



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
22 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

AMANDA E. BEAL
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND
WILDLIFE

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 280

An Act to Increase Funding for Snowmobile Trails and Capital Equipment Grants

February 17, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, my name is Joe Higgins, and I am the Supervisor of the Snowmobile Program in the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands. I am speaking neither for nor against LD280. As the Committee considers this bill, I want to provide some context on the value of snowmobiling in Maine and the needs of the snowmobile sector.

An economic impact study published by the University of Maine in 2019 indicates that snowmobiling annually generates \$606 million dollars for Maine's economy. In the last five years, snowmobile use has increased by 35%, from 62,797 machines in 2016 to 84,595 in 2020. In the Maine Snowmobile Program's annual budget, registration revenue accounts for approximately \$3 million dollars, and gas tax contributions are \$1.5 million. As a result, the Snowmobile Program provides an excellent return on the state's investment.

There are two primary ways the Snowmobile Program assists snowmobile clubs and municipalities. The Snowmobile Trail Fund provides for maintenance and grooming of trails, and the Capital Grant Fund provides money to help purchase grooming equipment. In the 2019-20 season, the Trail Fund contributed \$3.94 million toward grooming and trail work. The 290 snowmobile clubs show costs of a little over \$6.30 million, so the state's contribution is 62% of the overall maintenance expense.

In addition to trail maintenance responsibilities, clubs also remain challenged to keep up with the growing costs of grooming equipment. Five dollars of each registration is allocated to the Capital Equipment Grant Fund. In 1999, the total request for equipment was \$1.85 million, and in 2019 those requests totaled \$3.29 million. The average amount available in the Capital Equipment Grant fund is \$424,304.

Snowmobile club expenses are supported by fundraising, volunteers, and donations, and fundraising has been particularly difficult in this past pandemic year. The cost of insurance and

HARLOW BUILDING
18 ELKINS LANE
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200
FAX: (207) 287-2400
WEB: WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF

equipment is putting snowmobile clubs in jeopardy of dissolving. The reduction in snowmobile clubs results in trail closures, and the maintenance challenges caused by limited funding can result in reduced safety on trails.

Ultimately, we want to ensure that snowmobile clubs have the resources they need to maintain trails for ecological and safety reasons. At the same time, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is cognizant of the fact that the pandemic has created economic uncertainty for many, and we would not want to see an increase in fees serve as a barrier to registration for those financially impacted by the pandemic.

Snowmobiling is a vital part of Maine's growing outdoor economy, and the Department supports the Committee in its efforts to deliberate on the most effective ways to ensure that snowmobiling remains safe and accessible as a fundamental part of Maine's winter economy.