

October 29, 2024

State Librarian
20 Park Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301-6314

Dear Acting State Librarian:

Pursuant to RSA 215-A:3 IX and RSA 215-C:2 X, enclosed is the annual report that the Executive Director of the Fish and Game Department is required to file with the State Library. Portions of this report encompasses the time period from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. The registration year which runs from May 1st to April 30th

Registration totals for FY 2024 are as follows:

	<u>RESIDENT</u>	<u>NON-RESIDENT</u>	<u>TOTALS</u>
Snowmobile	18,056	13,073	31,129
ATV/UTV	19,441	11,248	30,689
Temporary OHRV	NA	3,121	3,121
Trail Bike	3,483	1,638	5,121
Transfers	773		
Dealer	228		
Rental	639		
Antique	482		

Enforcement

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department is the primary OHRV/Snowmobile enforcement agency. Conservation Officers conducted OHRV/Snowmobile enforcement patrols totaling 11,072.75 regular hours and 3,875.25 overtime hours through a twelve month period and checked approximately 39,838 vehicles for compliance. During this period, Conservation Officers issued 1,049 summonses and 558 warnings for violations of Chapters 215-A and 215-C.

During the winter, Conservation Officers continued snowmobile enforcement efforts to control excessive speed, unlawful operation, and modified exhausts while working cooperatively with landowners and snowmobile clubs to keep the trails safe. The statewide snowmobile trail system exceeds 7,000 miles. Loud exhausts and operating without landowner permission (off trail) are the primary complaints leading to the closing of snowmobile trails on private property. Modified exhausts, excessive speed and irresponsible off-trail riding are areas of continued concern. Conservation Officers focus patrol efforts on these problems through speed enforcement details, trail patrols and community policing initiatives.

Conservation Officers conduct wheeled vehicle or Off Highway Recreational Vehicle (All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV), Utility Terrain Vehicle (UTV), and trail bike enforcement patrols from spring through fall to improve overall trail safety and address unlawful operation. Officers work with riders, landowners, clubs and local law enforcement to control illegal operation, illegal/loud exhaust, and help ensure safety on a growing network of maintained and approved trails on state and private land. Currently, NH has roughly 1,200 miles of OHRV trails on several interconnected systems, the largest trail network in the Northeast.

In addition, many of these OHRV trail systems provide extensive use of local and state public roadways to access services and provide further interconnectivity. These significant increases in ATV/UTV riding opportunities have significantly increased our enforcement, administrative and coordination responsibilities particularly in Coos County. In addition to existing trail systems, many towns statewide are opening their roadways to OHRVs.

OHRV registrations continue to remain high. However, budget restrictions, past and present, have prevented filling vacant Conservation Officer patrol areas and open/unfunded Conservation Officer positions needed to keep up with the increase in activity. This has negatively impacted our ability to meet constituent demands for adequate enforcement patrol coverage and constituent complaints. There is substantial justification to fill several vacant patrol positions. Numerous attempts to do so have been

unsuccessful. Currently there are only twenty-six (26) Conservation Officers, two Conservation Officer Trainees, six (6) Sergeants, and six (6) Lieutenants statewide including four (4) assigned to administrative duties at Headquarters.

October 29, 2024

Page 3

Enforcement (Continued)

Due to normal day-on/day-off rotations, on any given day there are only fifteen (15) to twenty (26) Conservation Officers covering the entire state. This coverage is not limited to OHRV/Snowmobile enforcement but also includes their primary duties of wildlife law enforcement as well as search and rescue obligations. This low number, despite the significant increase in duties, responsibilities, and population underscores the need to revise our funding model and establish a new source of stable, dedicated funding for the Department.

OHRV/Snowmobile Safety Education

The Law Enforcement Division, through the Safety Education Program, actively promotes the safe and responsible operation of all recreational vehicles, facilitating this objective through enhanced enforcement patrols and safety education classes. The objective is to modify the behavior of the irresponsible rider and to promote safe trail systems. This is accomplished with the cooperation of the Bureau of Trails (DNCR), OHRV and snowmobile clubs, and statewide associations.

Fish and Game continues to coordinate over 65 volunteer OHRV and snowmobile instructors who, along with part-time OHRV Regional Coordinators, conduct safety classes across the state with the assistance of local clubs, police/fire agencies and volunteers. Safety Education Certification is required of any rider who operates off of their land and is over the age of twelve (12) who does not possess a valid driver's license. Program staff continues to work with interested individuals, state associations and national organizations to develop new safety initiatives. The Department certified 1,327 students in FY 2024. The OHRV Online Safety Education certification program is growing in popularity. This alternative method of certification supplements the long standing traditional classroom course taught by volunteer instructors and part-time regional coordinators. The online course was implemented as a result of constituent demand for readily available methods of certification for non-residents traveling to NH to ride as well as resident's desire for modernized, flexible certification options. In compliance with RSA 215-A: 19, IX and RSA 215-C: 34, VIII, the Law Enforcement

Division continues to administer the statutorily required Responsible Riders Safety Education Class, as needed, to those who are convicted of operating while intoxicated, disobeying a police officer, skimming open water or operating to endanger any person or property.

The Law Enforcement Division's OHRV/Snowmobile Program funds a full time Conservation Officer Program Coordinator, one full-time program assistant, and part-time regional coordinators to perform OHRV/snowmobile related duties.

October 29, 2024

Page 4

Registrations and Revenue

There were 73,128 OHRV/Snowmobiles registered in the FY 2024 season, compared to 81,078 OHRV/Snowmobiles in FY 2023. This is a 7,950 decrease in registrations in FY2024. The decrease in registrations does not reduce the calls and issues for which Conservation Officers had to respond; responding to landowner complaints, accident investigations and reports continue to take up a large component of a Conservation Officer's time. Pursuant to RSA 215-A: 32-a and RSA 215-C:53, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department is required to furnish OHRV and Snowmobile death and injury statistics to the Registrar of Vital Records. Copies of these statistical reports are attached.

In accordance with RSA 215-A: 23 and RSA 215-C: 39, the Fish and Game Department collected \$6,959,517.60 in registration fees and permits in FY 2024. A breakdown of fees collected per OHRV Category is attached. Pursuant to RSA 215-A: 23 and RSA 215-C: 39, the Fish and Game Department forwarded \$5,382,779.30 to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Bureau of Trails. The Fish and Game Department retained the remaining amount of \$1,576,738.40 for OHRV/Snowmobile enforcement, OHRV Safety Education and Training, Wheeled Vehicle Enforcement Contracts, and processing of Registration materials. Funds available to the department were as follows: \$1,576,738.40 for OHRV and Snowmobile Enforcement, Education and Training, and \$301,753.00 for the administration of the OHRV and Snowmobile Registration Program. These funds are non-lapsing and are utilized conservatively, in part to help offset minimal snow winters when snowmobile registrations and related funds can dip substantially.

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department also entered into OHRV Law Enforcement Contracts with 12 local police agencies for a total of \$40,000.00. These contracts aid in providing patrol coverage and mitigating landowner complaints.

October 29, 2024
Page 5

The following are attached for FY 2024 (7/2023-6/2024):

1. Off Highway Recreational Vehicle Safety Education Courses that were conducted by Department personnel and volunteers, as well as online.
2. Vital Statistics Report
3. OHRV and Snowmobile Accident Statistics Reports
4. Fee Table

You may contact Captain Michael Eastman at 603-271-3129 if you need additional information regarding this report.

Sincerely,

Scott R. Mason
Executive Director

Original Copies to:

Chair, House Fish and Game and Marine Resources Committee
Chair, House Resources, Recreation and Development Committee
Chair, House Transportation Committee
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Chair, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Chair, Senate Ways and Means Committee