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Adirondack Council pans Snirt again

By STEVE VIRKLER
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A A A LOWVILLE — An Adirondack Park environmental watchdog group has taken exception for the second straight year to the annual Snirt Run all-terrain vehicle rally, particularly any infringement into the western edge of the park during today's event.

And Lewis County officials have fired back, suggesting the Adirondack Council is wrongfully targeting the county and falsely accusing it of promoting misdeeds.

“We understand and support the county's desire to boost tourism with recreational vehicle rallies, but strongly believe that state law calls for such events to be carefully planned and strictly supervised to prevent the widespread abuses of public and private property left in the wake of all eight previous SNIRT events,” Scott M. Lorey, legislative director for the Albany-based organization, wrote in a recent letter to county officials. “Your lack of attention to these details encourages a culture of wanton environmental destruction, and at worst, simultaneously promotes drinking and driving, and reckless disregard for public and private property and the well-being of other riders.”

Lewis County Board of Legislators Vice Chairman Michael A. Tabolt, R-Croghan, issued a written response Friday, saying legislators “take great exception to your ill-informed and false assumption that Lewis County is the organizer for this event. It is not. We take even greater exception to the accusation that the county, as a government, condones or encourages lawless behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth. Lewis County takes its responsibility to maintain public safety throughout this event very seriously.”

The daylong Snirt Run — whose name stands for “snow” and “dirt” — began as a Tug Hill event. However, with the number of riders continuing to grow each year, the Barnes Corners Sno-Pals snowmobile club, which organizes the annual preseason ATV ride, last year decided to expand it into the Brantingham and Highmarket areas to better spread out the machines and include additional businesses.

That prompted the Adirondack Council to send a letter to county officials just before the 2011 rally expressing its concerns about the event itself and its expansion into the Adirondack Park region, and this year's letter reiterated those issues. The group maintains an environmental review of the event should be done and contends the county's opening roads to ATV riders may not comply with state vehicle and traffic law.

Mr. Tabolt, in his three-page letter, replied that roads for the Snirt Run and other such rallies are opened through section 2408 of the vehicle and traffic law, which allows organizers of special events involving ATVs to seek permission from a governmental agency to hold them.

The county's letter also noted that no county roads opened for the day are inside the Adirondack Park. They do, however, allow access to open town roads in the park near Brantingham without trailering.

Following the 2011 Snirt, detractors took issue with the routing of participants from Houseville Gulf to Houseville roads in the town of Turin as part of a connection between the Tug Hill and Brantingham areas. Because those roads do not intersect, riders had to use a short stretch of Route 26, which is not open to ATV traffic, to make the connection.

While the same roads are open to ATVs this year, riders will not be allowed to cross Route 26 — meaning there will be no legal route for ATVs between Tug Hill and Brantingham. No Brantingham businesses are formally participating in the rally.

Last year, 2,234 riders participated in the Snirt Run, down from a high of 2,283 in 2010.

A total of 27 law enforcement officers from several agencies will patrol the event, said Sheriff Michael A. Carpinelli.