

UTV/ATV groups ask for later hours to ride on Dubuque County roads

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Ann McDonough

Local all-terrain and utility vehicle users are asking the Dubuque County Board of Supervisors to expand the hours in which riders are allowed on county roads.

The Dubuque County ATV/UTV Alliance and the North East Iowa Action Trails Riding Club sent a request to the supervisors this week, asking them to allow riders to be out until 10 p.m., rather than sunset as currently required.

Supervisors in 2019 approved the ordinance that allows ATVs and UTVs on most county roads from 5 a.m. to sunset following many months of back-and-forth among supervisors, law enforcement and groups of riders.



NEAT President Ron Switzer said allowing users on roads until 10 p.m. would be closer to his group's initial wishes.

"Now, if you're out deer or turkey hunting, you'd have to quit before your hunting time is up at the end of the day to get home," he said. "Also, if people wanted to ride out to a restaurant for dinner, a lot of the time, it's getting dark at 5:30 or 6 p.m."

However, Supervisor Ann McDonough said there are reasons for the current times in which the vehicles are allowed on the road.

"For every person who thinks they should be able to ride whenever they want, there's another property owner who really relishes the quiet and peace," she said.

In a social media post, the ATV/UTV alliance pointed to nearby counties where riders can be on roads later than Dubuque County. The vehicles can be out until 10 p.m. in Jackson County and 11 p.m. in Clayton County.

Clayton County Sheriff Mike Tschirgi said his department has never had problems with the later time, largely because few people ride late at night.

"At the time we set that, we knew most people are home or in bed at 10 p.m.," he said. "But you have farmers or (raccoon) hunters who might be out late. Generally, people aren't messing around."

McDonough acknowledged that the patchwork of different county ordinances on ATVs and UTVs was confusing.

"With any ordinances we write, they don't match with adjoining counties in many, many respects," she said. "And there's legislation pending down at the statehouse looking at taking away our ability to do anything. Eventually, the state probably is going to have to lead on this."

A bill being considered in the Iowa Legislature would allow registered ATVs and UTVs on county highways statewide and strikes counties' authority to regulate their use.

Supervisor Jay Wickham said there would be a lot for supervisors to consider before making any change.

“From what I’ve heard from law enforcement, it’s been a nonfactor,” he said. “Supervisor McDonough voted against it. Supervisor (Harley) Pothoff has been critical of the ordinance and has a lot of experience with patrol. So, their input is going to be key.”

Pothoff could not be reached for comment. Dubuque County Sheriff Joe Kennedy was on vacation this week and declined to comment.