

2/17/11

TESTIMONY

To: Committee on Planning and Development

From: Duncan Broatch

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RE:

RAISED BILL NO. 6261, AAC UNAUTHORIZED USE OF ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES AND  
SNOWMOBILES

My name is Duncan Broatch and I am here representing the New England Trail Riders Association (NETRA) in opposition to the above bill.

This bill basically proposes to increase penalties for all terrain vehicles and dirt bikes (ATV's) that operate on state, municipal or private land without written permission. The proposed changes are: 1) change "infraction" to "offense", 2) charge a fine of \$180 and 3) give 50% of said fine to the municipality where the offense occurred.

I am opposed to this bill because it will do nothing to prevent the illegal operation of ATV's and may even worsen the situation.

The problem is that there are approximately 70,000 ATV's in Connecticut but virtually no legal area to ride on public land. Dealing with the problem by increasing penalties at this point in time is, I believe, counter productive. It will not solve the problem. I believe that we should look at the other end of the problem by providing specific trails for ATV riders to utilize in a prudent fashion. Once the designated trails are provided a registration program can be launched to serve as a monetary source for enforcement and maintenance.

NETRA ([www.netra.org](http://www.netra.org)) is an organization of over 3,000 dirt bike enthusiasts with the common goal of promoting responsible off road motorcycle dirt bike riding. Dirt bikes are included in the legislature's definition of ATV's. NETRA represents Connecticut's dirt bike community which does not include quads (four wheel ATV's). NETRA holds dozens of riding events each year ranging from pee wee events for ages 5 to 11 to Enduro races for street legal riders. These events are held on private property and on state property under single use special permits. NETRA members have logged thousands of hours maintaining trails with an eye to preserving the environment. NETRA strives for a sustainable sport. For example all events begin with a rigorous sound test to ensure that all bikes are quiet.

Connecticut has thousands of acres of public land where many activities are allowed including hiking, mountain biking, horse back riding and hunting. Unfortunately ATV's are not allowed but for a relatively small area of Pachaug State Forest where only street-legal ATV's are allowed. More ATV riding areas are needed and the street-legal designation needs to be dropped to allow participation by the younger segment of ATV riders.

We realize that there are ATV riders that do not ride responsibly by trespassing and operating loud ATV's. We condemn that type of activity. We also realize that ATV riding may be stereotyped by some as a negative

activity. In every sport there is a segment of abusers who disobey the rules and regulations. I submit that, based on my 38 years as a member, the NETRA community of dirt bike riders is comprised of responsible, caring individuals that respect our regulations.

Since 1971, dirt bike riding has been my primary sport and recreational outlet. It is a terrific and totally legitimate activity that offers many rewards including physical exercise, sportmanship and an outlet to appreciate the great outdoors. One of the greatest attributes of riding has been bringing up my son riding with me and seeing him become an enthusiast. This sport has shaped him in many ways - from reinforcing positive spirit to learning how to repair his own equipment. I'll never forget his first Junior Enduro race at the age of 9 when Ethan was stuck in a rut, impaired by a malfunctioning bike, exhausted and crying his eyes out. But he picked up his head, set his aim, gathered all his strengths and managed to overcome the pitfalls by finishing the event and collecting a trophy at the end.

Sometimes kids simply don't have many options when it comes to occupying their time. When kids are bored then not only is it a waste but it is potentially harmful because they can pick up negative traits and activities. Dirt bike riding is an excellent almost year round sport that provides kids with a rewarding challenge. Simply put it is good clean fun. Consequently we should promote responsible dirt bike riding to the maximum practical extent. Our first step should be to allow dirt bike access in state owned land on specific, designated trails.

In my opinion the subject bill is counter productive. We should divert our attention away from the subject bill and towards efforts to designate areas for ATV's to ride on state property and, once that is established, trigger a registration program for ATV's. NETRA counsel is currently working in cooperation with the Transportation Committee on legislation to effect the above. We respectfully request your support.

In summary, what we could be amenable to is the following: A law that requires an ATV registration program to begin immediately after a specific allotment of trails on state land have been designated for ATV use. Designate the trails then start the registration program. If man power is needed NETRA has plenty of individuals ready and willing to help in this effort, including myself.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Duncan S. Broatch