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# Snowmobilers don't want ATVs on trail

By Associated Press

WINCHESTER — New Hampshire snowmobilers are upset the state government has decided to allow wheeled off-road vehicles to use former railroad-bed trails.

Until this year, the snowmobilers had most of the 300 miles of state-owned railbeds to themselves.

But earlier this year, the state Bureau of Trails reinterpreted rules regarding the types of vehicles allowed on the trails, opening them to wheeled all-terrain vehicles.

Snowmobile club members are upset the change was made without asking them. They say they spend hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars maintaining the trails.

They are afraid the wheeled vehicles will leave large ruts in the trails, ruining them for snowmobilers.

"This took us by surprise," said Gary Rokes of the Winchester Trail Riders. "I called (the state) and was told it was a done deal. To us, it's a kick in the teeth."

He said the problems with sharing the trails with wheeled vehicles will become evident during warm winter days, when the trails will partly melt and be torn up.

Even worse, he said, is when the weather turns cold after those days, and the ruts left by the wheels freeze, making the tracks dangerous for snowmobiles.

As late as January 1997, state officials forbade the vehicles from the train trails at any time of the year, at least partly to prevent erosion.

But Robert Sporel, program specialist with the N.H. Department of Resources and Economic Development, said drivers of wheeled vehicles pay the same state registration fees as snowmobilers, and so deserve the same right of access to trails.

As of August, 36,723 snowmobiles were registered in New Hampshire, and 10,054 wheeled all-terrain vehicles, including off-road motorcycles.