



“What can my age group do to improve the quality of our snowmobile trail system?” By Carissa Butterfield

Most people my age who have snowmobiles, buy their trail passes and ride the fresh powder yet complain about the trail conditions. They do not understand how the trails were made or maintained. In order for my generation to improve the trail system, they must be informed. If you do not know how the trails came to be, it is hard to know what it takes to make them better. Another thing that my generation needs to do is join clubs. Joining clubs helps to protect the trail system and may have some personal benefits as well. I think it is important to join a club but maybe even more important than that is being an active member; more can be accomplished if more people participate.

I am an active member at the Swampsiders Snowmobile Club in the Bigfork area. The club maintains many miles of trails. My Grandfather tells me stories of when there were no “designated trails” and you had to make your own through the woods. As you can imagine, it took a long time to get anywhere. In 1978 a group of snowmobilers founded the Swampsiders Snowmobile Club and started making trails. They wanted the trails to connect Bigfork, Antler Lodge and Beer Lake- the most frequent haunts of that time. It took many hours of clearing trees, working through swamps and getting permission from landowners to establish trails on private property. During this time, this group of dedicated snowmobile enthusiasts also constructed a clubhouse. It is my belief that if more people knew these facts they would have more respect for the trails.

Being a part of something, like a snowmobile club, gives you a sense of partnership with other riders who share your love of the sport. Although there are about 270 recognized clubs in Minnesota the number of active members has dropped due to the people wanting to be “free riders”. These people want to use the trails but do not want to contribute to their upkeep. People outside of an organized Club do not realize that these club members work hard to acquire easements from private land owners and work with the State to ensure that trails can continue to stay as they are currently located. Clubs are also responsible for clearing trails, rerouting if needed and keeping them groomed for all to enjoy. Clubs need members and use the dues to assist in accomplishing some of the aforementioned tasks. It is not enough to pay your membership dues and not participate, you must be active. Volunteer to ride along in the groomer, help clear brush on the trails and help fundraise for your club. The work is much easier and more is accomplished when people work together.

To improve our trails, people must be informed and take action. Younger members are needed to learn the necessary skills and get involved with clubs so that snowmobiling is a sport that is enjoyed for generations to come.