

East Rim Dual-Use Trail

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Why are snowmobiles now being given access to the East Rim Trail?

The Apostle Islands Snowmobile Club requested to reestablish the historic snowmobile route through the East Rim corridor. Recently a private landowner who had previously not allowed snowmobile access agreed to permit it, making the historic snowmobile route once again feasible. This would move riders off approximately 1.2 miles of Meyers–Olson Road and onto a designated trail, improving safety and reducing roadway conflicts.

2. Why is there a dual-use trail, and will users be separated where possible?

The East Rim corridor was originally established as a snowmobile route, and pedestrian use developed later after a private landowner revoked snowmobile access and the motorized trail was closed. In the years since, the area has become well loved by hikers, snowshoers, and other silent-sport users.

The City is now pursuing a dual-use trail because the historic snowmobile route has again become feasible, and the City's Comprehensive Plan calls for supporting a wide range of recreational opportunities. The intent is not to replace one use with another, but to support the coexistence of both pedestrian and snowmobile recreation in this area through clear rules, safety measures, monitoring, and long-term planning.

The long-term intent is to separate pedestrian and snowmobile travel wherever feasible, particularly on City-owned land and where alternative routes can be developed with landowner permission. Until that system is fully designed, shared use is managed through signage, speed limits, enforcement and monitoring.

3. Why were some segments of the trail temporarily closed to foot traffic?

Some portions of the East Rim corridor cross privately owned land where access permissions are still being clarified or renewed. To respect landowner rights and avoid legal and safety risks, the City temporarily restricted foot traffic in these areas until agreements can be confirmed.

4. How are safety and trail etiquette being addressed right now?

The plan requires:

- A 15 mph speed limit
- Dual-use warning and etiquette signage
- Leashed dogs
- Directional arrows for users
- Coordinated enforcement by City Police, the County Sheriff, and the DNR
- Monitoring environmental conditions & trail closure when needed

These measures help ensure safe and respectful use.

5. What is the long-term solution for managing the trail?

A collaborative working group—including the City, Town, County, private landowners, Apostle Islands Snowmobile Club, Bayfield Area Trails, Bayfield School, and a City resident—will develop a formal dual-use trail management plan. The plan will address safety, property access, environmental protection, enforcement, monitoring, and future improvements. The plan will be delivered to the Common Council no later than September 1, 2026 for consideration.

6. Why does private land matter so much in these decisions?

Much of the trail corridor depends on voluntary landowner permission. The plan requires that agreements for both snowmobile and non-motorized use be secured and respected. When access is uncertain, the City must temporarily close those segments to protect landowners and the public. The City is deeply grateful to the private landowners who allow trails on their property—these generous agreements have made the Big Ravine and East Rim trail system possible and have provided lasting recreational, economic, and community benefits for Bayfield.

7. How will we know if the dual-use approach is working?

The plan establishes monitoring and adaptive management, including tracking:

- User numbers
- Safety incidents
- Conflicts
- Environmental impacts
- Property issues

AISC and BAT provide regular reports, and the City uses this information—along with public input—to make adjustments.

8. When does temporary access end, and when will the long-term plan be adopted?

Temporary snowmobile access is authorized only through March 31, 2026. During the off-season, the working group will use the plan outline to develop a formal management plan. The plan will be delivered to the Common Council no later than September 1, 2026 for consideration.

9. How were the recent trail access decisions made?

With assistance from the Bayfield County snowmobile coordinator, the Apostle Islands Snowmobile Club approached the City Parks and Recreation Committee with a proposal to reopen the East Rim Trail to snowmobiles. Subsequently, these entities collaborated with Bayfield Area Trails to develop the East Rim Dual-Use Trail Plan Outline as the framework for managing the corridor to allow coexistence of foot travel and snowmobiles. The City Common Council formally recognized this outline to establish the conditions for temporary access, safety standards, monitoring, and development of a long-term management plan. Decisions are guided by this framework and made collaboratively by the City, Apostle Islands Snowmobile Club, Bayfield Area Trails, partner agencies, and private landowners.

10. Where should I direct questions or concerns?

Questions, concerns, or observations can be emailed to cityoffice@ci.bayfield.wi.gov. This ensures messages are logged and shared with the appropriate partners.