

**SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
December 5, 2002
North Shore Lodge, Grand Marais**

The Snowmobile Advisory Committee was called to order at 9:00a.m. by Chairman Bill Manson in Grand Marais, Michigan. Bill introduced Ed Bowen, Grand Marais Sno-Trails to welcome everybody to Grand Marais. Ed went through an itinerary for the next couple of days. Ed also introduced other individuals from the Grand Marais Chamber of Commerce.

Members present at the meeting, representing:

Bill Manson, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Grand Rapids
James Duke, Region I, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Munising
Elza Inman, Grant Sponsor, Brethren
Paul R. Argall, Business Community, Ishpeming
Lee Murray, At-Large, Hopkins
Orville Olson, At-Large, Ludington
Dan Moore, DNR, Newberry, Ex-Officio
Anne Okonek, Forest Service, USDA, Hiawatha National Forest, Ex-Officio
Randy Charles, Forest Service, USDA, Ottawa National Forest, Ex-Officio
Cpt. Curt Bacon, DNR-Law, Marquette, Ex-Officio

Members absent:

Dana Wiltse, Region II, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Standish

Staff Present:

Allan Keto, Recreation Specialist, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management-Marquette
Tom Laird, Law Enforcement Division-Lansing
Paul Gaberdiel, Unit Fire Supervisor, Newberry

Others Present:

Lee Kelly, St. Helen Snow Packers Snowmobile Club
Russ Duke, St. Helen Snow Packers Snowmobile Club
Mike Rankin, Houghton Lake Chamber of Commerce
Gavin M. Carnegie, Houghton Lake Chamber of Commerce
Keith Niemela, Keweenaw Tourism Council, Houghton
Andy Smith, Trails Inc
David Whaley, Trails Inc
Matt Cardille, WLUC, TV 6
Dale Israels, MSA Secretary
Rick Brown, MSA Vice President
Bruce Wood, Jordan Valley Trail Council
Loren Purvis, Jordan Valley Trail Council
Lynn Lawrence, Schoolcraft County Snow Assoc.
Jon Clark, Schoolcraft County Snow Assoc.
Tom Myers, President, Michigan Snowmobile Association
Sue Meyers, MSA
Donald Brelsford, Chippewa Snowchasers Snowmobile Club
Jerry Moore, Chippewa Snowchasers Snowmobile Club
Edwin Carlson, Chippewa Snowchasers Snowmobile Club
Mel Stokes, President, Tip O' Mitt Snowmobile Council
Robert Sweet, MSA, Region II
Bob Ulrich, Cheboygan Snowmobile Club
Ed Bowen, Grand Marais Chamber of Commerce

Joe Francis, Grand Marais Chamber of Commerce
Mary A. Caskey, Antrim County Snowmobile Club
W. R. Caskey, Jordan Valley Trail Council
Jim Kostin, Jordan Valley Trail Council
Wally Jurinen, Forest Service USDA, Munising
Barb Kostin, Antrim County Snowmobile Club
Martin Cottle, Sault Snowmobile Association
Allen Cottle, Sault Snowmobile Association
Mike Grant, Snow Trails TV, MSA
Barry Shoemaker, Snow Trails TV, MSA
Dan Clementz, North Country Campground and Cabins
Cathy Clementz, North Country Campground and Cabins
Larry Hach, Senior Ranger, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

I. MINUTES

- A. Acknowledge minutes of October 1, 2002 Advisory Committee Meeting.

Mr. Inman made a motion, supported by Mr. Olson to accept the October 1, 2002 minutes as presented. Motion carried.

II. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Liability Insurance Update

Bill mentioned the ongoing discussions of this issue. Bill discussed sheet of projected costs developed by V&V and Employers Mutual. He also reported on further discussions with Dale Vaghts, V&V Insurance, regarding the need for this additional insurance. V&V prepared cost estimates of 1 million/1 million and 2/2 million. The actual limits required by Attorney General's office are only 1 million per occurrence and 2 million aggregate. V&V reported the largest payout on record has only been \$460-470 thousand, nationwide. He felt this additional insurance requirement is only hurting the program and is unnecessary. Bill charged, by the finance sub-committee to meet with FMFMD Chief along with V&V rep., insurance carrier rep. and Office of Litigation to try to sort this out.

- B. Grooming Cost Analysis Update

Mr. Moore passed out summaries of the original analysis and a modified version. The modified version raised the dollars for the groomer maintenance to \$40 per hour. The original analysis used \$25/hour for this cost. Pre-season meeting discussions led to this change.

There were a couple of other changes to the data collection for the cost analysis that came out of the pre-season meetings.

1. Sponsors must submit a grooming report for each groomer. Sponsors cannot lump two or more groomers on one report.
2. Costs for non-sponsor groomer maintenance labor will be reported under the "Parts Cost" column. Dan provided an explanation of this.
3. Under Groomer Maintenance hours, pre- and post-operation "preventative maintenance" time, even if its 15-20 minutes, should be reported as Groomer Maintenance.

Elza asked about changes in the forms since the program has returned to FMFMD.

Dan stated the administrative forms are still under GAD control, so the forms will not change.

Bill asked about the timeframe for filling the snowmobile program manager position.

Dan stated that the Recreation Trails Section Leader/State trails Coordinator position should be filled sometime in January. After that position is filled, the division will look to fill the snowmobile position as well as the Trailways and Campground program positions.

- C. Finance Sub-Committee/Long Range Planning Committee-Updates
Finance Committee
Covered above

Long Range Planning:

Orville discussed long term goals of the snowmobile program, specifically the “permanent trails” issue. He went on to discuss long term needs of the sponsors so they are fully funded and not relying on club funds to cover program costs. We need to work with other groups on the permanent trail issue. We need to work with grant sponsors to determine their needs and how we can meet those needs. We may be sending letters to the sponsors asking for specific information from them. Getting responses to those letters will be critical to moving ahead with this long range planning.

- D. Gaylord to Cheboygan Connector
Bill asked if this was the Tuscarora Trail issue.

Dan stated that the Indian River east connector was called the Tuscarora Trail. Since the department and this group have determined the alternatives considered were simply not viable, the issue is now actually the Indian River to Cheboygan connector.

Bill then related the discussion of this issue that occurred at the NRC meeting in Indian River. He stated that Bob Sweet had received a letter from FMFMD Chief, Mindy Koch, regarding this trail. He then asked Mr. Sweet to read the letter he had received.

Bill stated that FMFMD’s hands are tied as far as doing anything immediately. When this grade was approved for purchase, the Trust Fund Board got a commitment from the department and the Director that snowmobiles would not be allowed along the Mullet Lake portion of this grade. That was accomplished by Director’s Order. Changing this will require amending or rescinding the original order.

- E. Recreation Specialist Updates
Bill asked if any of the lower peninsula Recreation Specialist positions have been filled.

Dan and AI mentioned that Robin Pearson is now the Recreation Specialist in Gaylord. Neither was sure when the other position would be filled.

WUP-AI Keto:

- Still working to get the final GPSing done on the snowmobile trail system.
- Still working to complete the Escanaba River bridge project in the Gwinn Unit. \$200M bridge turned into almost \$300M. This project should be done any day.
- Working on Big Bay-Marquette trail. Funding allocated for “Phase 1” to get the trail on the ground for this season. This phase would use a portion of the county road for this season. Phase 2 will require some bridges and is planned to be completed by next season.
- Major issue is the Munising to Marquette grade through Chocolay Township.

Working to get everything on line and open this grade to snowmobiling, on a one season trial basis. The Gwinn and Shingleton Units are working to get decking and railing on the bridges. Al also indicated Chocoday Township opposed any use of this grade for snowmobiling, and has filed a lawsuit to stop the trail.

Bill displayed a map that was used in a presentation regarding this grade. He explained some of the details on the map.

- Working with Marquette City to get a permanent trail through the City. There seems to be some changing attitudes in the City. I will be meeting with City representatives in the next week or so.
- Problem with route between L'Anse and Baraga. Just put in an \$80M bridge. The landowner (Celotex) had liability problems in Texas and sent letter to Baraga closing the trail on their property. Might be able to get a route around this problem area, but not possible for this season. Working with Celotex to see if this can be allowed for this season and re-routed for next year. Explaining that the Michigan laws and liability are quite different from Texas laws.

Anne Okonek asked if we could put up special signs and inform snowmobilers that the Munising-Marquette grade is only a one-season trial and their actions will determine whether this trail will remain open to snowmobilers.

Several committee members responded this was an excellent idea. Need to strongly impress upon snowmobilers the fate of this grade/snowmobile trail totally depends upon their actions.

EUP-Dan Moore:

- Escanaba River Bridge was initially allocated \$200,000. The final cost is going to be closer to \$300M.
- Working on numerous amendments for maintenance projects.
- Trail number problems. Not a problem with the numbers themselves, but a problem with the sponsors knowing the right numbers for their trails.

Bill raised a concern with the new trail between Cadillac and Manton, and problems with the bridge wing over the new US-131.

F. Forest Service Update

Anne Okonek-Hiawatha National Forest

- Introduced Cat Woods, Recreation Staff for the east end of the Hiawatha National Forest (HNF).
- HNF now determining whether the HNF should re-write their forest plan. Public meetings to start next week to aid in this endeavor. Noted how critical it is to hear from persons who have recreational concerns.
- Cat Woods discussed the EA she is working on regarding the Red Creek/I-75 bridge at M-134. She mentioned wildlife concerns raised, specifically regarding the Canadian Lynx.
- Wally Jurinen, HNF, Munising discussed several issues happening on the west side of the HNF.

Bill asked about the Canadian Lynx issue and stated he thought since no one had found proof of lynx in Michigan, this shouldn't be an issue.

Cat Woods stated that the FS is required to consider Canadian lynx habitat, whether the cat is here or not.

Randy Charles, Ottawa NF

- Stated all three National Forests will be revising their plans over the next few months or years. This is very important because this planned revision will determine the direction of National Forest Management for the next 10 to 15 years.
- Funding for only one more year for Rick McVey's position as winter Recreation Specialist.
- Some questions raised about amount of funding available for acquisition of IP lands in the western UP. They should know by January how the funding is going to fall out.

Paul Argall asked about the Lynx issue and how it fits with private lands.

Randy responded that, at this time, the regulations (Endangered Species Act) would not impact private lands.

G. Law Enforcement Updates

Curt Bacon

- Governor talking about more budget cuts today. Said this is going to impact snowmobile enforcement because some general fund dollars that had been used for snowmobile enforcement would be reduced. General Fund cuts would require that the department stop snowmobile enforcement whenever the snowmobile dollars are expended. The Law Division will be working off of a snowmobile enforcement plan for the winter. Each district will have an amount for snowmobile enforcement in the plan. Once those patrol hours are used, enforcement will be done.

Larry Hach, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

- Snowmobiling into and through the National Lakeshore will be the same as it has been in the past. The main effort will be keeping snowmobiles on the trails and control speeds on Miners Castle Road where the speed limit is 35mph.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. Baraga-L'Anse Trail Connection

Was covered under Recreation Specialist updates above.

B. 2003 Grant Program Funding

Based on information from GAD, tentative allocation for 03 dollars totals approximately \$547,730,000. This includes grooming grant, maintenance, and equipment from 03 funding. This leaves very little funding for emergency maintenance or other emergency needs.

C. 2003 Meeting Dates

Feb 4, April 22, June 17, August 5, September 30, December 4. All meetings except December will be in Gaylord.

IV. PUBLIC APPEARANCE

A. Bob Sweet, Inland Lakes Snowmobile Club

People who received the letter objected to the statement, "no one objected to the Director's ban on snowmobiles on the Mullett Lake portion of the grade". He stated there were objections, but they were not voiced because the department committed to the Tuscarora Trail. One other concern was allowing non-winter residents to determine winter use on the grade. Very much concerned that this will open this opposition up to "green groups" from California.

Orville stated that any government agency that holds a public comment period must take comments from all the “public”. It doesn’t matter where they live.

B. Ed Bowen, Grand Marais Sno-Trails

Alger County ordered all snowmobile trail signs from county road right-of-ways. This is going to be a trail killer in the Grand Marais area and all of Alger County. Asked why snowmobile signs must be so big? Motorists complaining that the snowmobile signs on road right-of-way are confusing. This is a serious problem in Alger County. There will be a public meeting on this issue on Monday, December 16.

Bill stated that it is unique that the TEA study says our signs are too small, and now everyone out here is saying the signs are too big.

C. David Whaley, Trails Inc.

Trails Inc. might be behind this whole issue because we tried to get the Road Commission to allow a trail and signs on county roads in the west part of the county, in the Chatham area.

D. Cathy Clementz, North Country Campground and Cabins

They have a problem with a non-designated trail across private land, state land, and one county road. Presented the information regarding the situation to get snowmobilers from their businesses to the TASA trail. Based on resident concerns and permittee failure to meet terms of Use Permit, illegal use of private land, and agreements made at a public meeting a year ago, no trail will be groomed on state land south of CR 448.

Paul Gaberdiel gave a brief description of the history of this issue, beginning two years ago. Didn’t think there would be much use of the trail because only people coming from the 4-mile corner businesses would be using it. Traffic from the TASA trail would not go three miles up a non-groomed trail to the businesses.

E. Martin Cottle, Sault Snow Association

Asked about electronic submittal of reimbursements. Dan responded, saying that any sponsor could submit the reimbursement requests and documentation electronically, but they must also have the capability for the electronic signature. All supporting documentation must also be submitted electronically.

Raising the bid amount to \$2,500. Dan stated the Finance Sub-Committee and the Department would discuss this. Don’t expect an immediate decision on this one.

Signs coming very late. Dan stated that nothing can be done now, but this problem should be resolved for the next 5 years since we have a 3-year contract, with the ability for two 1-year extensions.

F. Bruce Woods, Charlevoix County Snowmobile Club

Why separating cat challenger from other “tracked” farm tractors. Asked about maps and trail accuracy.

Bill responded that the equipment categories were based on equipment costs. For the most part, the challenger is much more expensive than the other tractors.

G. Mike Rankin, Houghton Lake Chamber of Commerce

Updated their map. Provided Dan with a copy.

H. Jon Clark, Schoolcraft County Snowmobile Association

Asked about documentation to provide to landowners to address their liability concerns.

Dan stated this has been passed out to all grant sponsors several times, in the form of the Recreational Trespass Act and the Landowner Liability Act. Further stated he would send this information, electronically, to their club's primary contact.

- I. Martin Cottle, Sault Snowmobile Association
Caterpillar sold Cat Challenger design to Agco Allis.
- J. Andy Smith, Trails Inc.
Submitted trail proposal several months ago. Questioned status. Also, landowners were asking whether they should open the gates on the trail that have been there for 20 years.

Bill said he thought this trail was closed due to lack of legal land control.

Lengthy discussion of the Chatham-Little Lake trail, the bids and costs being required by these landowners for a trail that may not be a viable trail after 30 days.

Dan stated if we cannot get minimum 5-year permits, with no cancellation clause, then this trail will not happen.

Al suggested placing trailheads at Chatham and Rumley, which would keep the rest of this trail open.

- K. David Whaley, Trails Inc.
Really likes the signs from the new vendor. Shipping was much better than in the past.

Paul Argall made a motion recommending that if Trails Inc. gets 5 year, non-revocable permit/lease then the Chatham to Little Lake Trail should be opened this season. Second by Jim Duke, motion carried.

V. NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for 9:00am, Tuesday, February 4, 2003, at BJ's Restaurant and Catering, 990 North Center Street in Gaylord.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 1:30pm.