

# Snowmobile Rights and Responsibilities Act

## Briefing Document

### Why SRRA?

The primary reason for this legislation is to increase club membership and therefore increase participation for trail maintenance. Over the years clubs have faced 2 recurring issues: lack of *finances* for trail maintenance and lack of *volunteers* to perform the trail maintenance.

Since 2003 snowmobilers have seen 2 fee increases which have helped considerably with the *financial* situation. Unfortunately, this has not addressed the *volunteer* aspect.

In 2001 a process was started to allow clubs to attract more members. Initially, the idea of a "Trail Pass" as a means of accomplishing this was considered, but in order to implement such a system meant changing the NYS Trespass Laws. At about this time the New Hampshire Snowmobile Association had successfully lobbied for legislation that increased their registration fees, but in turn would give club members a discount. NYSSA adopted this formula.

A bill was put together that would address many issues facing clubs today. This bill became known as the **Snowmobile Rights and Responsibilities Act**.

### Process of getting the law passed

**SRRA** initially was envisioned and written as a way to address the club membership issue, amend the General Obligations Law, and enforce some common sense safety concerns. However, right away it became evident that amending the General Obligations Law would be nearly impossible. Safety measures would need to be included to make this bill acceptable and difficult to oppose as a legislator.

This season, fueled by early fatalities reported in the media as speed related, many legislators started introducing language that would impose a state wide snowmobile speed limit. In the past NYSSA had always been neutral on this issue, but it became obvious that a speed limit bill might very well be supported and passed into law.

Lobbyists hired by NYSSA were able to convince the legislators that if they would agree to support **SRRA**, then NYSSA would include the speed limit in its own version of the bill. NYSSA supported this idea, as did the delegates at the 2005 NYSSA Annual Meeting.

## **Components of the SRRA:**

**Duties of Snowmobile Owners and Operators:** This legislation explains some common sense duties for snowmobilers, among them: Snowmobiling is a voluntary activity that could be hazardous so make sure your equipment is working properly and obey all rules and regulations.

**Duties of Snowmobile Clubs:** Please note: these duties do not increase the liability for any club. Basically, these are all items that clubs should be doing. They are: mark the trails, encourage snowmobilers to participate in safety classes, educate your members, and post trails as whether they are closed or open.

**Mandatory Insurance:** Any snowmobile will now be required to be covered by liability insurance if operated off your own property.

**Youthful Operation:** The current law allows anyone 10 years old or older to operate a snowmobile alone on the trail system if they hold a safety certificate. Many felt that anyone under the age of 14 should not be riding the trail system without adult supervision. Therefore the new minimum age a youth with a safety certificate can ride alone is 14. Youth's between the age of 10 and 14 can still operate a snowmobile if they are within 500' of a guardian 18 or older.

**Two-Tier:** This is the most important aspect of the legislation. It increases the total fee to \$100 **UNLESS** one member of the household is a club member. If a member of the household is a club member, then every snowmobile registered by that household will only pay \$45/snowmobile. In other words if you are already a club member you are not impacted financially in any way by the Two-Tier language in this legislation.

**Speed limit:** A maximum 55 MPH speed limit is now the law on public trails and lands. This does not include lakes unless posted locally. Speed limits in our neighboring states are all currently lower than 55.

## **Benefits of the SRRA:**

**Increased Club Membership:** As stated earlier New Hampshire has adopted two-tier and according to their numbers over 90% of snowmobilers in NH now belong to a club. Also according to NH volunteerism has also increased. More snowmobilers now realize that trails just don't appear out of nowhere. It takes volunteers to build and maintain these trails

**Safety:** With more snowmobilers being aware of issues especially dealing with duties and responsibilities one would hope our trails will become safer.

**Landowners:** Through conversations with landowners, it is clear landowners prefer only club members use their property to ride on.

**Education:** More snowmobilers will know where they can ride and more importantly where they should not be riding.

**Financial:** Additional club membership will give clubs additional revenue so perhaps clubs will be able to start upgrading equipment using dues income instead of relying on grants. The additional income will also allow clubs to spend more time maintaining non-funded trails.