

## Report Highlights

### DCNR Implementation of the Grants Portion of the Snowmobile and All-Terrain Vehicle Program

Due to the increasing popularity of off-highway vehicles, the demand for snowmobile and ATV trails in Pennsylvania is at an all-time high. In response to public concerns, the LB&FC directed that a study be done of the status of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)'s implementation of the grants portion of the state's Snowmobile and ATV Program and the extent to which program grants are creating additional legal riding opportunities for snowmobile and ATV users.

#### Study Findings:

- 1. DCNR Grants Philosophy – While recognizing the need for additional trail mileage, DCNR views further snowmobile and ATV trail development on state-owned lands as being in conflict with its natural resource stewardship responsibilities. Instead, the Department is using snowmobile/ATV grant funding to encourage private businesses, government entities, and other nonprofit organizations to buy land, develop plans, conduct surveys, and construct and maintain trails on non-state-owned lands.
- 2. Snowmobile/ATV Grant Activity – Although authorized to award snowmobile grants since 1991, DCNR did not award any until 2002. Since that time, DCNR has awarded a total of \$4.7 million in grants for 19 snowmobile and ATV projects; about \$3.0 million of this amount had been disbursed as of October 2004.
- 3. Purposes of Grants and Impact on Trail Mileage – About 86% of the total value of grants awarded to date has been for land acquisition. While the intent is to substantially expand trail mileage on these lands, only 20 additional miles had been developed as of late 2004.
- 4. Status of Grant-Funded Projects – Only 4 of the 19 projects funded with Snowmobile/ATV Program grants had been completed as of late 2004. Most are currently either open or in a delayed action status. However, while some projects have encountered problems, several are laying the foundation for what should be substantial trail mileage increases in future years. (The report provides detailed status information on each project.)
- 5. “Prototype” Grant Project – One trail expansion method being used by DCNR involves the reclamation of abandoned mine lands. The initial example is the current ongoing development of the Rock Run Recreation Area—a multi-use motorized recreation trail complex on a 6,000 acre tract in Cambria and Clearfield counties formerly used for strip mining. This concept has significant economic development potential and could be applied in other parts of the state.
- 6. Snowmobile/ATV Trail Planning – DCNR has not yet formally documented its plans and timetable for Snowmobile/ATV trail development or publicly communicated its short- and long-range goals and objectives in a statewide planning document.
- 7. Program Administration and Oversight – DCNR continues to operate the Snowmobile/ATV Program through three separate bureaus, and program management and oversight improvements are needed.

#### Recommendations:

DCNR should: (1) work with the Snowmobile and ATV Advisory Committee to develop a multi-year “Snowmobile and ATV Trail Development Plan”; (2) designate one of three bureaus currently involved in administering the program as the “lead office” responsible for overall program coordination and grant oversight; (3) submit annual progress reports on grant-funded projects to pertinent legislative standing committees; (4) work with the Department of Community and Economic Development and local partners to maximize the potential tourism and economic development benefits of Rock Run and other similar projects; and (5) actively seek sponsorship support from the off-highway vehicle manufacturing industry for Rock Run and other similar projects.