

NLSF NEWS

WRAPPING UP THE SEASON(?)

By Donnie O'Keefe, Executive Director

Well, here we go with the 4th newsletter of the season. When I say the season, I'm asking myself, "Where is the season?" It has been one very strange winter for every area across this province. Nothing is normal, and as a matter of fact, it is the complete opposite. Each day we check the weather forecast to see what lies ahead, with the hope and dream that we are going to get one of those nor'easter storms bringing a big dump of snow. That's not happening this winter, and when we do get snow it seems to always be followed with rain, freezing rain and mild temperatures.

This weather brings some really disappointing, challenging and serious safety concerns for our industry. We have experienced several inquiries from members asking when we are going grooming or why we haven't been out grooming. Some of the inquiries relate to the lack of knowledge on what conditions we need to operate groomers, and what other problems come along with all these uncertain weather conditions. So let me take a little time in this article to explain to you some of this season's challenges, all because of the lack of snow and the mild weather.

GROOMING

Our groomers are certainly being challenged this year. We have spent over \$250,000 in repairs and up keep for the equipment. So you really have to keep in mind that you simply can't groom for the sake of simply providing groomed trails. There has to be enough snow from point A to point B in order to get the entire trail groomed. We have areas that have snow and grooming can be done, however the area where the groomer needs to go to get there doesn't have enough snow to drive the groomer there. Not only is the cost of floating a groomer to an area very expensive, it's also very hard on the groomers. If they are floated, the wet road conditions play havoc on the entire unit when it arrives at the destination and it's full of salt, sand and ice. Then there are the logistics of parking it in the area when the grooming is done, not to mention that if we are off our normal route, we need to get fuel and get the groomer operators in and out. So as you can see, the logistics become very challenging when you don't have your whole trail system to utilize.



Groomers are meant for snow and the cold weather. The tracks require snow to operate on, and when you are driving across sections of gravel it puts some serious wear on the tracks and can also damage them. When you are operating the groomers in temperatures warmer than -5°C, you are challenging the equipment's hydraulics. The hydraulics run very hot and without the cold temperatures to keep them cool, they are outside of normal use and wear.

Trails groomed are having a hard time setting up simply because it's not cold enough, and then they don't last as a good trail for very long because they haven't set up and some of the areas are experiencing higher volumes of use this year because of the limited usable snowmobiling areas.

We are out there; we are trying to deal with all the logistics, weather and volumes of traffic. We are not perfect, and this has certainly challenged our groomer operators on where and when they can groom.

SAFETY

Safety has been a serious problem this year with these unstable conditions. One minute everything is frozen and good to go, but the next day brooks and ponds are slushy or are opening up. We all want to hop on our machines and enjoy what we love the most. Sometimes we think that we know the area well, but do we really in these unstable weather conditions? This can put anyone at risk, at any time, and we have to be very cautious of the conditions. You need to know where you are riding is safe. Even simply riding on a trail, you need to know that the conditions are good through out. You could be travelling on a trail at a high speed and then hit patches of trail with no snow. This is a very dangerous winter with these conditions exposing snowmobilers to all sorts of new elements.

People are venturing out on alternative trails with alternative destinations, which put them in a situations with unknown trails and unknown safety concerns. Travelling on power lines is extremely dangerous. Guywires, holes, large rocks, how to get off the trail, and so on are all important safety concerns.

Even though the season is short in areas or off in some, the urge to ride is strong, but I can't stress enough the requirement for some added safety precautions before going out. We have had an increase in fatalities and accidents in the shorter season because of the lack of snow or knowledge of where you are venturing out to. No matter how much we have that urge to get out and push the powder, we need to increase our aware-

ness of safety, not just for ourselves, but for our fellow riders.

Know where to ride, know what the conditions are, know what your limitations are, make sure you tell someone of your route and make sure your sled is equipped with safety gear in case of an incident.

TRAIL CONDITIONS

We are all over the map and things are changing daily. The east coast is simply not available to snowmobile in. Central has limited territorial areas where there is plenty of snow in some areas and no snow just on the other side. The west has been fortunate with snow, but mild days play havoc, threatening to take it away from us. The north, like central, has some areas with snow and some without. Local clubs are trying to keep you updated and we are updating the web page (www.NLSF.org) on what areas are groomed.

TRAIL PASSES

Trail pass sales go hand in hand with the ability to snowmobile. However, I have to say that I have received a lot of feedback from pass holders, with regard to their disappointment and lack of enforcement with the non-pass holders. It's disappointing when your group rides to a destination and you come across another group of ten riders, all without trail passes. If you confront them and ask them where their trail passes are, you get a simple reply, "Oh well, we're just out here for a few days and that's about all the snowmobiling we will do, so what's the point in buying one?"

There was someone who asked a vendor how much a season pass was, and when he was told \$100.00, he said, "Well, for the amount that enforcement is out, I'll just ride and take the risk and pay the fine if I get stopped." These offenders are riding on trails that you have paid to groom. These offenders are using warming shelters that you pay to have there for your use. We are contacting enforcement and stressing our concerns to them. We need your help with the attitudes that we are encountering. More voices need to speak up. When you are out there on the trails and you are encountering offenders, contact your local natural resource office and tell them how many abusers you encounter during the day. If they get enough complaints, they have to hear us. Don't let the abusers get away with disrespecting our groomed trail system.

Have a great summer, and see you on the trails next winter!

PLACES ^{TO} EXPLORE: THE LEWIS HILLS

By Donnie O'Keefe, Executive Director

With so many places in Newfoundland one can explore, it's hard to pick just one. However, this year will go down as one for the records books for everyone, including the west coast! Regardless of the lack of snow, there is one place that has yet to show its willingness to give into Mother Nature - the Lewis Hills!

Riders have been heading into this easily accessible area since early December, and I'm sure when you receive this issue of *Sledworthy*, they will still be riding.

Our day, like many before, started in Corner Brook, on Lundrigan Drive to be exact, next to the "Green Tank" where the groomer departs. Smooth trails led us from here to the old railway bed and from there onward to an old but very popular logging road (Logger School Road). This road sees a huge amount of traffic from all over, it is by far one of the most travelled on the west coast and always has snow. In through Logger School Road to the Warm-Up Shelter maintained by the Western Sno-Riders. A quick count of everyone





(16 in total) and we were off with only another eight kilometres or so to go to the base of the hills.

It's approximately 40 kilometres from Lundrigan Drive to the base of the hills. If the weather is not great, or you don't have a guide, you have the option of driving on towards Stephenville, down through the infamous 38 Trail, maintained by the Bay St. George Club, into Gallants for some fries and then either back into Corner Brook via the Railway Bed or up through Twin Ponds and back out Logger School Road. This is a great loop, and has been travelled by many!

On this day, our group of 16, some had never been to the hills before, were in for a real treat. It was a very warm day in the valleys under sunny skies. We always recommend a guide because the hills, like any terrain in Newfoundland, can be very dangerous if you don't know where you are going or if the weather sets in on you quickly. As we travelled in through Hinds Valley, some of our group played on the hills. We went down through Wheelers for a quick look, and it was so warm that some folks even removed their shirts for a little tan, mind you it was late in February, but this winter has been anything but a normal one.

We decided then to go up top, work our way out towards the upper part of Wheelers and look down on

Serpentine Lake, the Blow Me Downs and back up through Wheelers. Let's just say most were speechless. There wasn't a draft of wind and we were at a place most will never get to experience, summer or winter. We continued to pick our way towards Rope Cove, which has some amazing scenery and climbs... climbs I personally don't recommend! Then we were off to the Highest Point in Newfoundland. Thanks to the Lewis Hillbillies and their followers, there is a sign erected which shows this point of land, now becoming a popular spot for photographs, and we were no exception. It's hard to believe this is the highest point, as once you are there, it's truly flat. None the less, it was a great experience for all.

We headed out after a few pictures and worked our way back through the valleys and back out to the groomed trail network. This trip is easy for both the experienced or novice rider. Don't let the hills intimidate you, but again, we highly recommend a guide for the area.

You can leave from either Corner Brook or Stephenville, both will provide you with a groomed trail right to the doorstep of the hills. I hope you have a safe and fun summer. Me, I'm waiting for the snow and winter 2011.

PLEASE DIRECT ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS TO OUR CORPORATE OFFICE

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