

**Testimony of Gail Hanson, Executive Director  
of the New Hampshire Snowmobile Association**

**Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative  
May 31, 2006**

Good morning Senator Sununu and distinguished members of the Federal Government. My name is Gail Hanson. I am the Executive Director of the New Hampshire Snowmobile Association (NHSA). I appear before you on behalf of the New Hampshire Snowmobile Association in support of issuing a "laser visa" or Border Crossing Card (BBC) to United States citizens for the purpose of traveling to the border region or beyond in Canada. This "visa" or BBC should have conditions for its issuance and its use should be prescribed by Federal regulations.

To explain our support for this, I would like to present as brief introduction about the sport of snowmobiling.

Snowmobiling is recognized by Economic Planners as a major job generator and an important part of the "Economic Engine" in rural America. Over \$27 Billion Dollars worth of Economic Activity occurs because of snowmobiling, with the majority of the money generated by tourism related activities. Approximately \$1.2 Billion dollars is the result of new snowmobile sales alone. Slightly over \$1 Billion dollars worth of parts, garments and accessories were sold in the marketplace this year, a 15% increase from the previous year. Sales of snowmobile registrations, licenses and permits reached a new record high in 2006. It is estimated that over 2,600,000 snowmobile registrations and/or permits will be sold in North America this winter season. The sales of permits and registrations will generate well over \$120 million dollars, most of which will go immediately back into the trail system in the development, improvement and maintenance of the greatest recreational trail system in the world. Over 200 thousand miles of groomed and marked trails traverse North America allowing snowmobiling

families to see North America in a unique way not available to any other form of recreation.

Recent Economic Impact studies performed by Iowa State University, Plymouth State University in New Hampshire, and the University of Minnesota all show dramatic increases in snowmobile activity and the economic importance of snowmobile tourism. It was estimated that well over 95,000 full-time jobs are generated by the snowmobile industry alone. In addition to that, approximately 3,000 licensed dealers, employing 60,000 full time employees serve as an important tax base to many rural towns and villages. Using Standard Economic Impact Analysis, it should come as no surprise that a substantial segment of snowmobile spending ends up being collected by every state and province in taxes. Approximately 10% of all the dollars spent by snowmobiler's ends up being directly collected by "the tax man" in the state or province where snowmobiling occurs. Simple math shows snowmobilers pay approximately \$2.7 Billion dollars in state and provincial tax alone during the winter season. Federal and Local taxes would be added to that number and one could easily say that snowmobilers collectively pay over \$4 Billion dollars in taxes each year, enjoying the family recreation activity of snowmobiling.

Travel and tourism is New Hampshire's second largest industry in terms of jobs and attracting dollars from out of state. In 2004, there were 328,600 overnight Canadian visitors. The average length of stay for Canadian overnight travelers was 3 nights and the average spending of Canadian travelers was up 46% in 2004 in comparison to 2000.

Thousands of New Hampshire residents and tourists from other states and Canada come to New Hampshire to enjoy snowmobiling. In the recent Economic Impact Study performed by Plymouth State University it found that snowmobile travel parties had direct spending within New Hampshire of about \$453 million and the total impact of snowmobile related spending was nearly \$1.2 billion. The direct spending by snowmobile travelers was 1% of the gross state product and was more than 10% of all travelers spending in the state. With snowmobiling, the North Country businesses that

would struggle in winter months prosper. The reason why so many residents and tourists come to New Hampshire to snowmobile is the over 7,000 miles of groomed snowmobile trails. A snowmobiler can ride from the Massachusetts border to Canada on the trail system. Our trail system is constructed, maintained and groomed by volunteer members of the 116 NHSA affiliated snowmobile clubs. Approximately 56,000 hours of labor were spent last year by club members in keeping the trails in tiptop shape so the tourists and citizens of New Hampshire could enjoy snowmobiling at its best.

Where as snowmobiling has such a significant impact on tourism in the State of New Hampshire the new passport requirements for U.S. and Canadian citizens entering the U.S. will almost certainly have a chilling effect on several aspects of everyday life along the border.

There are more than four million snowmobilers in Canada and the United States. Surveys show that over 94.5% of snowmobilers consider it a family activity. The overwhelming majority of snowmobile owners are married and have children. Snowmobiling appeals to people of all ages - from youngsters to senior citizens. Studies reveal that snowmobilers generally ride close to home. On day trips, snowmobilers typically travel 30 to 75 miles to favorite riding areas or on favorite trails. On any given winter weekend approximately 200 to 300 snowmobilers and their families take the opportunity to drive/ride their snowmobiles from the northern New Hampshire area into Canada to enjoy breakfast, lunch or just a scenic ride. The requirement of a passport will add an additional expense for families, based on public announcements every U.S. citizen of any age must purchase a passport and acceptable passport photo at about \$110 for adults and \$95 for children.

Snowmobile travel planning is being done only days or weeks before a vacation or weekend trip begins because of American's harried life style. Adding to this equation as with any type of sport that is based on the weather, Snowmobiling is truly a spur-of-the-moment activity. The new passport rules require long lead times for citizens thinking

of crossing the border for any reason. The standard waiting time for a U.S. passport is six to eight weeks.

All of these requirements will take a significant toll on the weekend and daily travel to and from Canada by snowmobilers. Though this may seem trivial to some, obtaining a passport is an unwanted sojourn into government bureaucracy to many on both sides of the border. **A significant portion** of New Hampshire's economy is based on tourism, requiring a passport will have a negative impact on tourism and will definitely have a negative impact on the northern part of the state that depends **heavily** on snowmobiling for its winter tourism.

The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative is needed to tighten security and to protect our borders, but a concern that has risen is that a very significant portion of North Americans do not travel overseas and their only foreign travel is to Canada. We urge you to look at the overall affect of this program and consider the BCC or "laser visa" for the document of choice for travel within Canada.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any of your questions.