



## **ATV Minnesota**

*"Your Voice For ATV Recreation in Minnesota"*

**Member Newsletter**

**January 31, 2026**

*523 new members in 2025...welcome!*



## **Save The Dates!**

**March 11, 2026: ATV Minnesota Legislative Reception.** It will be 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Radisson St. Paul, on the second floor, in the Sibley Room. This event is an opportunity for our members and members of the State Legislature to network and discuss issues affecting our recreational activity. Soup, sandwiches, and refreshments will be served, and a cash bar available.

**March 28-29, 2026: ATV Minnesota Vision Conference,** at Appeldoorn's Sunset Bay Resort, Isle, Minn. Main meeting with the DNR and other guests is Saturday, with the statewide board meeting on Sunday morning.

### **May 16, 2026: ATV MN Ride & Roast**

Hosted by the Alborn Dirt Devils and located at the community center in Meadowlands, Minn. Guided rides, food and fun, kicking off the 2026 trail riding season. More details and registration at [atvmn.org](http://atvmn.org), tap the Events tab.

### **September 18-20, 2026: ATV MN Ride & Rally**

The 2026 ATV MN State Convention/Ride & Rally will be held in Park Rapids at the Hubbard County Fairgrounds, hosted by local ATV clubs. New ATV routes through town will allow access to and from the trails. More details, including lodging options, are at [atvmn.org](http://atvmn.org), with registration coming soon.



## State-Government Fraud Now Impacting DNR 'Volunteer' Trail Ambassador Program

*(State mandates leave clubs confused, concerned, some dropping participation)*



*Despite the fact that not all ATV MN member clubs are part of the Trail Ambassador Program, we want to make sure all our members and ATV clubs are aware of this important development.*

On January 14 and 21, 2026, the Enforcement Division of the Minnesota DNR held meetings with the Trail Ambassador grant managers, to review the newly revised Trail Ambassador Grant Program application process for the 2026 ATV riding season.

The changes are many, and are getting mixed reviews from ATV clubs that participate in the DNR's volunteer Trail Ambassador Program. At least two clubs have decided to quit the program altogether.

**Why did this happen?** One of the powerpoint slides presented, summed up the reason for the changes. It reads: "With any state funded program, fraud is being watched closely. We need to be very conscientious on how dollars are spent in support of your



Ambassadors and Youth ATV Safety Training programs.” But how did this happen and what does it mean to the many ATV clubs participating in this program that's so important to promoting safe, responsible ATV riding in Minnesota?

According to Bruce Lawrence, Vehicle Recreation Coordinator with the DNR's Division of Enforcement, the changes were directed to Enforcement by the Office of Grants Management, under the Department of Administration.

**Here is a partial list of program changes and new, mandatory requirements.**

•**New - TA clubs must now carry general liability insurance.** It was mentioned at the meetings that TA clubs are now required to have a \$2M insurance policy. In prior years, TA were covered during their trail-monitoring rides under the State of Minnesota's insurance. This announcement caused major concern among clubs following the grant manager meeting. Smaller clubs with 3 or 4 TAs would have to spend their entire TA grant on their insurance policy; one dropped from the TA program. Later, an update from DNR Enforcement reported that the insurance policy requirement would be \$1 million. Most clubs with Grant-in-Aid trails already have the required \$1 million policy for that program, but adding the Trail Ambassador program may increase their premiums. Smaller, social clubs will need to get a policy by March 15th, submitted with their TA application.

•**New - All receipts for TA-related expenses must be sent to the DNR.** In the past, TAs reported their qualified reimbursable expenses and saved the receipts along with their trail ride logs. Now TAs will need to save receipts, send all the originals to their TA grant manager, who will submit them to the DNR. No receipt, no reimbursement.



•**More (and more complicated) paperwork.** TA Grant Managers were told to expect a significantly longer application this year. Clubs will be required to state in writing their "intentions and purpose" of their TA grant on the application (which has always been clear to the clubs and the DNR). Also, they will need to keep a "vendor log" of payments for grant expenditures (supplies for youth safety class, payments to club members for expense reimbursements, etc.). One club quit the TA program 2 years ago because it couldn't find anyone to be the grant manager and take care of all the paperwork.

•**Funds not used by December 1st must be returned to the DNR.** In past, clubs could rollover the funds to the next year and use them for qualified expenses (helmets and other safety equipment, safety education equipment, etc.)

•**DNR wants TAs to ride on a variety of trails,** not just the most popular ones. And now prefers TAs ride from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., but says riding at times between sunrise to sunset is okay. Many TAs prefer to meet with riders as they arrive at trailheads

early in the day. In addition, riding on many trails may be difficult for some clubs, because:

•**Lodging expenses will no longer be reimbursed.** For some clubs, like Bluff Country in SE Minnesota, this presents a financial burden for its TAs. Traveling hundreds of miles to meet the DNR's request requires a one or two night overnight stay at a local hotel or motel. Now at the TA's expense.

•**Meals are also no longer considered a qualified reimbursable expense.** Like hotel expenses, it's another burden for the volunteers monitoring the trails to keep them safe and to educate riders.

•**Participation in events may or may not be considered as time volunteering.** TAs are proud to promote safe, responsible riding at many community events, as well as the State Fair. There is a new form to submit for TAs attending events. Events must now be pre-approved to qualify as a possible qualified reimbursable expense, be included on the trail log and submitted with the application packet prior to the start of the riding season. Parades are not considered events. However, one sheet on the meeting powerpoint presentation says "Events are not reimbursable." Check with your TA grant manager or DNR Enforcement for clarification.

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### Q&A With Bruce Lawrence On Changes To The Trail Ambassador Program

We asked Bruce Lawrence for his thoughts on the TA program changes and how they came about. Thanks to Bruce for his cooperation and helpful answers to our questions.

**Q.** Can new or increased insurance costs be a reimbursable expense?

**A.** "Cost increases to an existing liability policy that result from adding the Trail Ambassador program can be reimbursed through the grant. For example, if the club already has a policy but the cost goes up by adding the TA program, the difference is an eligible expense. Also, if the club did not have a liability policy and must purchase one, the full cost of the premium can be reimbursed through the grant. We do recognize this could create some challenges for clubs with few TAs or not enough trail monitoring hours."

**Q.** Losing lodging as a reimbursable expense will be a major consideration for TAs who must now drive long distances and spend one to two nights to do their TA rides, in order to meet the DNR's expectation for TAs to ride a variety of ABC trails, at their expense. What's the final decision?



**A.** “After contacting the OGM (Office of Grants Management), lodging can be an expense (only by written request).”

**Q.** What if a club has an expense that isn’t on the list of eligible expenses?

**A.** “Clubs wanting to have a variance to the eligible expenses list must submit a written request to the State and have it approved prior to the riding season.”

**Q.** Why is all this happening? Is there now more grant oversight by the State in all agencies because of the recent fraud issues?

**A.** "Correct. All state grants in every state agency must comply with the Department of Administration, Office of Grants Management. The Trail Ambassador program was deemed a competitive grant, which requires it to be conducted like a request for proposal (RFP). That’s the reason for the points-based scoring system, grant application dates/deadlines, and diversity requirement using the ABC trail list. These changes will see considerably more DNR staff time to track and assess program documents and participants throughout the monitoring season.”

**Q.** Was the DNR invited to provide input on the TA program changes?

**A.** “The DNR was informed late in the fall of 2025 that these changes would be required for the 2026 season. Enforcement provided historical grant application procedures, tracking and expenditure frameworks, and allowable expense guidelines to educate OGM staff. However, as a state agency and due to the nature of changes to all grant funded programs, the DNR can only follow the policies and administrative guidelines outlined by the OGM.”

**Bruce Lawrence**

Division of Enforcement

Recreational Vehicle Coordinator

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Camp Ripley, BLDG 2-202

15011 Hwy. 115, Little Falls MN 56345

Phone: 763-267-8534

Email: [bruce.lawrence@state.mn.us](mailto:bruce.lawrence@state.mn.us)



## A Few More Updates From DNR

Following the TA grant manager meetings, the DNR Division of Enforcement sent out emails with the following updates:

### 2026 Trail Ambassador Grant Insurance Requirements

As previously relayed, Club Insurance is required for the 2026 Season, however the minimum general liability limit will be \$1 million, rather than \$2 million. The policy will need to be effective no later than April 1, 2026.

If the insurance is a new expense for your club and you would like to request the premium be an eligible expense, please request that in writing. Please get in contact with your insurance agent, sooner than later, as commercial insurance policies

sometimes take longer to obtain. Reminder: Proof of insurance will need to be provided with your application.

Considering the questions from both sessions of the GM training, we (DNR) followed up with the Office of Grants Management for clarification on a few things. Below are more details:

•**Mileage reimbursement.** We can continue to allow for reimbursement as we have in the past. To calculate the grant funds when you apply for the grant: you are allowed to use 2 hours of drive time per TA, per ride day, for a max of 10 hours per day per TA; however, as a club you can choose to reimburse the actual mileage in accordance with the current IRS rate. If the club chooses to reimburse the full mileage for the TA driving to and from the trail, it is approved even if the drive time is longer than 2 hours.



•**Receipts.** All purchases require a receipt. In rare instances where a receipt is not available – please complete in detail the spreadsheet.

•**Funding for Administration.** The dollar amount to calculate administration funds has changed from \$20.00 to \$23.00.

-Direct Deposit. If your club is interested in direct deposit rather than a paper check, please contact us and we can get the instructions to you – this option may not be for everyone.

-End point. At End Point, an envelope can be provided to you to submit receipts or a scanned/emailed copy will be acceptable. No photos. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Thank you.

Veronica Schilling  
OASI | Division of Enforcement  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



The Safety Training Office  
15011 Hwy 115 – Camp Ripley (2-202)  
Little Falls, MN 56345  
Phone: 320-412-1175  
Email: [veronica.schilling@state.mn.us](mailto:veronica.schilling@state.mn.us)





## BY THE NUMBERS

Here are the latest figures on the highly successful DNR Trail Ambassador Program.

(Source: MN DNR 2024 Volunteer Report)

**17** - Years the program has been in existence.

**180** - Number of DNR-certified TAs currently in the program. They are reimbursed for qualifying expenses, provided through their ATV club's annual DNR grant, from the ATV Dedicated Account.

**1,767** - Total hours monitoring trails that TAs gave of their weekends during 2024.

**33,127** - Total hours TAs monitored trails since the program began in 2018. Using a daily log, TAs report to the DNR any safety hazards, signage issues and washouts, to keep the trails safe for the riding public, as well as educating adults and youth on ATV regulations and trail etiquette.

**14,460** - Total miles of State ATV Trails monitored in 2024.

**102,410** - Total miles of trails monitored since the program began.

**4,192** - Number of regulation books, trail atlases and other materials distributed to riders.

## The Volunteer Trail Ambassador Program Has A History Of Success

*"The Trail Ambassador Program exists to promote rider safety and environmentally responsible operation of OHVs through informational, educational contacts and trail monitoring efforts provided by Trail Ambassadors."* -From the TA grant manager meeting presentation

The TA program started in 2008, with 69 TAs. It grew to over 200, and now stands at about 180.

Oversight and management of the

program is the responsibility of the DNR Division of Enforcement, Safety/Education section.

The DNR reports to the State Legislature, which originally mandated and funded the program. Most legislators have always looked favorably at the program for a variety of reasons. 1) It's inexpensive. The \$250,000 annual expense comes from the ATV Dedicated Account (funded by ATV registration fees and state gas tax paid by ATV owners). To implement the program, DNR Enforcement gets \$25,000 of that amount.

2) It's efficient. Last year, 180 TAs were in the program, with many out on the trails Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and holiday Mondays, educating riders and keeping the trails safe for the riding public.

3) Trail Ambassadors generally exert a positive influence, which has a cumulative effect, with tangible, lasting benefits. Trail Ambassador programs in Minnesota, Wisconsin and other states create a positive image of OHV riders among state legislators and the general public, building support for responsible motorized recreation on public lands.

4) The program has many side benefits. Trail Ambassadors have reported putting out abandoned campfires, coming across lost, dehydrated hikers and bringing them to safety, reporting deep trail washouts immediately following rainstorms to avoid catastrophic rider accidents, and much more.

Clubs vary widely in the number of Trail Ambassadors they have, from 2 to up to 30 or more. Consequently, the size of their annual TA grants also varies, funds which are used not to finance the clubs but to reimburse its volunteer TAs for their qualified, reimbursable expenses.

They visit with riders at trailheads and on the trails, answering questions and passing out OHV Regulation Books, Trail Atlases and other helpful materials. They also help

keep the trails safe by reporting to the DNR damaged or missing signs, and obstacles such as downed trees and washouts, which are quickly repaired by the DNR or ATV clubs.

## **Mixed Reviews From Trail Ambassador Clubs**

It remains to be seen what the impact of the mandates by the Office of Grants Management will have on the DNR Volunteer Trail Ambassador program.

Clubs are now scheduling meetings with their TAs to discuss the changes and, if they decide to continue with the program, create their ride schedules, complete and submit the longer, more complicated application, in order to make the deadlines for 2026.



### **Based on our conversations with TA clubs, the reviews are mixed.**

From a club with many Trail Ambassadors: “We just took on six new TAs for 2026, so we're planning on staying with the program at this time.”

From a club with three TAs: “The DNR Trail Ambassador program is broken, and our club just dropped out. It has become more work than it's worth.”

From a club president: “Requiring the money to be returned if not used by end of year, rather than allowing it to be used for its intended purpose, is not reasonable. It's comparable to going to work and then being required to return any money left at the end of the month to your employer, as if it were a gift, when in reality the club earned this funding through its work.”

From a club responding to losing lodging reimbursements: “In light of the new rules/regulations/mandates, it is untenable for our club to continue in the program. We will not work under that kind of “volunteerism” and, frankly, it's a bit off-putting that they seem to see us as less than adults that don't know any better.”

From a club staying in the program, with a warning about the future: “This could have a trickle-down effect. Some unforeseen issues may arise. It's hard to get volunteers now. Some people may say enough is enough. Many TAs are safety class instructors, and may back off that as well. Fewer TAs could lead to fewer repairs, downed trees removed and damaged signs replaced. Long-term, all this could effect tourism, on what is currently the best ATV trail system in the country.”

Despite the changes, most clubs we spoke with want to continue providing ATV Safety Training Classes. New mandates may be coming for that program, and new mandates for the Grant-in-Aid program are now being reviewed by ATV Minnesota leadership and ATV clubs. Stay tuned.



## **Congratulations to Tom Umphress, Named Chair of AMA Board of Directors**

The American Motorcyclist Association announced that longtime AMA Board Member, and previous Vice Chair, Tom Umphress of Jordan, Minn., was elected chairman at the January board meeting. Umphress has been active in the AMA, serving as a board member of

AMA District 23, representing his charter club, the Twin Cities Trail Riders. In that time, Umphress also served as the Government Relations Officer for AMA District 23. He also served several years on the board of the National Off-Highway Conservation Council (NOHVCC).

In Minnesota, Tom and Karen Umphress manage the Huntersville OHM trail system, and head up the Twin Cities Riders. They both are members of the Coalition of Recreational Trail Users (CRTU), the Minnesota Motorized Trails Coalition (MMTC), and have worked behind the scenes at the capitol for many years, on behalf of all OHV trail clubs and riders in Minnesota. Shoot Tom a congratulatory email at [tom@tnkent.com](mailto:tom@tnkent.com).

**Please Share Your Club's News & Events --** We want to promote your club rides and future events, and share your club's success stories about new trails, charity rides/events, and more. They can be short articles with a few photos, or just a photo and caption (include the who, what, when where details). Send them to David Halsey, ATV MN communications director: [d.halsey@atvmn.org](mailto:d.halsey@atvmn.org). Thanks!



## **ATV MINNESOTA** *"Your Voice To Ride"* *(And Have Fun!)*

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**See the mailing label on your Minnesota Wheelin magazine for your membership renewal date.** Be sure to include your email address on the renewal form we send you to receive our

twice-monthly newsletter. Send renewals to ATV MN, PO Box 300, Stacy, MN 55079. You can also join/renew at [atvmn.org](http://atvmn.org).

Belonging to ATV Minnesota, you join thousands of riders throughout the state, have fun, and help create a positive future for ATV riding in Minnesota.



**As a family or individual member, for \$30, you receive:**

- A subscription to Minnesota Wheelin magazine (published times 6 a year).
- Twice-monthly newsletter by email with the latest news.
- Membership card and ATV MN logo sticker for your ATV.
- Invitations to events, including our Legislative Summit, Vision Conference, Ride & Roast in the spring, and State Convention "Ride & Rally" in the fall, as well as membership meetings.
- A full-time lobbyist at the State Capitol, helping create pro-ATV legislation, and moving forward bills to provide funding for new trail systems.

**As a business member, for \$90 you**

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- Discounts on advertising in Minnesota Wheelin. For details on rates and deadlines, send an email to Creston Dorothy at Pro Print in Duluth: [cdorothy@proprintus.com](mailto:cdorothy@proprintus.com).**
- Opportunities to reach more customers by sponsoring or donating to our events.

To join, contact **ATVAM** or call (800) 442-8826.

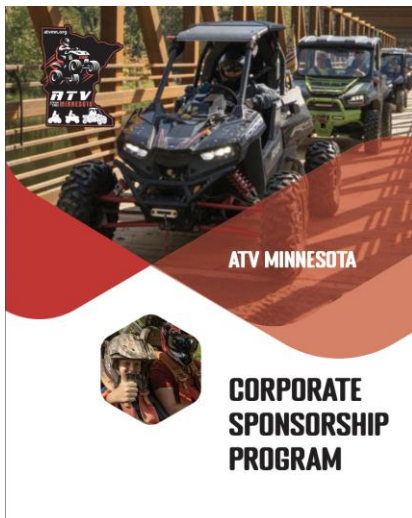


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### **ATV Association of Minnesota**

PO Box 300, Stacy, MN 55079

800-442-8826

[atvmnoffice@atvmn.org](mailto:atvmnoffice@atvmn.org)

[www.atvmn.org](http://www.atvmn.org)

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