

Alaska State Legislature



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SPONSOR STATEMENT

HOUSE BILL 397

In 2001, the [Alaska Department of Transportation](#) released its [Winter Transportation Study](#). The House Transportation Committee reviewed the study during the 2001 session.

Initially, the study was to address snow machine issues in the Fairbanks area but immediately grew into a statewide study. DOT reviewed the existing laws and regulations and determined that many enforcement officers and the general public were not aware of existing requirements. DOT concluded that a serious effort is needed to clarify and improve these laws and to promote more responsible snowmobiling.

Snowmobiles are defined as “motor vehicles” and are subject to those laws. As such, snowmobile operators are required to possess a valid Alaska driver’s license to “operate upon a highway, vehicular way or area, or other public property.”

The original version of [this bill](#) merely exempts snowmobile operators from needing a driver’s license. The committee substitute bill instead ends a state legal requirement for operators of all types of off-road motor vehicles (boat, plane, all-terrain vehicle, or snowmachines) to have an automobile driver’s license to operate on public properties, other than on roads. The bill would not affect existing laws requiring vehicles driven on-road to have minimum equipment, such as brake lights and turn signals.

For state government to require a person to pass a test to drive a car appears to have nothing in common with running a boat on a lake or river, flying a plane, or riding an ATV while hunting. Those who depend on snowmobiles, boats, and ATVs for basic transportation to work, hunt, and fish in many parts of Alaska need to have their rights protected.

Having a driver’s license has nothing to do with safe operation of an off-road vehicle. If safety is the concern, then the focus needs to be on safety, not on requiring a driver’s license.