



## State ATV Conference Trip Report 18 March 2003 – John Andrews

18 March was an historic day: Maine faced its ATV challenge. More than 300 gathered in the Augusta Civic Center to hear Maine's Governor, Speaker of the House, and Senate President share their thoughts on our ATV problem. George Smith, Executive Director of Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, organized and moderated the day. Thirty panelists and speakers, half from law enforcement, presented the most intense conference I've ever attended. The only break was a few minutes to pick up our box lunches.

During his remarks Governor Baldacci announced the formation of his ATV Task Force whose mission is to recommend ATV solutions by January 2004. Half his Council Members were appointed as well as representative from SAM, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and law enforcement agencies.

That ATV trespass and property damage are out of control and costing fishermen, hunters, snowmobile, and other outdoorsmen loss of access to private land was without dispute. Several speakers described the problem as caused by 10% to 15% of ATV owners. Many panelists told us not to expect the State or the counties to solve the problem. Felonies demand most of their limited law enforcement resources.

Encouraging news came from panelists reporting their success managing ATVs. They included Fort Kent Chief of Police Kenneth "Doody" Michaud; Lt. William Rose, Virginia Dept. of Game and Fisheries; and Sgt. Brian Griffiths of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police based in New Brunswick. Each described solutions based on community participation with municipal law enforcement. For example, Chief Michaud told of visiting homes to talk with ATV owners, parents, and those who had closed their land as a result of ATV property damage. This type of community training is a State of Virginia program. If towns are solving the ATV problem, it seems all we may need is some training and the will.

When Bob Meyers, Executive Director of Maine Snowmobile Assoc., sitting on a panel, was asked to merge its efforts to help ATV owners, he politely pointed out that their access agreements generally exclude ATVs. Snowmobile clubs are potential partner in ATV law enforcement. Their loss of access and threatened loss of land access have mobilized them for action. They locally know many of the offenders. Don Roux (donated ETA's office furniture) and Roger Christensen represented the Sanford Sno Goers. They organized the prototype ATV meeting last December to seek help for their horrific ATV problems.

At least half of the audience wore PRO ATV decals and ATV T-shirts. Yet they were largely silent. The parking lot was filled with trucks loaded with all manner of ATVs. I had lunch with four PRO ATV-wearing owners from Topsham and Norridgewock. They said ATV trespassers must be stopped. And the uneducated must be educated.

Sue Ask, Mt. Agamenticas Reservation Manager, who carpooled with me, reported stopping a group of 6 ATVs and asking them to leave the Mt. A Reserve. She said they apologized and left quietly. More courage than I.