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**GO SNOWMOBILING ONTARIO!**

Volume 14#1

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Provide leadership to member organizations in our commitment to enable exceptional snowmobile trails and rider experiences throughout the province.

**OFSC Vision is that:**

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The OFSC GO Snowmobiling Ontario Magazine is the voice for uniting snowmobile clubs, industry stakeholders and snowbelt communities to promote the recreational lifestyle, experience and fun that OFSC trail riding offers Ontarians every winter. Our goal is to grow snowmobiling by attracting new participants, persuading former riders to return, encouraging casual snowmobilers and families to ride more — and by urging everyone to do their sledding right here in Ontario!

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To keep your name on the list for the OFSC mailings and newsletters, you must sign up for Rider Advantage offers/benefits when you buy your 2022 Seasonal or Classic trail permit. If you don't sign up, we can't keep you informed!



Canadian Council of Snowmobile Organizations

**WARNING:** Some of the action shown in this magazine is potentially dangerous. Almost all riders photographed are professionals, racers or experienced experts. It is strongly recommended readers do not attempt to duplicate stunts beyond their capabilities. Always wear a helmet, boots and safety equipment.

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Because of many new challenges impacting print publications, this will be the only issue of *Go Snowmobiling Ontario Magazine* published this season. The OFSC will continue to provide latest news & updates to snowmobilers through its website, newsletter and Facebook page.

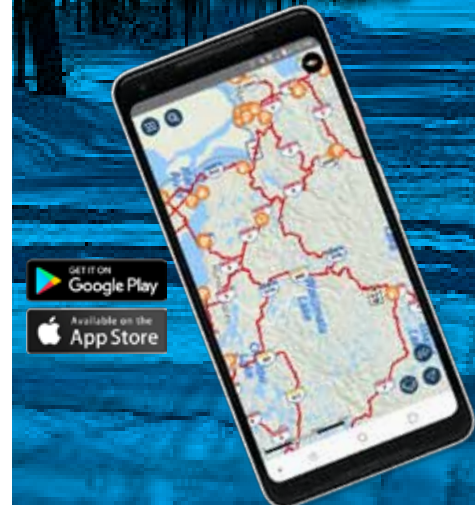
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By Ryan Eickmeier,  
OFSC CEO



## LOOKING FORWARD TO 2022!

The 2020-21 Snowmobile Season is certainly one we will remember for years to come. Who would have thought that an already difficult job – you know, thousands of volunteers getting 30,000 kms of trail ready each year – would become even more challenging? Well, it did, and our districts, clubs and volunteers met that challenge head-on.

Like all Ontarians, the OFSC was subject to direction from our public health officials, which sometimes varied by region. Despite restrictions and a little bit of a later start than normal thanks to Old Man Winter, our first trails became available on December 14, 2020, and we had more than 13,000 kilometres available across 15 Districts by January 25, 2021. Even with unusually low snowfall in some of our northern districts throughout the season, we averaged approximately 20,000 km through to March 8, 2021, with a peak of 81% of our total trail network available. Thank you to everyone who fought through that adversity to make that happen! As we turn the page and look ahead to our 2022 season, I can confidently say that our clubs are ready for whatever comes at them (hopefully cold temperatures and buckets of snow!).

As you are aware, the price of a seasonal and classic permit increased by \$5 this season; we are privileged to be able to serve as stewards of this incredible activity, and this is a decision we did not take lightly. With rising costs of goods and services as well as increased demand on our trail system, this increase will allow us to put all of these additional resources directly where they are needed most, on the snow. After having held firm on pricing since the 2018 season, we are confident that this is a fair and balanced plan, and the Snowmobile Trail Permit, authorized by the Ministry of Transportation, continues to offer exceptional value when compared to many other recreational past times, particularly if the weather cooperates!

With permit on sale as of October 1, 2021, we are now in the final stages of getting the

finishing touches in place for the upcoming season. Trail work is underway, groomers are waking up from their summer slumber and riders are starting to get that winter itch to pack their saddle bags, hitch up the trailer, and chase the snow. To ensure we can roll out that white ribbon, we have again made considerable investments in our fleet and infrastructure, all in an effort to ensure your Ontario snowmobiling experience is world class. Our provincial fleet of 279 groomers will be ready to roll, buttressed by an acquisition of 13 new and 2 used groomers, a substantial refurbishment program, cascading of equipment to the right areas, and 16 standby units strategically placed around the Province. On the technology side, you can also expect some exciting enhancements to the Go Snowmobiling Ontario App. Based on the feedback of users from last season, we are

thrilled to be able to offer satellite map views, social media check-in, automated trail status updates, downloadable maps, as well as a host of improvements to functionality. Keep an eye out for more information and our release date later this fall.

One final note - as you head out on the trails this winter, be sure to thank the thousands of volunteers who make this a reality. These folks prop 30,000 kms of trail on their back each year, and do so for nothing more than the satisfaction of a job well done. Let's also ensure we respect our generous landowners, who have selflessly permitted use of their land so we can access new and exciting areas. They don't ask for much - simply that we *stay on trail*. Without these two groups, organized snowmobiling would cease to exist.

I wish you all a safe and fun season! . GSOM

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“ Land use permission is a privilege not a right, and must be respected and defended by every trail rider or more OFSC trails may be permanently closed. Please Take The Pledge\* to: ”



- 1** Purchase and display a valid Snowmobile Trail Permit to access OFSC trails on private property.
- 2** Show your respect and appreciation for private landowners by never wandering off an OFSC trail to play in the powder, riding with loud pipes, or doing any property damage.
- 3** Slow down when passing close to any residence or livestock near an OFSC trail, always being courteous and polite to landowners and their families, and carrying any garbage or broken parts out with you.
- 4** Avoid following any tracks cut by others who have left the trail.
- 5** Ride between the stakes, and never knock them down or cut corners inside a stake line.
- 6** Avoid cutting through rope, tape or snow fencing, avoid short cuts or detours from the marked OFSC trail, and obey signs warning to stay off sensitive crop areas.
- 7** Avoid entering nearby fields where there are no trails.
- 8** Stay off any trail that shows RED on the Interactive Trail Guide (ITG) and/or is marked as closed at the trail.
- 9** Never ride an ATV on any OFSC trail on private property at any time of year.
- 10** Make sure that everyone you snowmobile with reads this OFSC Trail Rider Code of Conduct and understands the importance of staying on the marked trail.

\*The complete OFSC Trail Rider Code of Conduct can be found online at: [ofsc.on.ca](http://ofsc.on.ca)

## OFSC TRAIL RIDER CODE OF CONDUCT



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# FROM BEHIND THE HANDLEBARS TO BEHIND THE SCENES MY EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE AT THE OFSC

BY PATRICIA ROBINSON



PHOTO BY CRAIG NICHOLSON, THE INTREPID SNOWMOBILER

**H**ow complicated could the OFSC and organized snowmobiling possibly be? Little did I know! My first exposure to snowmobiling happened in 2010, when my boyfriend offered to introduce me to his winter passion. I was a city girl with no powersports experience. So, I was unsure what to expect on this first ride – especially with me wearing his spare gear and holding on for dear life as a passenger.

But I was instantly intrigued and impressed by a new world – an expansive network of smooth trails, with intersections and signage that pointed us to different towns, restaurants and gas stations. I wasn't sure what to make of being a passenger on one of these things, but when I got a chance to drive, I was hooked!

I bought my first sled the following summer and have shared snowmobile

fever with Johnny ever since. Over the past 11 winters, we have ridden extensively across Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, sometimes touring with the Intrepid Snowmobiler. Our travels have introduced us to so many wonderful people, many of whom remain great friends.

Through my own experiences and conversations with other sledders, I became aware of many rider issues and concerns. I also wondered what went on behind the scenes to make trails happen. So, when the OFSC Communications Manager role became available, it was a great fit where I could make a valuable contribution.

**Getting Started:** When I started there in mid-September 2021, COVID restrictions had limited in-person business at the OFSC office, the pressure was on from earlier than usual permits sales, and another pandemic lockdown loomed with new rules regarding public health regions and allowed activities. As a result, priority one became setting up an online call centre to answer incoming OFSC calls remotely. Soon after, where I live became a red zone; I could no longer travel to the Barrie office.

After only a few weeks in my new job, my onboard training continued while I orientated a new staff member, and jumped in to assist permit buyers in a season like no other. I also first met most of my new colleagues by Zoom. One year later, we have yet to return to the office (and I still haven't met some co-workers in-person), but we have managed to collaborate very effectively to keep organized snowmobiling operational.

## Communicating With You

As always, communication and engagement with permit buyers remained a key priority for us last season, including 35 weekly newsletters.

Here are some of the stats:

- 2,298,322 - page views on OFSC website (Apr. 1, 2020 to Mar. 31, 2021)
- 1,890,984 - views of the Interactive Trail Guide (ITG) on the OFSC web site (Oct. 28, 2020 to Mar. 31, 2021)
- 55,533 - downloads of the Go Snowmobiling Ontario Mobile App (including 31,908 upgrades to PRO version).

**Non-Stop Workload:** Meanwhile, I was experiencing a real eye-opener. Only a handful of OFSC staff manage a host of items on a provincial level – trail network, fleet management, interactive trail guides and apps, permit sales, customer service, insurance and risk management, government relations, communications, marketing, partnerships, information systems and finances, plus so much more.

And it never stops. In the summer months, all sorts of planning, updates, enhancements, partnerships and negotiations are in the works to prepare for the next season. To be honest, no time is good to take vacation because there is always so much going on.

**Highly Regulated Environment:** Working at the OFSC also opened my eyes to the true extent of work that exceptionally dedicated club and district volunteers deliver for riders across the province. I also learned that the OFSC, the districts and clubs are not-for-profit organizations that exist within a highly regulated, political and emotional environment. Permits are a product on the Ministry of Transportation, sold by the OFSC following MTO rules. The government also sets the definitions and regulations related to snowmobiles and trails. Insurance coverage is at the mercy of the insurance industry.

**Emotional Investment:** Relationships with volunteers, landowners, government officials at local and provincial levels, partners, OEMs, snowmobile dealers, law enforcement, etc., must be developed, nurtured and maintained year-round. Dealing with many different people who care so much comes with a lot of emotional investment by everyone involved, including snowmobilers – and OFSC staff.

My exposure behind the scenes at the OFSC has been mind-blowing. When you think about all the little details (and I am still learning them), you realize why it takes thousands of passionate people across this massive province. They pull together all year long to carry out a bazillion tasks that make organized snowmobiling a reality. It's the job of OFSC staff to help out wherever and however we can.

Being a sledhead, my recently acquired knowledge certainly makes me proud to be part of this leading, grassroots, snowmobiling organization. It also inspires me to provide meaningful service for my fellow sledders. Now, I realize how crucial it is that we find ways to help others – and each other – understand, respect and appreciate the depth of what is involved so we can all continue to enjoy OFSC snowmobiling for many years to come! GSOM

Patricia Robinson is an avid snowmobiler and OFSC Communications Manager.

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# SURVEY SAYS



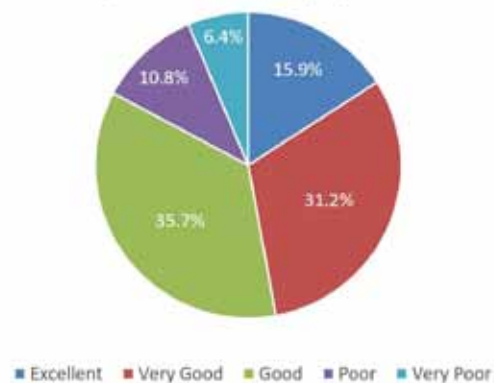
**A**ccording to the special OFSC Rider Opinion & Preference Survey conducted in spring of 2021, almost 83% of respondents agreed that the OFSC did a good to excellent job of delivering the best possible trail riding experiences last winter. In the context of a season fraught with uncertainty and changing pandemic protocols, this result is a tribute to the dedication of our districts, clubs and volunteers.

Every second spring, the OFSC conducts a Rider Opinion & Preference Survey. It's one tool to help improve trail riding experiences for snowmobilers. Following the unusual winter last season, we did a special 2021 spring survey. Then we compared results to the previous two surveys (2018 & 2020) and were surprised to discover only a few minor variations, including...

**How Many Responded:** The number of respondents last spring was 5,839, compared to 9,485 in 2018 and 5,151 in 2020. This seems to signal that snowmobilers were no less active in 2021, a notion supported by the consistent number of kilometers ridden each survey season.

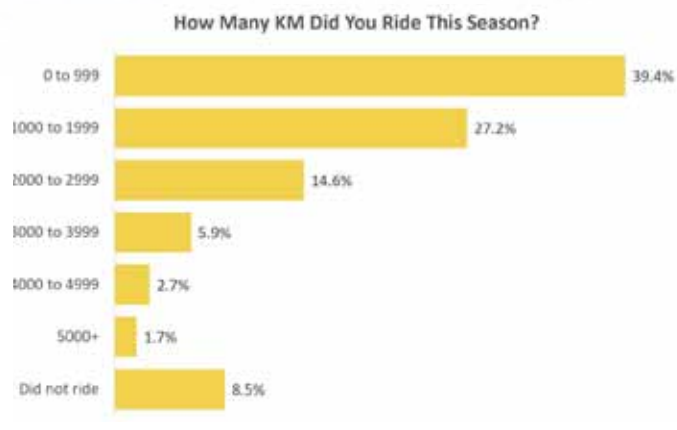
## How Well Do You Think The OFSC Delivered the Best Possible Trail Riding Experiences This Winter?

82.8% of respondents indicated Good, Very Good or Excellent



**How Much Riding They Did:** Those who did not ride at all increased in 2021 by only 3.4% from previous years, much less than expected. Meanwhile, the number of respondents who rode less than 2,999 km for the winter numbered just over 81% for all surveys, hardly any change. But perhaps reflective of more localized riding and less touring, the number of those who rode more than 3,000 km was down by 3.6%, but still a surprisingly small decrease.

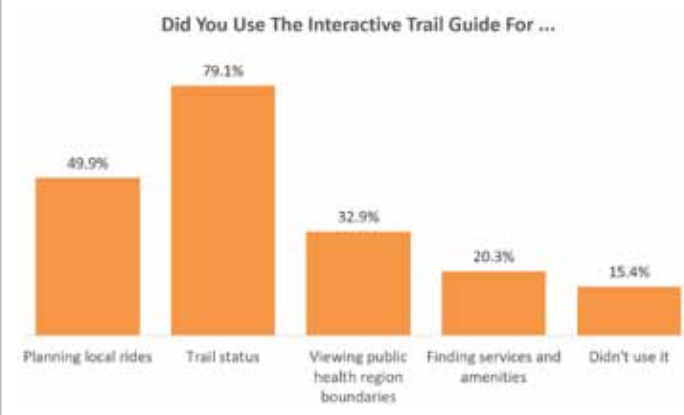
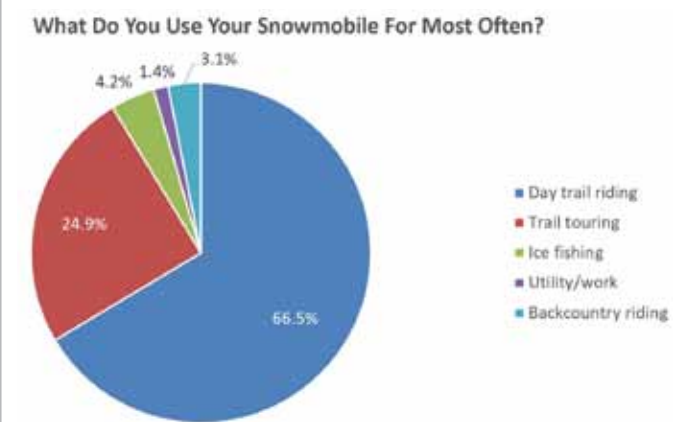
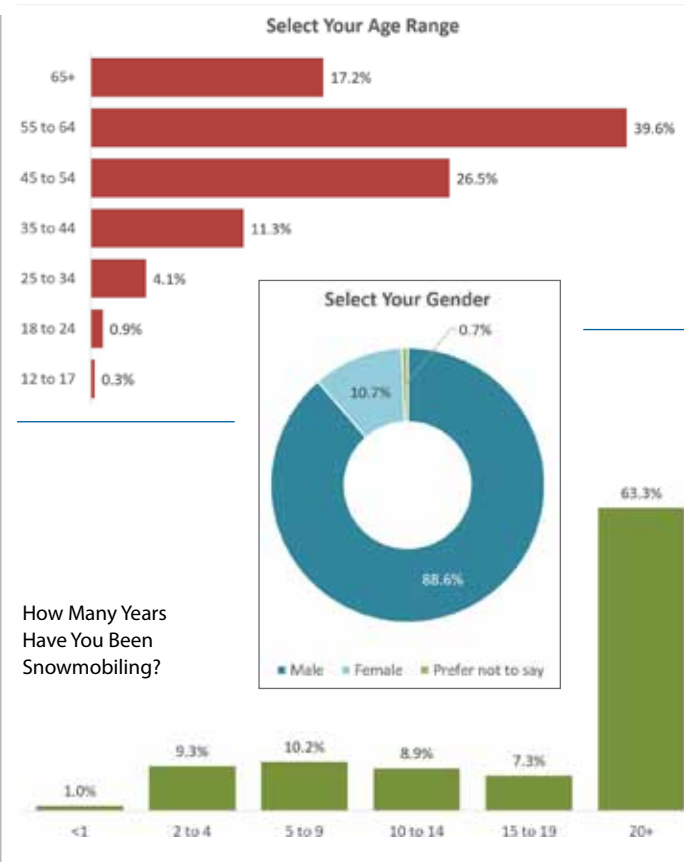
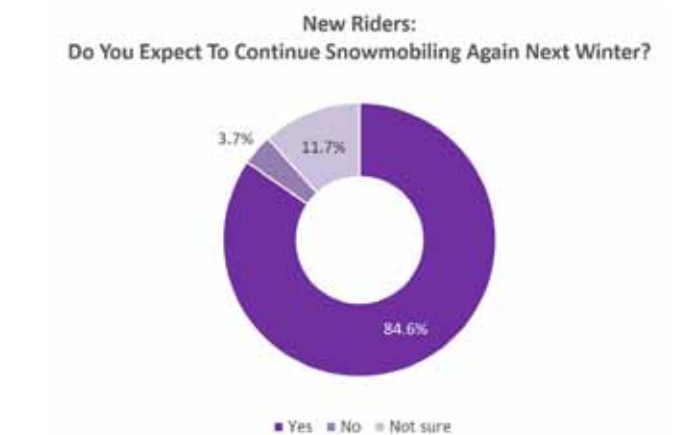
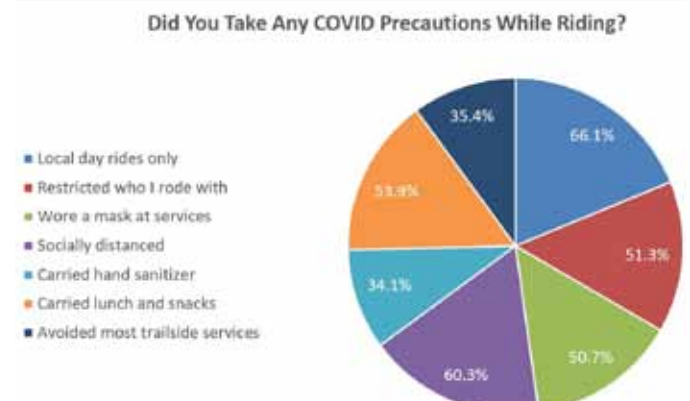
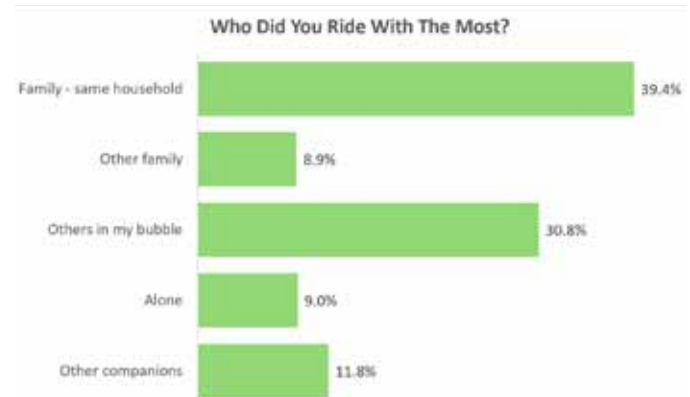
**Where They Rode:** As for what OFSC districts respondents rode most often, the numbers were very similar to previous surveys. Interestingly, comparable numbers even occurred in Districts 10 (Parry Sound Snowmobile District) and 11 (Near North Trail Association) where a



public health region shut down many trails for weeks. Districts 1 (Upper Canada Snowmobile Region), 2 (Central Eastern Ontario Snowmobile Region), 6 (Snow Country Snowmobile Region) & 9 (Midwestern Ontario) each scored a percentage of respondents more than 10% of

the total, with District 9 the highest at 12.6% – for them, a 5% increase from previous surveys, probably attributable to very consistent snow last winter.

**COVID Precautions:** As the COVID pie chart shows, many snowmobilers took pandemic protocols seriously. Their choice of riding companions shifted dramatically last winter. 88% of respondents rode with family, others in their bubble or alone, with only 12% riding with other companions instead of 50.5% in past years. These outcomes reconfirm that, as promised, the OFSC delivered many trails to ride last winter, with plenty of snowmobilers taking advantage of decent snow across Southern Ontario to get good value for their 2021 permit while riding cautiously. Here are a few survey highlights:



Thanks to everyone who took the time to participate in the survey!





CREDIT: PHOTOS BY AL FLETCHER

# WHAT DETERMINES TRAIL LOCATION?

BY CRAIG NICHOLSON

**S**nowmobile trails don't happen by magic. When you consider all the factors involved, it's amazing we have any trails at all...

As you're riding OFSC snowmobile trails this winter, you may come across an especially circuitous one and might well imagine that an inebriated engineer designed it. Not so. In fact, most snowmobile trails are placed only after much sober consideration, predetermined by a variety of largely uncontrollable factors.

It's estimated that each kilometer of new trail costs an average of about \$2,000 to build. Annual maintenance and grooming operations run upwards of \$400 per kilometre. So snowmobile clubs strive to get the shortest and most direct routes to save as much money and volunteer effort as possible. But trail location isn't that simple.

**Location, Location:** First, there's the question of why the trail is needed in that location and where it is supposed to go. Often, the purpose is to link services, communities or other existing trails. What can the club afford to build and maintain? How will this new trail impact the club's ability to groom existing trails? Will the new trail be used enough to justify its existence? How does it fit into the overall trail plan?

**Sustainability:** A sustainable route must be found. Sustainability is key for a permanent trail, because anything other than long-term tenure

can be a waste of very limited club resources – and your permit dollars. So who owns the land and what long-term land use permission may be available can determine the route. Any given proposal may involve multiple property owners, both public and private, and the refusal of any one of these can dramatically change the proposed route.

Wherever possible, preference is given to existing pathways such as early settlement roads, trapper's trails, cut lines, utility corridors, logging roads, abandoned rail lines or unopened municipal road allowances. But the availability of these more sustainable routes can also depend on variables such as other existing or planned land uses, government policies, attitudes of adjacent landowners, environmental concerns and even politics.

**Other Factors:** Many other factors are also involved. Is the terrain steep or flat? Rugged or rolling? Dry or wet? Stable or unstable? Are there any natural obstacles such as waterways, wetlands, cliffs, hills and forests that must be taken into account? What about man-made obstacles such as towns, super highways, buildings, gravel pits, reservoirs or active rail lines? What about future urban development plans? Considerations like permission for roads or railway crossings, use of existing bridges and the difficulty of building the trail itself play an important role. Then there are factors such as municipal by-laws, access to services, and public input.

Clubs must also be concerned with terrain-specific issues that can impact future preparation, maintenance, grooming costs and safety. Is it possible to make the trail wider on one route than another? Where will there be fewer blind corners or hills? Placing the trail in one location may help the snow base last longer by protecting it from direct sunlight. Placing it in another may avoid prevailing winds and drifting. Spring run-off can determine some locations, to avoid expensive erosion repairs. What about trail flooding if beavers are active? Farmland often merits special trail placement: along fence lines, instead of directly across the field, or in one field but not another, or maybe in a different field than last winter due to crop rotation. And what about esthetic concerns such as where the best scenery, staging areas, intersections or stopping points can be found?

**Loss of Trails:** Even when a club successfully addresses all of the above and opens a new trail, it may not last if snowmobilers upset any individual landowner. Too many trails that should have been permanent are being lost today because of inconsiderate people who trespass during the winter (and other seasons, especially on ATVs), do not stay on the trail, or cause property damage. When these thoughtless behaviours result in a trail closure, the club has to start this whole process all over again.

So the next time you encounter a trail appearing to have been laid out by a 2-year old with a crayon, consider yourself lucky to have one to ride at all — and do your best to protect its continuing existence. GSOM

## What's With The Permit Fee Increase?

2022 Seasonal and Classic Snowmobile Trail Permits have gone up by 5 bucks. This is the first change after a 3-year fee freeze. The increase is about how much more it costs to fill-up of your truck thanks to higher fuel prices – but groomers need many fill ups all winter long. What's more, building materials for trail necessities like signage, bridges, warm up shelters and other infrastructure have also increased.

In fact, about the only price that hasn't gone up since 2018 is for our volunteers. These dedicated snowmobilers still contribute their time and efforts for free to their local clubs – and the two best ways to help them out is to volunteer yourself, and not complain about the \$5 increase that will make their jobs easier.



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# WHERE'S THE GROOMER

BY TANYA KING OF  
WOODYS TRACTION,  
WITH CRAIG NICHOLSON



CREDIT: PHOTO COURTESY OF KENNY JOHNSTON

**We share snowmobile trails with heavy industrial equipment called groomers. Here are some tips to help avoid unexpected encounters...**

Meeting a groomer on the trail can be scary. You can gauge your risk by assessing each trail for the likelihood of a groomer encounter. For instance, if the trail is a wide logging road, utility corridor or rail trail, you should be able to see a groomer from much farther away than on tighter, woodland trail. Similarly, on a wider trail, you'll likely have more space to get past a groomer, whereas the groomer may take the

entire width on a narrower one.

**Sure Signs:** At night, spotting a groomer is easier: just watch for the lights. During the day, it's more difficult. One way to know for sure if the groomers are out and where is to ask the local club or

at a trailside pit stop. Also, if other sleds have left tracks ahead of you, which suddenly become smoothed over, you can be certain there's a groomer ahead. Generally, the more beat up a trail is, the more likely it is that groomers will be out sooner than later. More groomers are likely to be out just before and immediately after a weekend, but you can encounter one any time, especially after a fresh snowfall — but which way is it going?

**When the Whole Trail is Groomed:** If the entire surface is freshly groomed on both sides, check to see where the outside edge of the drag has left its most recent mark. If it's to the left of centre, that means your side was most recently groomed, so if there is a groomer ahead, it should be going away from you.

Alternatively, if the drag mark is on your side of the trail (to the right of centre), it means the last pass was probably headed in the direction you're coming from, so meeting a groomer ahead is unlikely.

If the trail is narrow enough that the drag has groomed the entire trail in one pass, leaving no drag mark, it's hard to know which way the machine was headed. But if you haven't already passed it, it's more likely to be ahead. If the snow surface is fairly hard, that means the trail has had some time to set, so the groomer is likely far ahead or gone completely. If it's still soft, that machine might be just around the next corner.

**When the Trail is Groomed on Your Side:** If the trail ahead of you looks freshly groomed only on your side, it may mean there's a groomer ahead going away from you that you may catch up with. Again, check the snow consistency to estimate how far ahead the groomer might be.

**When the Trail is Groomed on the Other Side:** Check out the other side of the trail too. If it isn't freshly groomed, but your side is, that means the groomer is ahead, but could already be started back toward you to do the other side. If the other side is already groomed, but your side is not, that means the groomer is likely behind you somewhere (if so, why didn't you see it?).

## Halfway Haven Update



Great news for snowmobilers touring in Algoma Country! Word is that the iconic Halfway Haven is confident they will be open for at least fuel this winter, with possible limited food and lodgings. Halfway Haven owners have worked tirelessly with many supportive stakeholders over the summer to resolve their issues, although staffing remains a concern.

Announced last spring, the possible closure of the only rest stop and sanctuary on TOP Trail D, between Searchmont and Wawa, would have effectively closed almost 1,000 kilometres of trails north of Sault Ste Marie. Why? Because Halfway is the only groomer fuel and operator accommodations on route, so no grooming without it. The closure would also have denied snowmobile access from the south to the trails that connect the towns of Wawa, Dubreuilville, White River, Marathon, Manitouwadge, Hornepayne, Hearst and Chapleau.

**Abandoned Groomers:** Occasionally, a groomer will break down or get so badly stuck that it has to be abandoned temporarily. Usually, the operator marks the trail ahead and behind somehow as warning, but you can still come up on the unexpected obstacle very quickly. Depending on when and where the problem occurred, there may not be a fresh groomed trail to tip off riders that a groomer is blocking the trail ahead!

**Final Tips:** It's always wise to be extra cautious when you spot any groomer activity, because there could be multiple groomers out that are smoothing different trails, but using the one you are on as an access route. And whenever you come across a freshly groomed section of trail, stay off the groomed surface if at all possible to avoid damaging it before it sets properly. If staying off isn't possible, then at least take it very easy, with no track spinning, hard accelerations or fishtail cornering that can quickly destroy the fresh surface and waste all the money just spent on trying to make the trail smooth. GSOM



PHOTO CREDIT: AL FLETCHER

# RIDE YOUR SIDE



# ALWAYS WATCH FOR ONCOMING SLEDs



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# TRAIL TRACTION

OFSC STAFF REPORT



PHOTO CREDIT: CRAIG NICHOLSON, THE INTREPID SNOWMOBILER

# STUDS MAKE YOUR RIDE SAFER

Automobiles used to ride on the same tires year round. Today, savvy winter drivers switch to “snow” tires for greater traction, control, safety and peace of mind on the roads. In yesteryear, many snowmobilers rode on whatever track came as standard equipment on their sled, without alterations or additions. Today, astute sledders have expanded their definition of “standard equipment” to include different kinds of tracks and top quality studs so they can be safer on the trails.

**All The Help You Can Get:** As with so much of the snowmobile technology we enjoy today, track traction used the racetrack for a test lab. But the ultimate mission is to develop the best possible results for consumer use. Yet some snowmobilers still shy away from studs. They see studs as “performance” products that aren’t necessary for normal snowmobilers engaging in “normal” trail riding.

Of course, that depends on your definition of *normal*. For experienced trail riders, “normal” means encountering a wide range of trail surface conditions, many encountered suddenly and unexpectedly.

How many times have you hit unforeseen icy patches? What happens when the hilly surface is polished smooth by previous sleds? How’s your traction on a trail that was groomed the night before and frozen solid into a polished

sheet by morning? Do you feel in control on an ice crossing bare of snow?

Some would argue that just slowing down would help – and certainly going too fast can make things more precarious. But the plain fact is that riding on the white stuff is inherently risky because of the physics of limited traction between hard rubber and frozen surfaces. Plus, abrupt and unpredictable surface changes require instant reaction and quick reflexes, so you need all the help you can get.

**Benefits of Studs:** Fortunately, studs are the best equalizer. A properly studded track provides a rider with better control, improved handling and increased stopping capability. It also delivers a more predictable balance between the upfront cut of your carbides and the back-end grip of your sled. With studs, you’ll

also do less track spinning during acceleration and experience less slip-sliding on corners and slippery surfaces.

One other consideration is when riding with others who have studded sleds. You may be at a disadvantage unless your sled is studded too. Without picks, your sled won’t perform like theirs will — and that could make it difficult for you to settle comfortably into the rhythm of the group ride. All in all, high quality studs and carbides will help make you a more comfortable, confident and capable rider – all of which contributes to your personal safety, the safety of others and to safer snowmobile trails.

But here’s a cautionary note. Studs are intended to help limit the inherent risks you take while trail riding *within your abilities and expertise*. Just like with winter tires, if you push beyond your comfort zone and proficiency



level, studs can’t save the day or compensate for poor judgement. Anyone who relies on studs to stop their sled in time, or who rides faster because they have studs, is asking for trouble.

**Other Considerations:** So what else do you need to know about studs? Consider the horsepower of your sled and its track length and lug height, plus your weight, riding style, how much mileage you do each season, what your normal riding conditions are and how long you intend to keep the sled. If your sled has a single ply

track, be sure to get a stud specifically designed for this application. These factors will help you determine what kind, type, quality, length and pattern to install, and how many push-thru studs to buy.

For trail riding, your best bet is carbide tipped studs, which offer good abrasion resistance to stay sharp longer. But when your studs (or carbides) lose their edge, use Go Safe sharpening tools from OFSC Partner BiteHarder (for a great deal, click on [ofsc.on.ca/rider-advantage/](http://ofsc.on.ca/rider-advantage/)).

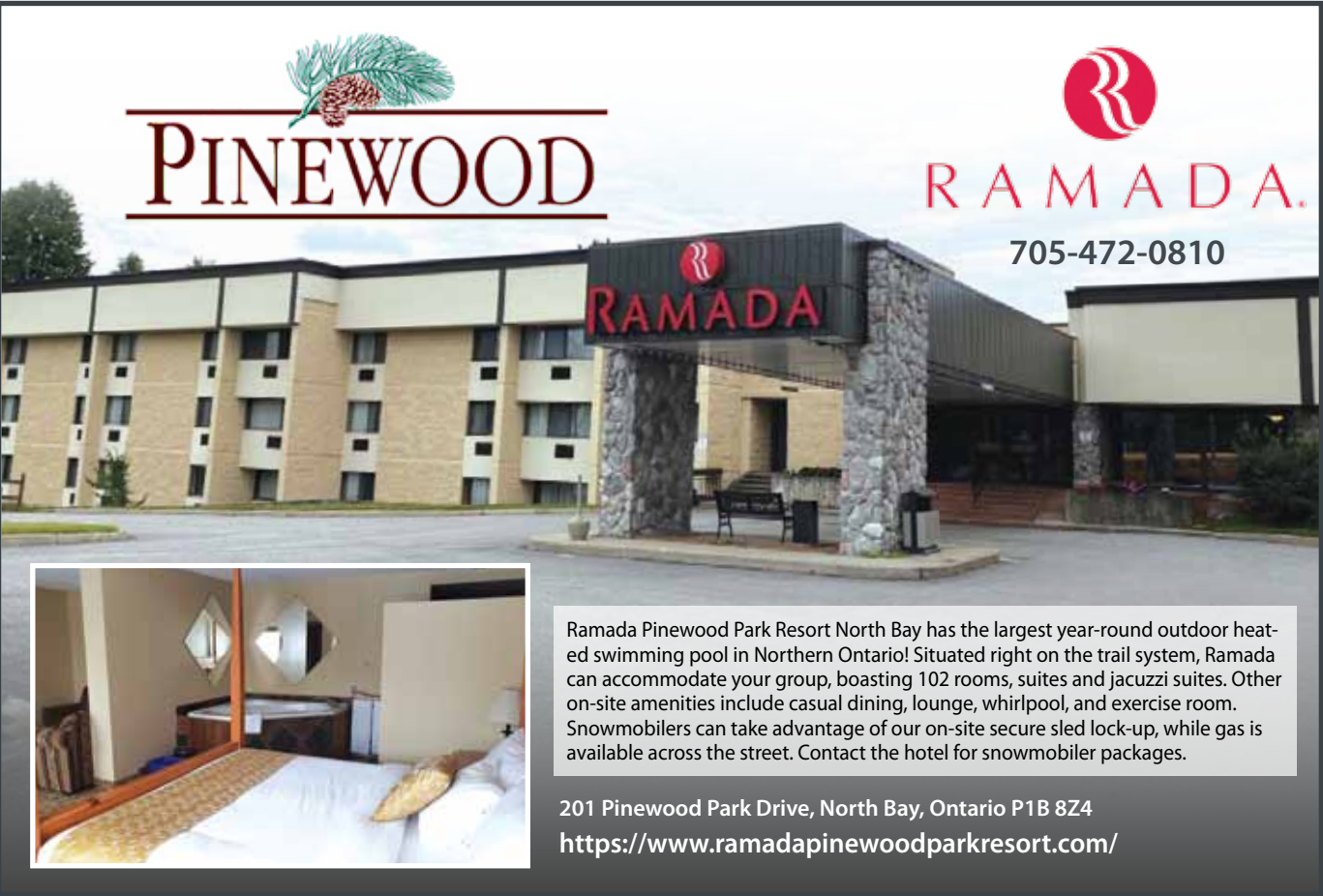
If you’re at all handy, studs are relatively easy to install yourself using a manufacturer provided template and special drill bit. Whether self-installed or by someone else, be absolutely certain a tunnel protector kit is included to protect your tunnel or heat exchanger.

Today, most experienced trail riders swear by studs and wouldn’t leave home without them. How about you? GSOM



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BY PAUL MCNICHOL AND CRAIG NICHOLSON

# GETTING READY FOR WINTER

## A PREPPING PRIMER FOR TOW VEHICLES & TRAILERS



PHOTO CREDIT: VIRGIL KNAPP FOR DESTINATION ONTARIO

**F**all is the time to get your tow vehicle and trailer ready for winter. It's been several months since they've been put to the test of harsh, winter road conditions. Maybe even longer than that. All the more reason to act now and get prepped for the snow.

Your tow vehicle is probably set up for summer driving; your snowmobile trailer may have been parked since last spring. So don't just hook them up at the beginning of this season and never look back. That's a sure recipe for a roadside breakdown or premature deterioration that can cause long-term damage.

### Tow Vehicle Prep

Each component of your tow vehicle plays a critical role in getting you safely to your destination without incident. This applies to everything from transmission to tow package and from winter tires to winter oil. It's a

good idea to enroll in a roadside assistance program that includes towing *both* your vehicle and trailer to a repair shop. Otherwise in the event of breakdown, you may have to abandon your precious trailer and sleds on the shoulder or pay lots extra to get them hauled along with you.

Before trailering, winterize your tow vehicle with a special service, including transmission, rear differential, radiator, brakes and suspension. Experts also recommend snow tires, winter wipers and washer fluid, and lubing all keyholes. Let your service advisor know that you do a lot of winter towing and to check your tow package and electrical hook up. If you do get snow tires installed, be sure to get them re-torqued on schedule. Regardless, hand check that your rim nuts are tight before leaving so you don't lose a tire or damage a rim on route.

If your vehicle doesn't have trailering mirrors, get legal by purchasing a set add-ons so you can see along the sides of your trailer properly.



## What Are Gift Cards Good For?



By purchasing a Gift Card, family, friends, business associates, dealers, etc., can pay the fee for a Classic or Seasonal full season permit at early season rates for someone (or for themselves) without needing to know their ownership snowmobile details (for example, if snowmobile not yet delivered). Buying a Gift Card online is simple. All you need is a valid email address, a permit account (easy to set up) as well as the last name and postal code of the intended recipient, and a valid credit card. Gift Cards must be redeemed by the recipient through their own online permit account before the permit expiry date - May 31st, 2022. The last name and postal code on the Gift Card must match the information on the recipient's account. A Gift Card itself is not a valid Snowmobile Trail Permit and cannot be used to legally access OFSC Prescribed Trails.

### Snowmobile Trailer Prep

Preventing breakdowns starts with the built-in reliability and durability of a good quality trailer. It continues with proper and regular maintenance (including trailer brakes if so equipped) to keep it in great shape. This includes proper summerizing and off-season storage to avoid premature structural or mechanical deterioration. At the same time, it's also important never to exceed a trailer's weight capacity while towing as that places undue stress on critical components that can affect its reliability.

Whether you do it yourself or have it done, here's what your pre-season trailer service should include:

**Wheel Bearings:** Low grease, road dirt, moisture and sitting parked for months can wreak havoc on our wheel bearings. So you should inspect, clean and repack them. Also, be sure to check grease level throughout the season.



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PHOTO CREDIT: CRAIG NICHOLSON, THE INTREPID SNOWMOBILER

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**Tires:** Inspecting your trailer tires is especially essential if you haven't looked at them until now. Or if they are older or if you've stored your trailer outside without protecting them. Check for tread wear, sidewall cracks and bulges (both sides) that could lead to a flat or blow out. If all is good, then make a habit of checking the tire pressure regularly to the manufacturer's recommended specs. And don't forget to include your spare – and make sure it actually fits your trailer rims! At the same time, double check that all the wheel nuts are present and tight.

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**Lights:** Although faulty running and signal lights aren't likely to leave you stranded in the middle of nowhere, they can be very dangerous while driving. Their absence is also highly likely to attract police attention. At the same time, inspect the wire and electrical connector that plugs into your tow vehicle. It's also a good idea to periodically apply a dab of dielectric grease to the prongs of the male connector.

**Hitch & Coupler:** Your hitch set up includes tow vehicle hitch ball, trailer hitch coupler & safety chains. Make sure nothing is loose, broken or otherwise out of whack. At the same time, spread a dab of grease on the surface of the hitch ball and make sure your trailer is towing level, not angled up or down from the ball.

### Last Season By The Numbers

Long before snow arrived last winter, the OFSC allocated about 80% of 2021 permit revenue into "get ready" trail infrastructure projects and over 79 groomers, including:

- 13 new groomers
- 15 new grooming drags
- 43 groomer upgrades & refurbishments
- 8 groomers dedicated as emergency spares or used for spare parts

After the snow came, about 20% permit revenue paid for over 81,200 grooming hours and ongoing groomer maintenance across the Province.



**Lube & Protect:** Take a can of spray lube to all pivoting points, including door and ramp hinges. Don't forget the fuel & front access doors, locks and tongue jack if your trailer is so equipped. If your trailer has any grease nipples, give them a shot from a grease gun.

**More Preventative Tips:** As with your tow vehicle, after every trip it's a good idea to pressure wash the full exterior of your snowmobile trailer, including the wheels and underside. If you have time pre-season, get a good corrosion protection product and coat all components susceptible to corrosion from exposure to road grime and salt or exposure to the elements. Otherwise, get it done before storing at season's end.

All of the preceding tips should be part of your regular preventative maintenance program starting with a new tow vehicle and trailer, and throughout every season thereafter. But they say that the best preventative maintenance is proper preparation for storing your trailer over the summer. So getting that done right should make your pre-season prep easier and less expensive too.

For many of us, trailering to the snow is now a fact of winter life, whether we're riding local or far away. That makes your tow vehicle and snowmobile trailer just as important as your sled. So it's really important to look after them upfront, as if your ability to go snowmobiling depends on it, because it does! . GSOM

Paul McNichol is the owner of Alumite Enterprises, distributor of Triton Trailers

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