

# The Citizen News of Laconia

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Winter rescue capabilities enhanced by addition of fire dept. snowmobiles  
Alton:

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## Winter 2010/11

The Alton Fire Department now has two snowmobiles to add to its off-road rescue capabilities during the winter months.

Last month, the Fire Department received a donation from the Alton Firemen's Association of two snowmobiles with a trailer along with a retrofitted rescue sled that can be towed behind the snowmobiles to transport injured persons from the lakes and remote areas such as the woods or mountains during the snowy season.

The department's current off-road rescue vehicle is a Polaris Ranger, a four-wheel, all-terrain vehicle that has some limitations when large amounts of snow are present. Deputy Chief Ed Consentino said the Ranger can usually be used three out of the four seasons, with winter being the exception.

"We do have chains for it so we can go on the ice, but we cannot use it in the deep snow," Consentino said. "Without some sort of snow system, we wouldn't be able to use it."

Since the Ranger cannot make it through deep snow, the department has had to use other resources to get to the lake, such as using a personal snowmobile from one of the firefighters in the department.

At one point the department sought to get snow tracks for the Ranger, which are similar to what Sno-Cat groomers are equipped with at ski areas. However after doing research it was found that the transmission of the machine could be compromised if snow tracks were added to the Ranger since they aren't designed for them.



DARYL CARLSON/CITIZEN  
PHOTO ALTON FIREFIGHTER  
Patrick O'Brien starts up the second of two snowmobiles recently purchased by the department from donated funds.

Another reason why the department decided to not go with the snow tracks was because of the overall cost between maintenance and purchasing. Consentino said the total price of the snowmobiles, trailer and sled (\$5,000) was less than what it would have taken to convert the Ranger with the snow tracks.

"Because of the different weather throughout the year, you need equipment for the different seasons," Consentino said.

Both of the snowmobiles are used but are in relatively new condition. One is a 1998 Polaris which has around 2,000 miles on it and the other is a 2002 model with just over 30 miles on it.

The snowmobiles are equipped with a light-indicator RideLite communication safety system which eliminates the need to use hand signals to tell oncoming snowmobiles how many members are in a group.

While riding on the trails in groups, there are usually hand signals given to oncoming traffic. With the RideLite communication safety system, a small unit is placed on the left side of the snowmobile that emits a yellow light to indicate to riders that others are behind. When the light is green, it indicates they are the last rider in the group.

Another item the department was able to obtain with the money was a rescue sled.

"We took the front end of a snowmobile and bought some steel, then we fabricated a rescue sled like the one we had seen," Consentino said. "It works very well and it cost us all of \$100."

Firefighter Pat O'Brien did some research on getting a rescue sled, reviewing specifications and photos. Instead of getting a factory manufactured sled, the department was able to make their own sled by taking the front suspension of an old snowmobile and welding it to a steel beam. The sled can carry supplies to remote locations and can carry someone in case of an emergency situation.

"All of the island properties that we have out there were virtually inaccessible before we got this equipment," O'Brien said. "I don't know the exact number of miles of the snowmobile trails, but I rode the trails just in town for upward of four to five hours. This is a great addition to the department."

Having the snowmobiles gives the fire department access to the lake during the winter season when the ice is thick enough, as well as the snowmobile trails.

"It gives us capability to go onto the lake and rescue people if need be, something we couldn't do before," Consentino said. "Being part of the mutual aid system, other departments can call for them if they don't have them."

Other departments in the area with snowmobiles include Moultonborough, New Durham, Gilmanton, and Meredith.