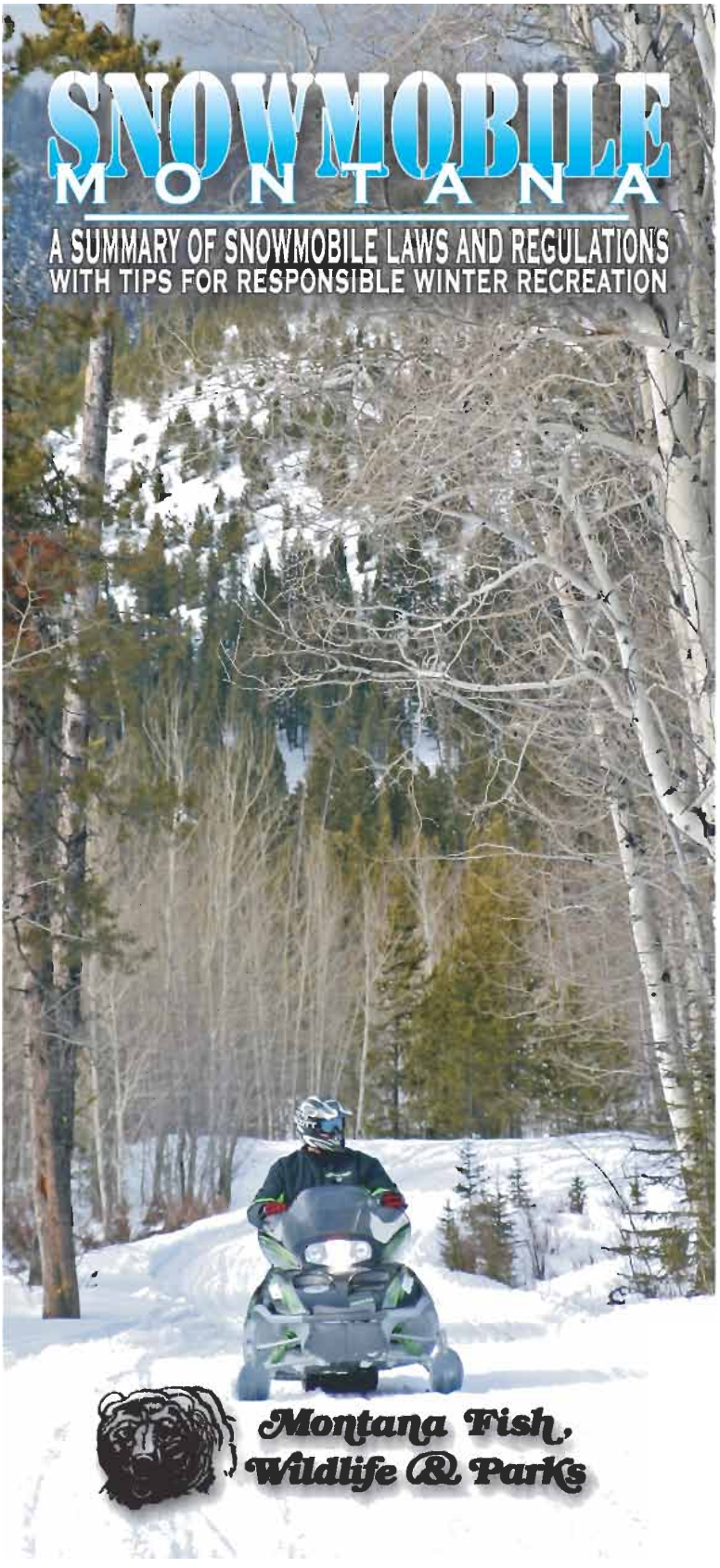
SNOWMOBILE MONTANA

A SUMMARY OF SNOWMOBILE LAWS AND REGULATIONS WITH TIPS FOR RESPONSIBLE WINTER RECREATION



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

THE SLEDDER'S PLEDGE

- I WILL OPERATE MY SNOWMOBILE ONLY WHEN SOBER.
- I WILL DRIVE WITHIN THE LIMITS OF MY MACHINE AND MY OWN ABILITIES.
- I WILL OBEY THE RULES AND LAWS OF THE STATE OR PROVINCE I AM VISITING.
- I WILL BE CAREFUL WHEN CROSSING ROADS, AND ALWAYS CROSS AT A RIGHT ANGLE TO TRAFFIC.
- I WILL KEEP MY MACHINE IN GOOD CONDITION AND PERFORM A PRE-RIDE INSPECTION CHECK BEFORE EACH RIDE.
- I WILL WEAR APPROPRIATE CLOTHING, INCLUDING GLOVES, BOOTS AND A HELMET WITH A VISOR.
- I WILL LET SOMEONE KNOW MY PLANNED ROUTE, MY DESTINATION AND MY EXPECTED RETURN OR ARRIVAL TIME.
- I WILL TREAT THE OUTDOORS WITH RESPECT. I WILL NOT LITTER OR DAMAGE TREES OR OTHER VEGETATION.
- I WILL RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE'S PROPERTY AND RIGHTS AND LEND A HAND WHEN I SEE SOMEONE IN NEED.
- I WILL NOT SNOWMOBILE WHERE IT IS PROHIBITED.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 2

ETHICS. 2

WILDLIFE 3

SAFETY 4

WINTER SURVIVAL 6

MOUNTAIN MEASURES. 7

AVALANCHE AWARENESS. 7

ICE & WATER. 8

PRE-RIDE INSPECTION 9

SNOWMOBILING LAWS 10

TRAINING & CERTIFICATION 12

STATE TRAILS PROGRAM 13

CLUBS & RIDING AREAS. 13

SNOWMOBILING CONTACTS . . . BACK

INTRODUCTION

The sense of freedom you get while riding a snowmobile over Montana's snow-covered lands and frozen lakes can be exhilarating. Yet with that freedom comes responsibility. Montana's system of 8,000 miles of public snowmobile trails depends on the cooperation of landowners, non-motorized trail users, other recreationists, and local governments. So drive your snowmobile safely and considerately. Please review this booklet to learn your legal obligations as a snowmobiler, and appropriate ways to interact with other recreationists, wildlife and the environment.

By operating your snowmobile safely, legally, and ethically, you help protect the future of your sport.

ETHICS

Share the Country!

A vast amount of National Forest land is open for winter travel. Recreation maps and information are available at Forest Service offices. In some areas those traveling by skis, snowshoes, and snowmobiles must share the same routes and areas. Common sense and courtesy will provide a safe and pleasant experience for everyone. The following suggestions are for your benefit:

- **Snowmobiles should operate at minimum speed near skiers or snowshoers. Do not accelerate until well beyond those on foot. Stop and yield the trail to dog-sleds.**
- **Skiers and snowshoers should yield the track to oncoming or overtaking snowmobilers, unless the track is wide enough for safe passage.**
- **Check with the local Ranger or ski area manager.** ***(Snowmobiles are not usually permitted on developed ski areas. Ski touring and snowshoeing may be restricted or regulated.)***

Photo: MSA

WILDLIFE

In winter, a wild animal's energies are focused on survival. In order to stay warm, animals (like humans) must burn energy (either from food or fat stores). Since food sources are usually scarce or non-existent in a snow-covered, frozen environment, most wild animals either seek winter range at lower altitudes, store food or fat for the winter, hibernate, or a combination of all three.

Snowmobiles give us the ability to cover a large amount of country in a short period of time and while doing so, we travel through the winter habitat of a wide variety of wild animals; animals that are in "winter survival mode."

All winter recreationists should be aware that they have an impact on wintering wild animals, most notably that disturbing or displacing them causes them to burn more energy.

In order to minimize your impact on wintering animals, follow these guidelines:

- ***Avoid winter range whenever possible***
- ***Do not linger in the presence of animals, move along in a steady, deliberate fashion***
- ***It is unlawful to chase, harass, herd, or rally wild animals***
- ***Keep your machine in well-tuned condition to minimize noise and pollution***
- ***Avoid areas designated as "closed" for wildlife protection***

Photo: MSA

Be a Safe Rider

Snowmobiling is a fun and exciting sport the whole family can enjoy. However, winter offers certain challenges that require snowmobilers to take precautions:

- **Know your abilities and your snowmobile's capabilities and don't go beyond them.**
- **Know your riding area.** Get a map. Talk to the local snowmobilers.
- **Check local weather forecasts** and plan for unexpected conditions.
- **Maintain your snowmobile** in top form for a dependable ride; perform a pre-ride inspection before every outing.
- **Cross roads carefully.** Come to a complete stop and make sure no traffic is approaching from any direction. Then cross at a right angle to the road.
- **Dress for changing weather conditions.** Wear layers of clothing so you can add or remove clothing as needed. Always wear a helmet.
- **Plan for the unexpected by carrying a tool kit, first aid kit and survival items.** Let someone know your plans so searchers will know where to look if you are lost or overdue.
- **Never ride alone.** Small problems can become big problems when you're alone.

- **Check ice conditions before traveling on frozen lakes or rivers.**
- **Learn to recognize avalanche areas and avoid them.** Carry avalanche rescue equipment including a transceiver, probe pole and shovel and know how to use them. Review the local avalanche advisory when available.
- **Ride sober.** Alcohol increases the chance of frostbite and hypothermia, and affects the skills you need to ride safely.
- **Operate at safe speeds** and be prepared to stop within your line of sight. Slow down and enjoy the ride.
- **Beware of darkness.** Low-light and darkness require special care. Slow down. Don't over-drive your headlights. Ask yourself, "Am I driving slowly enough to see an object in time to avoid a collision?" At night on lakes and large open fields, estimating distances and direction of travel may become difficult.
- **Stay Alert.** Avoid focusing on the tail light of the snowmobile ahead of you; scan ahead and alongside your path of travel and those you are following. Reaction times slow when you are tired. Be aware that even though you may not feel tired, the motion, darkness, wind, and vibration of the machine may begin to dull your senses.
- **Use basic hand signals**. Other snowmobilers and car drivers need to know what you're up to:

  Left Turn: left arm extended straight out
  Right Turn: left arm out, forearm raised, with elbow at 90-degree angle
  Stop: left arm raised straight up
  Slow: left arm out and angled toward ground

WINTER SURVIVAL

A Different World

Many people are unaware of the hazards of winter travel. Harsh conditions of wind, cold, snow or whiteout can turn an outing into a tragedy. Knowledge of the area, weather, route and the limitations of your body and equipment plus a little common sense can ensure a safe and enjoyable trip.

Winter Road Conditions

You will encounter a wide range of road conditions during the winter months, including dry pavement, black ice, hard packed snow, ice, loose snow, slush and every combination. Roads to winter destinations may be plowed periodically. However, road conditions may often be very difficult even after plowing.

Be prepared! High-clearance vehicles with 4-wheel drive and good mud/snow tires are best. Other vehicles, especially RV's, may find the going very difficult at times.

Be especially careful going downhill when conditions are snow-packed and icy! Towing adds to the difficulty. Areas may be plowed to a different standard. Call your local Forest Service office if you have questions.

Clothing and Equipment

Layers of clothing that can be adjusted to prevailing conditions are best. Avoid tight fitting clothes and boots that may restrict circulation. Take extra socks, gloves or mittens, warm cap, matches in a waterproof container, fire starter, nylon cord, an all-purpose knife or utility tool, high-energy food, plastic tarp, space blanket, signal mirror, first aid kit, wide tape for repairs and metal container for melting snow.

Photo: ISMA

MOUNTAIN MEASURES

Mountain snowmobiling is spectacular but can pose extra dangers, such as avalanches. Some avalanche areas may be posted and closed.

Be cautious of avalanche dangers throughout mountain country. Riding in these areas should only be done after receiving proper mountain riding training. Mountain snowmobilers should carry avalanche beacons, shovels, probe poles for locating people buried in snow and a portable radio to summon help.

AVALANCHE AWARENESS

Following are some safe travel tips for riding in avalanche country:

- **Only one rider on the slope at a time**.
- Learn to recognize and understand avalanche-prone terrain. Suspect any slope that is steeper than 30 degrees.
- Observe the slope orientation with respect to the sun and the wind.
- Be cautious of cornices.
- Think about the consequences of an avalanche. Will you be carried over a cliff, pushed into trees or buried deep in a gully?
- Travel safely, ride with a partner and carry the appropriate rescue gear.
- Practice using an avalanche beacon.

For information on Avalanche Awareness please visit the web site www.avalanche.org

Photo: ISMA

ICE & WATER

The safest snowmobiling rule is never to cross lakes or rivers. Besides the danger of plunging through the ice, you have far less traction for starting, turning and stopping on ice than on snow. **It is unlawful to operate a snowmobile on unfrozen public water.**

Collisions on lakes account for a significant number of accidents. Don't hold the attitude that lakes are flat, wide open areas, free of obstructions.

Remember, if you can ride and turn in any direction, without boundaries, so can other riders. Therefore, **the threat of a collision can come from any direction.**

If you do snowmobile on the ice, make absolutely sure the ice is safely frozen. Don't trust the judgment of other snowmobilers. You are responsible for your own safety. Drowning is a leading cause of snowmobile fatalities. Consider buying a buoyant snowmobile suit.

If you go through the ice, remember that your snowmobile suit (even a non-buoyant one) and helmet may keep you afloat for several minutes. Slide back onto the ice, using anything sharp to dig in for better grip (carry ice grips on your person if you will be operating over frozen water). Kick your feet to propel you onto the ice, like a seal. If the ice keeps breaking, continue moving toward shore or the direction from which you came. Don't remove your gloves or mitts. Once on the ice, roll away from the hole. Don't stand until well away from the hole.

Photo: ISMA

PRE-RIDE INSPECTION

The performance of a pre-ride inspection is paramount to a safe, stress-free ride. Most equipment failures can be avoided by periodic maintenance and inspection.

Before you start your machine, check the following:

- **Throttle** (it should freely return to the idle or closed position)
- **Fluid levels**; fuel, oil, brakes, and battery
- **Ski assemblies and rods**
- **Drive belt**
- **General mechanical condition**
- **Handlebars** (they should turn both ways)
- **Weather forecast, your clothes and the wind chill factor** (to ensure you'll be warm enough)
- **Emergency supplies**, including:
  - *spare spark plugs*
  - *knife/small ax*
  - *spare drive belt*
  - *waterproof matches*
  - *spare fuel*
  - *spare clothing*
  - *flashlight*
  - *first aid kit*
  - *tool kit*
  - *flares*
  - *extra ignition key - on a ring or attached to machine*
- **Before you start to ride, check the following:**
  - *brakes (they should operate freely and smoothly)*
  - *head and taillights*
  - *emergency kill switch*
  - *idle (slowly run your machine for 30 seconds)*

Photo: ISMA

Follow the Rules!

It is your responsibility to know and follow established rules and regulations. The following is a summary of those rules, but you should also review additional information available from your county treasurer's office, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, U.S. Forest Service offices and ranger stations and other state and county government sources.

The internet is also a good place to research snowmobiling regulations, starting with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at: **http://www.fwp.mt.gov/**

What is a snowmobile?

"Snowmobile" means a self-propelled vehicle of an overall width of 48 inches or less, excluding accessories, designed primarily for travel on snow or ice, that may be steered by skis or runners and that is not otherwise registered or licensed under the laws of Montana.

Registration

- Snowmobiles operating on public land must be registered and display decals.
- Snowmobiles must be registered at the County Treasurer's office in the county where the owner resides.

Nonresident Permits

Snowmobiles not registered in Montana are required to have a current nonresident permit before being ridden on public lands in Montana. Permits can be purchased from vendors, Fish, Wildlife & Parks offices, or online at http://www.fwp.mt.gov/

LAWS (CONTINUED)

Operating on Roads

Individuals wanting to ride on SPECIFICALLY designated roads or streets are required to have a driver's license. Minors must have a Snowmobile Safety Education Course certificate and be accompanied by an adult within eyesight.

Crossing Roads

Be careful when crossing roads of any kind. Come to a complete stop and make absolutely sure no traffic is approaching from any direction. Then cross at a right angle to traffic.

Operating at Night

When operated during the hours between dusk and dawn, a snowmobile must possess a lighted headlight and taillight.

Accidents

The owner or operator of a snowmobile that is involved in any accident, collision, or upset in which personal injury occurs to any person shall report the accident to the nearest law enforcement agency. An accident involving personal injury or a fatality must be reported immediately.

Firearms

A person may not discharge a firearm from or upon a snowmobile.

TRAINING & CERTIFICATION

Operating on Roads

Individuals wanting to ride on specially designated roads are required to have a driver's license or show a certificate of completion of a Snowmobile Safety Education Course.

Snowmobile Safety Classes

To obtain a snowmobile operator's certificate a person must attend and successfully complete a Montana-approved snowmobile safety education course. Classes are taught by volunteer instructors across the state. Contact your local club or FWP at 406-444-7317.

Nonresidents Certificates

Nonresidents should contact their state snowmobile association or the agency responsible for their state's snowmobile education program to find a snowmobile course offered locally. Course certificates from other states will be approved by FWP on a case-by-case basis.

Home Study Courses

Persons living in areas where a snowmobile course is not offered may take the FWP snowmobile home-study course. However, the temporary certificate expires on June 30. Request the course on the FWP website, or call 406-444-7317.

STATE TRAILS PROGRAM

Montana offers over 8,000 miles of groomed snowmobile trails. Grooming is managed by local clubs, chambers of commerce or government agencies with grant money provided by FWP. Grooming funds are derived from snowmobile gas tax refund and decal fees.

Trail maps are available from local clubs, Forest Service offices, or the Montana Snowmobile Association, 401 Lower Rainbow Road, Bozeman, MT 59718.
406-586-2880
406-586-0885

CLUBS AND RIDING AREAS

Join A Club

There are many local snowmobile clubs throughout Montana, most of which are members of the Montana Snowmobile Association (MSA). The Montana Snowmobile Association is an organization of individuals, local snowmobile clubs and businesses interested in promoting snowmobiling. It was founded in 1972 to provide a unified voice for Montanans who want to preserve the sport of snowmobiling.

The MSA is your best place to start if you are interested in joining a club, looking for folks to ride with, researching riding areas, or want to get involved in preserving the sport. Contact the MSA at www.snowtana.com

SNOWMOBILING CONTACTS

Contacts for information on snowmobile trails and riding areas, clubs, support organizations, use and regulations:

Montana Snowmobile Association
401 Lower Rainbow Road
Bozeman, MT 59718
www.snowtana.com

International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association
1640 Haslett Road, Suite 170
Haslett, Michigan USA 48840
(517)339-7788
www.snowmobile.org

Bureau of Land Management
222 North 32nd Street
P.O. Box 36800
Billings, MT 59107
(406) 896-5000

USDA Forest Service
Northern Region
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807
(406) 329-3511

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
(406) 444-7317

Fish, Wildlife & Parks receives federal funds and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, or handicap. For information or concerns regarding discrimination, contact the Personnel Officer, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620, (800) 542-0807

This document was produced in cooperation with the
Montana Snowmobile Association