

Testimony in opposition to LD 276 'An Act to Amend the Definition of Oversized ATV To Increase the Minimum Weight Requirement'

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John Bryant

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Committee On Environment and Natural Resources.

My name is John Bryant, and I reside in Holden, Maine. I am a licensed Maine Forester, a former co-owner and Region Manager for American Forest Management, and I served as co-chair of the Governor's ATV Task Force in 2019.

I am here today to strongly oppose LD 276, which would remove the allowable weight limit of oversized ATV's.

For the last 20 years of my career, I managed over 1 million acres of forestland for various timberland investors in Maine, including agreements on over 500 miles of state-maintained ATV trails to cross private land. From that experience, I want to stress one fundamental point: **ATV trails on private land are a gift, not an obligation.** Please keep that in mind as you contemplate your decision on this proposed legislation. Landowners receive no compensation, yet they bear the cost and liability for trail damage. When that burden becomes too great, access is withdrawn – and once lost, it is rarely regained.

During the work of the 2019 ATV Task Force, it became clear that weight is by far the most significant factor affecting trail damage and maintenance costs. Most trails are not designed nor capable of supporting large ATV's. Heavier machines cause more erosion, rutting, and infrastructure damage. That reality directly affects landowner willingness to keep trails open.

The current 65-inch width and 2,000-pound weight limits were the result of extensive discussion and public input in the ATV Task Force. They represent a careful compromise between ATV users, private landowners, and state representatives. The Task Force consistently heard that a clear, durable weight limit was essential to protect trails and maintain landowner trust. If LD 276 passes, I believe it will lead to increased trail damage, increased landowner dissatisfaction, and a reduction in trail access across the state – harming both the ATV trail system and Maine's recreational economy. Unlimited weights of ATV's present a clear danger to a sustainable trail system.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the committee to honor the professional work of the 2019 ATV Task Force and maintain the existing 2,000-pound weight limit for ATV's on state-maintained trails. Please do not let this bill negatively impact the partnership between private landowners, the State of Maine, and ATV user groups.

I urge you to vote 'Ought Not to Pass on LD 276'. Thank you for listening.