

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 8, 2016

1:12 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair
Representative Shelley Hughes, Co-Chair
Representative Louise Stutes
Representative Matt Claman
Representative Dan Ortiz

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Charisse Millett
Representative Benjamin Nageak

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 319

"An Act relating to registration fees for snowmobiles and off-highway vehicles."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 319

SHORT TITLE: SNOWMOBILE REGISTRATION FEES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) TILTON

02/19/16	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/19/16	(H)	TRA, FIN
03/08/16	(H)	TRA AT 1:00 PM CAPITOL 17

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE CATHY TILTON

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 319.

AMY ERICKSON, Director

Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV)

Department of Administration (DOA)

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided testimony related to HB 319.

CHRISTOPHER CLARK, Staff
Representative Cathy Tilton
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on HB 319 on behalf of Representative Tilton, prime sponsor.

BEN ELLIS, Director
Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 319.

DAN MAYFIELD, Chair
SnowTRAC Advisory Board
Big Lake, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 319.

KEVIN HITE, President
Alaska State Snowmobile Association (ASSA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 319.

JAMES SQUYRES
Deltana, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 319.

SCOTT LAPIENE
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 319.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:12:01 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:12 p.m. Representatives Claman, Ortiz, Foster, and Hughes were present at the call to order. Representative Stutes arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 319-SNOWMOBILE REGISTRATION FEES

[1:12:31 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR HUGHES announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 319 "An Act relating to registration fees for snowmobiles and off-highway vehicles."

[1:13:08 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CATHY TILTON, Alaska State Legislature, explained that HB 319 would increase the two-year snowmobile fee from \$10 to \$20 and provide an option to pay a six-year fee at a discounted rate of \$50. She indicated that in Alaska's current fiscal climate, it was refreshing for the proposal to have come from some of the user groups themselves. She relayed that snowmobile organizations view the proposed legislation as a means to improve development and maintenance of snowmobile trails and promote snowmobile safety. She explained that current snowmobile fees generate up to \$250,000 per year for the snowmobile trail development program Snowmobile Trail Advisory Council (SnowTRAC), which is managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation. She stated that user groups want to keep the funds available and are willing to do their part to ensure the continuation of the program.

REPRESENTATIVE TILTON related that according to a recent report prepared by legislative research, there are 22 states with snowmobile registration fees and, of those, Alaska and Oregon have the lowest fees. She recounted that prior to working for the legislature, she was involved in the snowmobile industry, and she offered that there are different types of user groups, disciplines, and opinions. She indicated that Kevin Hite, President of the Alaska State Snowmobile Association (ASSA), and Dan Mayfield of SnowTRAC would provide testimony in support of HB 319. She said Ben Ellis from DNR would discuss how the fund is used and Amy Erickson of the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) would explain the fiscal note and fee collection.

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CO-CHAIR FOSTER remarked that it had been a while since he had purchased a snow machine, but that he did not recollect paying a registration fee. He inquired whether the fee is included in the purchase of a snow machine and asked for clarification that the \$10 fee is good for two years.

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REPRESENTATIVE TILTON replied affirmatively and explained that the fee, as currently in statute, is on a two-year renewal schedule and generally charged at the point of sale at dealerships. In response to a follow-up question from Co-Chair Foster, she indicated that renewals are mailed out every two years, similar to vehicle or trailer registrations.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES requested that Amy Erickson discuss the registration renewal process and the response rate for renewal notifications.

AMY ERICKSON, Director, Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Department of Administration (DOA), said she was uncertain as to the renewal rate, but offered that of the approximately 39,000 registered snow machines, 25,000 have a 2-year registration, 7,500 have a 4-year registration, and 6,500 have a 6-year registration.

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CO-CHAIR FOSTER inquired whether the renewal notifications are sent to everyone in rural Alaska. He explained that he owns a snow machine but doesn't remember receiving a renewal notification in the past.

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MS. ERICKSON responded that it is required that snow machine owners register their snow machines.

CO-CHAIR FOSTER commented that he was unaware of the requirement to register and offered that most rural Alaskans are likely unaware of the requirement.

MS. ERICKSON responded that if a snow machine is not currently registered to its owner then there is no way for the DMV to send the owner a renewal notification.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES suggested that a private party sale would likely not involve the registration fee. She asked whether the registration is completed at the time of the original purchase from a dealership.

MS ERICKSON replied that is correct, and she stated that if dealerships register the snow machine, then the DMV would know about it, but in the case of a personal sale, the DMV would not necessarily know about it because there is no certificate of title.

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CO-CHAIR FOSTER recounted that he purchased his snow machine brand new, hasn't sold it, and it has always been registered in his name. He stated that he purchased it in 2003, and he suggested that by now he probably should have received six or seven renewal notifications by mail, yet he has not. He explained that he was inquiring because he was trying to figure out the structure of the renewal requirements and how it could affect rural Alaskans.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES asked how long the renewal requirements have been in effect and shared that when she lived in Fort Yukon, her primary mode of transportation was a snow machine.

MS ERICKSON stated that the statute was effected in 1998.

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CHRISTOPHER CLARK, Staff, Representative Cathy Tilton, Alaska State Legislature, drew members' attention to the documents in the committee packet listing the number of registered snow machines in each community throughout the state. He pointed out that in Co-Chair Foster's town there are only 45 registered machines, and he suggested that he may not be the only person not receiving a renewal notice.

CO-CHAIR FOSTER speculated that more than 45 snow machines were sold in Nome in the last year. He offered that it is likely that the registration paperwork is handled appropriately by the dealers, but he estimated that there are 2,000 snow machines in the region. He asked whether any of the revenue acquired from registrations had been distributed to rural Alaska, as the trails referenced thus far were generally in South-Central Alaska or more urban areas.

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BEN ELLIS, Director, Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), responded that the majority of Snowmobile Trails Advisory Council (SnowTRAC) funds, which are registration fees transferred from DMV to the Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation, are distributed primarily to the urban areas to offset costs for trail grooming. He mentioned that over the last three years he has encouraged grant recipients from off of the road system to apply for safety and education grants for the purpose of trail markers between villages or similar improvements. Three years ago, DNR received a request for, and provided a \$15,000 grant, to a village but the program was never executed. He explained that it was a reimbursable grant: a city, community, or club receives a project go-ahead, receipts for the project are retained, and upon project completion the receipts are reimbursed. He stated that for the next two years DNR focused on getting grants for signage, education, and emergency response to rural Alaska, but did not have any applicants. Finally last year, after the money has been sitting idle for three years, the division rolled it back into the trail grooming pool. He stated that SnowTRAC is and was designed as a statewide program, and DNR encourages safety and education grant applications from locales outside the urban areas, with little or no response.

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CO-CHAIR FOSTER stated that his initial inclination is to support the registration fee increase from \$10 to \$20 for people who would be benefitting from groomed trails, and that perhaps a Bush exemption would be appropriate, if none of the funds are benefitting rural Alaska. Trail marking and emergency response, are very important to people who use snow machines in rural Alaska, and it may be a matter of improving program awareness to outlying areas.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES mentioned that there had been several recent tragic events related to avalanches and asked if any funds are collected specifically for search and rescue.

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MR. ELLIS answered that there were no funds specifically for search and rescue through the DNR snow machine grant program, although the agency does provide snow machine ranger service at Hatcher Pass and other locations. The rangers are all qualified

in CPR and have received training in advanced search and rescue techniques.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES asked how much is spent on search and rescue related to snow machine users statewide.

MR. ELLIS deferred response, and offered to provide further information.

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REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN sought clarification that the revenue generated by the snow machine fees is directed to the general fund and, although there are programs that allocate funds for purposes such as trails, there is no requirement that an increase in revenue would be distributed to the snow machine program.

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MR. ELLIS replied that Representative Claman was correct in his understanding. He explained that this bill would increase snow machine registration fees, but there is not currently, nor would there be a nexus between increased fees and funding for the SnowTRAC program. The money collected by DMV would be slated for the general fund, and subsequently a request must be submitted to the governor or the legislature for the Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation to have receipt authority for a certain amount of money. He further explained that in the fiscal year 2016 (FY16) budget, the Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation was slated to receive up to \$250,000 in snow machine registration fees [for SnowTRAC]; however, the division has never received the full amount of the receipt authority and generally they receive around \$200,000 for the program. He noted that doubling the fee would not necessarily result in a doubling of the division's receipt authority for the program.

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MR. ELLIS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Hughes, clarified that unless the allocation is written into statute, it would be the legislature's decision each year whether or not to support the amount designated in the governor's budget. In the instance that it was excluded from the governor's budget, as was

the case the previous year, it would be the legislature's prerogative whether or not to fund it, and at what level.

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REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked if receipt authority guarantees that all fee revenue is earmarked for and passed directly to the program or if the legislature actually appropriates the funds.

MR. ELLIS stated his understanding that the revenue generated has never exceeded the amount of the program's receipt authority. He elaborated that the money is transferred into the general fund and the receipt authority for the program allows those funds to be transferred to the division's capital fund where it is "pigeonholed" for the SnowTRAC program.

MR. CLARK added that all funds are subject to appropriation. Statute provides authorization, but the legislature is charged with affecting the appropriation. The fiscal note, available in the committee packet, stipulates that any revenue collected in excess of current receipt authority is to remain in the general fund.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES asked about the price range of snow machine fees imposed by other states, and whether the primary use is for trail maintenance.

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MR. CLARK stated that 22 states and 5 Canadian provinces have snowmobile fees. Alaska and Oregon have the lowest fee at \$10 biennially, and New York has the highest fees at \$100 annually. He declined to speculate on the primary use of the funds.

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CO-CHAIR FOSTER noted that SnowTRAC is statewide program and the rural communities are eligible to apply for a share of the funds. He said he would inform rural communities of the opportunity and asked about the level of effort that has been put into notifying Bush areas about the program.

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MR. ELLIS stated that the snow machine trail coordinator has conducted outreach to Buckland, Kotzebue, Bethel, and other areas to encourage submission of grant applications; however, despite interest, applications have not been submitted. He stated that the division would be interested in working with Co-Chair Foster's office to disseminate information about the program throughout rural communities, noting that trail markers and safety training could save lives in areas that use snow machine routes as highways.

CO-CHAIR FOSTER stated his appreciation for the efforts made by the Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation. He expressed excitement about the prospect of adding tripod trail markers, village by village throughout the state, as there are several accounts of fatalities resulting from getting lost along snow machine routes during inclement weather. He offered that perhaps there could be an amendment regarding reporting requirements, specifically listing the annual distribution amounts for each community.

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MR. ELLIS stated that distribution information is available on the division's webpage. The information available includes: allocation amounts, communities receiving allocations, and use of the allocation. He explained that the division distributes a press release each year.

MR. ELLIS further explained that the SnowTRAC Advisory Board reviews the grant requests, which are thoroughly discussed and vetted, prior to making a recommendation to the director's office. Mr. Ellis said he usually approves the recommendations. The only exception in recent history was that no communities applied for the rural safety program funds, dollars which were subsequently rolled back into the snow machine grant program; an action the division would likely take again in the future. He noted that it is important to get the message out that the funds are available, and the division would continue to do its part.

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REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN inquired about other states' fees and what is the average fee for snow machine registration.

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MR. CLARK replied: Maine has a \$46 annual fee and New York has a \$100 resident and non-resident fee that is reduced to \$45 for members of the New York Snow Mobile Association; Minnesota has a \$78.50 three-year "trail use" fee; Montana has a one-time fee of \$60.50 and a multi-year rental fee schedule; Nebraska has a \$200 manufacturer registration fee; and Washington has a \$50 annual fee for snow machines less than 30 years old and \$12 for those 30-plus years old. He added that Newfoundland has a \$23 Canadian dollar (CAD) annual fee and Quebec has a \$92.90 (CAD) annual fee. He did not offer an average rate.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES asked how the nine members of the SnowTRAC Advisory Board are selected and whether rural residents are represented/seated on the committee.

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MR. ELLIS replied that the SnowTRAC Advisory Board is appointed by the director of the Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation. Two of the advisory boards in the division are appointed by the governor, one is appointed by the commissioner, and the other seventeen advisory boards are appointed by the director. He recalled that a Nome resident was seated, but resigned; thus, no rural resident is currently seated.

CO-CHAIR HUGHES inquired whether there were any regulations dictating the geographic composition of the SnowTRAC Advisory Board.

MR. ELLIS replied that the SnowTRAC Advisory Board has bylaws and operating procedures that discuss diversity on the board, but there is no statutory requirement. He said the board was established by the former director of Parks & Outdoor Recreation, in 1998, in conjunction with the implementation of the snow machine registration fee.

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DAN MAYFIELD, Chair, SnowTRAC Advisory Board, stated that HB 319 was a simple bill that could have a great impact on trail safety, education, access, development, grooming, signage, and the economies of communities that depend on winter recreational visitation from snow machine and other trail users. He said the aforementioned goals are the subject of the work of SnowTRAC. He informed the committee that SnowTRAC is the only revenue-

neutral, self-funded, user-based program in Alaska; all funding is derived from the registration of snow machines. He explained that available funding has fallen short of the amount necessary to sustain the goals of the program and SnowTRAC is currently operating in survival mode. The organization has set aside goals beyond trail grooming, in hopes that funding opportunities may be available in the future. He recounted that over the last three years, funding requests have ranged from a high of \$373,551 to a low of \$360,831, while available funding has ranged from \$204,000 to \$278,000, far less than necessary to meet demand.

MR. MAYFIELD offered that HB 319 would restore the sustainability of the SnowTRAC program and allow it to meet the demands of trail users at little or no cost to the state. He posed the question to the committee: "What better investment can you make in tough financial times than to let users adequately fund their own program?" He acknowledged that all legislation receives some opposition; however, it's worth considering that over 85 percent of all registered users come from communities that either directly benefit from, or have the potential to benefit from, the funding of services that the bill would provide. He clarified that the other 15 percent of users are important and SnowTRAC will continue to make strong overtures to inform rural Alaskans of available funding. He emphasized that SnowTRAC is a statewide program, and it's something that they want to continue on a statewide basis.

MR. MAYFIELD requested that the committee consider increasing receipt authority for the SnowTRAC program. He reiterated that the SnowTRAC is an inclusive group that celebrates the successes of all snow machine advocates and, accordingly, rural Alaska is very important to the program. He related that one of SnowTRAC's original plans was to develop a statewide trail network, a vision that he said it still embraces. He surmised that it would ultimately come to fruition, but that it would take a significant amount of time to build. He disclosed that he is the president of Big Lake Trails, a 501(c)(3) organization; President of the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce; and an assembly member in the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley.

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CO-CHAIR FOSTER stated that he was inclined to agree with the need to increase receipt authority for the program. He asked whether anyone on the board could be considered semi-rural, for example from just outside of Mat-Su.

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MR. MAYFIELD replied that there is representation from Fairbanks, Anchorage, Mat-Su, Juneau, and the Kenai Peninsula. He noted that although there is no representation from Western Alaska, it is not for lack of effort.

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KEVIN HITE, President, Alaska State Snowmobile Association (ASSA), recounted that he had the privilege of being a part of the group that originally developed SnowTRAC and has watched it progress from its nascent stages to its current form. He noted that the program was designed with a focus on safety and infrastructure in the state and offered that a significant amount of work has been invested by different groups that have been a part of the SnowTRAC Advisory Board. He recalled that the board has, in the past, filled seats with residents from Kotzebue and other areas of Western Alaska.

MR. HITE explained that inflation has eaten away at the available funding and, as a result, the program has transitioned away from some of its original intent, which was heavily weighted toward safety, including avalanche, backcountry travel, and travel between villages. He explained that SnowTRAC has evolved into more of a grooming program, and he speculated that although it was not part of the program's original intent, it has likely done more good than any previous program initiative. He related that snow machine users are proud that the program is self-funded. He acknowledged that there is a communication issue with people living outside the dealership areas; it has become much more difficult to distribute the funds in a meaningful way.

MR. HITE testified in support of HB 319, and related that ASSA views the increase in registration fees as the first step toward statewide trail infrastructure; one of the original intents of SnowTRAC. He stated that the association estimated that providing a good, comprehensive statewide safety program would cost approximately \$300,000 to \$320,000 per year. He asserted that raising the registration fee and increasing the receipt authority for the program is a good first step toward accomplishing the goal. He stated that ASSA is very focused on revitalizing SnowTRAC with some new funding. He attested that SnowTRAC is doing a terrific job with a small amount of funding, which is being spread very thin, and he acknowledged that some

areas are not getting the money they should. He said a lot of work goes into the programs, and many of the trail groomers have been completing the work on their own time and money. He mentioned funding obstacles and said that in order to change the situation, the proposed fee increase is an absolute necessity.

MR. HITE clarified that in addition to registration fees, New York and other New England States, impose a trail program sticker fee for individual counties. In some states, it is possible to pay an annual cost in registration fees of anywhere from \$250-\$450 per year, when using the interconnected trail systems. He explained that the funds come directly from the user groups and the applicable agencies work together to collectively develop statewide programs. He stated that Alaska's snow machine organizations intend to mimic these models for future development efforts. He noted that as a result of fee systems, some states have budgets of \$2-\$3 million for snow machine programs. He suggested that Alaska has work to do, not just on infrastructure, but also on finding ways to fund the infrastructure without putting any additional financial weight on the state. He indicated that Alaskan snow machine users have always stepped forward to do their part and enjoyed a good relationship with DNR and DMV. He said there has never been an instance where the DMV collected money that it didn't direct back into the program and, if anything, the agency has given more to SnowTRAC over the years than it has received in fees. He suggested that although a fee increase is a small first step, it is imperative.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES opened public testimony on HB 319.

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JAMES SQUYRES stated opposition to HB 319, and voiced disagreement with claims in the sponsor's statement that the bill "enjoys support from users who are willing to pay more for a service they need and enjoy." He adamantly stated that he is not willing to pay. The proposed legislation is a revenue raising measure under which the fee would increase by 100 percent, and he suggested it was a distraction from the legislative priority of reducing the budget. He pointed out that the Republican Party platform calls for a limited size and scope of government.

MR. SQUYRES stated that the issue of snow machine fees should be examined in its totality. He advised that many Alaskans live in remote areas and half the state is unorganized. He pointed out that the sponsor and co-sponsor come from the more organized and urbanized areas of the state. He mentioned that he had run his snow machine twice that day, once to bring in seasoned wood to replenish his cabin and once to haul green wood to split and stack for future use. He explained that where he lives, snow machines are used as a tool; there are no groomed trails. If residents want a groomed trail for cross-country skiing, they tow a weighed-down section of chain link fence behind their snow machines; they do it on their own. He related that he was not aware of anyone in his area that has registered his/her snow machine. He offered that he was sympathetic to part of Co-Chair Foster's previous statement, as registration of snow machines is almost entirely ignored in rural Alaska. He explained that people are either unaware that there is a requirement to register their snow machines or choose not to comply with the requirement, as the revenue from the fees provide no service to rural Alaska. He offered that no state program would ever groom a trail near his home, as his nearest neighbor is six miles away. He pointed out that there are five Alaska State Troopers assigned to an area that covers thousands of square miles; therefore, there is very little enforcement.

[Mr. Squyres' testimony ended at this point due to technical difficulties.]

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SCOTT LAPIENE stated support for HB 319, and said that he is currently on the board of the longest standing multi-modal trail organization in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough; the organization has been in place for 27 years. He related that he served on the SnowTRAC Advisory Board twice, once in 1999 as an appointee of the governor and a second time under director Ben Ellis. He stated his support of "pay to play," the principle that people who enjoy outdoor recreation should contribute to the maintenance of that infrastructure and the fees paid should be returned to the user community. He offered that if the registration fee was increased, then the legislature would also need to increase receipt authority for the SnowTRAC program. The development of winter recreation in Alaska is generations behind the Lower 48, he opined, and reported that during his 20-plus years of working on trails, he has had several opportunities to study and discuss other states' systems and modes of funding. Regarding the previously expressed concern

about rural areas, he recalled that in the 1990s the trail board had difficulty getting rural communities to participate and apply for grant money. He offered that the grant process is more difficult now, as grant applicants must be incorporated, non-profit organizations, government bodies, or native corporations. He explained that the "hurdle is high," and it is difficult even for established organizations to meet. He explained that past attempts to engage the rural communities have been thwarted by the aforementioned difficulties.

MR. LAPIENE suggested that there are a couple of options to address the issue. He said the law could be changed, but held that this would not be preferable because he would like all citizens to be treated equally. He opined that it is unrealistic to think registration fees would ever be enforced in the Bush, as there is no enforcement of motor vehicle registration in rural areas, and he recounted having seen motor vehicles with out-of-state plates and registrations that are 10-years old. Nevertheless, he said he believes rural communities should have the opportunity to participate in attracting money to improve their systems. He mentioned that another option would be to leverage organizations like Iron Dog, Inc. and the Iditarod Trail Committee, Inc. to sponsor grants and locate workers to ensure a more equitable distribution of funds throughout the state. He said the DMV database also needs improvements, as it is currently very difficult, if not impossible, to determine how many snow machine registrations are renewals and how many are made at the point of sale.

MR. LAPIENNE mentioned as an aside that snowmobile registration existed long before SnowTRAC was enacted in 1998, which is also when point-of-sale registration was added to Alaska statute. He stated that it would be valuable to track information regarding the source of the funds, whether from point-of-sale registrations or renewals, because it would indicate the level of continued voluntary participation. He stated that he has one significant concern with the proposed legislation. In its current form, the bill strikes the word "snowmobile" from AS 28.10.421(d)(7) and leaves only "off-highway vehicle" in its place. He informed the committee that ATVs, off-road jeeps, and similar vehicles are akin to snowmobiles in that although there are point-of-sale registrations, there is no enforcement. He stated his belief that there should be a summer equivalent to SnowTRAC for off-road motorized recreation, and a compulsory point-of-sale registration for off-highway vehicles is the mechanism that would allow that to occur.

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REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked whether Mr. Lapiene was suggesting that the off-highway vehicle fee should also be raised to \$20.

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MR. LAPIENE replied no, not until the legislature is willing to establish an off-highway vehicle grant program similar to SnowTRAC.

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN requested clarification that Mr. Lapiene's exception with the removal of the aforementioned language is that it would highlight the lack of enforcement related to other off-road vehicle fees and that Mr. Lapiene would prefer that discussion to be delayed for now.

MR. LAPIENE replied, "That's correct."

CO-CHAIR HUGHES asked whether the \$10 fee for off-highway vehicle registration is levied at the point-of-sale.

MR. LAPIENE replied that there is no compulsory point-of-sale registration for off-highway vehicles, and estimated that 1-2 percent of owners voluntarily register their off-highway vehicles.

CO-CHAIR FOSTER asked whether tribes are also eligible to apply for grants. He noted that tribes are the organizations most likely to get involved in trail marking in his district.

MR. LAPIENE deferred.

MR. ELLIS stated that tribes do fall into the category of organizations that are able to apply for the grant, as do non-profits, cities, municipalities, and boroughs.

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MR. SQUYRES suggested that there is a large amount of non-compliance surrounding the registration requirement in rural Alaska. There is a nullification for participation in a system such as [SnowTRAC] when the money is not reinvested in rural parts of the state. He pointed out that most of the people on the board of SnowTRAC reside, and the revenue is being spent, in urban areas. He questioned why people in rural areas would want to participate when they already cut and groom their own trails.

He restated that he doesn't know anyone whose snow machine is registered and that there are only 5 troopers for thousands of square miles. He requested that, since the topic has been brought before the legislature, he would like members to take the opportunity to repeal the section of statute entirely and reduce the size of government. He suggested that if snow machine program funding is an issue in organized areas, it should be specifically dealt with in those locales. He posited that if Representative Foster were to secure SnowTRAC funding for his constituents, the money would be tied to a requirement for registration compliance, which residents may not appreciate.

MR. SQUYRES voiced frustration with the comparisons being drawn between Alaska and other states; he said Alaska is unique. He opined that Alaska should not be modeling its programs based on other states, as it would result in a larger government, and emphasized that the legislature should not be increasing financial burdens on Alaskans or growing the size of government during a financial crisis. Rural Alaska is "under attack" by the proposal to restructure the permanent fund. He restated his opposition to the bill and urged committee members to repeal the pertaining statute and get Alaska back to being "the Last Frontier."

CO-CHAIR HUGHES asked Mr. Squyres how the state should cover the cost of search and rescue operations conducted in rural Alaska.

MR. SQUYRES replied that there is a responsibility to be fully prepared that rests on the shoulders of the individual living in or accessing remote areas. He recounted that the previous fall he was several miles away from any help and his motorcycle landed on his ankle. He was injured and it was difficult for him to get out. He stated that he had taken the initiative to share his plans with his wife and his neighbor, thus, had he not been able to get out on his own, he had people prepared to help. He stated that anyone residing in a remote area has a responsibility to behave like the previous generations have, which is to be prepared. He said, "If you are out in bear country, you carry a sidearm; you carry a means to start a fire; you do what you need to do to." He offered that in his experience, many of the instances that require a rescue did not need to occur in the first place. He acknowledged that education is important, but suggested that it should come from parents and peers, rather than the government.

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CO-CHAIR HUGHES posed a scenario where all of the precautionary actions taken by Mr. Squyres had failed and the state still had to use resources to provide search and rescue. She asked how those costs should be covered.

MR. SQUYRES responded that there are consequences of making the decision to lead an alternative lifestyle; it may come to a grim end. He suggested that there are many people in rural areas who would rather "live life" than depend on government to come to their rescue. He said with five Alaska State Troopers for thousands of square miles, assistance comes after the fact. He maintained that it is the individual's responsibility to know what he/she is getting into. He offered an anecdote regarding an acquaintance who runs 125 miles of trap line by himself, and has for many years, and suggested that rural residents should aspire to a similar level of self-reliance, take the wilderness seriously, and "do what they need to do." He suggested that it is absurd that money is being spent on grooming in the more urbanized areas. He offered that there is a natural balance taking place, wherein people in the urban areas are paying for grooming and people in rural areas are nullifying [the registration system]. Mr. Squyres recounted Representative Foster's statement that he had never received a registration renewal notice and didn't know anyone who had. He held that the effect of the natural balance is to turn honest Alaskan citizens into outlaws or bandits as a result of their noncompliance. He indicated that the reason that limited government is a platform plank for the Republican Party is because they appreciate self-reliance and the responsibility of individuals.

[HB 319 was held over.]

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:26 p.m.