NEWS RELEASE

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Coalition Warns of ATV Trail Network Disruptions if LD 19 Becomes Law

With the recent progression of LD 19, “An Act to Change the Definition of ‘Oversized ATV’ in the Laws Governing the Registration of All-terrain Vehicles,” in the Maine Legislature, a coalition representing woodland owners, ATV (All Terrain Vehicles) users, and the forest products industry is warning about the risk this legislation imposes on Maine’s ATV trail network.

LD 19 proposes changing the existing law that sets the legal size limits for registering ATVs, increasing the allowable weight from 2000 pounds to 2500 pounds. Legislators are considering increasing limits even further, to 2950 pounds. This potential change in the law is forcing landowners to consider restrictions to or complete denial of access to designated ATV trails on their property. These actions would result in the fracturing of hundreds of miles of interconnected trails upon which ATV users rely for their recreational activity.

“This is not landowners versus riders - our (ATV trail) network exists only because private landowners choose to allow it. If lawmakers change ATV weight limits without landowner support and real safeguards, Maine will face closures, fragmented trail connections, and immediate strain on the volunteer-driven clubs that maintain this system at no cost to the state.” said Doug Dickinson, President and founder of Maine ATV Coalition.

Maine Woodland Owners sent a letter this week to the ATV clubs who use their trails notifying them of the organization’s decision to close its properties to public ATV use should the State significantly increase current vehicle size or weight restrictions. The letter explained that the legislation dismantles the framework created by the Governor's ATV Task Force that determined what ATV size limit is acceptable to most landowners who have designated ATV trails on their property.

“The current size and weight limits established for ATVs were not chosen arbitrarily. They were the result of long, difficult conversations and compromises among representatives from the ATV community, private landowners, conservation groups, and law enforcement. The Task Force

agreement was a pledge to landowners that the ‘bigger and heavier’ trend would be capped to ensure our trails could survive,” said Executive Director, Amanda Egan.

Despite the Task Force’s findings, which considered the wishes of the very people who control key sections of Maine’s ATV trail network, Land owners with designated ATV trails on their property have repeatedly signaled that they are unwilling to absorb the additional cost of the environmental damage and trail maintenance issues that oversized ATVs create. Additionally, they find enforcing weight limits on their trails is a burden and will likely opt for closing their trails as the best way to protect their property.

“We prefer to honor the compromise originally reached by the Task Force and keep our land open to responsible riders. We cannot support a legislative move that breaks that agreement and endangers our property. If the weight limits are broken, our relationship with the trail system must end,” said Egan.

LD 19 was carried over from the first session of the 132nd Legislature and is being considered by the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. Two possible amendments are in consideration: one that would increase the weight of legal ATVs to 2950 pounds, and one that would keep the current weight restriction with a handicap exemption. The coalition encourages the Committee to ensure that any exemptions include thoughtful rules to avoid loopholes and ensure workable enforcement.

“Maine ATV Coalition stands with Maine Woodland Owners, private landowners statewide, and the local ATV clubs who work every day to protect the landowner relationships that make Maine’s trail system possible. Riders may gain bigger machines on paper, but they’ll have far fewer places to ride them - and today’s 80,000 legal machines will be affected just the same. The economic hit will be felt quickly by rural businesses, tourism, and the communities that rely on a stable, connected trail system,” Dickinson said.

Maine Woodland Owners is a member-supported, nonprofit organization that assists those who own from ten to a few thousand acres of woodlands with expertise, knowledge, and advocacy. Its goal is to increase landowner engagement and long-term woodland stewardship to ensure the health of Maine's forests. Maine Woodland Owners is the only statewide organization supporting Maine’s 86,000 family woodland owners and is committed to responding to the needs of its members and the public as they conduct long-term planning for their woodlots.