

## THE DRIVING FORCE MOTORIZED REC SCOOP

# A bustling week in motorsports

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On Thursday May 1, 2025, most our county's ATV trails opened for use — this includes all trails in the Sawyer County Forest, as well as in the Chequamegon Forest. As of now, everything is open except for trails in the Flambeau River State Forest in the SE corner of the county — which will open to ATV use on May 15th, and a segment of Trail 31 in the Birchwood area, north of the Tuscobia Trail, that opens over Memorial Day Weekend.

That same Thursday, our state's Lieutenant Governor, Sara Rodriguez, came to Hayward to get caught up with the motorized sports story in our area. I invited Don Mrotek to meet with us because I thought his years as a trail coordinator and his current spot on the Governor's Snowmobile Rec Council would bring valuable insight to this meeting.

Last year, we treated Ms. Rodriguez and her staff to a fun ATV ride, so we didn't have a lot of time to go over issues affecting us in the north. After two poor winters though, we had plenty of concerns now, so we met indoors, at the comfortable Chamber/Hayward Lakes conference room.

Our Lt. Governor has an engaging personality, and we rapidly fell into conversation. She listened intently as Mrotek and I described how the last two bad winters negatively affected our snowmobile tourism, our Northwoods economy, and the heavy loss it caused in the state snowmobile fund program. A self-funded program



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AWSC Miss Snowflake on her snowmobile.

which is now struggling to replace many aging trail bridges across the state.

The rest of our discussion covered a variety of topics; the need for a state-wide ATV report- like the existing snowmobile report through Travel Wisconsin, The Office of Outdoor Recreation, items in the state budget that affect motorized sports, grant programs, and possible solutions to help with state rec trail bridge replacements.

We appreciated the Lt. Governor's visit, and her interest in our little northern community! We really loaded them up with information to take back to Madison — and we hope some good will come of it all.

I spent Friday visiting my mom, who suffers from Alzheimer's and is in an assisted living facility in the east central part of the state. I never know what I'll get when I visit mom. Sometimes it means showing her, a hundred times, how to not accidentally turn her phone ringer off, and other times it's going over the whole family tree at her insistence- as she fights to remember everyone. Her random, off-the-wall stories about events

that she was never at, are getting more and more convincing though- she almost has me believing she was at JFK's assassination. She still knows me for now, and that's all I need.

Early Saturday morning I drove to the Sunnyview Expo Center in Oshkosh for the inaugural 'Let's Ride Expo' held on May 2-4, 2025.

Organized by the Wisconsin ATV Association, with help from other motorsports groups, this event was a celebration of motorized recreation in our state. State organizations that attended were: Wisconsin ATV Association (WATVA), Wisconsin Coalition of Four Wheel Drives (WC4WD), Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs (AWSC), and Wisconsin Off Highway Motorcycle Association (WOHMA).

The large indoor expo building was packed with booths and displays from state, regional and local associations, vendors, dealers, counties, tourism offices, and there was an entire wing devoted just to club booths! It was exciting to see so many different motorsports enthusiasts there- and I ran into

many folks I knew from other events, counties, and especially from AWSC.

The lineup continued beyond the main expo hall — one expo building housed an interesting vintage snowmobile and vehicle display, and a variety of tractors, groomers and other trail equipment lined the parking lot outside. Motorsports dealers brought in trailers of demo machines to display outside, and of course, who puts on one of these events without a line of food trucks!

There were lumberjack shows, a military helicopter visit, ATV rides, and workshops for clubs, plus a Ride-Safe roundtable discussion. This event had a nice turnout, at least on Saturday when I was there — and I'm looking forward to next year's Let's Ride Expo- although next year I will push for more of a presence from Sawyer County!

I capped off my tiring weekend with a long-awaited ATV ride on Sunday. After so many endless hours of driving this weekend (yes, it is orange barrel season too), you might think that riding my Wildcat was the last thing I'd want to do — but the draw of the forest after a particularly busy work week and weekend can't be understated. There is nothing more soothing than the low, staccato hum of my engine after a whole bunch of commotion. And a final thought — no one is happier than me, that the Arctic Cat company has a new owner, who will hopefully bring this brand back to its former glory!