

ALASKA STATE SENATE

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Senate Bill 85 Sponsor Statement

“An Act repealing the ban on the use of certain off-road vehicles within five miles of the right-of-way of the James Dalton Highway.”

A substantial portion of Alaska’s landmass lies on the north side of the Yukon River. Only one road exists in that entire area – the James Dalton Highway. Current law, with very limited exceptions, unilaterally bans the use of off-road vehicles within five miles of the highway’s right-of-way starting at mile 57 (the Yukon River crossing) and extending 357 miles north to the Arctic Ocean.

This law (AS 19.40.210) essentially prohibits access for average Alaskans to recreate on tens of millions of acres of public lands that would otherwise be open to their use. Senate Bill 85 *removes* the prohibition on the use of off-road vehicles within the five mile right-of-way of the Dalton Highway 12 months *after* the bill becomes law.

With the removal of the ban, this legislation clears the way for land owners to develop and implement land use plans for the first time. Then, in accordance with these plans, campgrounds, trails and public-use cabins could be built all while protecting sensitive areas. In this respect it would be no different from many other parts of the state where multiple user groups co-exist while maintaining certain restrictions where necessary.

On the Dalton, the fact is the Bureau of Land Management already has turnouts, restrooms and visitor centers constructed to accommodate increased public interest in this part of Alaska. Planned, orderly recreational development along the Dalton is not a matter of time — it’s a reality today. What’s more, the BLM has already prepared a Dalton Highway management plan. But it’s been sitting on a shelf since 1991 waiting for the state to remove the outdated ban on off road vehicles.

Continued prohibition of off-road vehicles will only foster an increasingly untenable situation. The Dalton is attracting more and more visitors. It’s only reasonable to expect this to continue on a year-round basis. Furthermore, dropping the ban would allow state agencies to continue doing valuable research work without being placed in the awkward position of violating state law.

Current law essentially requires that you be either wealthy enough to fly, or healthy enough to walk, into vast areas of public lands north of the Yukon. SB 85 will open this area to the rest of us as well.