P.E.I. ATV Federation eying growth

JP Gallant, president of the Evangeline ATV Club, drives his ATV to a bridge the club has built near its clubhouse in Mont Carmel. The club is building bridges and extending its trail system. - Millicent McKay

Clubs hoping to link their trails

MONT CARMEL

The Prince Edward Island ATV Federation is building bridges both figuratively and literally. It's all part of an effort to eventually develop a trail system across the province.

Federation president Peter Mellish said both the federation and its member clubs have been meeting with landowners seeking to establish trails through woodland and farmers fields and have received widespread acceptance. "We've put up fences, we've put in ditches and put in culverts, and have been able to keep our ATV traffic to a designated area," he said in describing their progress.

Landowners, Mellish said, are happy when the machines stick to one established track.

With 50 kilometers of newly established year-round trail and approximately 150 kilometers of winter trails, the Evangeline ATV Club has the largest network of trails in P.E.I. Club president JP Gallant said they are hoping to continue to grow that network and have them eventually extend west to O'Leary and east to Sherbrooke, and subsequently link up with trails established by other clubs.

Federal funding through ACOA helped with the creation of a new loop which extends from Richmond to Enmore, down to Tyne Valley and back to Richmond.

"It was quite a task," Gallant said, involving meeting with landowners to obtain permission and then stepping off areas to determine the appropriate route. If they came across an impassable area, they'd have to change their course and meet with other landowners.

Barry Phillips, owner of Arlington-based West Country Farms estimates there are about three to four kilometers of trail though parts of his fields.

"I think it is every bit a positive sport as snowmobiling, except that it got off on a bad footing and hence they don't have anywhere to go," Phillips said. He said a lot of farmers and woodlot owners have granted trail access.

"It could make the sport viable," he suggested.

"There's quite a bit of traffic but no damage, really," he said. He's giving benefit of the doubt to the one errant track he discovered this year.

"They have signs up," Phillips noted. "I think 99 per cent or better are adhering to the rules."

He even established a bridge over a gully for the ATVs to cross.

"It kind of makes it a little bit scenic for them; they can drive down around and across this gully, down along the sides of the field."

Mellish said the federation has an open house planned for January in Pownal to see about establishing a new ATV club there, and they are hoping to set up meetings in other communities, too, suggesting having more clubs would make it easier to expand the network.

Before establishing the summer loop, Gallant said he visited 76 property owners and received permission from 73 of them for a trail to be established on their properties. A lot of physical labour then went into cutting out trails. Decommissioned utility poles and abandoned platform scales have been repurposed as bridge structures.

While both Mellish and Gallant said they prefer the trails be established through private property, they agree that it would be helpful to have access to short sections of the Confederation Trail and abandoned or rarely used dirt roads for getting around wet areas, such as the Portage and Miscouche swamps. "It would make our life a lot easier," said Gallant.

Mellish said over 600 trail passes were sold this year in P.E.I. Those passes are accepted in New Brunswick and will be accepted in NS and Ont. by next year and they're reciprocal, he said.

"We're going to grow this and we're going to build this. Right now it is a $19 million a year industry," said Mellish. "We're going to put it on the map so that we have a place to ride. We're going to develop a tourism product."