

Tourism

Snowmobiling is the most important winter tourism product in several regions, and as such produces major economic benefits. Quads are a product currently undergoing development. The layout of trail networks and their permanence, both issues of major concern for OHV-related tourism, are often challenged, in particular with regard to the negotiations for a large number of wayleaves, the increase in trail infrastructure/maintenance costs, and by various citizens' groups pressuring.

Conclusion

The document entitled "Public Consultation on Off-Highway Vehicles," is intended as a basis of discussions for this consultation. It describes the current situation from several perspectives and suggests the major themes that need to be addressed. It also seeks to inform citizens and groups interested in taking part in the consultation.

The solutions that are put forward should take full account of the government's overriding priorities, which are sustainable development, regional economic development, and improvement of public health and safety through prevention.



"The challenge that this process must take up is to find the right balance that will allow residents living near OHV trails to enjoy a peaceful and healthy environment and at the same time allow OHV users to practice their activity freely and safely. I invite every concerned citizen and organization to take part in this public consultation. I am convinced that together, we will find effective means for ensuring harmonious co-existence."

*Julie Boulet
Minister for Transport
and Minister responsible
for the Mauricie region*

Additional information on the Public Consultation on Off-Highway Vehicles, such as cities and dates, as well as on the Discussion Paper, is available to the reader on the website of the Ministère, at: www.mtq.gouv.qc.ca or by phone, at: 1 888 355-0511


PUBLIC CONSULTATION

on Off-Highway Vehicles



**SUMMARY
OF THE DISCUSSION PAPER**





The discussion paper provides a basis for the public consultation to be held on off-highway vehicles (OHVs) in Québec's regions beginning in the spring of 2005. All citizens and groups concerned are invited to attend the consultation in order to present their ideas for resolving the issues regarding OHVs.

In Québec, off-highway vehicles (snowmobiles, ATVs or quads), are used for recreational and practical purposes, thereby providing an important lever for economic development in several regions. However, because citizens and governments are today focusing more and more attention on health and environmental protection issues, we must ensure that we assign the proper place to these activities and their future development in a harmonious manner.

The challenge consists in finding permanent solutions that will reconcile the expectations of residents living near OHV trails of a quiet and healthy environment with the expectations of users of practicing their activity freely and safely, in taking into account the sustainable development and the important economic benefits brought by OHV-related industries and services.

To grasp the full scope of these issues, we must bear in mind that the number of OHVs used in Québec has increased enormously over the past 15 years, with the number of registered vehicles jumping from 194,988 in 1990 to 456,146 in 2004. If we consider that each vehicle is used by at least two persons, we see that there are close to 1 million OHV enthusiasts in Québec.

The use of OHVs on trails is managed by two federations, both of which are non-profit organizations. Volunteers with the clubs that make up these federations perform several duties, including management of trail permits and of trail lay-out, maintenance, signage and safety.

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

The *Act Respecting Off-Highway Vehicles* and its regulations are the primary legislative and regulatory documents governing the use of OHVs, especially as regards to safety. Their main purpose is to establish usage and traffic rules (minimum age, speed limit, etc.), areas of use (no travelling within 30 m of residences apart from certain exceptions, etc.), and the main safety rules, particularly those concerning mandatory equipment.

Land Use Planning

The use of OHVs on public lands and certain territories such as provincial parks and wildlife reserves is governed by a number of specific regulations. The Act also includes the obligation to obtain authorization from landowners to operate an OHV on their property. The agricultural industry is in this regard one of the most important partners of the OHV clubs. Authorizations may, however, be revoked at any time. This means that the continuity of trails may be interrupted, causing inconveniences to users and leading to negative economic effects on the region involved.

Municipal authorities are being called on more and more to address issues related to the use of OHVs, primarily by fostering better regional cooperation and ensuring the harmonious development of OHV activities. The municipalities and the RCMs already have certain powers regarding land use planning and OHVs, but they do not always use these powers to their full extent.

Public Health and Environment

The use of OHVs can bring with them certain impacts on the environment and on the health of users and residents alike, with noise and exhaust emissions being the main concerns. Some factors can accentuate the potential inconveniences, such as speeding, the modification of vehicles that creates higher noise levels, the frequency of travel near residential areas, and the power of engines. From the point of view of sustainable development, it is important to identify means that will enhance residents' quality of life and will ensure respect of every person's right to environmental quality.

Safety

The use of OHVs also entails safety questions, especially on public, private and forest roads. The behaviour of users is often identified as a contributing factor in accidents. To better understand these issues, it is important to distinguish among the various OHV uses, i.e., their use for recreational or practical purposes or as means of transportation.

Peace officers and trail security officers are responsible for law enforcement. Trail security officers are volunteers who are recruited by the OHV clubs and who receive proper training to carry out their duties.

