

DEFENSE WINS THE DAY

Keeping What's Ours



By Rob Dingman

I was very gratified to hear that the embattled Recreational Trails Program was finally included in the transportation program reauthorization bill that was signed into law by President Obama on July 6.

For anyone who doesn't know, RTP is a program that funds recreational trails projects around the country. The program is funded with revenue generated from the federal motor-fuel tax that is attributable to fuel sales for off-highway motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, four-wheel drives and snowmobiles. This

means that you and I fund this program through the money we spend when we ride off-road.

I have a special interest in this issue because I was one of the primary advocates for the creation of the program while working for the Motorcycle Industry Council in the early 1990s. Thanks to the hard work of our AMA staff in Washington, D.C., our partners in the Coalition for Recreational Trails that exist to protect RTP (which includes the MIC, the AMA and other organizations) and—most importantly—you and the thousands and thousands of riders who wrote and called their representatives, the RTP will be around through at least 2014.

What does that mean for motorcyclists? That off-road motorcycle and ATV clubs, working with local and state governments, will continue to have access to funds to build and maintain trails in their communities. That the family sport we fought so hard to preserve when we eliminated the lead law requirements for kid-sized dirtbikes and ATVs last August can continue to thrive.

“When money from a motorcyclist-funded program is diverted from its intended purpose, motorcyclists are singled out for what amounts to a new tax.”



Photo Jeff Kardas

Saving the RTP was a major victory for motorcycling. But dedicated funding is under attack elsewhere.

Recently, California lawmakers sought to transfer \$21 million meant for off-highway vehicle programs—funds that were paid as taxes on gasoline sales by OHV enthusiasts—to the State Parks and Recreation Fund. When he signed the state budget into law, Gov. Jerry Brown took “only” \$7 million, which means more than \$160 million has been borrowed from the California OHV Trust Fund over the years with no guarantee that it will ever be paid back.

Those of us who love to ride on the street are also battling to preserve funding crucial to the future of motorcycling. In these difficult economic times, state motorcycle safety programs—many of which are funded by fees paid by motorcyclists—are frequent targets for our elected officials seeking to help address tremendous budget shortfalls.

Affordable rider training is crucial not just for new riders, but also for returning and experienced riders. Being trained is one of the most effective strategies we can employ as riders to lower our risk of crashing and being seriously hurt or worse. When our elected officials raid the funds that provide the resources for this training, fewer motorcyclists get trained and the unfortunate results are predictable.

As if it isn't bad enough that motorcyclists are always expected to fund our own street and off-road programs, when funding is taken from us and put toward other purposes, insult is added to injury.

That's because when funding for these programs is diverted to other uses, we motorcyclists are still expected to foot the bill. When money from a motorcyclist-funded program is diverted from its intended purpose, motorcyclists are unfairly singled out for what amounts to a new tax. This situation is not much different from the motorcycle-only checkpoints that we have been fighting across the country. Motorcyclists are being singled out and asked to do something not asked of other citizens simply because we choose to travel on two or three wheels instead of four.

There are many actions taken by policy makers that adversely affect motorcyclists. Much of what the AMA does on your behalf is intended to expose these efforts and then rally our members and the motorcycling community to oppose the adverse actions.

To make a stick-and-ball sports analogy, everyone likes to talk about their team's offense. Defense rarely gets the attention that it deserves. That's true in government relations, too. Even when we have a proactive victory like the creation of the RTP more than 20 years ago, we have to play defense—as we did when we defeated the lead law—to protect it.

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