

MnUSA 2026 Session Review

The 2026 legislative session adjourned sine die on May 18. The House of Representatives operated with an evenly divided 50-50 membership, requiring bipartisan agreement on all major legislation. Both caucuses accepted early in the session that certain areas would not move, and the Legislature kept its scope narrow - focusing on HCMC stabilization, fraud enforcement, property tax relief, federal tax conformity, and a capital investment package. Most policy legislation, including the vehicles MnUSA's priorities depend on, did not advance.

What MnUSA Was Working On

1. Sales Tax Exemption for Trail Work and Grooming

Right now, snowmobile clubs pay sales tax on the equipment, fuel, and supplies they use to groom and maintain trails. That cost comes straight out of club budgets. MnUSA has been pushing for an exemption on those purchases - the same kind of break that farmers and manufacturers already receive.

The bill received a hearing in the Tax Committee last session and was laid over, keeping it eligible for inclusion in this year's tax omnibus. This year, however, the House never produced its own tax bill - an unusual situation. The final tax agreement (HF2438) was almost entirely federal conformity work, bringing Minnesota's tax code in line with recent changes to the Internal Revenue Code. It included no new sales tax exemptions of any kind. There simply was no vehicle for discretionary tax policy this session. It remains a top priority for 2027.

2. Winter Recreation License Plate

The MnUSA Board of Directors voted to pursue a specialty license plate in partnership with the Minnesota Coalition of Lakeshore Associations and the Clean Water Coalition. The MnUSA legislative committee will determine the specifics heading into 2027.

Specialty license plates are included in the transportation policy bill. No transportation policy bill passed this session, so no specialty license plate legislation has advanced.

3. Protecting the Dedicated Fund and Gas Tax

The snowmobile dedicated fund is what pays for the GIA trail system - grooming reimbursements, maintenance grants, and club support across the state. It's funded by registration fees and a portion of gas tax revenue from snowmobile fuel. MnUSA's standing goal is to make sure that money stays where it belongs.

No active threat to the fund emerged in this session. That's a win. MnUSA's presence at the Capitol helps keep it that way.

4. DNR Fraud Provisions - Snowmobile Registration and Trail Passes

The DNR pursued legislation (Revisor No. 26-06077) to strengthen enforcement against fraudulent snowmobile registration and trail pass use, including schemes using fake or AI-generated documents. MnUSA supported the bill. It would have amended Minnesota Statutes sections 84.82 and 84.8205 to make the following offenses criminal:

- **Registration fraud: Using** fake dealer permits, lying on registration paperwork, or displaying bogus plates or decals. Misdemeanor for individuals, gross misdemeanor for dealers.

- **Trail pass fraud: Falsifying** a trail pass application, altering a pass, or using a fake pass. Misdemeanor. The fraudulent pass would be immediately void.

This type of DNR language normally moves through the Environment and Natural Resources omnibus. This year, the environment omnibus (SF2077, Chapter 126) passed, but the final conference committee report was a delete-all, replacing the entire bill with outdoor heritage fund appropriations, parks and trails modifications, and land conveyances. No DNR policy provisions of any kind survived. The fraud language had no vehicle and did not pass. It will need to be reintroduced in 2027.

Bills We Did Not Plan On

When two bills were introduced this session, MnUSA heard from members who were concerned about what they might mean for snowmobiling. We took those concerns seriously and went straight to the bill language. Here is what we found.

SF3236 - Electric-Assisted Bicycle and Motorized Bicycle Regulation

SF3236 was an e-bike bill. It added new language to Minnesota's traffic laws requiring that any vehicle operated on state highways meet the definition of a vehicle type listed in that chapter. Snowmobiles and ATVs are not listed there - they have their own chapters of state law. And both of those chapters include explicit language saying that nothing in the traffic laws can be used to ban snowmobiles or ATVs from the trails and road rights-of-way they use. That protection is written directly into state law. Getting at snowmobiles or ATVs through this kind of bill would require going directly after Chapter 84 - the snowmobile and ATV chapters. SF3236 did not do that. We had a meeting with the House author, Rep. Tabke, to point out the technical problems with the bill. Rep. Tabke told us that the bill still had issues to be worked out.

SF1245 - Off-Highway Vehicle Trail Restrictions

SF1245 proposed new restrictions on off-highway vehicle trails - including water setbacks, a process allowing 50 county residents to petition for a trail closure review, mandatory environmental reviews for new trails, and statewide expansion of restrictions that currently apply only south of Highway 2. This bill was aimed at ATVs and off-highway vehicles. Snowmobiles are defined separately in state law and are not classified as off-highway vehicles. The restrictions in SF1245 apply to off-highway vehicle trails and do not reference the snowmobile trail system or the GIA program. The bill did not pass.

MnUSA's job is to track every bill that could affect the sport - including ones that aren't aimed at us. That kind of monitoring is part of what your advocacy program at the Capitol does every session.

The November Election Matters - A Lot

This November, every seat in the Minnesota House and Senate is up for election. Every single one. The people who win those races will control the Legislature starting in January 2027 - including who chairs the committees that decide whether MnUSA's bills get hearings.

Here's the honest reality: many of the legislators who will be elected this fall have never heard of the GIA program. They don't know that snowmobile clubs - not the state, not the DNR - are

the ones who build and groom the trails. They don't know that Minnesota's 22,000-mile trail system exists because of volunteer club members who show up year after year with their time and equipment.

That's not their fault. It's our opportunity.

What You Can Do

Elections are the best time to introduce MnUSA's story to new and returning legislators. Here's how club members can make a real difference:

- **Find your candidates.** Both your House and Senate seats are on the ballot this fall. Look up who is running in your district at mnvotes.org. Incumbents and challengers alike need to hear from you.
- **Tell them what we do.** Reach out and explain the GIA program in plain terms: club volunteers build and groom the trails, the state provides partial reimbursement through the dedicated fund, and the result is a 22,000-mile trail system that supports rural economies across Minnesota. Most candidates will be hearing this for the first time.
- **Invite them out.** There is no better way to make a legislator a champion for snowmobiling than putting them on a sled or showing them a grooming operation firsthand. Extend the invitation during the campaign.
- **Ask where they stand.** Before November, ask candidates directly: do they support the dedicated fund? Would they back a sales tax exemption for trail grooming supplies? Get them on record.
- **Vote - and bring your club.** In competitive districts, a few hundred votes decide the race. A club that turns out together is a political force.
- **Share what you learn.** Pass along candidate responses to your club members and to MnUSA. Building a picture of where each candidate stands helps focus our effort when we get back to work in 2027.

See You in 2027

The session is over, but the work isn't. We'll keep building toward next year's priorities and supporting the legislative committee's process.

Thank you for everything MnUSA members and clubs do to maintain the trails, support the system, and show up for this sport. It matters more than most people at the Capitol realize - yet.