

SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Best Western
M-28 East
Wetmore, Michigan
December 7, 2006

Chairman Manson called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 9:03 a.m., Thursday, December 7, 2006, in Wetmore, Michigan.

Members Present:

Bill Manson, Chair, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association (MSA), Grand Rapids
James Duke, Region I, MSA, Munising
Bill Lucas, Region II, MSA, Cadillac
Lee Murray, At-Large, Hopkins
Jack Nelson, Business Community, Greenville
Orville Olson, Representative at Large, Ludington
David Thomas, Trail Sponsors, Marquette

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Anne Okonek, USDA, Ottawa National Forest
Terry L. Johnson, Antrim County Sheriff's Department

Staff Present:

Steve DeBrabander, State Trails Unit Manager, Forest, Mineral, and Fire Management (FMFM), Lansing
Steve Kubisiak, Recreation and Trails Program Coordinator, FMFM, Lansing
Richard Kennedy, FMFM, Lansing
Joe Taylor, FMFM, Lansing
Christie Bayus, Grants Management, Lansing
Jeff Stampfly, FMFM, Shingleton
Scott Lakosky, FMFM, Seney
Dan Moore, FMFM, Newberry
Ron Yesney, FMFM, Marquette
Kay Fisher, FMFM, Gwinn
Pete Glover, FMFM, Ishpeming
Loretta Cwalinski, FMFM, Gaylord
Lt. John Cischke, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Newberry

Mr. Manson welcomed everyone. The Committee, Department of Natural Resources (Department) staff, and the audience introduced themselves.

MINUTES

The minutes of the September 26, 2006 Snowmobile Advisory Committee Meeting was acknowledged. **Motion was made by Mr. Duke to adopt the minutes of the September 26, 2006 meeting, seconded by Mr. Thomas. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Finance Subcommittee -- **Mr. Olson** reported the subcommittee met several times and have justification for the trail permit fee increase. The recommendation is to increase the snowmobile trail permit fee to \$40. Primary justifications being the gas tax revenues have decreased and the program will be funding groomers at 100%. He added that Michigan has very reasonable fees compared to surrounding states. The subcommittee is working on a ten year plan.

Law Enforcement Subcommittee -- **Mr. Murray** reported the subcommittee has not met for awhile, but noted the Montmorency County Sheriff's Department has been denied grants for breathalyzers and communications equipment the past two years. He noted Antrim County was also denied communications equipment funding. Mr. Murray believes county sheriffs should be properly equipped to communicate with conservation officers in order to safely enforce the law. He requested grant information related to requests to purchase radios, breathalyzers and global positioning (GPS) units.

Mr. Kubisiak noted the snowmobile law enforcement grants program is jointly administered by Law Enforcement Division and Grants Management, and they will need to be involved in these discussions. Mr. Murray will work with Mr. Kubisiak to define specific information needs for the subcommittee. Snowmobile law enforcement grants will be placed on the next meeting agenda.

OLD BUSINESS

Mullet Lake Update -- **Mr. DeBrabander** reported the trail segment along Mullet Lake is open to snowmobiling. Director Humphries amended the land use order to open the 11 mile trail segment this year, with a 35 mph speed limit and no snowmobiling from midnight to 8am. Discussion ensued.

DNR Grooming Update -- **Mr. Kennedy** reminded the committee this will be the last year the Department will groom snowmobile trails. He noted the Department has been successful in finding several clubs to take over trail grooming, but some trails still are not covered. Mr. Kennedy suggested contracting the grooming service as an alternative if a club could not be found and asked the committee for their thoughts. It was the consensus of the committee that contracting should only be considered as a last resort if a club cannot be found. The committee requested a list of trails that are currently being groomed by the Department so they can begin working with the clubs. The target date to have clubs lined up to take over the grooming is next June.

Mr. Olson asked if the Department budget will be reduced because of the grooming reductions. **Mr. Kennedy** said there would still be oversight expenses and could not confirm if there would be any reductions. **Mr. Manson** asked what would happen to the old grooming equipment. **Mr. Kennedy** thought it would probably be auctioned. The committee requested a list of Department owned grooming equipment.

NEW BUSINESS

Fuel Cost Adjustment -- **Mr. Manson** reported fuel costs are reviewed at the start of the grooming season each year to determine if an adjustment should be made based on fuel cost increases from the previous year. Based on this analysis it was determined no adjustment is needed this season. The 2006-07 grooming rate of reimbursement will be set at \$4.34 per mile.

SAC By-laws -- **Mr. Kubisiak** advised there are no by-laws for the snowmobile advisory committee. He encouraged the committee to consider developing by-laws because they document guidance for both staff and committee members, and would have long term benefits for the program. He noted other committees have by-laws and they have been very effective. He referred the committee to the by-laws for the ORV advisory board in their packets. **Mr. Manson** asked Mr. Thomas to chair a committee to determine if by-laws are needed and make a proposal, if necessary. He asked Mr. Murray to assist. He also requested a copy of other by-laws be sent to committee members.

AAA Trail -- **Mr. DeBrabander** reported the AAA snowmobile trail in Marquette County will be impacted by mineral exploration for about two weeks during the end of December and early January. Kennecott Minerals Company will use approximately ½ mile of the trail to move drilling equipment into several test sites. Kennecott will post guards on the trail during the disruption and groom the trail immediately afterward to ensure public safety and minimize trail impacts. The local snowmobile club has been notified. **Mr. Manson** said it would be better if the work was done in January after the holidays.

Snowmobile Budget Report -- **Mr. Taylor** distributed a handout and explained snowmobile revenues and expenditures for fiscal year 2005. He said this information is being provided upon the request of the committee. Discussion ensued regarding revenues and program costs. **Mr. Taylor** noted 2007 snowmobile revenue projections predict a small deficit in the program based on existing revenue streams.

Shared Use of ORV Funds to Repair Snowmobile Trails -- **Mr. Manson** asked what the funding criterion is for maintaining combined trails. **Mr. Kubisiak** said ORV grants are available to non-profit clubs and public agencies. If a trail is open to both ORV and snowmobile operation either the ORV or snowmobile program may be used for trail maintenance. He noted ORV damage restoration funding is used to repair illegal ORV damage off of the trail system and must be on public lands. He noted ORV funds have been used for grading and other special maintenance projects on combined use trails. The ORV grant applications are due August 1st for the following maintenance year.

Mr. Nelson asked about emergency requests. **Mr. Kubisiak** said Forest, Mineral and Fire Management have contingency funds in their grant earmarked for those concerns on state forest lands.

Ms. Okonek mentioned they have seen an increase in damage due to illegal ATV use on snowmobile trails that need immediate repairs. She asked if the National Forest Service could put in an advance request for repairs, so when it's needed, the funding would be available immediately. **Mr. Kubisiak** said they could include a request for contingency funds in their ORV grant request and it would be considered. **Ms. Okonek** added that the Department has been very supportive on repairs to National Forest trails.

Mr. Manson asked if there is a move within the Department to change ORV use regulations in the Upper Peninsula. **Mr. Kubisiak** said the Department plans to maintain the status quo.

Criteria for Drag Replacement – **Mr. Manson** asked if there are criteria for replacing drags. **Mr. Kennedy** explained status reports and equipment requests are sent out to the clubs in March that includes a detailed description of equipment needs. There are not specific criteria for drag replacement. Discussion ensued about drags. **Mr. Manson** recommended criteria for drag replacement be developed.

STAFF REPORTS

Recreation Specialist Reports – **Mr. Moore** and **Mr. Yesney** reported on snowmobile activities in their areas.

USDA Forest Service Report -- **Ms. Okonek** updated the committee on the Whitefish River Bridge trail crossing feasibility study. She announced the National Forest Service will be surveying snowmobilers this season and asked for their cooperation. In the Ottawa National Forest the agreement for the Buck Lake decision memo has been signed and work has begun on the Military bridge trail proposal. In the Huron-Manistee National Forest, an update was given on the M-65 Bridge. The 56th Street by-pass scoping letter will go out in 2007.

Law Enforcement -- **Lt. John Cischke** advised that Captain Bacon was unable to attend the meeting due to a commitment in Lansing. He provided a snowmobile report for the North Zone (Upper Peninsula and northern Lower Peninsula). The report listed the number of complaints, patrols, and arrests, etc. He discussed new lighting for law enforcement sleds and costs, along with enforcement time and budget for last year.

Mr. Manson requested a law enforcement report for the Chocolay Township area complaints.

Sheriff Terry Johnson reported Antrim County's 911 signs seem to be working. They have a new numbering system. Signs have been ordered and the program is coming together very well.

Mr. Manson said that the east end of the Upper Peninsula also has a new numbering system that is working well.

SAC Members Reimbursement Policy -- **Mr. DeBrabander** reported committee members are eligible for travel, meals, and lodging expenses in accordance with State travel rates. This includes the regular SAC meetings and sub-committee meetings. Members must get written approval from the State Trails Coordinator prior to all sub-committee meetings or other meetings they wish to be reimbursed for. He explained the Department needs to be accountable and it would be beneficial to know the proposed meeting schedule for the sub-committees.

Mr. Taylor noted the Department is under budget constraints and justification is necessary. **Mr. Olson** said the committee members do try to be conscientious as to excess spending, and often end up with various costs out-of-pocket.

Policy for Public Bid Openings -- **Mr. DeBrabander** summarized the bidding process and referred to the outline in the snowmobile grant handbook. He noted the bidding procedures were clarified and included in the handbook as a result of the snowmobile program audit conducted in 2004. He feels the process is very clear and that it is important to have a transparent process that is fair to all potential bidders. He noted some inconsistencies statewide and that emphasis will be made at future pre-season meetings with the clubs and field staff to make clarification. **Mr. Manson** said he would like to review the process before the next handbook revision.

Snowmobile Grant Status Update -- **Ms. Bayus** reported all grants have gone out except four. Those were late applications that didn't make it to the Administrative Board in time. They should be approved this week. She reported 34 out of the 65 clubs have not signed up for Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). The SAC will contact those 34 clubs not signed up. **Mr. Manson** asked what happens if there is not a technically signed grant at the time of grooming. **Mr. Kennedy** advised as long as work was not done before October 1, grooming should be reimbursed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Don Britton, Hiawatha Trails asked if the clubs could be notified when a timber cutting would impact a snowmobile trail. **Dan Moore** said compartment reviews and public open houses are an opportunity for the public to comment on proposed timber sales and trail impacts. He noted the open houses are publicized and posted on the Department web site. **Jeff Stampfly** said loggers typically have two years to complete a sale. He noted provisions can be put in the contract to require the logger to notify the Department and the clubs in advance of beginning work. He encouraged the clubs to attend the open houses and make their concerns known so they can be considered for inclusion in the timber sale contract.

John Houk, P.I. & NE MI Council expressed concern about a stretch of railroad grade east of Mullet Lake that was damaged by a logger. He feels timber sale money should be used to repair the trail and foresters need to do a better job ensuring loggers comply with timber sale contract provisions.

Martin Cottle, Soo Snowmobile Association asked if they could get a 75% advance for catastrophic equipment repairs. **Ms. Bayus** said a 75% advance could be made, followed up with payment documentation. **Mr. Cottle** asked if ORV funds could be used to maintain snowmobile trails that are open to ORV use but not designated as an official ORV trail. **Mr. Kubisiak** said if a snowmobile trail is open to ORV use and located on public lands it would be eligible for ORV funds. However, he noted the designated ORV trail system will receive priority funding consideration. **Mr. Coddle** said his field contact denied requests for ORV funds in the past because the trail was not a designated ORV trail.

Larry Marzean, Alpena Snow Association expressed concerns with loggers leaving stumps along the side of trails. He also expressed concerns with a wetland permit issue involving the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Department of Environmental Quality on a proposed snowmobile trail near Hillman. The proposed trail is located on MDOT right-of-way.

John Houk asked if there is any more information on the railroad grade in the Rogers City area. **Mr. DeBrabander** said negotiations are ongoing with the quarry owner. There is no new information other than possible land exchanges are being explored.

NEXT MEETING

Mr. Manson handed out next year's proposed meeting schedule. The next SAC meeting is scheduled on February 6, 2007 at BJ's Restaurant & Catering, at 10:30 am, 990 North Center Street, Gaylord, Michigan.

Meeting adjourned at 12:47 p.m.

Public Present:

Ken Scott, MI Snowmobile Assoc (MSA)
Don Britton, Hiawatha Trails
Robert Forry, Schoolcraft Co. Snow Assoc
Bradley Porter, W MI Snow Council
Denny Zoet, W MI Snow Council
John Houk, P.I. & NE MI Council
Larry Marzean, Alpena Snow Assoc
Allen Cottle, Soo Snowmobile Assoc
Martin Cottle, Soo Snowmobile Assoc

Dennis Johnson, Hiawatha Trails
Dave Whaley, Trails Inc.
Bob Bowers
Rick Brown, MSA
Rob King, MSA, Heart of North Country
Gayle Scott, Gogebic Area Grooming Inc
Dale Israels, MSA
Bud Martin, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club
Bob Humpert, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club