

Winona Forest Recreation Association Trail Maintenance Equipment Policy, Grooming Policy and Program Plan

Name of Club: *Winona Forest Recreation Association*

County: *Oswego and Jefferson Counties*

Date Reviewed: _____

Equipment and Grooming Manager: *Association's Trail Steward*

Introduction:

It is understood that Winona Forest Recreation Area, is a four season area. The area making up Winona Forest Recreation Area encompasses State Land, County Land, various Municipalities, as well as some private land owners. Each of these property owners has specific requirements and it is understood that these requirements, guidelines or regulations supercede any part of this document when on the appropriate property

For ease of organization and understanding this document is divided into five sections.

1. General
2. Year around
3. Trail Maintenance
4. Winter Grooming
5. Non Winter Grooming

Section 1. General

Purpose:

It is the purpose of this Trail Maintenance Equipment Policy, Grooming Policy and Program document to state the goals and objectives of the Association's grooming and trail maintenance program, list the topics and policies that all association's members involved with grooming and trail maintenance, need to understand, and provide details that explains what each person needs to do. It is the listing of topics, policies, and details which form the basis of the programs equipment operators training. It is the responsibility of the Winona Forest Recreation Association to work within this policy and program.

This document does not supercede any contract, law, or policy as established by the appropriate government agency. Such agencies are, but not limited to, New York State DEC, primary controlling agency for Winona State Forest, Jefferson County Legislature (or designee) primary controlling agency for Jefferson County Forest known as Winona Tract.

Goals and Objectives:

Meet the legal mandate on the association in providing annual training to those association members participating in grooming and trail maintenance of association trails.

Provide leadership and guidance of association members in the association's grooming and trail maintenance program by stating Program procedures, guidelines, rules, policies, and other expectations that currently are part of the grooming and trail maintenance program.

Determine the procedures and tasks experienced grooming members must complete to maintain their current status.

Determine procedures and tasks for other association members that are not currently part of the association's Trail Maintenance and Grooming Program.

Review:

This document is subject to review each year. This review shall be attested to by Chairperson of the Board of Directors and Program Manager.

Program Management:

The Association's Trail Maintenance and Grooming program is to be managed by the Trail Steward.

As safety is a major factor within this program, a Safety Officer will be selected from the Trail Crew.

Program Management Responsibilities:

Schedule equipment pre-season maintenance in the fall.

Solicit from the association membership those members that want to continue serving as an equipment operator and secure new operators that want to enter the Grooming Program.

Schedule training of all equipment operators following the training guidelines as issued in document.

Determine equipment operator teams

Design a grooming territory responsibility for each grooming team

Seek Board of Directors and/or association approval for those things deemed necessary for the smooth operation of the Trail Maintenance and Grooming Program.

Collect all paperwork from each machine including maintenance records and activity logs. Enter activity log data into appropriate worklogs as necessary to meet funding program mandates. Review maintenance logs to determine if operators completed tasks as expected and determine if major equipment repair is necessary.

Make recommendations to the association of grooming equipment revisions.

Submit to the Board of Directors when requested budget plans that would need association approval at its annual meeting.

Section 2. Year Around

Safety:

The safety of those working on or using the trail system is priority number one.

All Trail Crew personnel are to wear safety vest when on the trail system.

1. Doing this provides a high level of visibility of the crew member when working on the trail system.
2. When wearing the vest, the public can clearly identify the fact you are authorized to be out performing the task you are under taking.

All trail crew members are required to document any safety hazard they come upon.

1. If it is reasonable and safe the safety hazard is to be corrected immediately.
2. If not reasonable and/or safe, the hazard is to be clearly marked with warning flags.
3. Report all hazards to the trail steward, and if not available report it to the safety officer.

If neither is available, use your best judgment in deciding if the trail requires closure and take appropriate action.

4. It is the responsibility of the Trail Steward or the Safety Officer to assure the appropriate action is taken. This action includes temporary trail closure, and the notification of the appropriate authority.

5. Regardless of the safety hazard, everyone is required to document their findings on the appropriate form (Project Planning Sheet One).

Chainsaw operation;

1. Only people on the authorized list shall operate chainsaw equipment anywhere on the trail system.
2. Chainsaw operation is not a one person job. At anytime when operating a chainsaw, you must have another person in the immediate area capable of summoning help should it be required.
3. All people involved in this work are required to wear the appropriate protective equipment.

Tree Trimming or removal;

1. At anytime overhead tree trimming or tree cutting is taking place on a trail; the trail is to be temporarily closed. Appropriate warning signs are to be placed appropriately on the trail, warning everyone, the trail is temporarily closed prior to entry to that section of the trail.
2. All people involved in this work are required to wear the appropriate protective equipment.

3. Tree removal is an absolute last resort, and may only be done within the guidelines established by the appropriate controlling agency. Rule of thumb – cut no tree without permission.

Emergency Response:

As a regular user of Winona Forest your in depth knowledge of both the trail system and our equipment could be of great value in an emergency. All available association resources will be made available to the responsible agency for use in responding to an emergency.

Such emergencies would include:

1. Search and rescue efforts for a missing/lost person.
2. An accident on the trail system
3. Fire
4. A declared state of emergency i.e.; snow or flood

During such a response only experience operators shall operate association equipment.

No association member shall exceed their training or experience level.

When responding to an appropriate emergency, equipment use will be directed by the controlling agency. Association members are to work with such an agency however must call on their knowledge and experience to limit such use. Do not take unnecessary risk to life or equipment

Warning Beacons;

All motorized equipment used in trail maintenance are to be equipped with warning beacons, either strobe or rotating.

When any motorized equipment is operating or temporarily parked on the trail system they must have their lights and warning beacons turned on.

Non Motorized equipment;

Any towed non motorized equipment used on the trail shall be equipped with a slow moving vehicle warning placard.

Drug/Alcohol Policy

Zero tolerance.

1. Absolutely no drugs or alcohol are allowed during any trail maintenance activity.
2. Absolutely no drugs or alcohol are allowed on or in any equipment owned or operated by the Association. This applies to both operator and any passengers.
3. Anyone involved in any trail maintenance or grooming is not allowed to take part in such activity under the influence of any drug or alcohol.

Communications:

When work is taking place on the trail system it is critical that this information is communicated to the trail steward.

Regardless of the work performed, you must record this information on a Volunteer Work Ticket. At a minimum you must record;

Date and time work was done.

What work was done and on what trail.
Who was there working.
Equipment used.

Anytime you are out working on the trail system you must have a means of communicating with someone to summon help. At a minimum you must have a cell phone with you, but it is preferred you take an association two way radio.

Caution – cell phones do not work everywhere in the Forest.

Telephone – there is telephone service at the CCC Camp for emergency use only.

The radio system used here is programmed to handle many frequencies and you must operate on the proper channels. You are cautioned there are many that can hear you, and improper use is illegal. Use of police, DEC, or other programmed emergency frequencies is not authorized for general use.

Personal Property:

The association is not responsible for the use or replacement of personal property used on the trail system. Any personal property used is the sole responsibility of the owner, and the owner must have all appropriate license and insurance.

When any association member uses their personal equipment in authorized trail maintenance or trail grooming, the Association agrees to replace the fuel consumed. This will be accomplished in the following method;

1. Prior to starting your task, you are requested to have a full tank.
2. When you are done for the day, you are authorized to refill your fuel tank with association provided fuel.
3. If no fuel is available, you may provide a valid receipt from a service station covering only the amount consumed. On the back of receipt note, name, date, and work done. A check will be issued only with the proper documentation.

At the discretion of the Association, consumable items may be replaced, if need for replace is directly related to trail work. Examples of such items would be chainsaw chains, bar oil, spark plugs, or equipment drive belts. Proper documentation must be provided.

Section 3. Trail Maintenance

Trail Maintenance General: Trail maintenance is the responsibility of all association members. All association members are asked to volunteer some time to improvement and maintenance of the trail system. For those that are limited, there are plenty of other tasks that need assistance.

Volunteer:

Anyone may volunteer time to work on the trail system.

All volunteers must sign in on the Volunteer Work Ticket.

As the majority of our trail system is within DEC Property, all volunteers must be listed with the DEC as a trail volunteer. If not already listed, you may complete the form on the day of the activity.

All volunteers must know their limits and agree to work within these limits.

Use of Association owned equipment is restricted to authorized trail crew members.

A record of work planned and accomplished must be recorded on the Volunteer Work Ticket.

Trail Crew Member:

1. Any association member may be a member of the trail crew. Any member under the age of 18 must have written parental permission and will have strict limitations as to the work they can do.
2. A Trail Crew member must be willing to donate time to help in the maintenance of the trail system.
3. A Trail Crew member agrees to take part in necessary training.
4. A Trail Crew member agrees to abide by this document.
5. Anyone volunteering to be a Trail Crew member must know their physical limits and agree to work within these limits.
6. Trail Crew members are authorized to operate Association equipment upon meeting any required qualifications and/or training requirements.

Trail Captain:

1. They shall be a responsible member of the Association.
2. By accepting the responsibility for a specified trail, the Trail Captain agrees to routinely inspect their assigned trail.
3. They agree to report these findings to the trail steward for remediation.
4. It is critical trails are inspected, at a minimum, prior to the start of winter and then again in the early spring.

Section 4. Winter Grooming

Passenger in the Groomer Policy:

Passengers in the groomer are limited to Association members or a person serving in an official capacity, i.e.; DEC, Police, or Rescue Personnel.

Any passenger must be made to understand that operation of the groomer requires 100% attention. This not a joy ride and any kind of distractions are not allowed.

Grooming Teams

With the diverse type of equipment, the individual level of commitment of crew members, and level of experience, the following teams have been established.

Trail Crew Member;

Are authorized to operator association snowmobiles.

Trail Opener/Buster;

The request for trail opening shall come from trail steward or an authorized groomer operator. The Trail Steward or Groomer Operator must clearly state what trails are to be opened.

Every effort will be made to perform this task in off peak time, which is usually in the evenings.

The purpose of this team is to prepare a trail for grooming.

This preparation shall consist of using snowmobiles to break open deep snow and pack the trail down in order to allow for better trail grooming.

This preparation will further consist of breaking open the trail to as wide as conditions will allow – not follow the leader.

When performing this task at least two snowmobiles will go out together.

Each group must have at least one radio and be able to speak with groomer operator or grooming base. All people must have a safety vest on at all times.

When trail opening it is critical that trees down and open water are accurately reported to the groomer operator and/or grooming base.

Class C – Snowmobile Groomer Operator (SGO)

All SGO's must attend pre season training.

Within this group there are three classifications.

1. Trainee

Must be a Trail Crew Member.

Must be an experienced snowmobile operator.

Must be physically fit and capable of heavy lifting under extreme conditions.

Must receive instruction on grooming principles and process.

Will only operate Snowmobile Groomer with a second snowmobile working in the same area.

2. SGO Operator

Has completed trail grooming supervised by a qualified Snowmobile Groomer Operator.

It is the responsibility of the supervising SGO, Team Leader, and Trail Steward to determine if the trainee has reached the level of experience and capability to become a SGO.

Is responsible to work within the grooming plan, and groom only trails designated.

Fully understand the limits of the equipment they are using.

Must have read and understand the instruction manual for the Mogul Master, and other related grooming equipment.

3. Snowmobile Groomer Team Leader
 - Must be a SGO operator
 - Must have completed and documented at a minimum of one season of grooming.
 - At a minimum, must have read and understand “Guidelines for Snowmobile Trail Groomer Operator Training” or have attended a New York State sponsored training program
 - Be willing to be the primary contact for each operator assigned to the snowmobile groomers.
 - Respond when contacted by an operator in the event of a breakdown, an accident or a trail condition that cannot be resolved by the operator.

Class A/B Groomer Operator

All Groomer Operators must attend the Association pre season training.

Within this group there are four classifications.

1. Trainee
 - Any Association Trail Crew Member may become a groomer operator. As a groomer operator you must make a commitment to be available as part of a regular grooming schedule and to assist in repairs when that becomes necessary.
 - Must attend the New York State sponsored groomer operator safety course before becoming a qualified operator.
 - Must become a grooming partner to work with an experienced groomer operator to learn how to groom the trail system and take care of the equipment.
 - Must accompany an experienced groomer operator in the machine while it is grooming the Association trails, until being deemed able to operate the machine alone as judged by the experienced groomer operator.
 - Attend preseason equipment maintenance work details.
 - Attend the association annual groomer operator training held before the season begins.
2. Operator
 - Will have attended the New York State sponsored groomer operator safety course within the past three years.
 - Will have read and understand “Guidelines for Snowmobile Trail Groomer Operator Training” manual.
 - Will maintain trails to the established width.
3. Experienced Operator
 - Will have attended the New York State sponsored groomer operator safety course at least every five years.
 - Will have completed at a minimum one season of grooming, with documented grooming hours in that season totaling a minimum of forty hours.
 - Only experienced groomer operators will set trail width.
4. Class A/B Groomer Team Leader
 - Is the primary contact for each operator assigned to the machine.

Respond when contacted by the operator in the event of a breakdown, an accident or a trail condition that cannot be resolved by the operator.

Winter Trail Season

Provided the snow conditions permit and there is appropriate weather, the winter grooming season will start the day after the last day of hunting season in the northern tier.

Prior to the start of grooming on any trail, they must be inspected to assure the safe passage of grooming equipment.

As the end of the season approaches, weather and trail conditions will be considered when determining at what point grooming will stop on a trail segment. When trail conditions reach the point where they can not be safely groomed, the operation on that trail segment will be terminated. It is the responsibility of the Team Leaders, Safety Officer and Trail Steward to make this determination.

The last day of grooming will be April 1st, when the seasonal roads are opened again for routine maintenance.

Grooming Schedule

Each fall and prior to the beginning of the grooming season, the grooming team leaders will meet to determine appropriate groomer territory assignments.

It will be up to each team leader to determine a specific grooming time schedule for their specific machine.

Groomer operators should avoid grooming in the territory assigned to another machine unless requested by the team leaders to do so.

Weather remains the largest determining factor with actual grooming schedule. Considered within weather will be the condition of the trail system at the time of scheduling specific resources. How frozen, wet, and snow coverage on the woodland trails is the largest governing factor with regards to woodland trails.

Forest use will be the other determining factor. It will be the primary goal of the grooming schedule to open and maintain all trails for general public use. Special effort and attention will be given to event specific trails and grooming requirements.

All Groomer Operator Responsibilities

Each groomer operator is responsible for following the procedures listed in each category below each and every time a machine is taken onto the trails.

Plan:

Each time a groomer goes out, there must be a plan.

This plan will clearly state what trails will be worked on. If there is a change to this plan once underway, it must be communicated.

The plan must be reviewed and approved by the Team Leader or the Trail Steward prior to starting operation.

Every time a groomer goes out a responsible person must know where it is going, what time it is leaving, expected return time to the base, and who will be in the groomer.

Once returned to base, you must check in.

Pre-Grooming Checklist;

Regardless of the piece of equipment you must complete a pre-grooming checklist for that specific piece of equipment.

Standard Operating Procedures and guidelines for equipment operation.

Post-Grooming Checklist;

Upon completion of a grooming run you must complete the post-grooming checklist for that specific piece of equipment.

Meeting Oncoming Traffic

Meeting oncoming traffic on a narrow trail:

The groomer must come to a stop.

Allow traffic to go around you.

If needed, maneuver the groomer to make room for traffic.

Grooming equipment should not be moving when a snowmobile passes you on a narrow trail.

Equipment:

The following is a minimum list of equipment each groomer operator must have in the groomer or on their person before leaving on a grooming trip.

Association Snowmobile Equipment List:

Spare belt

At least one set of NEW spark plugs

Map

Two orange safety flags

Tow rope or strap

Working flashlight

Portable Radio

Shovel

Class A/B Groomer

Four orange safety flags

Working flashlight

Portable radio

Safety Vest for everyone in groomer

Map
First Aid Kit
Fire Extinguisher
Foil Rescue Blanket
Hand Towels
Hand Cleaner
Snow Scraper
Shovel
Tow Chain
Motor Oil
Hydraulic Oil
Pre mixed Anti Freeze
Butane Torch/Heater
Chainsaw

Repairs

Invariably when using equipment that is under the stress and strain of trail grooming, repairs will be required. Repairs are not the normal routine maintenance activities that every groomer operator needs to know and follow. Repairs result from breakdowns; repairs need immediate attention. If the grooming equipment you are operating begins to malfunction, you are to terminate grooming operations immediately. If you can safely operate the equipment without doing further damage, return it to the groomer base. The secondary stops are the CCC Camp on the North side of the Forest and Parking Lot #1 on the South end of the Forest. Otherwise park it.

Repairs are the responsibility of the entire grooming team, not the team leader. Each groomer operator is expected to assist whenever possible to complete repairs.

If a breakdown occurs that does not disable the groomer, report the breakdown as soon as possible to the team leader so that repairs can be done quickly.

Disabling Breakdowns

If a breakdown disables the groomer so that it cannot be moved back to its place of storage, the groomer operator needs to follow these guidelines:

Secure the area around the machine so that snowmobile traffic does not hit the disabled machine. Immediately place warning flags in both directions on the trail. Be sure these markings carry far enough in each direction approaching the groomer so that the public will be able to react to safely get around the machine. Call for assistance and have them bring out safety cones and caution tape to be placed around the disabled equipment.

Document the condition of the disabling breakdown scene and if you have a camera, take pictures.

Contact the team leader and/or Trail Steward. Provide them with information on location, your condition, obstructions to snowmobile traffic flow on the trail around the groomer, and advice on

whether repairs can be made at the current location or if the machine needs to be moved to a location to either be repaired or transported.

Stops (Basically all stops are either planned or unplanned.)

A **planned stop** is one to make checks on the exterior of the groomer or to inspect the trail to determine if drag settings are being effective. Planned stops need to be made in locations where traffic can easily see the machine and its drag, and can easily pass the groomer while it is stopped.

An **unplanned stop** is one that is unexpected, and results from either a disabling breakdown or an accident. The operator needs to do all it can to maneuver the groomer as far off the trail as possible and follow the procedures listed above.

Groomer involved in an accident

First responsibility is to the condition of the other parties. You are required to contact the base immediately and if unable to contact the base directly contact emergency response personnel (including law enforcement) and the team leader by any means available. Caution cell phones are very limited within the Forest. All radios are programmed with emergency frequencies. Give accurate information of the location and an assessment of the condition of the other parties.

The Trail Steward, Safety Officer and/or Team Leader are to respond all necessary equipment and manpower needed to assist at the scene. The base station is to be manned until the scene is stabilized and under control of emergency personnel.

Once the accident has been resolved, use the camera to document the accident scene. Get information such as name and address of the other party in the accident.

Groomer comes upon an accident scene

First responsibility is to the condition of those involved in the accident. Be ready to provide whatever assistance as necessary. When the accident scene has been secured or your services are no longer needed, use a camera to document the accident scene, otherwise clearly mark on a map details of the site. Take good notes.

Observations of trail conditions

As the groomer operator, you could be the first person to identify areas in the trail that need the association's attention. Some examples are missing signs and blown down trees. It is up to the groomer operator to take the first mitigating action

Section5. Non Winter Grooming

Trail maintenance is a year a round activity.

Almost all major trail improvements and rehabilitation must take place during the non winter months.

It is understood that the better the trails are during non winter months, the better they will be during the winter.

Non winter activities include such things as;

- Trail clean up – trash
- Brush Hogging
- Tree trimming
- Repair of trail damage and wet areas
- Bridge maintenance
- Culvert maintenance
- Sign maintenance

All work activities must be approved prior to starting.

All work will be documented on the Volunteer Work Ticket.

For reasons of safety, trail work will be limited during the hunting season.