

THE DRIVING FORCE MOTORIZED REC SCOOP

Whip'in it up good!

CATHY LAREAU

Well, I'm back after taking a couple weeks' break from writing my column! An intense rush of real estate activity and personal obligations left me no time to squeeze in anything but that, and admittedly the break was a relief.

This past Sunday, I took up Gene Richardson's offer to help me install some whip lights on my Wildcat that were graciously gifted to me by a riding friend, Drew Anderson, which prompted this week's article.

Whip lights are a great safety feature, especially when riding on dry, dusty, gravel trails such as we have in Sawyer County. The cloud of dust generated by a machine can dangerously reduce visibility for anyone behind. The bright light emitted by whip lights cut through the dust and alert other riders to the presence of another machine on these trails.

There is always confusion about ATV lighting, whip light colors and light patterns riders can use in Wisconsin, so I thought I'd try to clear that up.

First, here is an excerpt from the Wisconsin Statutes, Chapter 23.33 (6)(cd) on ATV lighting:

Except as provided in sub. (11m), no person may operate an all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle that is equipped with any of the following:

1. A lamp that emits any color of light other than white or amber and that is visible from directly in front of the all-terrain vehicle or



KIM HELGESON

On a night ATV ride we took in 2024.

utility terrain vehicle.

2. A lamp that emits any color of light other than red, yellow, amber, or white and that is visible from directly behind the all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle.

3. A flashing, oscillating, or rotating lamp that emits any color other than yellow or amber.

(ch) Except as provided in sub. (11m), if an all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle with headlamps is equipped with additional adverse weather lamps, spot lamps, auxiliary lamps, or any other lamp on the front of the all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle that is capable of projecting a beam of intensity of more than 300 candle-power, the operator of the all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle may not light more than 4 lamps on the front of the all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle simultaneously, not including flashing amber or yellow lights, within 500 feet of an oncoming all-terrain vehicle, utility terrain vehicle, or other vehicle upon a roadway, all-terrain vehicle route, all-terrain vehicle trail, or public area.

(cp) Except as provided in sub. (11m), when the operator of an all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle equipped with multiple-beam headlamps, adverse weather lamps, spot lamps, auxiliary lamps, high-beam lamps, or any other lamps other than those required by this subsection approaches an oncoming all-terrain vehicle, utility terrain vehicle, or other vehicle within 500 feet or approaches or follows an all-terrain vehicle, utility terrain vehicle, or other vehicle within 500 feet to the rear of that vehicle, the operator

shall dim, depress, or tilt the multiple-beam headlamps, adverse weather lamps, spot lamps, auxiliary lamps, high-beam lamps, or any other lamps of the all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle so that the glaring rays are not directed or reflected into the eyes of the operator of the other vehicle, all-terrain vehicle, or utility terrain vehicle. This paragraph does not prohibit an operator from intermittently flashing the high-beam headlamps of the all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle at an oncoming all-terrain vehicle, utility terrain vehicle, or other vehicle whose high-beam headlamps are lit.

In case you are wondering about the references to 11(m), here is that language: 11(m) Exceptions. Sub-sections (3) (em), (6) (cd), (ch), (cp), and (i), and (6r) do not apply to the operator of an all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle owned or leased by a city, village, town, county, state agency, federal agency, federally recognized American Indian tribe, public safety corporation, or public utility while the operator is engaged in an emergency.

Nick Al-Moghrabi, our local DNR Conservation warden, offered this on whip lights: "Amber or white from front, red or amber from the back. I've stopped quite a few that can program the front separate from the back"

Lt. Jake Holsclaw, the DNR's Off Highway Vehicle Administrator adds "This is not just whip lights but any light on the UTV. The thing to remember is that there is a max of 4 separate lighting units visible from the front. So, if there

are two whip lights and then two headlights (legally required) the machine would be at the max. This applies day or night."

With this being said, unless you can program your whips so only white or amber shows from the front and only red or amber shows from the back, you will be safest with displaying only amber, which is the only color that is approved to be used for both front and back display.

Lieutenant Holsclaw also told me that with today's LED lighting, it can be difficult to differentiate between yellow and amber, and he doesn't see an issue using either interchangeably.

You cannot legally run any flashing, oscillating, or rotating lights that are red, blue, green or any other color other than amber or yellow, when you are in operation. If you are stopped on the trail though — turn up the color and enjoy but revert back to legal colors/patterns before you take off.

You don't need to turn your auxiliary lights off while on routes — but read the statute above related to dimming lights, and Holsclaw's comments about the number of lights, so you don't get pulled over.

And lastly, a comment about lighted license plate lights — the only time white light seen from behind is legal, is when you are about to, or are backing up — so replace those lighted license plate lights with amber instead of white, if you really want to be legal.

If you have any questions on ATV/UTV lighting, or whip lights, reach out to your local DNR warden for clarification.