

HOW THE WISCONSIN SNOWMOBILE PROGRAM WORKS

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It has been several years since we published an in-depth explanation on how the snowmobile program in Wisconsin works. In this article I will explain where the funds come from and how they are spent.

The program is administered by the Wisconsin DNR, with recommendations from the Governor's Snowmobile Recreation Council (SRC), a 15-member citizen board appointed by the Governor. The Department collects all funds and distributes the money back to the clubs through each county. Clubs with approved funded trails do not receive the funding directly, but through their county government.



The revenue comes from the following sources:

- Snowmobile registrations: \$30 per snowmobile, good for up to 3 years
- Antique registrations (35 years old) – \$20 for the first 3 years, \$5 for 3 years when renewed
- Gas tax: \$.309 x 50 gallons per registered snowmobile x 1.55 (tourism factor)

Annual Trail Passes

- Non-resident Trail Pass: \$50 per snowmobile not registered in Wisconsin
- Resident Trail Passes: \$30 – non-club member
- Resident Trail Passes: \$10 – members of a snowmobile club and the AWSC

Note: All the money collected by the AWSC from club members when purchasing trail passes are transferred directly into the state segregated fund. AWSC dues submitted by the clubs are used to operate the AWSC and provide member benefits.

For fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, the total of these revenue streams added up to more than \$11 million. In addition to this, there is \$1.2 million of Tribal Gaming revenue earmarked in the state budget for use by the DNR for snowmobile law enforcement by DNR wardens.

How is this money spent and what is it spent on?

Wisconsin is fortunate to have more of the program money going directly for trail maintenance than other states. However, approximately 15 percent goes to the DNR to cover the administrative costs and the \$396,000 for the county law enforcement program. This year, the amount for county law enforcement will increase to \$600,000.

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The remaining amount is spent according to the state statutes in the following priority:

The cost of \$300 per mile for maintenance on the 20,254 miles of funded trail is taken off the top along with \$200,000 for GPS tracking units for all groomers. Up to \$300 per mile is distributed through each county and goes to the clubs or county alliances for the expenses incurred while prepping and grooming the trails. The remaining amount is available for use to fund project grant requests for bridge and trail rehabs, trail relocations, new bridges, and finally new miles of trail. The cost of projects for trails with both ATV/UTV and snowmobile use are split between the ATV/UTV and the snowmobile programs. The state has the ability to use funds from a national program, the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), to help cover the costs of some of the infrastructure projects on public property. Last year over \$700,000 of RTP funds were used on snowmobile trail projects. Revenue for RTP comes from federal taxes collected on gas purchased for use in off-road vehicles.

There is additional supplemental funding available when counties in high snow, high traffic areas exceed the \$300 per mile in expenses and spend at least \$200 per mile on grooming. There is a cap on supplemental payments of \$900 per mile (pending legislation will increase that to \$1500 per mile). The money for this program comes from non-resident trail passes and the 55 percent multiplier for gas tax.

The rates used by clubs when submitting their expenses are based on DOT rates and adjusted annually by the SRC. The clubs use an electronic automated recording system (SNARS) to submit their expenses to their county coordinator, who approves them and sends them on to the state. Grooming time is tracked by GPS units in every groomer and automatically submitted into SNARS for the time spent grooming a funded trail.

Detailed financial reports for the program can be found under meeting minutes on the SRC page of DNR website at: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/aid/Meetings.html>

Additional information regarding the snowmobile program can be found on the DNR website at: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/aid/SnowmobileTrails.html>