

**Minutes of the
Michigan Trails Advisory Council
October 28, 2014**

The regular meeting of the Michigan Trails Advisory Council (MTAC) was called to order by Chair Frank Wheatlake at 10:00 a.m., on Tuesday, October 28, 2014, at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center, 104 Conservation Drive, Roscommon, Michigan 48653. The following members were present:

*Frank Wheatlake
Jim Dickie
Bill Manson
Jim Duke
Drew YoungeDyke
Tim Kobasic
Mike Foote
Nancy Krupiarz*

The following Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff was present: Jim Radabaugh, Tim Schreiner, Anna Sylvester, Todd Neiss, Kristen Bennett, Amy Swainston and Barb Graves, Parks and Recreation Division (PRD); and Bill Sterrett, Forest Resources Division (FRD).

Randy Van Portfliet, MDOT Director, Bureau of Field Services conferenced in by telephone.

ACTION ITEMS

MOTION: Mr. Tim Kobasic moved to approve the July 8, 2014 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mike Foote and it carried unanimously.

Mr. Jim Radabaugh said that they're looking for recommendation for the Equine Trails Subcommittee vacancies that are currently with the Director for appointment.

Criteria for Priority Trails

Mr. Jim Radabaugh said that the subcommittees were to bring those to the Council, but has not had an update as of yet.

Ms. Nancy Krupiarz said that the non-motorized workgroup had a few comments on suggested criteria; regarding the connections for two or more counties - they would like to perhaps see 'jurisdiction' instead. The wording regarding connecting regionally significant facilities – they would like to see broadening the inclusion for a connection instead of just regional. Also, in reference to constructing trails – further defining the term 'regional'. Next, the wording of multi-use trail versus single use – sometimes a trail is better established as single-use. And last, regarding the completion of a loop trail versus a linear trail – priority trails shouldn't have to satisfy all the criteria.

UPDATES

Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup

A summary from their last meeting was provided by Mr. Thomas Dunn to MTAC. Their financial goals seem to have been met, but are holding off on creating new projects just yet with the new license package. Also, they are asking Chair Wheatlake to reappoint Don Helsel for two year term and Skip Schultz to another one year term. All other members are willing to continue at the Chair's recommendation. Mr. Tim Kobasic added they are connecting several designated routes in the UP that are contiguous. Also, USFS is working on their Travel Analysis Process (TAP) regarding road use. Concerns included road closures to public use which could impact trails on state land. The public comment has ended and will go for review, and final recommendations by next fall. He added there has been beneficial communications between the USFS in the eastern UP and the DNR.

Ms. Kristen Thrall, USFS, Huron-Manistee said they have been looking at road systems closer and are documenting what roads they have and what those roads are used for. It is currently in analysis process.

Equine Trails Sub-Committee

Mr. Mike Foote said they did not have their meeting last month, but said that the Rose Lake signage issue has been resolved. All grants applied for are moving forward in the process. Two other grants being looked at for interest (one in particular electricity at Ionia) and will be followed up on. Also, discussed were equestrian trails, forestry and logging operations.

Non-motorized Advisory Workgroup

Ms. Krupiarz reported on the NAW meeting in September – discussed priority trails criteria and looked at their list of 24 multi-use trails, narrowed it down to 12, but difficult to pick priority trails. They are looking at other funding sources and want to raise awareness of the Comprehensive Trails Plan. There will be a Legislative Information Day regarding all trails Tuesday, April 28th.

Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup

Mr. Bill Manson gave an update from the October SAW meeting - the program has purchased thirteen pieces of equipment. They will be putting GPS units in new equipment which will provide detailed information on grooming activity. Major maintenance grants are out. They will also be furnishing oil sample kits to clubs once a year. Final recap on sales - fewer than 146,000 permits were sold last year. Registration is down as well. Criteria for permanent easements were discussed and they are still trying to figure out the registration fund (which is used to purchase permanent easements). He also shared the breakdown of costs incurred for the program in grants, totaling approximately \$6.7 million.

Mr. Manson asked the status on the Chassell to Houghton railroad grade where Recreation Trail Program (RTP) funds are being used. Mr. Radabaugh said they have resolved the trespass issues, but there is still an open discussion of ownership with Michigan Tech. Discussion continued. This topic will be an Action item added to the next agenda.

Also regarding Trail 109 south of Twin Lake – local landowner closed part of the trail. Houghton County researched the property and shows it's an undeveloped road thus the gates were ordered to be removed.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Bruce Rendon, State Representative, 103rd District addressed the group. He represents five counties in the northern lower. He noted appreciation of MTAC and added that he's familiar with groups such as this, and the importance of trails, in particular boosting local economies.

Dan Wilhelm, restaurant/pub owner in Harrison along Leota snowmobile trailhead voiced concern about DNR law enforcement along that trail, and the numerous tickets that have been issued to folks riding side-by-sides, vs. Secretary of State licensed vehicles. Many of his customers, (those ticketed in particular) have said they will not be back to Clare, and that concerns him. That particular trail is not a designated ORV trail. Mr. Kobasic suggested submitting a trail proposal to get that portion designation changed. Ms. Amy Swainston will be their contact and they will discuss after the meeting.

Mr. Frank Starkweather with Saginaw Bay Water Trail Alliance wanted to update the group about the Alliance and share some of the upcoming activities in their area and provided Water Trail Maps of Michigan's Saginaw Bay Blueways Trail to the group. He mentioned several improvements they have made as various access sites. They are currently working on what will soon be the single most comprehensive water trail program. He also shared a thorough plan regarding those water trails in Arenac County.

Randy Fairbanks, Thunder Bay Trails Association wanted to express concern over the Chippewa Hills Pathway, Alpena County and a projected timber cutting in that trail section, which will impact over 80% of the non-motorized trail. He talked about all the activities on the trail, the varied terrain and recreation importance. The total affect could disrupt use for potentially three to five years and the loss of aesthetics is of major concern. Their group wants to stress they are not against timber cuttings, but how it's done, and how close to trail systems they come.

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Appointment of MTAC Vice Chair

Chair Wheatlake said he asked Mr. Jason Rolling if he would be interested in that position and Mr. Rolling had agreed. Chair Wheatlake added he would like to see more UP involvement as well as a younger people being involved in the Council and trails programs.

Liability of Landowners

Mr. Radabaugh said that Donna Stine is still working on this issue and nothing to report at this time.

Gold Standard Committee

Mr. YoungeDyke said their committee has not met since the last meeting, but updated on their group's activities, and will have a final report soon. He would like to have a conference call in

the next few weeks. Setbacks for timber sales near designated trails will be discussed as well, and they hope to have a recommendation by the next MTAC meeting.

Mr. Bill Sterrett, District Supervisor shared two handouts with the Council (Logging Operations information to Timber Producers and Best Management Practices policy Draft). He wanted to address forest logging and their challenge of balancing the health of the forest, recreation interests and various user groups along with economic value. There is a compartment review process for public comment before every timber cutting, and he stressed the importance of cutting diseased and aged trees before they become blow-downs. Buffer zones will also be looked at to improve longer-sustaining trees (i.e. red pine or oak) after short-lived trees like jack pine are removed. FRD continues to improve their communication with contractors involved in timber sales to be aware of all those concerns as well. Mr. Sterrett will ask Bill O'Neill, Chief of FRD if he would contact the timber industry to review the policy document provided as well.

Ms. Anna Sylvester spoke about the improved communication that Parks is building on in conjunction with awareness of special use permits and trail events with FRD, Fisheries and Wildlife division staff as well.

Ms. Darlene Alexander also expressed concern about the cutting in Chippewa Hills Pathway. She is concerned the trail will be ruined and wants to make sure that there is follow-up in the areas cut. Mr. Sterrett said that he'd like to discuss any other concerns the group may have; they will continue with their discussion after the meeting.

Pure Michigan Trails Update

Mr. Radabaugh talked about the Governor's signing of the six bills that became Public Acts September 25th (one established MTAC's new name designation); also provisions for the Director to designate certain water trails and towns as Pure Michigan designations. Ms. Krupiarz added they are working on policies, procedures and administrative rules for Pure Michigan designations as well. This will reinforce quality standards, enhancements, maintenance and plans for maintenance. This will begin with a five year designation, and continue if successful.

Mr. Jim Duke wanted to invite everyone to AuTrain, and the trail enhancements there on multi-use trails which includes water trails connections with AuTrain River.

Question was asked about Administrative Rule process - Mr. Radabaugh said it takes 6-8 months. Chair Wheatlake would like to see Pure Michigan Trails as an agenda item for the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

VASA Pathway Economic Report

Julie Clark, TART Trails gave a presentation along with Woody Smith, Avenue ISR regarding the VASA Pathway and their year-long study regarding economics in the Traverse City area. She summarized the funding involved, volunteer efforts and user groups/usage for Michigan. The total local economic impact/benefit to the area is approximately \$2.6 million annually in direct spending. In looking closer \$23.5 million spent in Michigan dollars for these events, including everything spent for those events and visits to the area. Significant income is from

events on the pathway. Their takeaway is to engage more with users, local businesses and civic leaders, and encourage more travel by featuring the VASA Pathway.

MDOT Bicycle Program

Debra Alfonso, Manager Intermodal Services Unit with MDOT had a handout to go along with her power point presentation. She shared MDOT's vision and goals, and reviewed many of the trails programs they are involved with. Fifteen states have designated trails under the United States Bicycle Routes, which is an ambitious route system that consists of long-distance touring routes including trails and road systems. The two routes in Michigan that were both recently established are Marine City to Ludington and New Buffalo to Sault Ste. Marie. They have recently proposed a third trail system in the UP, from St. Ignace to Iron Mountain. They also offer road and trail bicycling brochures which lists local bike trails for ten regions throughout Michigan. An overview of their economic study showed \$668 million as total annual economic impact from bicycling in Michigan. The presentation can be viewed at [[MDOT Bicycling Initiatives](#)].

Ms. Alfonso completed her presentation giving MDOT's website for further information – www.michigan.gov/mdot-biking

Recreation Trails Accessibility

Cindy Burkhour, Access Recreation shared a power point regarding accessibility. She reviewed the importance of making trails accessible to everyone, and stressed that when these facilities and access points are created they will be used. She said that state and local entities are not bound by the newest federal requirements, but making as many trails and recreation areas accessible to everyone are the right thing to do. Ms. Burkhour shared many examples of improvements and enhancements to recreation areas, campsites and trails that create a positive experience for everyone. She completed her presentation with numerous opportunities available to increase accessibility throughout the state, from funding sources, economic benefits and most of all accessibility for everyone to equally enjoy Michigan's resources.

STAFF REPORTS

Leadership Academy Project

Mr. Radabaugh shared the final document with MTAC that was presented at the Leadership Academy's presentation/graduation today. He and Donna Stine were co-sponsors to six members from DNR, Department of Agriculture and Department of Environmental Quality which they tasked with how to communicate to health community's for healthy living and injury/illness recovery through recreation and trails use. They are very pleased with the final product, and hopefully can put this document into good use as well as getting assistance with funding from various health organizations. He would like everyone to read it and share any input or comments.

Mr. Radabaugh introduced Kristen Bennett, Regional Field Planner as a new PRD staff member; she will help coordinate statewide trail planning, replacing Annamarie Bauer. He also recognized Matt Pegouskie, Community Investment Manager, Chelsea Area Wellness Foundation who spoke about their local efforts to join five communities for better health and wellness in conjunction with area recreation areas. Scott Post, P.E., Engineer with Prein &

Newhof, Grand Rapids was also introduced; he is overseeing the development of the Fred Meijer Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail, which is near 90% completion.

Law Enforcement

Cpl. Morey updated the group on the three ORV Instructor Academies this year - they are in the process of planning three more so far in 2015. There were 14 snowmobile fatalities last season, but down nine from previous season. Law Division is also planning on hiring 44 more conservation officers in January.

Chair Wheatlake brought up the two openings on the ORV Advisory Workgroup. He asked that Don Helsel be given another two year appointment, and one year for Skip Schulz.

2015 Meetings

Chair Wheatlake said that three meetings a year are good – and keeping them in April, July and October. He will look at his schedule and recommend dates. *Subsequent dates selected by Chair Wheatlake are April 7, July 6, and October 21 at the RAM Center.

Mr. Duke would like to submit a letter for reappointment – his term is up this year.

Various comments were shared by Committee members of a productive meeting, great information shared and the progress that has been made.

Ms. Bennett added that there has been a Connecting Communities Project trail in Oscoda that has been given a DNR designation, to be ready in the spring (existing snowmobile trail with ORV use now). This trail will connect Oscoda to Mio. They are also in discussion with North County Trail Association to discuss their Memorandum of Understanding of trail connections through seven National Forests. And last, there's been discussion with USDA Forest Service regarding AuSable River water trail.

MOTION: Mr. Foote moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:24 p.m. The motion was seconded by Mr. Dickie and it carried unanimously.