Maine ATV Coalition Read-Ahead

Sustainable Funding for Maine's Motorized Trail System

Prepared for the Maine Trails Coalition Sustainable Funding Roundtable
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The Maine ATV Coalition supports a permanent, long-range trail funding strategy for Maine. Our position is straightforward: Maine needs to fund the full system that keeps trails open, not just individual trail projects.

ATV and snowmobile trails are a major part of Maine's outdoor recreation economy, especially in rural communities. They support fuel stations, restaurants, lodging, repair shops, dealerships, contractors, events, tourism, and local businesses. But the system behind those trails is fragile. It depends heavily on private landowners, volunteer clubs, reimbursement-based grants, registration revenue, insurance, and limited enforcement capacity.

In Maine, private landowners make up roughly 92% of the trail access foundation. That means landowner confidence is not a side issue. It is the foundation of the system. A trail can be lost before it washes out. It can be lost when a landowner loses confidence, when rider behavior is not addressed, when enforcement is not visible, or when a club no longer has the volunteers to manage the relationship.

MAC believes the long-range funding discussion needs to focus on one core question:

How does Maine permanently fund the people, clubs, landowners, enforcement, insurance, and administrative capacity that keep the trail system open?

Available funding is not always usable funding

Many ATV clubs are volunteer-run organizations with no paid staff, grant writers, accountants, engineers, or project managers. A funding program can be technically open to clubs and still be functionally out of reach.

That is one of the concerns with both MTP and RTP. RTP has historically been difficult for clubs to use, and since MTP became available, RTP has been removed from practical local use in 2025 and 2026, with current understanding that it will remain limited to state projects while MTP is available. MTP is a valuable opportunity, but it was modeled too closely on RTP and remains too complicated for many typical ATV clubs.

The new MTP portal may help experienced applicants, but it does not solve the real barriers: project scoping, grant writing, match, reimbursement, accounting, permitting, documentation, and volunteer time. MAC supported the creation of MTP and has worked to make it useful, but we warned early that unless the process was made much simpler, many ATV clubs would watch the funding come and go without being able to fully use it.

MTP also is not permanent. It is bond funding. Once the $30 million is allocated, Maine will still need a long-term funding structure that supports trails, clubs, and landowners after the bond money is gone.

Clubs need operating support, not just construction grants

ATV clubs are maintaining public recreation infrastructure on private land. They handle landowner permissions, trail work, insurance, signs, maps, grant paperwork, reimbursement records, nonprofit filings, complaints, equipment, fundraising, and volunteer recruitment.

This system is approaching the point where it is too large and too important to run entirely on unpaid volunteer labor. Long-range funding should begin considering ways to support club operations directly. That may include technical assistance, grant navigators, shared bookkeeping, officer training, startup support for new clubs, regional trail staff, stipends, or eventually paid trail-management positions where justified.

A bridge grant is helpful, but someone still has to insure, inspect, sign, maintain, document, and defend that trail after the project is complete.

Insurance and enforcement are trail infrastructure

MAC currently coordinates general liability coverage for 68 clubs statewide. Those clubs have reported roughly 4,000 members, with some overlap. Premiums had already exceeded $50,000 when MAC covered 66 clubs. Insurance is not optional. It protects clubs, officers, volunteers, landowners, and the trail system itself.

Current reimbursement helps, but clubs still have to apply, pay first, document the expense, and wait for reimbursement. A long-range funding strategy should consider direct state payment of required club insurance, a statewide or coordinated ORV insurance structure, and D&O coverage as a standard operating cost.

Enforcement must also be treated as part of trail sustainability. Landowners need to know that rules matter. Clubs should not be expected to police the trail system alone. MAC believes Maine should consider dedicated trail patrol or trail constable positions whose role would include visible trail presence, rider education, safety observations, warnings or citations where authorized, and fast connection to law enforcement when needed.

Enforcement is not separate from funding. It is one of the tools that keeps landowners willing to keep trails open.

Riders and beneficiaries need to help carry the system

There is a large gap between trail users and club supporters. Maine has more than 70,000 registered ATVs, while MAC-insured clubs report roughly 4,000 members. Even allowing for overlapping memberships, family memberships, and multiple machines per household, the imbalance is obvious.

Maine should examine a lawful rider-support mechanism. This could include proof of club membership at registration, a nonmember trail-support fee, or a dedicated registration assessment distributed directly to trail-maintaining clubs. The goal is not to punish riders. The goal is to make sure everyone using the system helps support the clubs keeping it open.

Even a modest support fee could generate more than $1 million annually for local clubs. That revenue could help with administrative costs, insurance gaps, landowner relations, signs, bookkeeping, startup support, and eventually part-time or salaried trail staff.

Businesses that directly benefit from trail access should also be part of the discussion. Fuel stations, restaurants, lodging providers, repair shops, dealerships, campgrounds, and local vendors all benefit when trail systems are open and connected. Voluntary sponsorships are helpful, but Maine should also explore structured trail-town partnerships, municipal support, event-based contributions, or other legally workable models.

New revenue must be protected

MAC is open to discussing new revenue, including registration adjustments, machine-class fees, nonmember trail-support fees, enforcement surcharges, or other user-pay models. But any new money must be dedicated in law to the trail system.

New revenue should support trail grants, club capacity, landowner support, enforcement, education, insurance, mapping, signage, startup assistance, and program administration. MAC cannot support new fees that disappear into unrelated accounts or simply replace existing ORV funding.

Bottom line

Maine cannot grow the outdoor recreation economy by only funding projects. It must invest in the full system that keeps access open.

For motorized trails, that system includes clubs, volunteers, landowners, insurance, enforcement, education, administration, signs, maps, and long-term funding that local trail organizations can actually use.

MAC wants to be a constructive partner in building that future. Our concern is not simply that ATV clubs need more money. Our concern is that Maine’s current funding structure does not fully support the people and relationships that make the trail system possible.