

# Michigan Snowmobile Regulations

## Legal Definition of a Snowmobile:

“Snowmobile” means any motor-driven vehicle designed for travel primarily on snow or ice of a type that utilizes sled-type runners or skis, an endless belt tread, or any combination of these or other similar means of contact with the surface upon which it is operated, but is not a vehicle that must be registered under the Michigan vehicle code. (1949 PA 300, MCL 257.1 to 257.923)

## Equipment Required

**Brakes:** Each snowmobile must have a braking system capable of:

- a. Stopping the snowmobile in not more than 40 feet from an initial speed of 20 miles per hour while the snowmobile travels on packed snow carrying an operator who weighs 175 pounds or more.
- b. Locking the snowmobile’s traction belt or belts.

**Noise:** Each snowmobile must be equipped with a muffler in good working order and in constant operation from which noise emission does not exceed the current standards. To see the current snowmobile noise regulations, visit [Michigan.gov/Snowmobiling](http://Michigan.gov/Snowmobiling).

**Helmet:** All those operating or riding on a snowmobile must wear a Department of Transportation-approved crash helmet, except those operating on their own private property.

**Lighting:** All snowmobiles must display a lighted headlight and taillight at all times during operation. However, the headlight shall not be covered with a lens cap of any color.

## A Snowmobile May Operate on a Public Highway Under the Following Conditions:

- A snowmobile may be operated on the right-of-way of a public highway (except a limited-access highway) if it is operated at the extreme right of the open portion of the right-of-way and with the flow of traffic on the highway.
- Snowmobiles operating on the shoulder of right-of-way must travel with the flow of vehicular traffic and in single file and shall not operate abreast except when overtaking or safely passing another snowmobile.
- A snowmobile may be operated on the roadway or shoulder when necessary to cross a bridge or culvert if the snowmobile is brought to a complete stop before entering onto the roadway or shoulder and the operator yields the right-of-way to any approaching motor vehicle on the highway.
- A snowmobile may be operated across a public highway, other than a limited-access highway, at right angles to the highway for the purpose of getting from one area to another when the operation can be done safely and another vehicle is not crossing the highway at the same time in the immediate area. An operator must bring their snowmobile to a complete stop before proceeding across the public highway and must yield the right-of-way to all oncoming traffic.
- Snowmobiles may be operated on the shoulder of an open county roadway or its right-of-way, outside the corporate limits of a city or village, which is designated and marked for snowmobile use by the county road commission having jurisdiction.

## Accident Reporting

The law requires that the operator of a snowmobile involved in an accident resulting in injury to, or death of, any person, or property damage in an estimated amount of \$100 or more, must immediately notify a law enforcement agency within the county in which the accident occurred.

## Driver License Information

### Suspended Driver License

You may not operate a snowmobile if your license to operate an automobile has been suspended or revoked by Michigan or your home state.

### Points Assessed to Your Driver Record

A person convicted of manslaughter, negligent homicide or a felony resulting from snowmobile operation shall have six points assessed against their driver record. A person convicted of operating a snowmobile while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance, or with an unlawful blood alcohol content, shall have six points assessed against their driver record. A person who is convicted of operating a snowmobile while visibly impaired due to consumption of alcohol or a controlled substance shall have four points assessed against their driver record.

## Safety Education and Training

Snowmobile safety education training is required for youthful operators as indicated below and recommended for snowmobile operators of all ages.

For information on snowmobile safety training, visit [Michigan.gov/RecreationalSafety](https://Michigan.gov/RecreationalSafety) or contact a DNR Service Center.

## Restrictions on Youthful Operations

Those under the age of 12:

- May not operate a snowmobile without direct supervision of an adult, except on property owned or controlled by the parent or legal guardian.
- May not cross a highway or street.

Those who are at least 12 but less than 17 years of age:

- May operate a snowmobile if they have a valid snowmobile safety certificate in their immediate possession, or are under the direct supervision of a person 21 years of age or older.
- May not cross a highway or street without having a valid snowmobile safety certificate in their immediate possession.

## Registration and Trail Permits

- A snowmobile shall not be operated unless the owner first obtains a certificate of registration, registration decals and a trail permit sticker.
- The certificate of registration must accompany the snowmobile and be made available for inspection upon demand by a peace officer.
- If owned by a nonresident, before operation in Michigan, a snowmobile must display a valid registration from the operator's home state or province, or be registered in Michigan.

- State law requires that you affix the registration decals issued to the snowmobile to each side of the forward half of the cowl above the footwell. Decals must be exposed and visible. It is illegal to place registration decals on the tunnel or footwell.
- Snowmobile registrations are valid for three years, expiring on September 30 of the year indicated on the registration decal and certificate.
- Any time a registered snowmobile is sold to another person, the registration also must be transferred within 15 days of the acquisition to avoid monetary penalty. Contact the Secretary of State transfer information.
- A person who desires to operate a snowmobile in this state shall obtain a snowmobile trail permit sticker. The snowmobile trail permit sticker shall be valid for a period of one year, which begins October 1 and ends September 30 of the following year.
- The trail permit sticker shall be permanently affixed and visible on the forward half of the snowmobile directly above or below the headlight.
- Snowmobile trail permits are available from snowmobile dealers, DNR offices and retail license agents throughout Michigan as well as online at [Michigan.gov/DNRLicenses](https://Michigan.gov/DNRLicenses).

Snowmobiles are exempt from registration and having a trail permit if they are: operated exclusively on lands owned or under the control of the owner; used entirely in a safe education program conducted by a certified snowmobile safety instructor; or exclusively operated in a special event of limited duration which is considered according to the prearranged schedule under a permit from the governmental unit having proper jurisdiction. In addition, a snowmobile used solely for transportation on the frozen surface of the public water for ice fishing is exempt from the trail sticker requirement, but must still be registered.

Michigan law allows owners to register snowmobiles 26 or more years old and owned solely as a collector's item as a historic snowmobile. Historic snowmobiles are limited to occasional use and for participation in club activities, exhibitions, tours, parades, and similar uses, including mechanical testing. Unlike regular snowmobile registrations, the historic registration is non-expiring and cannot be transferred with the snowmobile to a new owner. A trail permit is not required for snowmobiles registered as a historic snowmobile. A single historic snowmobile decal is issued and is placed above or below the headlight or, if the historic snowmobile was not originally equipped with a headlight, on the forward half of the cowl above the footwell. A historic snowmobile registration is \$50.

#### A Person Shall Not Operate a Snowmobile:

- While under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- At a rate of speed greater than is reasonable for existing conditions.
- In a forest nursery or planting area on public lands posted or a reasonable identifiable as an area of forest reproduction when growing stock may be damaged or on any designated wild, wilderness or natural area in the state.
- On the frozen surface of public waters within 100 feet of a person, including a skater, not in or upon a snowmobile; or within 100 feet of a fishing shanty or shelter except at the minimum speed required to maintain forward movement of the snowmobile; or on an area that has been cleared for ice skating, unless necessary for gaining access to the public water.
- Within 100 feet of a dwelling between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m. at a speed
- greater than the minimum required to maintain forward movement of the snowmobile.

- Upon the land of another without consent of the owner or their agent, as required by the recreational trespass act.
- In an area open to public hunting during the Nov. 15-30 firearm deer season from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- While transporting a bow unless it is unstrung or encased, or a firearm unless it is unloaded and securely encases. A person with a valid concealed pistol license (CPL) may carry a loaded and incased pistol, but not a longarm such as a rifle or shotgun, on a snowmobile.
- On or across a cemetery or a burial ground, airport, public or private parking lot, railroad or a railroad right-of-way within 100 feet of a sledding, skiing or skating area.
- To chase, pursue, worry or kill and wild bird or animal.

## Regulatory Signs

**Stop sign:** Instructs riders to bring their snowmobile to a complete stop before proceeding with caution. Colors: Red and white. An octagon with the word STOP in the middle.

**Yield sign:** Instructs riders at an intersection to yield the right-of-way to vehicles traveling on the other trail. Colors: Red and white. A triangle with the word YIELD in the middle.

**Railroad crossing sign:** Instructs riders a railroad crossing is ahead. Colors: Yellow and black. A circle with an X going through the middle and the letters R and R.

**Stay on trail sign:** Reminds riders to stay on the designated trail. Colors: White and black. A rectangle with the words STAY ON TRAIL.

**No snowmobiling sign:** Identifies areas where snowmobiling is not allowed. Colors: Red and black. A red circle with a line going through it over a black snowmobile icon.

## Caution Signs

These signs advise snowmobile operators to proceed with caution at a reduced speed, or advise the snowmobiler of a specific trail condition. Colors yellow with black or red letters or symbols.

## Additional Signs

**Community route marker:** Informs the rider about local snowmobile routes within a community. Color: Green. A Green diamond.

**Object marker:** Identifies an obstruction on or at the side of the trail. Colors: Yellow and black. Yellow rectangles with black stripes, the stripes slope down towards the trail.

**Trail reassurance marker:** Lets the rider know which specific trail they are using. Colors: Orange and black. Orange diamonds with black numbers.