

Snowmobile Problems Prompt Legal Review By State And Federal Agencies

President Nixon on Feb. 8, issued an executive order to federal land managing agencies to establish policies and procedures relating to uses of motorized off-road recreational vehicles on public lands.

The president directed these agencies to control and regulate the uses of motorized off-road vehicles to protect the resources, promote the safety of all users, and minimize use conflicts.

The president's action was the latest in a series of efforts to manage a phenomenon unprecedented in the recreation field -- man's invasion by motor-powered vehicles of roadless, frequently wild areas.

Involved are snowmobiles, trail bikes, dune buggies, and other assorted all-terrain vehicles which will run on water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain.

There are an estimated five million of these vehicles in use in the United States, more than a million of them snowmobiles.

PRACTICALLY nobody views off-road vehicles dispassionately.

Hikers and horsemen find conflicts severe when attempting to use the same areas with them.

Wildlife managers find them excellent for back country transportation but highly detrimental under some circumstances to wild animals if heavily used or misused during wildlife's vulnerable winter months.

Foresters report damage to young trees and, in some cases, abnormal watershed wear and tear. Other land managers find that vegetation which took years to establish on fragile desert and ocean front sand dunes can quickly be destroyed.

Soil erosion, and destruction of woods, roads and trails are also leading concerns.

TWENTY-NINE states have initiated laws and regulations regarding off-road vehicles. Twenty-eight include

licensing and registration, including Michigan.

All these states regulate snowmobiles, while 17 states include various types of vehicles in their legislation. Only three, California, Colorado and Ohio, include all off-road vehicles.

In May 1971, the National Industrial Pollution Control Council issued a report on "Leisure Time Product Noise," suggesting the establishment of federal noise level standards for pleasure boats, motorcycles, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, and outdoor power equipment such as mowers and chain saws.

Following a symposium on off-road recreational vehicles, Nixon issued an executive order requiring each federal land managing agency to set forth regulations and administrative instructions within six months, designating specific areas and trails on public lands where off-road vehicles may be used or are banned.

Designations of ORRV areas and trails are to be in accordance with the following:

- Areas and trails shall be located to minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, or other resources of the public lands.

- They shall be located to minimize harassment of wildlife or significant disruption of wildlife habitat.

- They shall be located to minimize conflicts between off-road vehicle use and other existing or proposed recreational uses of the same or neighboring public lands, and to ensure the compatibility of such uses with existing conditions in populated areas taking into account noise and other factors.

- Areas and trails shall not be located in officially designated wilderness areas or primitive areas. They shall be located in areas of the national park system, natural areas, or national wildlife refuges and game ranges only if the respective agency head determines that off-road vehicle use in such locations will not adversely affect their natural, esthetic, or scenic values.

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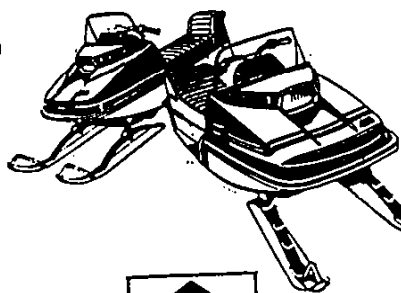
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