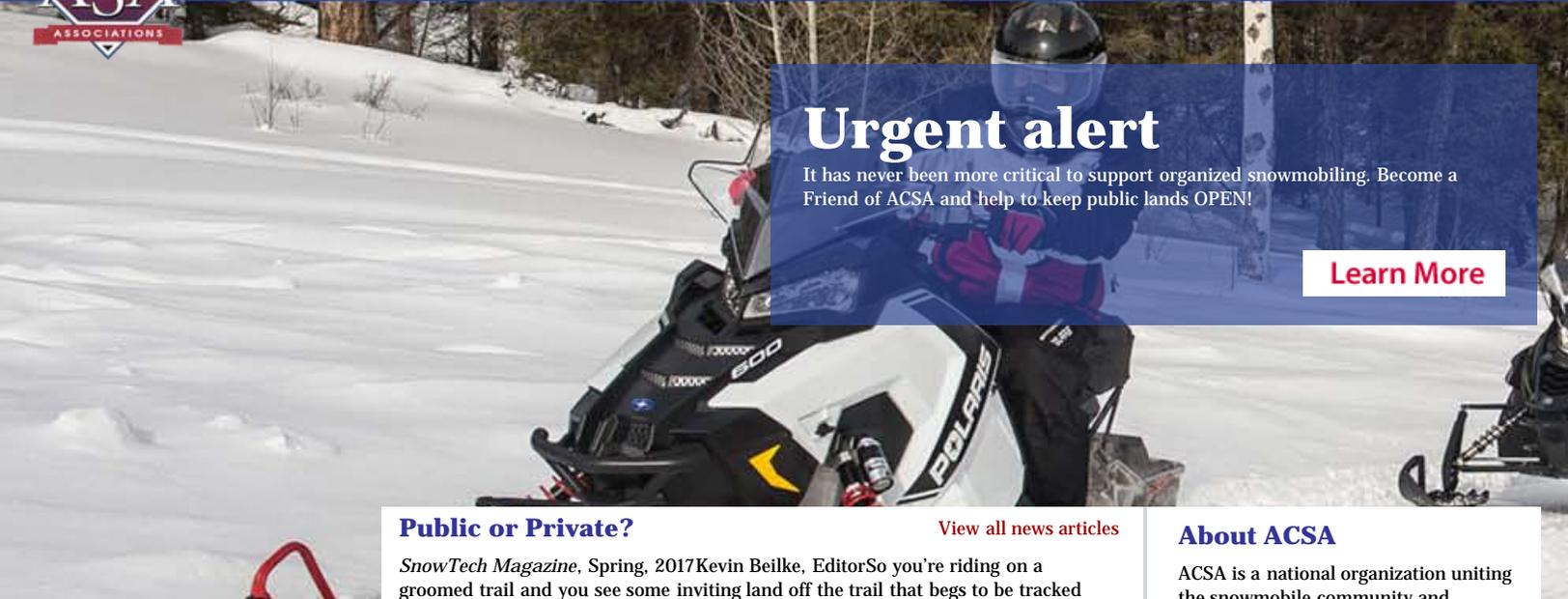




The American Council of Snowmobile Associations Uniting the Snowmobile Community



Urgent alert

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Public or Private?

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SnowTech Magazine, Spring, 2017 Kevin Beilke, Editor So you're riding on a groomed trail and you see some inviting land off the trail that begs to be tracked up. We've all been there, over and over again. Everyone of us likes to tear up the fresh, untracked snow. Before you peel off the trail and tear it up, you MUST ask yourself – is this land public or private? If you don't KNOW the answer, don't go off the trail! Pretty simple, eh? So, why is this basic common sense logic so often ignored? This is an increasing problem, particularly in areas where there is NO public land and FEW off trail riding opportunities, but it is a problem everywhere groomed trails are located. Riders seem to have the idea that if land isn't posted closed it must be open for them to ride on. NOT! Snowmobilers MUST know if the land they are about to ride onto is public or private, each and every time they decide to go off a groomed or marked trail. This is the premise upon which we propose to have new trail signs created, so clubs can remind riders who come across such inviting areas. Public or Private? If you don't know, don't go! As a general rule, you are legal to ride on groomed snowmobile trails, on un-plowed forest roads, along most roads in the public right-of-way (ditch) along the road, and on certain public lands. Other than that, you have to assume the land is PRIVATE and to track it up is ILLEGAL trespassing. So, you go make a few tracks off the trail, big deal, right? This is the exact attitude that gets trails closed. Landowners everywhere are being disrespected by snowmobilers taking liberties and trespassing on their private land, so they tell the trail club to close the trail and go elsewhere. You know how it is, a favorite trail no longer goes where it used to, ever wonder why? In almost every single case, it is because the landowner gets upset with continual trespassing onto their private property. Use of private land is a PRIVILEGE, not a RIGHT. What is really troubling is the trail clubs will have such areas clearly marked with "Stay on Trail" signs, but there are sled tracks going off trail all over the place. Since we know the riders can read English, we then know for a fact the riders are simply IGNORING the signs and doing whatever they want to. Why would the club take the time to post such signs? Um, because the trail is on private land and have been told the trail will be closed if the snowmobilers keep going off trail? Hello? Hate to say it, but this is more of a problem with younger riders than it is older ones, and it is usually more of a problem with out-of-town riders than it is local ones. Generally, but not always. Mature riders do not want their local trails closed, nor do they want to upset their neighbors they live near to. Simple logic here. Younger riders seem to have the "entitlement" attitude where everyone owes them something and they can do as they please, that the rules don't apply to them. When a snowmobiler knowingly goes off trail onto private land, they are showing disrespect for the landowner, the local club that worked so hard to place the trail, and the sport as a whole. We see this more and more where we ride in the U.P. of Michigan. For some reason, people think that "off-trail" riding means tearing up the fields next to the groomed trails. If you see an open field next to a groomed trail, it is almost always private property. That is why it is open and not wooded, somebody cleared the land. It should be just as logical that if you can see houses and farms, you are on private land. Pretty basic common sense, but too many snowmobilers seem to be lacking this intelligence. Even within tracts of public land, there are often smaller pieces of private land grandfathered in that were there long before the national (or state) forest was created. Just because you are in the middle of a great big piece of public land doesn't mean it is 100% public, rarely is. Snowmobilers need to pay attention. They need to study maps, carry a GPS, and be keen to what sections of trail are located on private land and what sections are on public land. Moral of the

About ACSA

ACSA is a national organization uniting the snowmobile community and promoting snowmobiling as a safe, fun and environmentally friendly family sport.

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story, know the laws and know the lay of the land where you are going to be riding. Know where the private land ends and where the public land starts. Each and every state or national forest now has land use regulations, it is your responsibility to know what the rules are where you will be riding. Know what is legal and what is not legal to ride. Do not assume an open unless posted closed policy, verify it. What might be acceptable behavior back home for you might not be acceptable behavior where you are going to be riding. It is each rider's responsibility to know the laws and legalities of snowmobiling in each area they visit. The future of our sport and groomed trail system depends on this vital compliance. Each year trails are closed, rerouted and made less desirable due to the ignorance of a few. Ride only where legal. Leave your loud exhaust systems at home, as they also cause land owners to close trails. You might think riding a loud machine is your right, but it is not, especially when we are riding on private land. Stay on the trail and forest roads unless you know for a fact the land is open for you to legally ride on. Behavior like this is closing trails for the rest of us. Pretty soon, areas that used to welcome snowmobilers will be pulling up the welcome mat, telling the tourists to stay home. For those of you who don't remember what it was like to ride back in the 70's with no groomed trails, you just might get the chance to find out if you continue this behavior. I would like to think that since you are reading this, you are not part of the problem but part of the solution in doing what we can to educate those less informed. Peer pressure is perhaps the best deterrent, but then again, it is very difficult to control ignorance and stupidity. We must at least try to salvage what we have before it is too late.

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Contact Us

American Council of Snowmobile Associations
 271 Woodland Pass, STE 216
info@snowmobilers.org
 East Lansing, MI 48823
 Phone: (517) 351-4362
 Fax: (517) 351-1363



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