

MAINE SNOWMOBILE ASSOCIATION, INC

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Testimony in Support of LD-446

“An Act To Appropriate Funds to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry To Maintain Snowmobile Trails”

Presented by Bob Meyers, Executive Director, Maine Snowmobile Association
February 19, 2019

Senator Dill, Representative Hickman and distinguished Committee members:

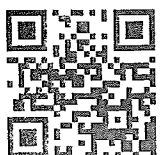
The Maine Snowmobile Association represents 28,000 snowmobilers and 2,100 businesses that belong to 289 snowmobile clubs statewide. We just celebrated our 50th anniversary. Our members are the volunteers who maintain Maine's 14,500 miles of world-class snowmobile trails, creating an industry worth an estimated \$350 million per year. It provides the full-time equivalent of 2,300 jobs. Much of this activity takes place in small rural communities that have few other opportunities in the winter months.

We appreciate President Jackson putting this initiative forward. The current economic value of snowmobiling is estimated, based on a study completed by the University of Maine in 1997. At that time they estimated that snowmobiling generated approximately \$12 million per year in sales tax. We are currently working with the University on an update of that study which will be completed next year. I think we can all agree though that those revenues have increased substantially in the past 22 years.

What is important though is that unlike any other industry in the state, the infrastructure that creates those revenues are generated entirely on the backs of generous landowners and volunteer labor. Every year countless thousands of hours are provided by our volunteer clubs to obtain landowner permission, brush and sign trails, and keep them well-groomed throughout the winter. The irony is that most of these clubs were formed by people who loved to snowmobile, and now have reached a point where many of them have little time to ride any more. They're working to keep the trails at a level that most riders have come to expect.

Our program is entirely funded by user fees, snowmobile registrations and a small percentage of the state gas tax. The grant program that is managed by the Bureau of Parks & Lands can reimburse clubs for up to 70% of their stated costs, although in reality that figure rarely exceeds 50% due to available grant money. Our clubs have to rely on raffles, suppers, donations and other fundraisers in order to accomplish their work. They are non-profits in sense. Our clubs know how to squeeze the most out of every dollar, and this modest appropriation to the Snowmobile Program would go a long way in helping them accomplish their work.

There is also a precedent for a General Fund appropriation. In 1999 the 119th Legislature appropriated \$500,000 in General Fund money for the Snowmobile Program. That money was used to



establish a Capital Equipment Grant Program that has since helped clubs leverage purchases of millions of dollars in grooming equipment that is very expensive, but necessary to complete their work. Thanks to careful management by the Snowmobile Program and oversight by an advisory council made up of snowmobile club representatives, qualifying clubs can obtain grants of up to 40% to assist them in the purchase of groomers that in many cases exceeds \$200,000 per unit.

Now twenty years later, this modest investment of General Fund money is an opportunity to again invest in an activity that will return significant benefits to the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.