



---

## Riding All-terrain Vehicles in Wisconsin: Results of a 1999-2000 survey of ATV riders

---

### *Introduction*

Between 1999 and 2000 the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) conducted a comprehensive survey of ATV riders in Wisconsin. The principal purpose of the study was to document the amount of gasoline burned in ATV's. The excise taxes recreationists pay on the gasoline they use supports the sport. The survey also documented how ATV riders use their ATV's, their issues and concerns about their sport, and their contacts with law enforcement officials.

### *Background*

There are more than 160,000 registered ATV's in Wisconsin. The popularity of this sport increased rapidly over the past decade, and there are now many more participants than machines on which to ride. A recent recreational survey suggests that nearly 12 percent of Wisconsin's residents had ridden an ATV and projections by University of Wisconsin demographers indicate that the number of participants will increase by about four percent over the next ten years.

### *Study design*

This report is based on the response of Wisconsin ATV riders to a mailed questionnaire. Six thousand riders were selected at random from the WDNR's list of registered ATV's. Each month 500 riders received an advance letter announcing the survey followed by a four page questionnaire. Non-respondents received a follow-up mailing and questionnaire. They were asked to report on their riding activities for that month. This procedure minimizes memory bias: the tendency to forget or distort information over time. The overall response rate to the survey was 73 percent.

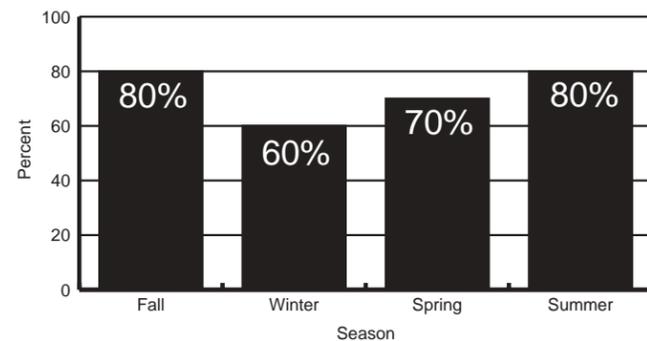


## Principal Findings

### Gasoline consumption

The survey results disclose that ATV riders used their vehicles an average of 68 days per year and that ATVs burned an average of 57 gallons per machine. Estimating that there were 108,000 publicly registered ATVs in Wisconsin, this means that they used a total of 6,156,000 gallons of gasoline and paid \$1,795,000 in excise taxes (.273 cents/gallon).

Figure 1 Seasonal variations in ATV use



### Patterns of use

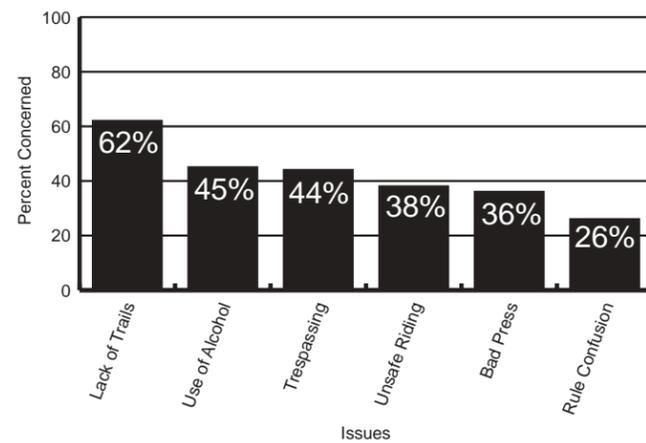
Both the survey data and comments made by ATV riders indicate that ATV riding is a year round sport. Riders use their machines almost as much in the winter as they do during the summer (Fig. 1). This stands in marked contrast with other motorized sports such as snowmobiling or motorboating. Indeed, riders report that the ability to use their machines the year round is one of the reasons for owning an ATV.

*It's a multi-season machine. Not like a snowmobile that you can only run 3 months out of the year.*

*ATV's are also multi-purpose: riders use them for both work and recreation with recreational uses predominating. Riders say that the longer they own their ATV's the more uses they find for them.*

*It's such a handy vehicle. The more you ride them the more you see what they're capable of. Scout for hunting or fishing. Nice to get into a remote area of the woods real quick. Just get off and walk. Go where other people can't go.*

Figure 2 Riders' concerns about safety-related issues

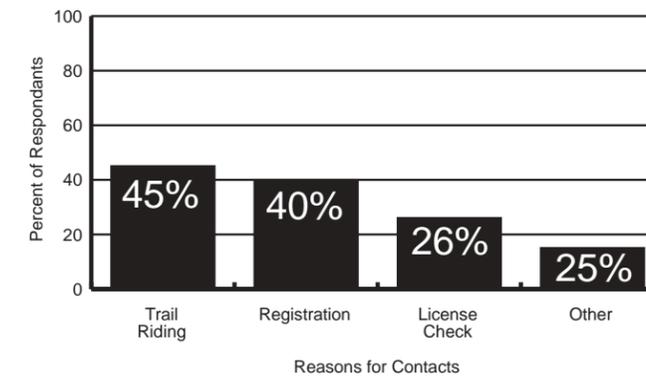


### Issues and concerns

Both the survey results and personal conversations with ATV riders point to a single over-riding concern: a lack of trails on which to ride their machines. A strong majority of respondents—62 percent—rate the lack of trails as the major problem facing their sport (Fig. 2)\*. In the words of one rider: “There are 100,000 ATV's and no trails to ride them on.” This is consistent with an earlier WDNR survey of riders which also found the lack of trails as the leading concern. Secondary concerns include issues that relate to the safety and image of their sport: the abuse of alcohol, trespassing, unsafe riding and negative press reports. Despite these concerns, however, only ten percent feel that there is a lack of law enforcement. They are more likely to say that they are concerned about the lack of safety education and confusion about the rules governing their sport in different parts of the state.

\* Wisconsin has approximately 3,000 miles of winter/summer ATV trails.

Figure 3 Reasons for contacts with law enforcement



### Contacts with Law Enforcement

Slightly more than one ATV rider in ten reported that they had a contact with a law enforcement official in the two years prior to the survey. Most of these contacts were with DNR wardens. These contacts came as the result of trail riding or when wardens checked their licenses (hunting/fishing) or registration, or some other reason (Fig. 3).

ATV riders generally characterized these contacts as positive and said that they were treated courteously. Only 19 percent described the contacts as negative and 16 percent felt that they were treated discourteously (Table 1).

Their personal remarks about these contacts were positive. “My son got stopped because he's under aged. The warden didn't fine us but he warned us. He was nice about it and insisted my son had to have a safety course.” Riders primary concerns included conflicting or uneven law enforcement. Some felt that enforcement varies by area and by the agency doing the enforcing (DNR warden, local sheriff, etc.).

Table 1 ATV riders' rating of contacts with DNR wardens and local sheriffs.

Contact with Law enforcement personnel?	Percent distribution
DNR warden	8%
Local sheriffs	3%
Both warden and local sheriff	2%

Rating of contact with warden and sheriff	Percent distribution
Generally positive	52%
Neutral	30%
Generally negative	19%

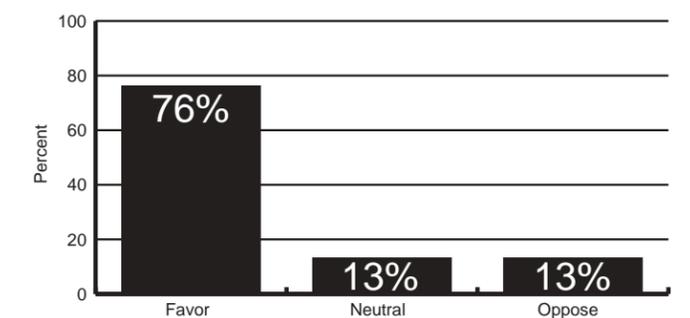
  

Rating of warden's and sheriff's courtesy	Percent distribution
Very courteous	29%
Courteous	56%
Discourteous	12%
Very discourteous	4%

### Support for mandatory ATV training for young riders

There is a strong consensus among respondents that young riders should undergo mandatory training (Fig. 4). Three quarters of those surveyed endorsed the idea of mandatory training. Their comments suggest, however, that they have had difficulty in finding such training for their children. Some long-term riders say that they have benefited from attending training classes. In the words of one rider: “I had to go up to Michigan and take the ATV class because it was not available here. I did that and it was well worth it. I think everybody should go.”

Figure 4 Riders' support for youth ATV mandatory training



## Background characteristics

Table 2 discloses three main points:

- \* ATV riders are middle aged—mean age is 46 years old.
- \* A majority have access to the internet.
- \* A majority reside in the northern part of the state.

**Table 2:** Background characteristics of ATV riders.

	Percent
<b>Age</b>	
Under 18 years	1%
18–25 years	5%
26–35 years	15%
36–45 years	29%
46–55 years	26%
56–65 years	16%
66 years and older	9%
Mean age	46
<b>Have access to the Internet</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Location of primary residence (WI)</b>	
Northern region	26%
West central region	25%
Northeast	25%
South central region	12%
Southeast region	12%

***For more information about the Wisconsin ATV program contact DNR  
LE Office at 608-267-2772 or email: [breisp@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:breisp@dnr.state.wi.us)***

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to: Equal Opportunity Office, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

This publication is available upon request in alternate formats (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc.) upon request. Please call (608) 276-0531 for more information.



Division of Enforcement and Science  
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
PO BOX 7921  
Madison, WI 53707-7921  
PUB-SS-959 2002

