

Wisconsin County Forests Association

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Rebekah Luedtke
Executive Director

April 8, 2021

Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Energy
Senator Cowles
Senator Felzkowski
Senator Ballweg
Senator Wirch
Senator Agard

RE: Proposed Legislation to Increase ATV/UTV Weight Limits

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Energy,

Please accept these comments from the Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) for your consideration when addressing the ATV/UTV weight limits proposed legislation.

WCFA represents the 30 counties in Wisconsin with County Forest lands established under state statutes §28.10 and 28.11. Collectively, these 30 counties manage over 2.4 million acres of forests, the largest public ownership in our State. Wisconsin's County Forests are working forests, providing essential raw material for our State's \$24 billion forest products industry, plus a suite of other benefits and assets (robust wildlife habitat, ample recreation opportunities and abundant clean air and water).

As the largest trail owner and management entity in the State of Wisconsin, caring for over 1,800 miles of ATV trails, we feel the decision of adjusting ATV/UTV weight limits should not be driven by what machine manufacturers want but by what is best for the resource and by the dedicated professionals who care for it. To that point, we are kindly requesting the ATV/UTV weight limits to not go above 2,750 pounds. I must underscore there are a handful of our member counties who do not support any increase above 2,000 pounds.

If there was one possible concession we'd be willing to consider making, it is an allowance for electric machines to have a maximum weight of 3,000 pounds. Unfortunately, based on recent discussions, it doesn't appear the manufacturers know how heavy electric machines would even weigh once developed.

Any increase in the weight limits must be matched with a sufficient increase in trail maintenance and law enforcement funding. The Counties struggle to properly maintain their trails even at the current limits and trail standards, because of lack of adequate funding, ever increasing expenses and having to do more with less. In addition, patrol reimbursements continue to be pro-rated, also, due to lack of sufficient funding.

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We recommend the ATV & UTV registration fee structure be re-evaluated, with no less than a \$200 per mile increase for trail maintenance. Likewise, law enforcement funding must be adequately increased and made whole to provide safety to all users.

Furthermore, we request dealerships be required to provide written information or publications on what the current statutes are in the State of Wisconsin. This could have potential to mitigate any angst for new machine owners before they realize they are out of compliance with state law.

While we think it's great that more Wisconsinites are getting outdoors and enjoying our wonderful natural resources, and we also appreciate the effort to get existing heavier machines into compliance, there is a major concern that weight limits will continue to increase in perpetuity until there are no restrictions for any type of machine using Wisconsin's trail systems. Whatever the outcome of any proposed legislation, we would also ask for a moratorium on any future increases for ten years.

We all must ask ourselves, manufacturers included, when will enough be enough? At what point are bigger machines not really better for trail use? If weight limitations continue to be increased to satisfy demands of manufacturers, there is real potential the Counties, among others, will be forced to enact ordinances with lower weights and narrower widths in order to protect their trail systems or get out of the business of ATV/UTV trail management all together. To further compound the issue, we are currently aware that certain townships will be closing town roads, which act as trail connectors, because of the continued negative impacts they are experiencing with no way to pay for repairs.

These comments were shared with legislation authors, Senator Stafsholt and Representative Mursau, previously, as well with the Wisconsin ATV Association. We appreciate, and thank you all for your continued support of forestry in Wisconsin and for the County Forests System. Please let me know if you have any comments or questions.

Kind regards,



Rebekah Luedtke
Executive Director