



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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**EXTEND SNOWMOBILE "DEMO"
TRAILS**

AS ENROLLED

**House Bill 4280 (Substitute H-1)
First Analysis (11-13-96)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Allen Lowe
Committee: Conservation, Environment,
and Great Lakes**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Several years ago, in an effort to both ensure the safety of snowmobile users and provide challenging trails, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) incorporated stretches of abandoned railroad rights-of-way into its recreational trail system. At the time, some questioned the policy, concerned that this use of these abandoned areas would lead to encroachment by snowmobilers on functional railroad rights-of-way. Others encouraged broadening the public's safe use of rights-of-way. In an effort to resolve the issue, the legislature in 1990 amended the act that regulated snowmobiles (Public Act 74 of 1968) and allowed snowmobilers to operate their machines, between December 1, 1990, and March 31, 1991, on a demonstration trail located on a state-owned railroad right-of-way operated by the Detroit and Mackinaw railway company, or on a company-owned right-of-way that connected to a state-owned right-of-way that the railway company operated between Gaylord and Frederic. (The Detroit and Mackinaw railway company has since gone out of business and the right-of-way is now operated by Lake State railway company).

The demonstration project was designed to study whether opening a functional railroad right-of-way to snowmobilers could lead to unsafe situations for persons using the trails and for trains using the tracks. The one-year demonstration period was extended in 1992 for three additional winter periods to permit further study. Since there had been no accidents on these demonstration trails, it was determined last year that the need for a trial period had ended and the sunset date on their use was therefore eliminated. Now, the success of the trail has encouraged local residents to request that it be extended so that it runs between Gaylord and Grayling.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA) to extend a certain demonstration snowmobile trail. The trail is located on a state-owned railroad right-of-way, and runs

between Gaylord and Frederic. Under the bill, the trail would extend from Gaylord to Grayling at Railroad Milepost 91.8.

MCL 324.82126

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency (HFA), the bill would have no impact on state funds. (11-13-96)

According to the Department of Natural Resources, the bill would result in costs to the department of \$35,000 for clearing, grading, and fencing of the trail. (11-13-96)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill would extend to Grayling the demonstration snowmobile trail that currently runs between Gaylord and Frederic, following a state-owned railroad right-of-way between Gaylord and Grayling. The Grayling Regional Chamber of Commerce has made this extension the key priority of its transportation committee for 1997. According to the chamber, the I-75 Business Loop corridor along the railroad right-of-way would be the proposed site of the new section of the trail. Since the town is experiencing economic growth, the chamber believes that it is vital that this corridor be protected in order to maintain a needed recreation section for the area, since, in the past, many towns have cut off access to trails when improving surface roads.

Also, in a letter to the bill's sponsor, the City of Grayling expressed its belief that snowmobiling is a key economic element of winter tourism in Crawford County, and that the trail will enhance the area as a winter destination. The city's letter also noted the importance of such a trail in controlling snowmobile traffic, and the fact that the

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right-of-way in question would provide a legal, safe snowmobile trail through the community.

POSITIONS:

The following submitted letters in support of the legislation:

- * The City of Grayling
- * The Grayling Area Visitors Council
- * The AuSable Valley Snowmobile Association
- * The Grayling Regional Chamber of Commerce

The Department of Natural Resources has no position on the bill. (11-13-96)

Analyst: R. Young

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.