



# MARY FELZKOWSKI (CZAJA)

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## Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 180

**Representative Mary Felzkowski**

**Assembly Committee on Tourism**

**April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Good Afternoon members of the Assembly Committee on Tourism, and thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 180 (AB 180).

Wisconsin is home to one of the best snowmobile trails systems in the Midwest, and Wisconsinites, as well as out-of-staters, live and travel here to use our trails. Our 25,000 miles of trails offer unique opportunities to our residents and visitors, and snowmobilers from out-of-state come here for the experience and help contribute to the \$1.5 billion in recreation and \$2.5 billion in lodging spent by visitors annually. Additionally, restaurants, taverns, and area businesses get an astounding boost from snowmobilers during the winter months. Despite all of this, it is left to local snowmobile clubs and counties to maintain our extensive trail system.

Volunteers from these clubs conduct regular maintenance and construction projects needed to keep their trails open, and they are reimbursed through the snowmobile account, which is administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This account is funded by the snowmobilers themselves and is created through the collection of snowmobile registrations, annual trail passes, and the current year's gas tax on 50 gallons of gas per snowmobile registered. **Not a dollar of GPR goes to funding snowmobile trails in Wisconsin.**

During the 2013-14 Legislative Session, we learned that the funds being generated were not enough to provide for trail maintenance, project requests, and supplemental aid needed to keep the snowmobile trail program running. This issue became more apparent since funding increases had remained stagnant for 20 years. Additionally, an aging membership base threatened the number of willing and able volunteers to ensure the quality of our snowmobile trails. To solve these problems, 2013 Wisconsin Act 142 implemented a number of measures.

Act 142 required snowmobile operators on public snowmobile corridors in Wisconsin to display a trail use sticker issued by the DNR. It also established new trail pass sticker fees, and lengthened the registration period for a snowmobile from two years to three years. These steps helped generate over \$2 million during the last fiscal cycle and \$2.25 million so far in 2017, through the collection of trail pass fees. Act 142 also increased snowmobile club membership from 23,438 in 2014 to 41,970 in 2017, which resulted in an increase in the number of volunteers who are vital to Wisconsin's trail system.

Our next step is to pass AB 180 and ensure that counties and local snowmobile clubs have access to the increased funds provided by Wisconsin Act 142, a step recommended by the Snowmobile Recreation Council at its August 22, 2016 meeting and supported by the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile

Clubs. AB 180 increases the amount snowmobile clubs may be reimbursed from \$250 per-mile to \$300 per-mile for trail maintenance activities, but it will not have a fiscal impact on Wisconsin's budget. It simply grants clubs the ability to use the increased funds that resulted from the changes made by Wisconsin Act 142. The cap on the per-mile maintenance funding for snowmobile trails has not been raised in 20 years, and raising it will alleviate the strain counties and clubs have felt due to two decades of stagnate funding. This bill also increases the supplemental trail aid eligibility requirement from \$150 per-mile to \$200 per-mile for grooming expenses.

This bill will also continue the trail pass stickers changes made under Wisconsin Act 142. Snowmobilers will continue to purchase and display annual trail pass stickers issued by the DNR. Under this bill, the price for trail passes will be maintained at the current levels. Passes will cost \$50.00 for snowmobiles registered in another state, \$10.00 for members of a snowmobile club that are a part of the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs, and \$30.00 for all other snowmobiles registered in Wisconsin. Continuing this requirement will ensure that snowmobile trail projects and maintenance are adequately funded and promote club membership and volunteerism through the reduced rate for club members.

Thank you again for your time and consideration, and I am happy to answer any of your questions.



## State Senator Sheila Harsdorf

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To: Assembly Committee on Tourism

From: State Senator Sheila Harsdorf

Date: April 27, 2017

RE: Assembly Bill 180 Relating to: trail aids and supplemental trail aids for snowmobile trail maintenance

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Dear Chair Tranel and Committee Members:

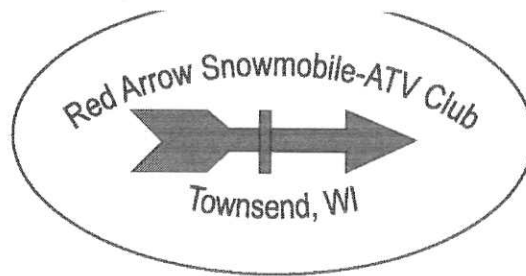
Thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 180 which seeks to increase the amount of aid payments that snowmobile clubs may be reimbursed from \$250 per mile to \$300 per mile for maintenance activities and from \$150 to \$200 for grooming costs. It is worth noting that the snowmobile trail aids have not been increased in 20 years.

Wisconsin has a long and robust history in sporting heritage and is home to one of the best snowmobile trail systems in the Midwest offering 25,000 miles of trails for snowmobilers. Residents and visitors who enjoy snowmobiling and take advantage of our extensive trail system help to contribute \$1.5 billion in recreation and \$2.5 billion in lodging annually. Construction and maintenance of the trail system is provided by the many dedicated volunteers and members of snowmobile clubs across the state.

Currently, snowmobilers purchase trail pass stickers issued by the DNR which cost \$10 for snowmobile club members, \$30 for snowmobiles registered in the state and \$50 for snowmobiles registered in other states. Since establishing these fees in the 2013 Legislative Session, over \$2 million was generated in the last fiscal year and \$2.25 million generated so far in 2017. This bill makes no changes to these fees but simply allows snowmobile clubs to be properly reimbursed for their efforts and costs in maintaining and grooming our state's trails.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge your support of AB 180.





*49 years of Service to Northern Oconto County 1968-2017*  
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April 26, 2017

To: Assembly Committee on Tourism:

Representatives Tranel, Swearingen, Jarchow, Ballweg, Tauchen, Summerfield, Kitchens,  
Bernier, Mursau, Zimmerman, Billings, Ohnstad, Mason, Considine & Vruwink

**Subject:** Please Support AB 180 & SB 188 and Wisconsin's Snowmobile Program

I am a member of Red Arrow Snowmobile ATV Club and AWSC in Oconto County. Having served as President of Red Arrow and as the current Oconto County Snowmobile Alliance President I have dealt first hand with the shortage of trail funding over the years. I have been a snowmobiler for 45 years.

I am asking you on behalf of myself, our Oconto County Alliance and my fellow snowmobilers statewide to urge you to **please support AB 180 & SB 188, which will help maintain Wisconsin's snowmobile trails and ensure the continued vitality of the statewide snowmobile program.** AB 180 & SB 188 will:

- Allow local snowmobile clubs to be reimbursed more for per-mile trail maintenance activities, which will help state snowmobile trails remain in excellent condition; and
- Provide a permanent funding source for the statewide snowmobile program through the highly successful trail pass program.

**Please support AB 180 & SB 188 and ensure that Wisconsin's snowmobile program remains a national model!**

Thank you for your support,

John Brantmeier



## **Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs – AWSC**

529 Trail Side Dr., Suite 100 – DeForest, WI 53532  
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### **Please Support Assembly Bill 180 and Help Protect Wisconsin's Snowmobile Program**

Assembly Bill 180 (AB 180) helps maintain Wisconsin's snowmobile trails and ensures the continued vitality of the statewide snowmobile program. Specifically, AB 180 will:

- Allow local snowmobile clubs to be reimbursed more for per-mile trail maintenance activities, which will help state snowmobile trails remain in excellent condition; and
- Provide a permanent funding source for the statewide snowmobile program through the highly successful trail pass program.

### **Increasing Aids for Trail Maintenance Does Not Impact the State of Wisconsin Budget**

Wisconsin has a self-funded snowmobile trail system in which snowmobilers themselves pay for the system of trails across the state. Funds for trails are administered by the Department of Natural Resources and generated by snowmobile registrations, annual trail passes, and the current year's gas tax on 50 gallons of gas per snowmobile registered. **Increasing aids for trail maintenance and supplemental maintenance simply allows snowmobile clubs to be reimbursed more for per-mile maintenance activities – it does not have a fiscal impact on Wisconsin's budget.**

### **Increased Trail Maintenance Aids Ensure that State Snowmobile Trails Remain in Pristine Condition**

Wisconsin's cap on the per-mile maintenance funding for snowmobile trails has not been raised in twenty years. Since that time, the costs of labor and grooming equipment needed to maintain Wisconsin's snowmobile trails has increased significantly. In fact, the cost of new vehicles to maintain snowmobile trails can cost in excess of \$200,000. As a result, allowing local clubs to use more state aids for trail maintenance is necessary to ensure that Wisconsin's snowmobile trails remain in excellent condition for state residents, visitors, and future generations.

### **Volunteers Maintain Wisconsin's Snowmobile Trail System**

The Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs ("AWSC") is comprised of over 600 local snowmobile clubs and approximately 41,000 members – all of whom are dedicated to the preservation and promotion of recreational snowmobiling in the state. Volunteer efforts by snowmobile club members provide for all of the maintenance and grooming for Wisconsin's snowmobile trails. These efforts have resulted in a system of nearly 25,000 miles of snowmobile trails that is consistently recognized as a national model of excellence.

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**Erica Keehn, AWSC's Miss Snowflake  
Testimony in Support of AB 180  
April 26, 2017, 1:30 p.m., Madison, WI  
State Capitol, Room 328 Northwest**

Good afternoon, Chairman Tranel and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the Assembly Tourism Committee. My name is Erica Keehn and I'm here to express my strong support for Assembly Bill 180.

I am a member of the Orfordville Country Riders Snowmobile Club in Orfordville, Wisconsin, which is a part of the Rock County Snowmobile Alliance. I am currently AWSC's Miss Snowflake for 2016-2017. My role as Miss Snowflake is to travel mainly within the state of Wisconsin promoting safe and responsible snowmobiling while also promoting snowmobile clubs. I am currently a Junior at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville where I major in Agriculture Business with an emphasis in communications and marketing.

Snowmobiling has been an important part of my family for many generations. My grandfather started the Utica Trailblazers Snowmobile Club in 1970. From a very young age, I can remember riding with my family on snowmobiles and falling asleep in between their arms, bumping the kill switch. To this day, snowmobiling continues to be a great recreational activity that I enjoy with my family and friends. As part of my local club, I volunteer to brush and mark trails and I am also a certified snowmobile safety instructor.

Over the past several months, as I've traveled the state attending club events and fundraisers in my role as Miss Snowflake, I've witnessed firsthand the need for AB 180. While fundraisers are important and help our volunteer clubs raise money to maintain the state's snowmobile trails, they cannot keep up with the increasing costs of everything that is a part of maintaining snowmobile trails. For example, costs are increasing for grooming equipment, labor of specialized welding on this equipment, fuel, insurance costs, labor rates (which are currently less than minimum wage), administrative supplies, equipment storage, and many other supplies.

While talking with many club volunteers throughout the state, one concern beyond the trail maintenance rate is the costly effort to maintain bridges, for example. With insufficient funding to maintain a bridge, one club that I've recently met with struggled to find a way around the bridge and to re-route the trail.

AB 180 will help to ease the burden on clubs' trail maintenance efforts by increasing the amount of money that may be used for trail maintenance activities from some of the funds made available by the trail pass program.

As a young snowmobiler, I want to ensure that future generations have the same snowmobiling opportunities that I've had. To that end, I think that AB 180 will help to ensure that snowmobiling in Wisconsin has a bright future.

Thank you for listening to my testimony this afternoon and for your support of AB 180. I'm happy to answer any questions that committee members may have.





## **Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs – AWSC**

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Phone: 800.232.4108 / 608.846.5530 – Fax: 608.846.5534  
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**Dave Newman, AWSC President**  
**Testimony in Support of AB 180**  
**April 26, 2017, 1:30 p.m., Madison, WI**  
**State Capitol, Room 328 Northwest**

Chairman Tranel and Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Assembly Tourism Committee. I am here today to speak in support of AB 180.

I am the current president of the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs and I am here representing our over 41,000 members and the 615 clubs in the state. It is these clubs and their volunteer members that are responsible for developing and maintaining most of the nearly 25,000 miles of interconnecting snowmobile trails across Wisconsin which are open to the public. These clubs own and operate the expensive equipment needed to groom the trails and make them safe and enjoyable for everyone. In return they are reimbursed through the snowmobile program which is administered by the DNR. The revenue that goes into this segregated fund comes entirely from the snowmobilers who use the trails through registrations, trail passes and the gas tax on the gas they use.

AB 180 will raise the amount available to the clubs which will allow the program to get more of the revenue available back to the clubs and provide a constant stream of revenue in future years. After two years, it is obvious the trail pass is doing what we expected by bringing in an additional \$2.25 - 2.5 million into the snowmobile program and providing an incentive that has resulted in over 13,000 new snowmobile club members.

It is our hope that by continuing the trail pass, there will not only be enough revenue to raise the cap, but we will also have enough to fund some additional new miles of trail.

This initiative is not only supported by the AWSC and our members, but also by the Governor's Snowmobile Recreation Council, of which I am a member.

Thank you to Rep. Felzkowski and Sen. Harsdorf for their efforts and I hope we can count on the support of this committee to move this legislation forward.

**Gary Hilgendorf**  
**Testimony in Support of AB 180**  
**April 26, 2017, 1:30 p.m., Madison, WI**  
**State Capitol, Room 328 Northwest**

My name is Gary Hilgendorf

I'm from Tomahawk, Lincoln County.

First I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Tourism Committee.

I am a member of the Knight Owls Snowmobile Club, past trail boss, vice president, president, and have continuously volunteered as a groomer-operator for the past 50 years.

I'm also currently the President of Lincoln County Snowmobile Council, the Lincoln County AWSC representative, and a member of the Governor's Snowmobile Recreation Council.

As many of you know, the trail pass program was implemented two years ago. Since that time, it has done just what was expected: Raised funds for the trail system and increased club membership. This has been a big help to the snowmobile program. But, with state statute controlling the per-mile per-year rate for maintenance, and I think it probably should, we still have a problem. Part of the problem involves rates for equipment used in maintaining the trails. To set equipment rates, the Governor's Council uses the DOT rates as a guideline for every piece of equipment that might be used by the clubs for maintenance and puts a rate on it. Grooming has five different classes. AAA, AA, A, B, C. Then, using the equipment rate for the pulling unit and a rate for the different size drags and a labor rate, it is all put together for a complete groomer rate per class.



If the rates for maintenance (brushing, signing, bridges, trail improvement) and grooming rates are increased without increasing the per-mile rate in the statute, the result would be to push everyone to the \$250 per mile statutory cap faster and consequently into supplemental funding, and we would be back in the same boat as before, with having to prorate, and getting only a percentage on the dollar. That is where AB 180 comes in by increasing the rate per mile from \$250 to \$300.

Clubs haven't received an increase in the rate per mile for 20 years, even though costs of equipment have more than doubled. Some of these groomers are \$195,000 to \$225,000 and up. Clubs are having a hard time to even exist, let alone try to upgrade some very old equipment. Also by raising this cap it doesn't entitle clubs to it. They have to justify everything they do. And get paid for only that.

Our club currently has 88 miles of funded trails.  $88 \times \$250 = \$22,000$ . This year we had to raise about \$10,000 additional to cover our grooming costs.

AB 180 would increase per mile to \$300 which would be a huge help of \$4,400.

Also AB 180 would remove the sunset clause making sure the funding would be there in the years to come and keep Wisconsin the leader in the snowmobile world.

Thank You again for your time and support of AB 180.