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GOVERNOR PATERSON ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL MAJOR FUNDING FOR NEW YORK'S SNOWMOBILE TRAILS

State Funding for Local Trail Improvements Will Nearly Double

New Procedures Implemented to Help Ensure That Registration Fees Are Dedicated to Trail Maintenance and Related Activities

Governor David A. Paterson today announced that the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) will implement new procedures to help ensure that funds paid to the State each year for snowmobile registration fees will be dedicated to trail maintenance and other related program activities. As a result, the State will nearly double the amount of funding it is projected to provide for local snowmobile trail maintenance grants from \$2.87 million in 2007-08 to \$5.34 million in 2008-09.

"Our State's network of snowmobile trails are an important tourist attraction and economic engine, particularly Upstate," said Governor Paterson. "We undertook a careful review of our grant payment procedures and determined that we could improve that process. Accordingly, we will be able to nearly double our annual investment in local trail improvement and maintenance, helping to ensure that New York remains a premier destination for snowmobilers from across the county."

Mike Fischer, President of the New York State Snowmobile Association, said: "We commend Governor Paterson for taking this action to guarantee that monies dedicated from snowmobile registration fees will be spent specifically on snowmobile trail maintenance and safety. This is great news for the State's 100,000 snowmobilers and the Upstate businesses that rely on the \$1 billion snowmobiling adds to New York's economy."

The amount of funding provided each year for local snowmobile trail maintenance grants is determined based upon projected revenues from snowmobile registration fees. Previously, OPRHP set grant levels and reimbursements in the fall of each fiscal year based on its initial revenue estimates. Oftentimes, however, during the course of the year, income from registration fees came in higher than projected, but grant payments were not increased accordingly. Revenues outpaced expenditures and excess balances built up in New York's Snowmobile Trail Development and Maintenance Account.

Under the new procedures instituted today, at the end of each fiscal year, OPRHP will reevaluate the amount of revenue the State has received from snowmobile registration fees. Surplus funds will then be dedicated to trail maintenance efforts through additional grant payments. This will help ensure that money from these registration fees will be spent in a way that specifically benefits snowmobilers. Based on a review of revenues collected in previous years, as well as the current fund balance in OPRHP projects that it can nearly double its 2008-09 local trail maintenance grant payments to \$5.34 million. This represents an increase of nearly \$2.5 million or approximately 86 percent. Over the next several years, the remaining excess balance will be spent down – solely on trail maintenance and related program activities.

New York is also taking other actions to ensure that increased funding will be available for local grants. Currently, OPRHP and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) are authorized to spend \$1.1 million annually from the Snowmobile Trail Development and Maintenance Account on activities they undertake to help maintain approximately 2,500 miles of state-owned snowmobile trails. Over the next three years, the agencies will reduce the amount of funding they withdraw from this account by a cumulative total of \$1 million (\$200,000 in 2008-09, \$400,000 in 2009-10, and \$400,000 in 2010-11). This money will be used instead to help fund local trail grants and reimbursements.

Reducing the amount that OPRHP and DEC are authorized to draw off the account will not have any adverse impact on the maintenance of state-owned trails. Through increased efficiencies and the identification of other financial resources, these agencies will still be able to maintain the high quality of New York's state-owned trail system even after the change in funding structure.

Senator Darrel J. Aubertine said: "I'm pleased that the Governor recognizes the impact that snowmobiling has on winter tourism throughout the State and especially in Central and Northern New York. These new procedures will open up more money to go to our clubs for trail development, which will benefit snowmobilers and businesses."

Senator Joseph A. Griffo said: "The direct discussions with Governor Paterson were effective and yielded positive results. He told me that he was aware there was a problem and of the importance of snowmobiling to the northern parts of the State. Snowmobiling is ingrained in the economic and recreational livelihood here. Governor Paterson should be commended for offering a viable solution. We appreciate his attention and efforts."

Assemblywoman RoAnn M. Destito said: "I would like to applaud Governor Paterson and Budget Director Laura Anglin for all of their hard work in making this important state investment in our snowmobile trail system, which is so vital to the winter tourism industry of the Upstate economy. By taking this action, we will ensure that the trail fund has the resources available for future needs and the State's extensive snowmobile trail system overall will be the best maintained and groomed throughout the northeast."

OPRHP Commissioner Carol Ash said: "Snowmobiling is an enjoyable form of public recreation that gets riders outdoors in the winter months. We need to encourage the use of the State's extensive snowmobile trail network by both New Yorkers and our out-of-state visitors, bolstering the State's economy and local tourism. The actions we are taking today represent a win-win for the snowmobile community and New York as a whole."