

Fremont recreation officer lays down law

By BRIAN DAVIDSON

Post Register



Terri Fisher, a recreation law-enforcement officer with the Fremont County Sheriff's Office and the Fremont County Parks and Recreation Department, talks with two snowmobilers at the Elk Creek gas station about snowmobile registration Friday in Island Park.

ISLAND PARK - Sled-heads and gear-heads ought to envy **Terri Fisher**.

This winter, she's cruised the roads of Island Park. Whenever she wants, she leaves her heavy-duty pickup truck behind and hops on one of the county's famed snowmobile trails. Everywhere she goes, it seems, she can find a friend or make one quickly.

She has no other job.

This is her job.

"I've got the best job in the world," said **Fisher**, 42. "All winter, I can ride snowmobiles. All this summer, I'll be on an ATV or on a boat on the reservoir."

Fisher is the Fremont County Sheriff's Office's first full-time recreation deputy, a position derived from a 4-year-old program started by a cooperative effort between the sheriff's office and the Fremont County Parks and Recreation Department.

In the past several years, the department has done "the best we could" to bring recreationists - and their money - to Fremont County, said Tamra Cikaiotoga, its leader. "But at the same time, we've done a disservice of sorts because we've brought in the people but not contributed to the law-enforcement aspect to curb the problems that arise," she said.

Since October, the department has used county tax dollars and a portion of the money the county receives from snowmobile and boat registrations to create **Fisher's** position.

Her job is to check snowmobiles for registration stickers, cite or caution speeders, and make sure snowmobilers aren't using county-plowed roads as trails. Deputy Joe Manley does the same for summertime activities at the St. Anthony Sand Dunes in cooperation with Bureau of Land Management personnel.

Grants for equipment also will allow **Fisher** to expand into patrolling Island Park's cabin areas during the summer and winter.

Fisher's presence - on the trails and in parking lots where snowmobilers gas up their machines and take breaks - is definitely noticed.

"I've never personally been checked (for snowmobile registration)," said Scott Chidester of Blackfoot, "but we hear about it up here all the time now."

He, his sons and a few friends from St. Louis were at the Elk Creek gas station Friday fueling up when **Fisher** noted two of their machines didn't carry the required snowmobile registration sticker. They registered the borrowed rigs quickly.

"We're pleased with the level of registration we're seeing," Cikaitoga said.

And for good reason - registration fees pay for the county's trail-grooming program.

"Most people understand I'm just out here doing my job," **Fisher** said. "Most of them are up here riding, enjoying the trails, and don't mind being checked - because most of them are registered. Very rarely do I encounter someone who's unreasonable."

When she spots unregistered machines far from where riders can get a sticker, she tickets them but adds a slip that says if they register their machine in 10 days, the citation will be dropped.

"People look at the \$50 for the citation and the \$21.50 for the registration and do the math," she said.

She's had a few try to debate the fairness of the registration law. She tickets them anyway and tells them to tell their stories to a judge.

"We're thrilled to have an officer we can have working on recreation who doesn't get taken off on other calls," Cikaitoga said.

The most trouble **Fisher** encounters is the occasional lost recreationist. She often counsels riders to take a map and compass.

"There are maps available of the county's trails everywhere, but we always find these people, lost without any idea where they are, and without a map," she said.

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