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Gov't to introduce licensing, registration of off-road vehicles

By J.P. SQUIRE

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The free ride is over for dirt-bike and ATV riders.

Licensing and registration requirements are on the way for 2010.

"We think it is important that we increase the regulation with regard to off-road vehicles, and that we develop a licensing and registration system. And I don't think we're very far away from that," Tourism, Culture and the Arts Minister Kevin Krueger said in an interview.

"We think it's important because there is the issue of -- and it's a small minority but -- people who behave badly on these machines. They rip up riparian zones, chase wildlife, chase domestic stock. There is a crime-prevention issue in that it is hard to trace where vehicles came from when they are suspected stolen. We need to come to grips with that."

He believes his ministry is very close to making recommendations to respond to those concerns. Ministry staff have already started drafting the changes, but the details won't be released before it is introduced in the legislature.

"I expect to see some changes in next

spring's legislation," Krueger said, with the hope the recommendations are in place for next summer's riding season.

"I believe that it (licensing and registration) is important, and so do my colleagues, that people can identify a machine, clearly identify it if they have need to, just as we rely on license plates to identify vehicles that have been used in offenses or that are related to misbehaviour in any way."

It would then become an offence to cover the identification on a dirt-bike or ATV, he said.

"I've been working with a group of MLAs in our caucus for a number of years now as we come to grips with the many competing interests with regard to off-road vehicle usage and the whole question of licensing and registration," said Krueger.

"There is a very wide spectrum of opinion on the issue. The range of public opinion is all the way from 'Leave us alone; we like things the way they are' through to 'Everybody ought to be licensed and have to pay every year to license their vehicle.'

"Some people are calling for a fairly large amount of money (for licensing and registration).

"And that the money should be used for everything from training people to compli-

ance and enforcement bodies to trail-building."

His ministry provided grant money to a large coalition of concerned groups: everyone from the Grasslands Conservation Council to the B.C. Snowmobile Federation, manufacturers to groups that use Crown land.

The committee provided a set of recommendations and ministry staff have been working through those.

Krueger, active on the committee for years, is now in a position where he is the minister responsible for leading the decision-making.

"By no means is everybody expecting it, nor will a lot of people like it. We already have that provision for snowmobiles and there isn't 100 per cent compliance there either but it's still better than the situation for dirt-bikes and ATVs where there is no requirement for identification. We think there should be and that definitely will be in the recommendations coming forward to government."



Krueger

Enforcement then becomes the focus and citizens can contribute significantly, he said.

"Many crimes with motor vehicles are resolved because of citizen reports. And that's going to be one aspect."

Krueger expects conservation officers would be involved in enforcement as well as enforcement officials with the Ministry of Forests, police officers and similar enforcement staff in the civil service.

"Some of the recommendations include creation of a network of trails where a person can't use them unless they have the required identification," he said.

"And with some of those trails, probably any new trails, there's likely to be a fee for using the trails which would be built into the cost of licensing users' vehicles. It's not something that we want to apply across-the-board if we get into costs for trail building. We want it to be a user-pay situation. A rancher who is using his off-road vehicle on the Crown land he leases and the land that he owns wouldn't want to be required to pay an annual fee for that; nor should he be."

But if that farmer wants to use his off-road vehicle on a Crown network of trails that other users are paying to use, then he'll be treated the same as everyone else.