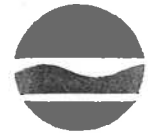


THE DEC POLICY SYSTEM



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PROGRAM POLICY

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Title: Snowmobile Trails - Forest Preserve

Issuing Authority:

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Title: Director - Division of Lands and Forests

Signature: Frank Dunstan Date: 9/2/98

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Abstract: The policy establishes procedures by which snowmobile trails may be planned, located, constructed, used and maintained on Forest Preserve lands. Further, it includes the types of trails that are permissible and specifies standards.

Related References: Article XIV, Section 1 of the New York State Constitution
Title XI, Article 47 of the Vehicle and Traffic Law
Title D, Article 21 of the Parks and Recreation Law
Department Rules and Regulations, particularly 6 NYCRR Part 196
The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan
The Catskill Park State Land Master Plan
1985 Memorandum of Understanding Between the Adirondack Park Agency and the Department of Environmental Conservation
Department Policy and Procedures Manual, Title 8400, Chapter 8426
Division of Lands and Forests Policy LF-91-2

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish a procedure by which snowmobile trails are to be planned, located, constructed, used and maintained on Forest Preserve lands. Further, it is to outline the types of trails that are permissible and specify standards to be followed.

II. BACKGROUND

Over the years, municipalities and private organizations have developed networks of snowmobile trails that benefit the locality. Through interconnecting trails crossing the Forest Preserve, extended travel enhances the snowmobile experience.

In the Forest Preserve, snowmobile trails are permitted only in those areas classified as Wild Forest and Intensive Use.

Where a Wilderness, Primitive or Canoe Area boundary abuts a public highway, snowmobile trails may be located within 500 feet of the highway right-of-way on a site-specific basis in limited instances in conformity with a duly adopted unit management plan.

Snowmobile trails crossing the Forest Preserve are generally narrower than those on private land, requiring slower speeds and more cautious driving.

These general guidelines and policies are derived from the recommendations of the Temporary Study commission on the Future of the Adirondacks as stated in its report dated December 15, 1970. The pertinent recommendations from that report are as follows:

"124. Existing mileage of snowmobile trails on wild forest land should not be expanded but it should be improved by:

- a. converting dead end trails more than ten miles long to loop trails;
- b. converting dead end trails less than five miles long to ski touring trails;
- c. relocating existing trails that are damaging the environment to other areas of wild forest land better suited to snowmobile use.

126. Other rights-of-way should be acquired as they become available and, subject to the other recommendations of the Commission, added to the snowmobile trail system where appropriate.

127. Snowmobile trails in wilderness areas should be closed immediately and snowmobile use of these areas prohibited.

128. Snowmobile trails in primitive areas should be phased out over a five year period and snowmobile use of these areas prohibited at the end of that time.

129. The state should encourage the development of snowmobile trails on private lands. To the extent that such trails become available, the mileage of snowmobile trails on wild forest land should be proportionately reduced.

131. Existing snowmobile trails less than five miles in length, or otherwise inappropriate for snowmobile use, should be converted to ski touring trails."

On the basis of the above recommendations, specific Guidelines for snowmobile trails were promulgated in the Adirondack Park State land Master Plan. Those Guidelines pertinent to snowmobile trails and the use thereof are as follows:

"WILD FOREST Basic Guidelines

4. Public use of motor vehicles will not be encouraged and there will not be any material increase in the mileage of roads and trails open to motorized use by the public in wild forest areas that conformed to the master plan at the time of its original adoption in 1972.

5. Care should be taken to designate separate areas for incompatible uses such as snowmobiling and ski touring or horseback riding and hiking.
7. No new structures or improvements in wild forest areas will be constructed except in conformity with a finally adopted unit management plan. This guideline will not prevent ordinary maintenance, rehabilitation or minor maintenance of conforming structures or improvements, or the removal of non-conforming uses.
8. All conforming structures and improvements will be designed and located so as to blend with surrounding environment and to require only minimal maintenance.”

Structures and Improvements

The maintenance and rehabilitation of the following structures and improvements will be allowed but new construction will not be encouraged:

-snowmobile trails are set forth below;

Motor Vehicles, Motorized Equipment and Aircraft

2. ...the use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment and aircraft will be allowed as follows:

- (c) by snowmobiles on trails now or hereafter designated by the Department of Environmental Conservation in accordance with basic guideline 4 set forth above, and will the guidelines for such trails specified below.”

“Snowmobile Trails

Snowmobile trails should be designed and located in a manner that will not adversely affect adjoining private landowners or the wild forest environment and in particular:

-the mileage of snowmobile trails lost in the designation of wilderness, primitive and canoe areas may be replaced in wild forest areas with existing jeep trails or abandoned wood roads as the basis of such new snowmobile trail construction, except in rare circumstances requiring the cutting of new trails;

-wherever feasible such replacement mileage should be located in the same general area as where mileage is lost due to wilderness, primitive or canoe classification;

-appropriate opportunities to improve the snowmobile trail system may be pursued subject to basis guideline 4 set forth above, where the impact on the wild forest environment will be minimized, such as (I) provision for snowmobile trails adjacent to but screened from certain public highways within the Park to facilitate snowmobile access between communities where alternate routes on either state or private land are not available and topography permits and, (ii) designation of new snowmobile trails on established roads or jeep trails in newly acquired state lands classified as wild forest; and,

-deer wintering yards and other important wildlife and resource areas should be avoided by such trails."

III. POLICY

The above Guidelines as set forth under that section entitled BACKGROUND - are herewith adopted as the Policy controlling snowmobiles, snowmobile trails and the use thereof on the lands and water constituting the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve.

In clarification of the mileage limitation imposed by Basic Guideline No. 4 -- as quoted above -- and the authority to replace "...the mileage of snowmobile trails lost in the designation of wilderness, primitive and canoe areas..." in wild forest areas, the following limitation shall apply:

- a. The mileage of snowmobile trails in or on the Adirondack Forest Preserve shall not exceed a total of 848.88 miles and
- b. The mileage of snowmobile trails to be "replaced" in wild forest areas shall not exceed a total of 11.50 miles, which 11.50 miles is included in the 848.88 miles total cited above.

Note: The mileage figures here stated are taken from a document entitled, "ADIRONDACK PARK - Snowmobile Trail Mileage" as compiled by the Division of Lands and Forests December, 1980, which document is herewith made a part of this policy.

In addition, the following general policies shall apply:

1. Existing snowmobile trails shall not be widened or otherwise upgraded without benefit of an approved unit management plan for the land area involved.
2. Snowmobile trails shall not be established where impacts on adjacent private holdings are probable without the prior written agreement of the private landowners involved.
3. Snowmobile trails shall be located so as to avoid crossing bodies of water, the edge of ledges or ravines, environmentally sensitive floral and faunal areas, wetlands, deer wintering areas and other significant habitats so that the values of these habitats are not diminished for wildlife purposes or otherwise.
4. Existing woods roads and trails should be utilized as snowmobile trails when possible in lieu of constructing new trails.
5. When a snowmobile trail is routed along a public road, such trail shall be located parallel to the traveled way of the road. When a snowmobile trail is routed across a public road, such crossing shall be made at right angles and at a location with adequate sight distance along both the trail and the road.

6. When maintenance costs for a snowmobile trail become excessive or the trail cannot be maintained because of fiscal or other constraints, such trail shall be closed.
7. When the condition of a snowmobile trail becomes hazardous to the user or a threat to the environment, such trail shall be closed.
8. When a snowmobile trail is no longer used or receives only minimal use, such trail shall be closed.
9. Dead-end snowmobile trails shall not be established and any such trails now in existence shall be closed unless such trail dead-ends at a specific facility or feature used by the public in the winter season.
10. Snowmobile trails shall be located and maintained so as to ensure safe travel.

A. SNOWMOBILE TRAIL STANDARDS

1. TRAIL CLASSIFICATIONS

Snowmobile trails shall be classified as either Class A or Class B.

a. Class A Trails are those that are major travel routes, which provide physical features that permit grooming if deemed desirable and;

1. Follow old roadways, or;
2. Connect with groomed trail systems on adjacent public or private lands, or;
3. Join with other trails on State land to form a long loop or other major travel corridor.

b. Class B Trails are those that are other than major travel routes that are not designed for grooming and, which;

1. Are connecting or "spur" trails companion to Class A trails, or;
2. Lead to a particular point of interest such as a popular ice fishing pond, a scenic overlook, etc.

2. ALIGNMENT AND GRADE

a. Trail alignment shall avoid blind curves and abrupt changes in either horizontal or vertical direction.

b. Minimum sight distance shall not be less than 50 feet.

c. Curves with a radius of less than 25 feet shall not be included in any trail alignment.

d. Grades shall not exceed 20%.

e. Line and grade shall be designed so as to insure that the average snowmobile operator can safely negotiate the trail with little or no difficulty and experience a ride that is interesting and safe.

3. Trail Width (Funded Corridor Trails)

Funded Corridor Trails are trails or parts of trails that have been designated by the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation as portions of the statewide snowmobile corridor trail system.

a. Class A trails may be kept clear to a width of eight (8) feet on straight or gently curved stretches of trail and to a width of twelve (12) feet on curves and steep grades.

b. Class B trails may be kept clear to a maximum width of eight (8) feet.

c. All trails, regardless of class, shall be kept clear to a height of twelve (12) feet, as measured from ground level.

4. Trail Width (All Other Trails- Not Funded Trail Corridors)

a. Class A trails may be kept clear to a width of eight (8) feet on straight or gently curved stretches of trail and to a width of twelve (12) feet on curves and steep grades where the cutting of trees or other woody growth of over three (3) inches DBH is not necessary.

b. Class B trails may be kept clear to a maximum width of eight (8) feet where the cutting of trees or other woody growth of over three (3) inches DBH is not necessary.

c. All trails, regardless of class, shall be kept clear to a height of twelve (12) feet, as measured from ground level, where the cutting of trees or other woody growth of over three (3) inches DBH is not necessary.

5. Drainage

Adequate drainage shall be provided to prevent washouts, sheet ice, and other hazards to the safety of trail users. Open streams may be bridged as necessary for safety purposes or the trail rerouted so as to eliminate the stream crossing.

6. Maintenance

a. Maintenance on snowmobile trails and parking lots should be accomplished during the late summer and early fall.

b. During the use season, trails should be kept open and passable as resources permit.

c. Grooming of trails is not to be a function of the Department. If grooming is desired, user groups may perform grooming under temporary revocable permit.

7. Parking Areas

Parking areas, designed for drive-through of vehicle and trailer, shall be provided as appropriate at strategic access points. Whenever possible, arrangements should be made with the local government responsible for maintaining the adjacent highway to provide for snow removal in the parking lot.

8. Signing

a. Trails shall be marked with a standard 4.5 inch marker placed in both directions at a height to insure visibility when snow is on the ground. Spacing will be determined by local conditions; however, at least one marker shall be placed every one thousand (1,000) feet. In open terrain, markers shall be placed at least every three hundred (300) feet.

b. All access points and trail intersections will be marked with a standard sign stating trail designations and distances. Trails will be measured to obtain accurate distances.

c. Signs and markers should be replaced as necessary during the fall at the time of other regular maintenance.

d. If an unusual condition exists, such as an ungroomed section of a trail, such condition will be noted on a temporary sign at either the trail entrance or the trail intersection closest to the unusual condition.

e. All road crossings will be adequately signed on both the trail and the road so as to give sufficient warning that the crossing is ahead.

9. Maps

Sketch maps and trail descriptions, suitable for publication in the "Snowmobiling in New York State" booklet, will be prepared by the Regional Office and provided to the Central Office on an annual basis.

IV. Responsibility

The responsibility of interpretation and update of this document, and overall management shall reside with the Office of Natural Resources, Division of Lands and Forests, or its successor.

V. PROCEDURE

The management and actions taken regarding snowmobile trail planning, establishment, construction and maintenance on Forest Preserve lands shall be in accordance with the above stated policy.

