



## Flathead National Forest

## Media Release

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### Flathead National Forest Continues Increased Snowmobile Travel Monitoring

The Flathead National Forest is continuing to monitor snowmobile travel activity on the forest with increased aerial and ground patrols. Recent incidents involving snowmobiles traveling in non-motorized areas, specifically designated wilderness and the Jewel Basin Hiking Area, have also prompted forest officials to recommend stiffer penalties for such actions. Forest Service law enforcement officers have recently encountered more than 20 snowmobilers in violation of non-motorized travel in a variety of closed areas on the forest.

Ten individuals were encountered and admitted they were riding snowmobiles in the Bunker Creek area on the East side of the Swan Divide north of Inspiration Pass. This area is closed to snowmobiles and one citation was issued. In 1998 and 2000, two fatalities involving snowmobile travel happened in this same area.

Five individuals were issued a violation notice for snowmobiling in the Mission Mountains Wilderness as they were exiting the area, which has been closed to motorized travel since 1972??. One of the individuals was also cited for attempting to flee. This same area was the location of a fatality that involved illegal snowmobiling in the mid 1990s.

Three snowmobilers, in which one apparently triggered an avalanche, snowmobiling in the Jewel Basin on Thursday, March 1, were traveling in a non-motorized area. The incident is under investigation and charges are pending. Three days after this situation, Forest Service law enforcement officers encountered two additional individuals illegally snowmobiling in the same area, Jewel Basin. These individuals were cited.

The maximum fine for operating a snowmobile in a non-motorized area may vary from \$200 to \$5,000, with additional penalties dependent on the violation situation and the discretion of the

U.S. Magistrate. Hungry Horse Jimmy DeHerrera said, “We are recommending stiff penalties on snowmobile travel violations, especially if extensive search and rescue efforts are needed and this puts others at risk. This needs to stop.”

Swan Lake District Ranger Steve Brady said, “Responsible riders do not ride in closed areas. Irresponsible riders put others at risk when they have problems in these remote areas.” Brady continued, “We will keep up our efforts to stop this abuse of the law, including the potentially dangerous situations this activity creates. We hope the general public and the law-abiding snowmobilers will help us and communicate illegal activity.”

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