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Editorial



The case for outlawing snowmobiles on P.E.I.

As the snow continues to fall upon this fair isle, the sounds and signs of snowmobiles become ever more noticeable. Those 350-pound machines with 70 horsepower that travel on top of the snow with the greatest of ease. The great escape machines that make it possible for people to enjoy nature during the winter months.

You see them not only when the snow is piled high, but even when there is hardly any snow at all. After having invested a few thousand dollars in the machine, snowmobilers attempt to take advantage of every snow possible, including those one to two inch snows in the fall, and those last few snows before spring.

We have laws prohibiting snowmobiles from going into certain areas, eg. provincial parks, when there isn't enough snow (though the law is often ignored). The reason for this restriction is that those wonderful treads that grip into the snow so well, grip even better into the ground beneath, destroying it in the process.

There are private and provincial lands where snowmobiles are prohibited altogether. Land owners are forced to put up signs telling snowmobilers not to enter, because people with snowmobiles have a tendency to think they can go anywhere there is snow.

Serious problems arise over such areas as nurseries, where a single snowmobile can destroy hundreds of young trees. People on snowmobiles neglect these signs so often that we continually see notices

in the local paper reminding snowmobilers to stay out of certain areas, such as the one last week reminding them to stay out of the PEI housing Authorities Senior Citizens' Properties.

Besides the destruction of property that is caused by snowmobiles, they are often restricted (or people wish they were restricted) from certain areas because of all the noise they make. Even though they make such a loud, obnoxious noise, snowmobilers usually keep no hours and do not hesitate to drive right near houses and barns. It is absurd to think of snowmobiling as a way to get out and enjoy nature, when it is not only destructive to the area, but also successfully scares away all wildlife from the area for at least a couple of days.

Snowmobiles can be used with nature, such as the new growing spurt in N.B. What some people on snowmobiles do there is find deer, and then chase them on their snowmobiles. Last year, over fifty deer died this way in N.B. Not because they were shot, but because they ran till they broke their legs in the snow or died from sheer exhaustion.

Besides what snowmobiles do to nature and other people, you have to remember what they can do to the people driving them. Snowmobiles are extremely dangerous machines. People sit on them with their legs straddled to the sides. If they come too close to something (a tree, a pole, a fence post) and it hits their leg, the force can break their femur bone, which is one of the hardest bones in the body to reset.

Snowmobiles have run into trees, tipped over, run into

other snowmobiles, etc... Each year, more and more snowmobilers are injured or killed. A common problem has been snowmobilers running into wires or clotheslines and being decapitated. Many have tried to avoid these obstacles, by going out on rivers and lakes, but each year we have more reported cases of people on snowmobiles dropping through thin ice.

If snowmobiles are such dangerous and destructive machines, one may wonder who would drive one. Nobody knows for sure who does drive them, because we have no form of licensing on PEI. If you want to drive a car or truck, you have to prove that you are competent to do so, but in order to drive a snowmobile, all you have to do is have one.

Another large problem that exists on the Island is the large number of people that drive to the legion on their snowmobiles and get drunk. Then they drive home (and don't worry about it because they're not driving a car).

There is a law on PEI against driving a motorized vehicle while intoxicated. If you get caught driving your snowmobile while intoxicated, you can have your license taken away. That is your automobile license. So you won't be able to drive your car, but you can still drive your snowmobile, because you don't need a license to drive it.

One can always find a few examples where snowmobiles are put to a useful purpose, but nine out of ten times it is not the case. Snowmobiling, as some people have even referred to it on the local radio show Contact is con-

sidered by most to be a sport. To ride a \$2,000 machine, that needs gas and oil that is dangerous, destructive and a nuisance, and that requires absolutely no physical exercise, and to refer to it as a sport is a form of perversion.

It would be possible to put through more restrictive laws towards snowmobiles. We could set up a driving test and license people before they could drive a snowmobile. We could have the registration number as a part of the tread, so that the number would be imprinted in the snow every couple of feet. This means people could be charged with trespassing and destruction of property even though nobody saw them do it. We could have a whole unit of the police on snowmobiles to make sure nobody was breaking the law.

It would be easier, and far better just to completely outlaw snowmobiles on PEI. For the few times that people can really justify the use of a snowmobile, it is far outweighed by the overall negative factors. We got along quite well without them till a few years ago, and there is no reason why we can't do it again. By area we are the most heavily populated provinces in Canada, and it is impossible to go any great distance without running into another farm. If somebody wants a winter sport that gets them out into nature, let them get some snowshoes or skis.

Ontario is presently considering legislation to outlaw snowmobiles. The State of Minnesota has already done it, and part of that state is farther north than PEI, and they get more snow.