or UTV unless they are on private land and performing farm-related work operations.
- Youth aged 10 and 11 years old may operate an ATV or UTV if they possess a valid ORV safety certificate and they are on land owned by the child's parent or guardian under the direct visual supervision of an adult.
- **Youth aged 12 to 15 years old may operate an ATV or UTV only if they possess a valid ORV safety certificate and they are under the direct visual supervision of an adult.**
- Youth under the age of 12 may not cross any street, highway or county road while operating an ATV or UTV.

Direct visual supervision means having direct observation with the unaided or normally corrected eye and being close enough to come to the immediate aid of an ATV or UTV operator.

Title

Michigan residents owning an ATV or UTV are required to obtain a certificate of title for their ATV/UTV through the Secretary of State. This requirement does not extend to an ATV or UTV owned by a nonresident of Michigan even if the ATV or UTV is used in Michigan.

License and Permit

In addition to titling your ATV or UTV in Michigan, you must license the machine with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) if it will be used on public lands in Michigan. While non-residents are not required to title their ATV or UTV, they are required to license it if they are riding in Michigan.

The DNR license for your ATV or UTV is called an ORV license and there is an annual fee of \$26.25. In addition, an ORV trail permit is required to operate on state-designated trails, routes, or areas. The cost of the ORV Trail permit is an additional \$10.00.

Your ORV license must be displayed and visible at all times. You are required to place the ORV license on a flat metal surface, a bumper, or a plate permanently attached to the rear of your ATV or UTV.

Licenses and permits are valid from April 1 through March 31 of the following year, regardless of the date of purchase.

ORV licenses are available from the DNR at DNR Operations Service Centers, over the Internet at

www.mdnr-elicense.com, by mail, through participating ATV dealers, or through participating hunting and fishing license agents.

In addition, the use of an ATV or UTV is prohibited in public hunting areas during the regular November firearm deer season, from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., except in the following circumstances:

- Going to or from a residence or hunting camp that is inaccessible by a conventional vehicle.

- On private property with the landowner's permission.
- UTVs may be operated on roads capable of sustaining automobile traffic; and
- Persons holding a "Permit to Hunt from a Standing Vehicle" or otherwise meeting disability requirements while engaged in hunting or fishing activity.

To obtain a "Permit to Hunt from a Standing Vehicle," you must be a person who due to injury, disease, amputation or paralysis permanently disabled and unable to walk in a hunting situation.

This condition must be certified by a physician, a licensed physical or occupational therapist that has performed a coordination assessment to assess the ability of muscles to work together while walking in a hunting situation.

You can also qualify if you have been certified by a physician as an amputee with the loss of a lower limb, paraplegic, spinal cord injury resulting in permanent wheelchair restrictions, or other disabilities that prevent a hunter from walking in a hunting situation.

What to do if you are involved in an ATV or UTV Accident in Michigan?

If you are involved in an ATV or UTV accident resulting in injury to a person, you must stop immediately at the scene and secure medical aid or transportation.

Likewise, if you are involved in an accident resulting in injury to a person, death, or estimated property damage of \$100 or more, you must immediately notify the State Police or Sheriff's office of the county in which the accident occurred and complete an accident report.

Other Regulations:

- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV in such a way as to create an erosive condition.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If you are operating an ATV or UTV, you are legally considered to have consented to chemical tests of blood, breath or urine for blood alcohol levels.
- Open containers of alcoholic beverages may not be transported in or upon an ATV or UTV unless in a trunk or compartment separate from the passenger compartment of the vehicle.
- You may not operate an ATV or UTV if your driver's license has been suspended.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV in a manner that damages trees or crops.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV in a cemetery.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV at an airport.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV within 100 feet of a dwelling at a speed greater than the minimum speed necessary for controlled forward movement except when operating on private property or on designated routes, trails, areas, or access routes.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV on a railroad.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV at a rate of speed greater than is reasonable and proper based on existing conditions.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV in a manner that leaves behind litter or debris.
- It is unlawful to operate an ATV or UTV with an uncased strung bow or an uncased loaded firearm unless the firearm is a pistol, and you have a Concealed Pistol License.
- It is unlawful to carry passengers on an ATV or UTV that is not designed to carry said passengers.