

# VAST

Vermont Association of Snow Travelers

# Snowmobile VERMONT

VERMONT ASSOCIATION OF SNOW TRAVELERS



Cindy Locke, Executive Director



# Agenda

## Presentation for Vermont House Transportation Committee 4/12/23



- VAST Brief Overview
- Funding Sources
- Technological Infrastructure
- Law Enforcement
- S. 99 - An act relating to miscellaneous changes to laws related to vehicles:
  - a) Section 35 Proof of Liability Insurance; Snowmobiles
  - b) Section 4 Registration Periods

# About Us – Historic Snapshot



## **Fifty-Five Years Old**

VAST will celebrate our 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. In the early 1970s VAST worked closely with the State of Vermont to become more regulated to better support our needs and the needs of Vermont landowners. This led to many laws being developed about: safety, law enforcement, trail development and insurance.

Laws regarding snowmobiling in Vermont will be found in

**Title 23: Motor Vehicles**

**Chapter 29: Snowmobiles, Vessels, And Water Sports**

**Subchapter 1: Snowmobiles**

# Who We Are



## Membership

VAST has 23,000 members. In order to snowmobile in Vermont on the VAST trail system, you must be a member of VAST and a member of at least one affiliated VAST club. VAST brings approximately \$550,000,000 of economic impact to Vermont annually.

## Landowners and Liability

We have more than 9,500 landowners that allow us to have trails on their property. 80% of our trails are on private lands with the remaining residing on state and federal lands. We have annual contracts with our landowners and spend more than \$180,000 a year on trail liability insurance, above the state's indemnification policy for landowners that allow recreation on their property.

## Volunteers

VAST relies on thousands of volunteers that groom our trails put up our trail signs in the fall and take them down in the spring, maintain our trails, work with private landowners to get their permissions, host events and fundraisers and run their own club as a non-profit while being compliant with state and federal laws. We have 120 clubs.

## Staff

VAST has six full time staff members that work tirelessly to manage and run our organization, which often is thought of a quasi-state agency because of what we do and how that differs from other states.

# Trails

## Trails and Signs

With 4,100 miles of trails in Vermont there is a lot to maintain with thousands of signs like our regulatory signs in the photo to the right. On the left is a copy of our trail map in the Windham and Bennington areas. We also have a free online phone app map and work closely with first responders and offer our trails as a layer on the Vermont E-911 map.

## Grooming

Our groomer fleet is valued at nearly \$770,000,000 and these machines are owned by our clubs with grant and aid to help with purchase and repair provided by VAST. Average cost of a new class one power unit is between \$255,000 and \$325,000. We have 104 power unit groomers in our fleet.

Our Class one Power units like the one to the right are 8 feet wide and 20 feet long when hooked up to the drag they pull. We pay our clubs and volunteers to groom, and we expense for grooming 1.3 to 2 million dollars annually.

As an example, even though we no longer are in charge of building or maintaining the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail we will spend annually up to \$50,000 to groom it for all types of users each winter. We also share some trails with other types of trail organizations including but not limited to Catamount, Green Mountain Club, VASA, Kingdom Trails, VMBA and more.

Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Inc.  
16 West Lane, Barre, VT 05641  
vvast.org

### Approved Regulatory, Cautionary & Information Sign Supplement

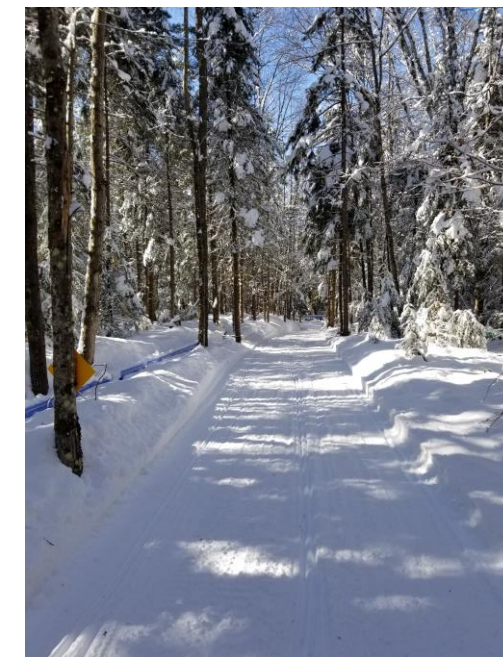
**General Sign Instructions**  
Other signage may be necessary, however it should not be placed in the line of sight of any cautionary or regulatory signage.  
All signs should be placed 3-5 feet above the ground and 2-4 feet to the side of the trail for optimal visibility.  
This document serves as a supplement to the Guidelines for Snowmobile Trail Signage & Placement.  
Posting distance for signs is dependent on line of sight and average anticipated speed.

**Trail Intersection**

**\*Intersection Sign**  
Intersection Signs are to have the following information:  
- Intersection number  
- Corridor route number and direction (N, E, S, W) accompanied by a directional arrow  
- Next trail intersection number along the anticipated route of travel accompanied by a directional arrow  
Post design can vary.  
Drawings not to scale.

Stop signs are used to regulate trail users at trail intersections where the normal right-of-way rule might not be readily apparent. Use Stop signs where users are required to stop before proceeding.  
Stop signs are usually preceded by a Stop Ahead sign or symbol to alert the rider that they are approaching a stop.  
Reasonable distance before Stop Ahead

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# Snowmobiling in Vermont

## **In order to snowmobile in Vermont on the Statewide Snowmobile Trail System (SSTS) you must have:**

- A snowmobile registered in VT or another state or province (\$28 for a VT resident, plus pay 6% Vermont sales tax (one time). For a nonresident the cost is \$36 per year.
- Have liability insurance on your snowmobile (Costs: \$100-300 per year)
- Buy a VAST Trail Maintenance Assessment (TMA) or trail pass (Costs: \$80 for a 3-day pass. Annual trails passes are \$145 to \$225)
- Have taken and passed a snowmobile safety course if born after July 1, 1983. Classes are given by Vermont State Police (VSP), or those trained by VSP. Even those that go on snowmobile tours or rent a snowmobile have a class to take and instruction prior to operating a snowmobile.
- We also act as a DMV registration agent and have a few businesses outside of Vermont that process VT snowmobile registrations, they send all the paperwork to us and then we send on to DMV. Currently you cannot register a new or new to you snowmobile in Vermont online. You can only renew an existing registration.

# Annual Budgets – Income - Expenses

VAST has three main budgets. Two of the budgets have revenue made up from our TMA (trail pass sales).

- **General Fund:** Administration, marketing, insurance, technology, salaries, benefits, our building and fleet costs, etc. (27%)
- **Trails Fund:** All trail costs including grooming which again costs VAST between 1.3 million and 2 million each winter. (73%)
- **Statewide Snowmobile Trails Program (SSTP):** The SSTP budget is funded from snowmobile registrations and a capped percentage of the gas tax collected by the State of Vermont.

## **SSTP section one:**

Income from law enforcement fines and snowmobile registrations (- FPR Admin fees of \$11,500): \$416,500

Expenses: Plowing Parking Lots, Administration %, Insurance safety programs: \$416,500

## **SSTP section two:**

Income \$5.00 from each snowmobile registration is to be used **only** for law enforcement: \$132,500

Expenses: Law enforcement patrols, safety inspections, equipment \$132,500

## **SSTP section three:**

Income: Vermont Gas Tax capped at \$148,000 for VAST by statute (split between VAST, FPR and VASA), VAST also pays out of a carry forward fund \$100,000 to supplement the expenses in this section.

Expenses: Power Unit and Drag Equipment Grants: \$248,000

# Technology infrastructure

Some of what VAST has built is:

- An online data portal with the ability for secure transactions and delivery of virtual and tactile results (trail passes and stickers).
- Database access for law enforcement to help with their snowmobile safety checks.
- Online Maps with real-time grooming due to placing GPS units in our groomers.
- Ability to track your ride, find services and trail conditions.
- Because of our extensive database and the data we have gathered we can run all types of reports to help us to continue to grow how we operate and service our members.

We have spent the past five years building up our technology infrastructure. It was import to us and to our members to make sure we have the plane built before we tried to fly it, so we could work out any bugs before going live.

Of course, with technology you are always tweaking as new processes are discovered, but starting with a strong base that is tried and tested before going live is important to the success of the endeavor, especially when it will affect others and the public.

All that being said, moving completely online has proven hard, especially if you are asking the consumer to now prove their purchase on a smartphone due to:

- 1) Everyone does not have a smart phone or can afford one.
- 2) Everyone does not have cell service.
- 3) Everyone does not have email or access to a computer.
- 4) Cell service is spotty in Vermont.
- 5) Call phones and batteries die, especially in cold weather.



# Law Enforcement

VAST contracts with and pays Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife (F&W), Vermont State Police (VSP) and local sheriff agencies and police departments to patrol our trails and perform safety checks.

In addition, the Southern Vermont Wilderness Search & Rescue, USDA Forest Service Law Enforcement and the Silvio O Conte Fish & Wildlife Refuge Law Enforcement who also provide law enforcement on snowmobile trails.

In the winter of 2021 law enforcement performed:

- Performed 4,660 Patrol Hours
- 17,559 Snowmobile Inspections
- Wrote 543 Tickets and Warnings



What is a snowmobile inspection? It is similar to a car inspection. The operator must display a current registration decal, an annual registration (white) sticker, and a VAST TMA (trail pass). They also must carry written copies of a current DMV registration, current TMA and liability insurance. And again, if born after July 1, 1983 also a safety course completion card.



# S:99

## Proof of Insurance

VAST has asked to have language added into S.99 this year to change the statute that now requires snowmobile operators to not only have liability insurance, but to carry proof of it on their person. This can be a photo on a smartphone, but the snowmobile rider has an option to have the paper version sent to them by their insurance carrier and carry that in case they do not have a phone, or their battery is dead, etc.



# S:99

## Concerns – Vehicle Registration Changes (deleting white annual registration stickers)

**VAST would like to offer some questions and possible suggestions as you ponder making these monumental changes to how people register vehicles in Vermont and receive and display their proof of registration: Some of these questions may have already been asked, so I apologize if you have gotten satisfactory answers already.**

- Do all law enforcement agencies use one database? Is it connected to DMV? Do we need all these systems connected before moving ahead? What about license plate recognition capabilities?
- If we are moving in this direction, don't we want to build the technology and make sure it will work for a few years prior to making it 100% mandatory? How is the DMV vehicle inspection sticker QR code system working now? Is law enforcement able to access it?
- In addition to the Vermont State Police, have other law enforcement agencies been asked how these change would affect their efforts regarding safety and costs? What about local police departments and sheriff agencies? Are other state doing this and what is the feedback from them and what systems did they have in place before starting?
- By not having the white registration sticker this now will remove all visual cues on vehicles normally showing that someone is registered. So, the burden of proof of everyone's registration being valid is now the burden of law enforcement officers, including those enforcing snowmobiling, ATVs and boats? Will this make policing harder and more hands-on?
- How will law enforcement know without contacting dispatch if a vehicle is legally registered? Won't this make traffic stops longer and therefore not safe for the officer or the public? Will this now be more of a cost for those law enforcement agencies as well? Will more people just not renew registrations and take the chance of being caught?
- What happens when cell phones are dead or there is no cell service? Won't there need to be follow-up which will again add time and costs for law enforcement?
- How will a law enforcement officer handle being responsible for someone's phone if they have to take it into their possession to look up information or contact dispatch from their cruiser? What would stop anyone from saying an officer looked in their phone at other information, or broke their phone?
- If there is money saving, is it truly money saving or just moving the burden from one agency to another and at what cost? Jobs, safety, process ease or difficulty? Have these questions been answered thoroughly?

I do understand that my questions may seem outside of the scope of VAST and what we do. We are coming to you as VAST because the loss of registration stickers will hamper our snowmobile law enforcement efforts (resulting in stopping more folks because the visual cue of a valid registration will no longer be there), but as VAST we also have a responsibility to those that we contract with for services like law enforcement, in addition to a responsibility to the thousands of Vermonters that volunteer for us, that host our trail system and are our members. VAST encourages you to speak to others and your own constituents before making such drastic changes to DMV law.



Cindy Locke

[cindy@vtvast.org](mailto:cindy@vtvast.org)

802-730-2461

Thank you

