

**Minutes of the
Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council
July 31, 2012**

Approved October 8, 2012

The regular meeting of the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC) was called to order by Chair Frank Wheatlake at 10:10 a.m. on Tuesday, July 31, 2012, at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center, 104 Conservation Drive, Roscommon, Michigan 48653. The following members were present:

*Frank Wheatlake, Chair
Sandra Batie
Jim Dickie
Jim Duke
Tom Dunn
Mike Foote
Carolyn Kane
Bill Manson
Erin McDonough
Greg Yager*

The following Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Parks and Recreation Division (PRD), staff was present: *Chief Ronald A. Olson, Jackie Blodgett, Jim Radabaugh, Annamarie Bauer, Paul Curtis, Paul Yauk, and Andrea Turner.*

Public attendees included: *Tom Bailey, Blue Ribbon Panel, Little Traverse Conservancy; Brad Garmon, MEC; and Lewis Shuler, Cycle Conservation Club of Michigan.*

MINUTES

The minutes of the April 23, 2012 MSTAC meeting were acknowledged. Ms. Sandra Batie asked that corrections be made to page 6, under *Equine Trailways Subcommittee* report; "...the statewide equine trail inventory ~~at Fort Custer~~ and have expanded..." **Motion to adopt the revised April 23, 2012 meeting minutes unanimously carried.**

Chair Wheatlake spoke of new DNR Director Keith Creagh and how appreciative he is to have him on board.

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Presentation of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

Ms. Melissa Gibson, Public Sector Consultants, distributed handouts of the *Michigan Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* and *Michigan Outdoor Recreation Telephone Survey Summary Findings*.

She explained that the SCORP is completed every five years to identify trends, needs, and issues, and is required by the National Park Service to access Land and Water Conservation Funding. The PowerPoint presentation included additional background, surveys, key findings, and objectives of the SCORP. Discussion followed.

Ms. Gibson continued by sharing the revised draft objectives and stated that she will incorporate ideas mentioned today. The plan is due November 2012.

A question was asked as to how the SCORP fits into the DNR Plan. Chief Olson stated that the SCORP, along with other division strategic plans, are all very important.

Ms. Batie asked if there was a list of all DNR surveys currently being conducted. Chair Wheatlake asked Ms. Turner to look into this request.

Discussion followed regarding forestry/logging and how it affects the state forest trails/recreation – plan accordingly to avoid user conflicts.

Ms. Batie asked for an update on the Land Cap Legislation. Chief Olson reviewed the provisions including a Strategic Plan, when complete, the Land Cap is lifted.

Review of the Trail User Survey and Develop a Vision Statement for the Trails Plan

Mr. Jim Radabaugh, on behalf of Ms. Donna Stine, reported that the State Trails Network Planning Team (STNPT) met July 25 and reviewed the draft Trail User Survey (Survey). The final Survey will be sent out soon to a number of user groups; approximately 500-600 contacts so far. The deadline for Survey responses will be August 31, 2012.

Chair Wheatlake asked that the revised draft Survey be sent via e-mail to the MSTAC, Equine Trailways Subcommittee, and Advisory Workgroups; comments should be sent to Ms. Stine and are due in by August 8, 2012.

Mr. Radabaugh, on behalf of Ms. Stine, distributed the *Draft Vision Statement Michigan Trails Network* and *Potential Priority Recommendations* for review and comment (prioritize).

Mr. Radabaugh stated that Ms. Denise Cline reported that the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG) has received enough funds to complete the initial website development. Funding was awarded to complete the tasks as follows:

MEDC in the amount of \$40,000

Complete Asset Data Collection of Northeast Michigan; Develop Localized Trail Town Economic Development Program and Regional Best-Practices Manual; and Develop Mobile Version of the Website.

USDA in the amount of \$27,500

Form Trail and Asset Data Teams; Compare/Aggregate Trail Data that is Available from Various Sources; Develop Trail Data Standards; and Seamlessly Integrate Trail Data into Usable GIS Layers for Upload to the Website

The NEMCOG is working toward obtaining funding to fill in the asset data for the Northwest region.

Discussion on “Designated Trail” and Trail Amenities

Mr. Jim Radabaugh reported and asked for any comments to be sent to Ms. Stine. Much discussion followed. Chair Wheatlake stated that Ms. Stine should be present at the next meeting for further discussion.

Report on the Water Trail Initiative

Mr. Jim Radabaugh reported on Michigan Sea Grant funding of a Great Lakes water trail study being led by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA).

UPDATES

Blue Ribbon Panel

Ms. Erin McDonough distributed a draft handout on behalf of the Michigan State Parks & Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel. The handout included two draft vision statements and the desired outcomes. She asked that comments be sent directly to her.

Mr. Tom Bailey, Blue Ribbon Panel and Little Traverse Conservancy, commented that we need to take action to follow up on "implementation" of these plans; hearing/seeing the same thing from various groups.

Mr. Brad Garmon, MEC, stated that trying to make these short terms groups – how do we create the experience, tie in amenities/community. Ms. McDonough responded that we use this opportunity to evaluate these ideas.

Chair Wheatlake reiterated that the MSTAC/DNR is bound by executive legislation to have a Draft Plan finished by September 30 and a Final Plan by March 2013.

DNR-PRD Trails Programs

Chief Olson distributed a *DNR-PRD Trails Programs* handout. The handout provided a summary overview of PRD's Planning, Resource, and Program Services Sections and included the various units/staff associated with each. The handout also included the Recreation Specialist and Trail Analysts staff and their area of responsibility. There was a request to add the program area of responsibility. Mr. Curtis provided a *Summary of Recreation Specialist and Trails Analyst Responsibilities* handout.

Chief Olson also followed up on an earlier question regarding if it was legal to hunt from a horse - yes. Some trails also allow carts. Mr. Curtis commented that designated use for mobility - work with local friends groups to identify what is needed. Mr. Curtis responded to Mr. Foote regarding what is/is not acceptable use on certain trails. User groups need to work with Park Management. Chief Olson will have staff reach out and work with user groups.

Ms. Batie stated that is was a fine line dealing with ADA and motorized use. Maybe better to create criteria of when a handicapped/disabled device may not be allowed on a trail.

Chief Olson commented on the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) and issues regarding funding; was previously funded by oil and gas revenues; after the MNRTF reaches \$5 million, the oil and gas revenues would go into the Park Endowment Fund (can only be used for state park/state park recreation capital improvements/matching other grants); and at \$8 million rolls to the state's general fund. The MNRTF use is 75% acquisition and 25% development. State forest campgrounds and nonmotorized trailway parking/trailheads are designated as recreation areas. Snowmobile/ORV are not designated as recreation areas, therefore cannot receive funding from the Park Endowment Fund. Designation will need to be addressed at some point.

A question was asked as to who makes the designation of trails. Chief Olson replied that it by a Land Use Order of the Director (LUOD) of the DNR, through the NRC and State Parks Advisory Committee.

Chief Olson will send a *Chart of Standards of Funding* to the MSTAC for reference.

Reference was made to the Governors Budget proposal for an ORV fee increase; it did not move forward and is not part of the budget. Chief Olson addressed Mr. Dunn and commented that staff is looking at some different scenarios/numbers and would like to speak with the ORV Advisory Workgroup (ORVAW); will discuss further during the ORVAW update.

Chief Olson reported that Governor Snyder and Director Creagh will be touring the UP in approximately two weeks.

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Status Review of Trail Restricted Funds

Ms. Jackie Blodgett presented a PowerPoint regarding the snowmobile program. The presentation included background information on what the DNR has completed and an update on the trails transition from the Forest Resources Division to PRD. Ms. Blodgett also shared an ORV Registrations handout showing the number of registrations from 2005 through 2012 (estimate). Discussion followed.

Subcommittee and Workgroup Reports **Equine Trailways Subcommittee**

Ms. Sandra Batie, Chair, reported that the Equine Trailways Subcommittee continues to work on developing the equine trails and facilities portion of the MSTAC plan through the workgroup established as part of the process. The workgroup consists of ETS members Sarah Nichols, Jan Herrick, and Sandra Batie, and Chair Paul Curtis of PRD. The workgroup has developed an outline of their portion of the MSTAC report. Currently considerable work is underway inventorying existing trails and facilities as well as identifying GPS coordinates of equine campgrounds and mapping of equine trails. There will be focus group interviews of equestrians in each of the four ETS regions about perceived gaps in the existing opportunities. Depending on the results from these focus groups, there may be follow up email surveys of equine trail users. The results from the focus groups and any surveys will be used to help identify the metrics to be used in evaluating the equine trails and facilities part of the MSTAC plan. An initial list serve has been established of trail riding associations; the existence of this list serve will greatly improve the ETS's and the DNR's ability to communicate with trail riders. After investigation, it was decided that there is not enough pack animal activity on state lands to warrant inclusion of these trail users in the equine planning.

Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup

Mr. Lee Murray, Chair, stated that at best, the snowmobilers have a 90 day season. Not able to order equipment in a timely manner. Would like discussion made earlier in the year. Mr. Murray also said that he is very optimistic of the SAW program working with PRD.

Mr. Bill Manson stated that the discussion regarding viable trail areas, trails will survive may need to look at changes with equipment, etc. Ms. Batie commented that good work is being

done by snowmobile grooming/maintenance, has benefits to the other trail users (horse, ORV, etc.).

Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup

Ms. Nancy Krupiarz reported the NAW had filled a vacancy left by Mr. Rob Golda and then the NAW Chair, Mr. John Gonway, resigned. Many different programs fall under NAW (watertrails, biking, etc.). She stated that MDOT's role has changed over the last few years regarding nonmotorized – will be a useful source; currently working with Ms. Bauer, Mr. Radabaugh, and Mr. Yauk.

Chair Wheatlake appointed Ms. Krupiarz acting Chair of the NAW.

Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup

Mr. Tom Dunn, Chair, reported that the ORVAW has timelines, etc. in place. Polaris would like to change legal definitions, all for not if we don't change the fee. The last ORV fee increase was in 1996 at \$16.25. No changes/increases since that time. Have had several meetings; PA 240 appears to be going statewide (ride shoulders of county roads). Current discussions have been for two licenses; one license to ride \$16.25 and Trail Permit \$14.

Mr. Dunn suggested an ORV fee increase is needed to keep this program moving along. Mr. Dunn motioned to have MSTAC endorse a Resolution of Support of an ORV fee increase for licensing ORVs to maintain trails, routes and their scramble areas, and sustain their maintenance. The motion carried unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS (by exception)

None reported.

Chair Wheatlake asked the MSTAC members to comment on how they felt things were going. Overall, the members reported that it was a good meeting and they are looking forward to the next one. Ms. Kane was pleased with the SCORP and related reports. She commented that "Trail Towns" should not be put on the back burner - very important. Mr. Dickie agreed with Ms. Kane and the need to improve tourist's visits. Mr. Dunn stated that he appreciates and thanks the MSTAC for its ORV support.

Meeting adjourned.

The next MSTAC meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 8, 2012, at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center.