

Press Republican  
January 13, 2010

## Safety key to snowmobile guidelines, sledders say

By KIM SMITH DEDAM, Staff Writer

RAY BROOK — Snowmobile maintenance guidelines approved by the Adirondack Park Agency in November were laid out to give riders safe access to forest trails, the trails director for the State Snowmobile Association said.

The Adirondack Council challenged the new plan with a lawsuit Monday, claiming it does not conform with policy spelled out in the Adirondack State Land Master Plan.

The Adirondack Council said motorized groomers and expanded trail widths require formal amendments.

Dave Perkins, New York State Snowmobile Association trails director, spent days walking through Adirondack forest trails with staff from the APA and the Department of Environmental Conservation, taking stock of snowmobile paths.

"I was involved all summer long with APA and DEC looking at trails in existence and how the character of trails could meet the concerns of everybody. We spent quite a bit of time doing just that kind of thing."

Perkins, of Hudson Falls, said the snowmobile plan was a compromise drawn in keeping with the character of foot trails.

Most Adirondack snowmobile routes are not flat and straight, as they are in other parts of the state.

"The nature of trail in forest preserve is to meander through the woods," Perkins said.

Grooming becomes a different process altogether in Adirondack forests.

"On a curve, snow gets thrown to the outside and builds up on the high side," Perkins explained, "and the curve takes on a banked appearance."

Banked curves increase sled speed.

"It is just physics," Perkins said. "But snowmobile trail-groomer operators are trained to get on the high side and knock that snow down to flatten the curve out, so that snowmobiles have to go slower. A number of track groomers have plows on the front to bring snow into the low side.

"If you were talking about a straight trail, it would be different. It really is kind of surprising they (environmentalists) don't see that."

Using motorized equipment to manage wilderness snowmobile trails in part triggered litigation.

"Grooming equipment has been a contention all along, but I'm not sure they know we aren't talking about the same types groomers used on ski slopes. A lot of that equipment wouldn't even fit on a 9-foot trail width."

Perkins said wooded snowmobile trails become curved chutes with repeated use, making it difficult for two sleds to pass safely.

"The track groomers make the trails safer by smoothing out the surface."

Jim McCulley, president of the Lake Placid Snowmobile Club, said the State Land Master Plan should be amended.

"I don't disagree on that point. They (APA) were supposed to amend the State Land Master Plan in 1986. Where I disagree is when they say the new snowmobile plan is going to widen trails 50 percent," he said.

"From the standpoint for snowmobilers, a 12-foot-wide trail width makes sense for safety where necessary. But the Adirondack Council doesn't care about safety. They have been playing politics with the lives of New Yorkers for too long — fighting cell towers or snowmobile-trail width for donations. It is a sad statement on their priorities."

In Newcomb, a new snowmobile connector trail is planned along old logging roads, crossing only a small portion of state land to link Newcomb and North Hudson with trail systems in Long Lake and Indian Lake.

The easement right-of-way was worked out when the Nature Conservancy purchased Finch & Pruyn timberlands about two years ago.

The connector is expected to drive winter business to the region.

Newcomb Town Supervisor George Canon was not surprised to hear of the lawsuit.

"That's not totally unexpected. We thought the snowmobile plan was a good compromise between all parties. The State Land Master Plan is a document subject to interpretation, but APA interpreted it correctly."

Canon said the new connector is likely not in jeopardy from litigation.

McCulley said the Lake Placid Snowmobile Club may file third-party status on the lawsuit.

No word yet if the Snowmobile Association plans to do the same.

E-mail Kim Smith Dedam at: [kdedam@pressrepublican.com](mailto:kdedam@pressrepublican.com)