

Technical Study

***Off-Road Vehicles:
Stakeholders' Responsibilities, Networks and Use***

WORKING PAPER

Summary

This technical study is part of the planning process of the Transportation Plan of Nord-du-Québec. The objective is to draw a portrait of the system of off-road vehicle transportation and its use in the region. The Nord-du-Québec region, located between the 49th parallel and the northern limit of Québec, is the largest administrative region of the province. The territory is divided on either side of the 55th parallel with James Bay to the south and the Nunavik to the north.

Although the Crees and the Inuit now have varied sources of income, a large number of them still count on hunting and fishing for part of their food requirements. The use of off-road vehicles is often necessary to traditional activities. Contrarily, Jamesians (non-Aboriginal people of James Bay), use off-road vehicles for recreational purposes mainly.

The main impact of off-road vehicles on the community is probably to allow Aboriginal people to enjoy better food supplies. No study has yet allowed to measure the impact of off-road vehicles on the environment in Nord-du-Québec; therefore, no assertion can be made on the magnitude of the problems created by this use. However, considering the low density of the population versus the immensity of the territory, the impacts would be localized. Special attention should be given to the polluting emissions of vehicles, treading of vegetation, ground compaction and contamination of watercourses from the continual rejection of part of the gas-oil mixture. At a human level, the impacts are however the risks of major accidents as well as the development of hearing problems to the users not wearing helmets.

According to the Pre-analysis carried out by the Ministère des Transports in June 2001, there were several requests from the Nord-du-Québec population. More particularly, the population requests more marked snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails, a reduction of sales taxes on snowmobiles, ATVs and gas, as well as of the cost of parts and the waiting period before getting the parts.

Several intervention leads are proposed, mainly the promotion of membership to off-road vehicle clubs, an increased users' awareness to impaired driving and the impacts on health and the environment, as well as increased supervision of the trails by a larger number of police officers. It is also a priority to make sure the clubs have the resources they need to better assume their responsibilities. In this respect, more consultation between government and local representatives would contribute to the development of an overview. Furthermore, information dissemination on registration and driving permit regulations in the Nord-du-Québec Aboriginal communities must also be improved to clarify certain legal procedures and requirements. Besides, any intervention regarding off-road vehicles should take into account the large number of stakeholders. Considering that the Crees and the Inuit mainly use snowmobiles and ATVs for subsistence activities, government intervention planning in Nord-du-Québec should place this aspect in the centre of any decision, especially when adapting regulations.

