

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 212**

**AN ACT TO PROVIDE A SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR THE
ATV RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT FUND**

SPONSORED BY: Representative Danny Martin of Sinclair

CO-SPONSORED BY: Representative Skofield of Weld
President Jackson of Aroostook
Representative Martin of Eagle Lake
Representative McCrea of Fort Fairfield
Senator Carpenter of Aroostook
Senator Davis of Piscataquis

DATE OF HEARING: February 27, 2019

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Colonel Joel Wilkinson, Chief of the Maine Warden Service at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of **L.D. 212**.

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) and the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry(DACF) work closely and in concert regarding the recreational use of all-terrain vehicles in Maine. Our Department manages registration, safety classes and enforcement. DACF oversees the ATV Trail Grant and coordination of ATV clubs. We work together on ATV landowner issues. This industry is responsible for bringing an estimated \$750 million dollars into the state annually based on a 2017 study.

When the laws were written to fund the management of the ATV program in the late 80's early 90's there were roughly 21,000 machines registered. Today we are registering nearly 72,000 machines. Snowmobile registration numbers during a similar time comparison have stabilized, we currently register approximately 82,000 snowmobiles. The last increase to the registration system generating funds to support the industry on all-terrain vehicles occurred in 2004. ATV registrations are on a steady increase and it appears that if the trend continues, ATV registrations will surpass snowmobile registrations in the very near future.

During the last two years, the Maine Warden Service handled 657 complaints, issued 1,009 warnings, 1,166 criminal and civil summonses, arrested 49 operators under the influence, handled 8 fatalities and 320 accident investigations, most of these accidents involved personal injury. Although funding has not increased, the demands and expectations of the industry continues to rise.

Landowners, both private and public have begun to close trails jeopardizing local community trail systems. Private landowners who own most of our 5,728 miles of trail system are demanding and expecting more maintenance on the trails while the volunteer base is shrinking due to demographic changes. The Bureau of Public Lands alone has closed nearly 1,000 miles of trails due to lack of funding. The ATV Trail maintenance fund administered by DACF is currently covering less than 50% of requested expenditures and that does not account for significant increases that landowners are requesting. With the new demands, current funding only covers approximately 25% of the total needs. One private landowner, American Forest Management, had a recent audit of needs which resulted in over one million dollars in necessary repairs to their current trail system. Due to the lack of funding, many trails on their land have been closed, some temporarily and some permanently as the state attempts to get repairs done and infrastructure brought up to best management practices. This represents one significant landowner, but unfortunately also represents the status of land on the approximately 3,000 private landowners who allow use of their land. Due to the lack of resources, no new trails are being authorized even though some are significantly needed to increase connections between communities.

We believe that this bill is a start to provide the necessary funding to address the needs of the ATV Recreational Fund. However, it does not address the necessary funding to support increased demands for law enforcement, accident investigation and search and rescue. We urge the committee to look at funding this issue broadly since there has not been a registration increase in 15 years and industry growth is on par and expected to exceed our current snowmobile registration numbers which is representative of the user base. We are asking the committee, while examining the ATV Recreation Fund to also explore the creation and funding of a ATV Enforcement Fund like the Snowmobile Enforcement Fund as defined in 12 MRS. § 10258. This fund takes a portion of the registration fees to be used for regular and overtime personnel service costs, safety and education programs and equipment purchased for those programs. In closing, Brian Bronson who manages the ATV Recreation Fund and I will be available at the work session to discuss specific elements of my testimony and provide the necessary information for your dialogue on this issue.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.