

## **Snopinion #1: A Perfect Winter**

**By Craig Nicholson**

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A perfect winter of great riding would start in December with prolonged sub-zero temperatures, setting deep frost into the ground and forming black ice on the water. Only then would the snow come, and it would be in a series of frequent falls of about 15 centimetres or so. This perfect scenario would mean the snow holds off until after the freeze sets in, because snow's insulating effect does not allow the trail surface to get cold enough to retain the white stuff throughout the winter or the ice to get good and strong for marking safe crossings.

For example, last fall was unseasonably warm right through early December. Nothing was anywhere near frozen when that massive dump of lake effect snow hit cottage country on December 12th, an incredible 65 centimetres or more that buried much of Central Ontario. Every snowmobiler cheered, but that much snow all at once is far from ideal. Earth and water never had a chance to freeze properly, and the sheer volume of the white stuff made proper trail grooming almost impossible, at least in the short term.

One result was that a durable, deep, hard packed snow base never really materialized in many areas. Another consequence was that many riders became frustrated because in their minds, lots of snow should mean great trails overnight. In fact, too much snow has just the opposite impact: no man-made equipment can handle that much volume, especially when it's the first snow of the season and the trail base hasn't even been established yet.

While Mother Nature doesn't always cooperate to deliver the perfect scenario described above, the signs are good so far for the upcoming season. First, we had an exceptionally warm summer. That means the waters of our major lakes are warmer than usual. Lakes staying open and warmer for longer means they're primed to generate more lake effect snow, more frequently — and that's great news. Second, from Labour Day to the writing of this column, we've not experienced a prolonged, balmy "Indian Summer". Instead, the temperatures have been dropping in the more traditional fall pattern that foreshadows a typical Ontario freeze up.

We'll need that deep freeze, because in many trail areas, there's more standing water and flooding than usual. And the groomers can't roll across the swamps, marshes and bogs until these wet spots are solid enough to support their massive weight. Practically, that can mean if we're lucky enough to get totally land-based trails open early, we still might not be able to ride wherever we want because some sections could remain closed until freezing makes the way passable for groomers.

In its annual quest to get trails open as early as possible, a snowmobile club's primary goal, after doing fall trail preparation, is to pack a durable trail base. This base makes or breaks a great riding season. A deep, hard-packed trail base fills in all the ruts, cracks, protrusions and irregularities in the underlying ground surface. It is the solid, frozen, foundation onto which all subsequent layers of snow are packed. Being built up over the winter, a good trail base better withstands the ravages of traffic, weather, frequent groomings, and lasts longer when spring arrives. Our snowmobile clubs are the trail

building experts, so let's have some confidence that they know what's best early in the season to ensure great trails all winter long. And let's also exercise some patience while they do their good work on our behalf during the opening weeks of winter.

But the clubs can't predict when it will snow, so maybe it will be easier to be patient this winter, thanks to the new OFSC Snow Guarantee. After all, part of the urgency for getting out at first snow is the feeling that you've invested in an early buy Seasonal Permit and now the snow clock's ticking to get your money's worth. And what if it doesn't snow enough? Can we really trust Mother Nature anymore?

The OFSC Snow Guarantee can alleviate your concern and reduce your risk. It offers a payout of \$200 to participating 2011 OFSC members (defined as those who buy a 2011 Seasonal Trail Permit and sign up at no additional charge for member benefits). All you have to do to cover your bet on an early permit and enough snow is to buy your Snow Guarantee no later than Wednesday, December 15, 2010 at midnight. After buying your Seasonal Permit, simply go online at [www.snowguarantee.ca](http://www.snowguarantee.ca) and for ten buck (taxes included), you're covered. You get paid if the total accumulation of snow from December 25, 2010 to March 15, 2011 is 31 centimetres or less (as measured at the Environment Canada station at Shanty Bay Airport, near Barrie).

We may not always be able to count on Mother Nature, but you can count on the OFSC Snow Guarantee this season. When there's enough snow, you get to ride great trails. If there's not, you can get paid. Best of all, you could ride farther north than Barrie all winter in OFSC Districts 6, 7 or 11 and still qualify for a Snow Guarantee payout if Barrie gets skunked. Talk about having your cake and eating it to! That's about as perfect as winter gets.

*Craig Nicholson is the author of "Canada's Best Snowmobiling: Your Ultimate Ride Guide" (order at: [www.snowgoercanada.com](http://www.snowgoercanada.com)) and National Tour Editor for Snow Goer Canada Magazine. As "The Intrepid Snowmobiler", he also hosts The Intrepid Snowmobiler on Radio, while appearing on Snowmobiler Television. The opinions expressed are solely those of the author. For more info, click on [www.intrepidsnowmobiler.com](http://www.intrepidsnowmobiler.com)*