Snowmobiling in New Hampshire has become one of the most popular forms of winter recreation in the state. What a great opportunity to enjoy the wonders of winter! New Hampshire has some 6,900 miles of snowmobile trails throughout the state — more trails than you would need to get to Vancouver and back. Those who are ambitious enough can travel by snowmobile from Manchester to Pittsburg and from the Connecticut River to the seacoast.

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At Fish and Game, we talk about snowmobiling’s continued success and safety in terms of what we call the “3 E’s”: Engineering, Education and Enforcement.

Engineering: Trailblazers at Work

All those trails didn’t magically appear in the woods; they were engineered by trailwrights and are maintained by volunteers. The work of gaining permission to develop trails on private property, and the trails’ upkeep, is accomplished by volunteer help from clubs belonging to the New Hampshire Snowmobile Association (see sidebar). More than 5,000 landowners host sections of the snowmobile trail system. Not surprisingly, the trails that are developed and maintained through-out the season by dedicated volunteers are some of the best and safest trails in the state.

Enforcement: On Snow Patrol

During the “good times,” no one realizes the importance of an enforcement officer. But when one is needed, a CO cannot get there fast enough! Conservation Officers from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department are the primary enforcement officers on snowmobile trails. Other police officers have the authority to enforce the different rules and regulations, but the responsibility falls to Fish and Game. COs are issued snowmobiles to allow them to patrol the trails in their areas. The officers also are assigned to high-activity areas to control illegal or irresponsible riding. For most riders, seeing a CO on the trail is a welcome sight; for others, they soon learn the consequences.
**Education: Safe Riding Starts Here**

The safety of the sport has sometimes been taken for granted, because the dedication of many volunteers, doing countless hours of behind-the-scenes work, have made the Granite State’s snowmobiling program a real success.

New Hampshire’s strong education program teaches snowmobilers the basics of safe riding and trail etiquette. A key component of the Safety Education Program is the *Snowmobile Safety and You* class for children over the age of twelve. This certification program reaches over 2,500 children each year, introducing them to safe and responsible riding. Other safety education campaigns developed and put into action by the state’s Snowmobile Safety Awareness Committee have earned international recognition. The objective of the committee is simple: to control the irresponsible rider.

New Hampshire started conducting Sobriety Checkpoints in the winter of 1997-1998. What was originally planned as an enforcement initiative ended up as a combination of enforcement and education. The purpose of the checkpoints was to detect and apprehend impaired operators. One of the requirements of receiving authorization to conduct the checkpoint was to advertise the county where it would be conducted; the checkpoints quickly became front-page news, and the consequences of operating a snowmobile under the influence of alcohol or drugs well-known to riders.

While participating in the checkpoints, COs had the opportunity to speak with many snowmobilers. The most common comment they heard was that they (riders) would not dare to operate while impaired, because they knew the officers would be out there on the trail. They didn’t know exactly where — but they knew they were there. Therefore, the checkpoints became more of a deterrent program through education than an example of the “heavy hand of the law.”

**Sharing the Trail**

Snowmobilers welcome other winter recreational users on their trails. Hikers, cross-country skiers, and those on snowshoes and dog sleds all use the trails, taking advantage of where the trails go and how well they are maintained. New Hampshire strongly encourages multiple uses when planned for properly. If you do have the opportunity to get out on one of the trails, always remember that the trails were developed by and for snowmobilers. Through the 3 E’s, the trails can be a safe and fun way to enjoy the beauty of the winter season for all who venture outdoors.

*You’ll Never Ride Alone*

The New Hampshire Snowmobile Association (NHSA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to safe and responsible riding and access to riding opportunities. There are 115 member clubs located throughout the state that participate in all aspects of the program. Club members actively participate in the 3 E’s: they volunteer their time to develop and maintain the snowmobile trail system; teach safety education classes; and conduct Trail Safety Patrols. Club members also get a break on sled registration fees. NHSA works with Fish and Game and the N.H. Bureau of Trails on legislative matters to develop model safety initiatives that have been used across North America. To join a club or the association, visit the NHSA website at [www.nhsa.com](http://www.nhsa.com) or call (603) 224-8906. As the folks at the Bureau of Trails say — “Join a club and never ride alone!”
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