

**MICHIGAN SNOWMOBILE AND TRAILS ADVISORY COUNCIL (Council)
MEETING MINUTES**

July 22, 2011

Approved October 19, 2011

**BJ's Restaurant & Catering
990 North Center Avenue, Gaylord, Michigan 49735**

PRESENT FOR THE COUNCIL

Frank Wheatlake, Chair
Sandra Batie
Jim Dickie
Jim Duke
Mike Foote
John Gonway
Carolyn Kane
Bill Manson
Greg Yager

PRESENT FOR STAFF

Jim Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, Forest Management Division (FMD)
Andrea Turner, Administrative Assistant, FMD
Andrew Turner, Supervisor, Recreational Safety, Law Enforcement Division (LED)
Rose Ingram, Huron National Forest, USDA Forest Service

PUBLIC ATTENDEES

Denise Cline, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG)
Harry Burkholder, Land Information Access Association (LIAA)
Charlie Veneros, Aloha Township/Michigan Townships Association (MTA)
Dale Naturkas, Public
Russ Kent, Antrim County and Alpine Trails Snowmobile Clubs, and
Michigan Snowmobile Association (MSA)
Grey Yager, Cycle Conservation Club (CCC)
Jeff Winegard, Top of Michigan Trails Council
Pat Brower, Off-road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup, and
Great Lakes Four Wheeled Drive Association (GLFWDA)
Deb Manson, MSA

WELCOME

Chair Wheatlake called the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (Council) meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Chair Wheatlake welcomed everyone and introduced himself, followed by introductions of the Council members, and all other attendees.

MINUTES

The minutes of the April 20, 2011 Council meeting were acknowledged. **John Gonway** asked that the minutes be updated to reflect that Rob Golda's (NAW) absence from the June 2, 2011 Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup meeting was due to shoulder surgery. **Motion to adopt the revised April 20, 2011 meeting minutes unanimously carried.**

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Chair Wheatlake altered the order of agenda items to allow Sandra Batie to present first.

House Bill 4684 (MacMaster)

Sandra Batie, Chair, Equine Trailways Subcommittee (ETS) gave a brief summary of House Bill 4684 (attached); the definition of pack and saddle trailways would be amended to mean *"trails and equine access locations that currently are or at any time previously were used by pack and saddle animals."*

The bill was discussed at a May 2011 meeting held at Pigeon River Country State Forest (PRCSF). There was much conversation regarding the federal funding the DNR receives through Pittman-Roberson Wildlife Restoration Act (PR) and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act (DJ) for wildlife-related programs. There is a lot of misunderstanding about PR/DJ funds. Sandra Batie and Mike Foote will work with the Michigan Horse Council to help spread the word and clear up the misunderstandings.

Sandra Batie expressed her concerns with the bill and feels that it undermines the work of the ETS. The bill would put PR/DJ funds in jeopardy and if found in diversion, the DNR would lose approximately \$24.5 million (PR 10.5, Hunter Ed. 2.3 and DJ 11.7).

John Gonway asked who is pushing for this bill, constituents. It sounds similar to a past bill (Right-to-Ride). **Sandra Batie** stated that it might be the same group as behind the Right-to-Ride bill, perhaps dissatisfied with progress being made. Actually – unaware of progress made.

John Gonway said it is very important to understand what this bill does. It has the potential to upset a number of plans in the works (Fort Custer). **Sandra Batie** said if this passes, many groups would revert to not liking horses. **John Gonway** stated that he has written to his Legislature regarding his opposition; has not received a response.

Chair Wheatlake said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) oversees the DNR's compliance of PR/DJ funds.

Pat Brower asked where/when PR/DJ funds could be applied, all state lands. Is recreation in jeopardy? **Jim Radabaugh** replied that fish/game co-managed state lands are hard to separate. **Sandra Batie** referred to the *2011 Recommendations Report of the ETS* (Report) and need for state funds to not be tied to PR/DJ.

Chair Wheatlake responded with the need for general fund money.

Mike Foote referenced Jon Parker's, USFWS, remark regarding the frequency/intensity of use. If it stays below the threshold, things are ok.

Sandra Batie gave a quick review of the creation of the ETS; how the survey was distributed; the meeting held in Lansing concerning the PRCSF issues; and what caused the restrictions that led to PA 45 and 46. Donna Stine, Policy Coordinator, DNR, is working closely with the ETS regarding the Equine Access Management Plan for the PRC. **Sandra Batie** referenced page 30 of the Report.

Discussion followed regarding trail expansion - loop rides (Elk Hill), the need for trail signs/makers, improving the STS trail, and Elk Hill campgrounds need for parking and reservation system. This will be reevaluated in accordance with the PRC Management Plan.

Sandra Batie reported that the ETS is in majority support of the Report.

Chair Wheatlake summarized what the ETS has accomplished. **Jim Radabaugh** stated that the ETS separated "funding" from the Report and focused on what is needed/wanted. **Chair Wheatlake** asked if the DNR was on board with the Report. Jim Radabaugh responded "yes."

The DNR/ETS will oversee an aggressive campaign for public review/comment of the Report. **Jim Radabaugh** asked the Council that with its approval, a Press Release and the Report would be posted on the DNR-ETS website Monday, July 25, 2011.

2011 Recommendations Report of the ETS

Sandra Batie gave an overview of Goals 1 through 4:

Goal #1

Identify and promote a statewide network of high quality pack and saddle trailways and related facilities/businesses in such a manner that Michigan becomes widely known as a state that both welcomes and promotes saddle and pack equine recreation.

John Gonway asked if they were trying to set up central/median to address local conflicts. **Sandra Batie** reference Goal #3. Local issues become political statewide. **Mike Foote** would like to work with workgroups, etc. before going to the DNR with conflicts. He referenced the great work the snowmobile group has accomplished and would like the ETS to do the same. Discussion followed.

Goal #2

Establish effective collaborations and partnerships to identify, develop, and maintain a generous set of safe, financially sustainable and ecologically sound equine trail recreational opportunities on public and leased private lands spatially distributed across the state.

Jim Dickie asked about (equine) leased land, is it something new? **Sandra Batie** responded that there are a few leases in place, nothing like what snowmobile has.

Goal #3

Develop an informed group of equine trail users who share a common interest with the DNR, with other land managers and other trail users in assuring the availability of and access to high quality pack and saddle trailways and related facilities.

Goal #4

Develop partnerships and collaborations with the DNR, with other land managers, and with other trail users for support of, expansion of, and maintenance of Michigan trails and related facilities as well as minimization of user conflicts and illegal use.

Sandra Batie recommended that the ETS report annually.

Council vote to approve Press Release and posting of the Report with a 60-day public comment period (ending September 30).

Bill Manson motioned to support, seconded by **Mike Foote**. Motion unanimously carried.

Drummond Island Update

Jim Radabaugh reported that Chair Wheatlake appointed Pat Brower to serve on the Drummond Island (DI) Writing Team, a Director initiative to develop a *Natural Resources and Recreation Plan for Drummond Island* (Plan), and asked him to provide an update. The DI Writing Team members are the stakeholders that the DNR identified to help write/develop the Plan. The first meeting (procedures) was held this past Monday, and next meeting (planning) would be in two days. The issue of PR/DJ funds has already been mentioned.

Trail Acquisition

Jim Radabaugh referenced a recent rail corridor acquisition into Rogers City that connects to the rail corridor that was gifted to the DNR.

Jim Radabaugh, per Carolyn Kane's request, gave a brief overview of updated House Bill 4111, regarding Volunteers. The Michigan United Conservation Clubs initiated this bill to help in wildlife settings but it covers all programs. The DNR is currently working on Policy/Procedures as guidance.

Bill Manson mentioned potential problems. **Greg Yager** asked how this effects ORV grant sponsors. **Jim Radabaugh** responded that it does not change anything for grant sponsors.

ORV Advisory Workgroup (ORVAW) Report

Greg Yager reviewed the written update sent in by Tom Dunn. **Chair Wheatlake** commented that John Matonich, Commissioner, Natural Resources Commission, is supportive of ORVs – pushing use in UP for hunting season.

Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup (SAW) Report

Bill Manson reported that the last SAW meeting was June 21, discussion on snow processors and vote to be eligible for funding through the snow program. Permit sales are down 7 percent this year, grooming down approximately 100,000 miles. Overall, program has evened out.

Jim Dickie said sponsors have been calling to ask about when they can get equipment. **Jim Radabaugh** responded that there is an upcoming budget meeting, should know in about two weeks.

Historic snowmobile permits moving along and should be available August 1, 2011, at the Secretary of State.

Chair Wheatlake asked about the progress of the M-65 crossing over the Au Sable River. **Bill Manson** replied, "yes it should be open this winter."

Chair Wheatlake referenced the Britton e-mail regarding alternative night grooming and asked that it be forwarded to the Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup for response.

Jim Duke mentioned Military Hill bridge; working with Ron Yesney. Hickey Creek bridge on-track and should be complete by the end of September.

Bill Manson discussed the White Pine paved area; bicycle riders have raised concerns and have contacted Rep. Booher regarding snowmobile stud damage. Bill Manson responded that is not damage, but just normal wear and tear.

Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup (NAW) Report

John Gonway, Chair, Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup (NAW) – reported that the last NAW meeting was held June 2, 2011. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Council of Governments - mapping assets are moving toward GIS. Data, trail organization act locally, have a lot of mapping assets. Subcommittee of mapping will meet August 9 to develop plan for tech/region and will put a proposal together.

Chair Wheatlake commented that they were on a good track - taking inventory. He suggested that the Council ask Pure MI if funding is available to assist. John Gonway and Jim Radabaugh to discuss further.

Northeast / Northwest Council of Governments

Denise Cline, NEMCOG, and **Harry Burkholder**, LIAA, gave a Power Point presentation *Working Together to Market "Up North" A Multi-Regional Collaboration in Northern Michigan*.

Recently, a new collaboration of partners has formed which feels that they can accomplish more together than they can separately. They have a goal of collectively marketing all northern Michigan recreational assets from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron with an Up North identity so that the rest of the country knows what it really means to go "Up North."

Web-based marketing is the first obvious step to effectively make our region known throughout the country. The LIAA, NEMCOG, and MDOT partnered last year to create a coastal tourism marketing website for the US 23 Heritage Route, www.us23heritageroute.org. Their group intends to use that program structure as a model to create a northern Michigan identity and on interactive mapping website which contains detailed information on all types of trail systems in northern Michigan as well as information about the things to do and see and services available around the trail systems.

Rose Ingram remarked that the work accomplished thus far was very impressive.

John Gonway asked in terms of funding, partnership with private industries.

Chair Wheatlake asked Jim Radabaugh if we could have a Pure MI representative attend the next Council meeting. **Jim Radabaugh** responded yes; who would you like to invite? **Chair Wheatlake** stated that he would like representative from the MDOT, Pure MI, USDA Forest Service, NE/NWCOG to meet with the Governors office.

STAFF REPORTS

Lt. Andrew Turner, LED – gave an update regarding the number of students issued Snowmobile/ORV safety certificates: Snowmobile 4,073 and ORV 7,579 (five-year average).

Lt. Turner discussed the three new ORV Safety Instructor classes being offer this year. Their target is 24 students per class; current class has 17 students.

Jim Dickie asked when the on-line snowmobile safety classes would be available. **Lt. Turner** responded that with a green light from MSA, it's ready to go. Discussion followed.

Rose Ingram, USDA Forest Service – reported that Region 9 (representing 20 NE states) has a new manager. Charles (Chuck) Myers began his position as Regional Forester of the Eastern Region in mid-July 2011. He comes to the Region from the Washington Office, where he served as Deputy Chief for Business Operations since January 2009.

Two forest supervisor positions have been filled; Joe Reyer for Hiawatha, and Anthony Scardina for Ottawa.

The Sixth Circuit court analysis of semi-permanent snowmobile use impact statement – process of reviewing the draft document. Meeting the timeline allotted by the judge.

The timber market is making a turn – new bidders, more bidders, no “no bids.”

Chair Wheatlake referenced expiring terms and asked workgroup Chairs to seek reappointment or suggestions for appointments to him.

Group comments as follows:

Greg Yager really liked the power point presentation.

Mike Foote agreed.

Carolyn Kane commented that it was pretty exciting to be here and be part of this. She was also proud to announce her acceptance of the *Rails to Trails Conservancy* “Champions Award.”

John Gonway - nothing to add.

Jim Dickie - due to economy, people are staying closer to home. He reported that Bill Manson was selected for the Snowmobile Hall of Fame in Wisconsin.

Jim Duke agreed with Jim Dickie.

Bill Manson - nothing to add.

Chair Wheatlake referenced a presentation he attended in honor of Keith Charters, Natural Resources Commission; Traverse City State Park renamed to *Keith J. Charters Traverse City State Park*.

NEXT MEETING

October 19, 2011, Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center

Chair Wheatlake suggested that we assess where we are before scheduling the next Council meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 1:58 p.m.

DRAFT