



Luther S. Olsen
State Senator
14th District

TO: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
FROM: Senator Luther Olsen
DATE: Wednesday, January 8, 2020
SUBJECT: Testimony for Senate Bill 623

Thank you Chairman Cowles and members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in support of Senate Bill 623 (SB 623).

Beginning in July 2015, all snowmobiles operating in Wisconsin were required to display a Wisconsin Trail Pass in order to operate on our trails. The resident trail pass costs \$20 for those who belong to a snowmobile club, \$30 for those who do not belong to a snowmobile club, and \$50 for all non-residents. The revenue that is generated from the sale of the Wisconsin Trail Passes and snowmobile registration goes into the segregated snowmobile account, which is then used to maintain our snowmobile trails.

These changes that were made to the snowmobile program in recent years has led to increased revenue in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) segregated snowmobile account, but they are not allowed to appropriate the additional funds without an increase in the Chapter 20 spending authority.

SB 623 will increase the segregated snowmobile trail and area aids appropriation in Chapter 20 for snowmobile trail maintenance, which will allow the DNR to appropriate the funds that currently exist within the program account and ensure that these funds go back to our trails.

Again, thank you Chairman Cowles and members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy for holding a hearing today, I ask for your support on SB 623.



John Nygren

WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 89TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

**Senate Bill 623 Testimony
State Rep. John Nygren
January 8, 2020**

Chairman Cowles and Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 623. This is a simple bill that allows the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to allocate surplus existing funds toward snowmobile trail maintenance and new trail miles.

Over the last few years, a series of changes to the snowmobile program have created extra funds within the program's segregated accounts. The trail pass that Wisconsin residents must now display when operating on public trails, as well as the increased cost of non-resident trail passes have created a higher revenue stream moving forward. Antique snowmobile registration and renewals will also result in more dollars in the program. In fiscal year 2019, the aforementioned changes led to about \$2.8 million in additional funds.

However, the Chapter 20 spending authority schedule caps spending on trail maintenance and miles at \$2,475,000 annually. AB 692 would increase this limit to \$5,475,000 annually, a \$3 million increase.

Personally, snowmobiling is one of the activities I enjoy the most and each winter I log several thousand miles on trails in the Northwoods and Upper Peninsula. It is a major driver of the outdoor economy in the winter months in not only northern Wisconsin, but throughout the rest of the state as well. It is therefore important this sport continues to grow and thrive across Wisconsin. This bill will clear the way for new and/or improved trail offerings and will be a strong step in the right direction.

We worked with the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs in developing this legislation. DNR Secretary Cole was supportive of this statutory change earlier this session when we were working on the state budget.

Thanks again for allowing me to speak in favor of SB 623 and will be happy to answer any questions committee members may have.

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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

2019 Senate Bill 623 *Snowmobile Trail Aids Fiscal Appropriation* *January 8, 2020*

Good morning Chairman Cowles and members of the Committee. My name is Cathy Burrow, and I am the Environmental and Natural Resource Grant Section Chief with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Previously, I was the Snowmobile Grants Program Manager. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 623 regarding funding for county snowmobile trails and areas.

The Snowmobile Grant program provides grants to county governments which are, for the most part, passed on to local snowmobile clubs to maintain over 18,000 miles of funded snowmobile trails in Wisconsin. Additionally, these clubs maintain several thousand miles of unfunded snowmobile trails throughout the state. The clubs are made up of volunteers.

Funds for this program are generated through user fees: snowmobile registration, a small portion of the gas tax collections which is based on a formula (50 gallons of gas per registered sled), and the state trail pass program. Prior to FY15-16, the trail pass was only required for non-residents. With the introduction of the resident trail pass program, revenues have increased by an average of \$2.5 million annually.

SB 623 will raise the existing spending cap, allowing DNR to award grants with funds already available in the segregated snowmobile account. In August, the Governor's Snowmobile Recreation Council was able to fund over 600 new trail miles. This legislation will enable more funded miles in the future.

The snowmobile grant program awards funds only up to the amount of the net revenue from the previous fiscal year. Therefore, there is not a danger of exceeding available funds. As long as the trail pass continues, sustainable funding is likely.

On behalf of the Bureau of Community Financial Assistance, I would like to thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs – AWSC

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January 8, 2020

Chairman Cowles and Committee Members:

My name is Sam Landes and I am the AWSC's Legislative Chair and the Dane County Director. I am also a member of the Governor's Snowmobile Recreation Council.

I am here today to speak in favor of SB 623 and want to thank Sen. Olsen and Rep. Nygren for sponsoring this bill.

Since the snowmobile trail pass program took effect in 2015, the goals that were set for that program have been met. Specifically, the snowmobile program received nearly \$2.5 million in new revenue each fiscal year since the trail pass began. AWSC's membership has also grown from under 24,000 to nearly 40,000 members.

Additionally, as part of the 2017-2019 biennial budget bill, funding for the local snowmobile clubs' trail maintenance was raised from \$250 to \$300 per mile, and the supplemental maintenance cap was increased from \$150 to \$200 per mile. All of this has led to additional revenue in the snowmobile segregated fund that is available to fund public trails. As a result of this new revenue, the Governor's Council recently awarded funding for over 600 new miles of trails, all of which were previously maintained and provided solely by volunteer snowmobile clubs.

I have been a member of the Governor's Council since 2003, and last year was the first year that all approved projects in mandatory ranked classifications were awarded. In Dane County alone, since the trail pass took effect in 2015, we have replaced over \$300,000 worth of severely damaged bridges, originally installed in the early 1980s.

Because of the severe flooding of 2018, we have another \$300,000 worth of trails and bridges in Dane and Green Counties that must be replaced before next season.

It is critical for the statewide snowmobile program that SB 623 become law. We suspect that much of the \$2.8 million dollars that is available with DNR will be needed for emergency trail repairs all over the state because of recent flooding and storm damage.

Please approve SB 623 so our volunteers can access needed funds that are available in the snowmobile segregated fund.

Thank you for your support of these proposals.



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January 8, 2020

Chairman Cowles and Committee Members:

Thank you for holding a public hearing on SB 623. My name is Dave Newman and I am the President of the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs (AWSC). I am also a member of the Governor's Snowmobile Recreation Council and am currently serving as the finance committee chair of that body. I am here today to ask for your support of SB 623.

I want to start by thanking Sen. Olsen and Rep. Nygren for sponsoring this bill.

The snowmobile program in Wisconsin is very unique in that it is entirely self-funded by the users of the trails and does not receive GPR support. The snowmobile program's revenue comes from snowmobile registrations, trail passes, and the gas tax on some of the gas used in snowmobiles.

The statewide snowmobile trail system, which includes nearly 25,000 miles of interconnecting trails, is developed and maintained for public use by the volunteer members of over 600 snowmobile clubs across the state. These clubs and their 40,000 volunteer members who also belong to AWSC, are responsible for obtaining permission from private landowners to cross their property, working with public land managers to cross public lands, and to clear brush, put up and take down signs,

and to own and operate the expensive grooming equipment that is used to groom the trails to make them safe and enjoyable.

As a result of all this hard work, snowmobiling is a very important part of the Wisconsin economy by providing winter tourism dollars all over the state. The local economies in many popular destinations are dependent on snowmobiling in the winter.

The Wisconsin snowmobile program, which is administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), reimburses the clubs for the equipment and time spent working on and developing the trails. The reimbursement is coordinated with the applicable county, which in most cases, contracts with individual clubs to maintain trails in that particular county.

SB 623 simply increases the spending authority in Chapter 20 so the DNR can appropriate funds that currently exist in the snowmobile program.

Thank you for this opportunity to come before this committee and we would be happy to take any questions.