

SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY WORKGROUP (SAW)

MEETING MINUTES

October 19, 2010

**Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center
104 Conservation Drive, Roscommon, Michigan 48653**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Lee Murray, Chairman, At-Large Representative
Al Green, Michigan Snowmobile Association (MSA), Region II Representative
Bruce Wood, Trail Sponsors Representative
Rich Filley, Trail Sponsors Representative
Jim Duke, MSA, Region I Representative, Munising
Bill Manson, MSA Region III Representative, Grand Rapids
Don Britton, At-Large Representative

DNRE STAFF PRESENT

Steve DeBrabander, State Trails Operations and Construction Unit Supervisor, FMD, Lansing
Cpl. John Morey, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Gaylord
Loretta Cwalinski, Secretary, Administration, Gaylord

PUBLIC ATTENDEES

Dale DeClark, Jordan Valley Trails Council (JVTC)
Jim Dickie, MSA
Bud Martin, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club (OHSC)
Norman Rockwell, OHSC
Dan White, OHSC
John Hurry, OHSC
Don Carroll, OHSC
Danny Daggy, Pere Marquette Snowmobile Club

WELCOME

Chairman Murray called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup (SAW) to order at 10:00 a.m., Tuesday, October 19, 2010, in Roscommon, Michigan.

Rules of Procedure and Meeting Schedule

Mr. DeBrabander explained that the SAW meetings will have less staff present due to the creation of more trail advisory groups. He is hoping someone from LED will continue to attend; the Forest Service has been invited to attend these meetings as well. The Rules of Procedure will apply to all the workgroups. Also, there will be appearance cards handed out to anyone wishing to speak during the public comment section. Comments sent before the meeting to Mr. DeBrabander are acceptable. Public comment will take place at the end of each meeting.

Mr. Murray asked if these Rules of Procedure (Rules) are available on-line - they are; at the DNRE's website www.michigan.gov/dnr. Go to the Commissions, Boards and Committees link, MSTAC, then Rules of Procedure for the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council.

Mr. DeBrabander indicated the Rules state that the next years schedule will be determined at the last meeting of the year. Therefore, this item will be an agenda item at the December SAW meeting.

Mr. DeBrabander suggested the workgroup should have a Vice-Chairman, as a back-up to the Chair. Rules were reviewed regarding "Officers" in Article II and "Members" in Article III. Mr. DeBrabander will clarify and have that discussion as an agenda item for December meeting.

Mr. Manson said that at the last MSTAC meeting it was discussed SAW would have five meetings a year. He added that the SAW's charge was to be working on day to day operations and new trails and trail planning. Discussion continued.

Special Maintenance Project Funding

Mr. Wood led the discussion on increasing the amount of advance payments to trail sponsors beyond the current 75% of project cost. In particular, a project that he and Mr. DeBrabander have discussed – installing three bridges. Cost is above \$200,000. They had to borrow \$35,000 to accomplish that goal. He feels there should be a cap on the amount contributed by the trail sponsor and that 25% is excessive.

Mr. Manson asked if interest and bank charges were included in that – no, they were not. If the program is going to pay those charges, why incur them in the first place? Discussion continued.

Mr. Murray asked Mr. DeBrabander if that can be resolved.

Mr. DeBrabander said there may be something in the Snowmobile Law that provides some direction – the SAW can make a recommendation to the Department. He added that in discussion with Laura Harrison, Accounting Unit Supervisor, FMD, she was not aware of clubs getting loans but that she can perhaps work with the clubs to avoid any loans.

Mr. Manson referred to the Administrative Rules and the 75%; the clubs will still need to come up with money. He added that the 75/25 should read "up to a certain amount" and work with the finance department as well. Discussion continued.

Motion was made by Mr. Manson, seconded by Mr. Britton, to reimburse clubs for any bank fees that may be incurred on large projects. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Mr. Manson asked if the Department could look into Administrative Rules regarding large projects and what can be done. It was asked it to be added as an agenda item for next meeting.

Mr. Murray suggested sending any ideas to Mr. DeBrabander and to please put 'SAW' in the subject line of any e-mails.

Mr. Wood (speaking for Don Reed) asked about Special Maintenance Funding regarding the construction of a new bridge on the Sunken Lake Trail which is a new trail approved by the Department. The Seney Snowmobile Club has requested funding for the bridge but that funding has neither been approved nor denied and seems to have been ignored. What's the next step to get it done?

Mr. DeBrabander explained that there were several bridge projects requested, and not all were approved due to project necessity and funding priority. A bridge on a new trail would not necessarily be a priority, especially due to the budget concerns. Sharon Shafer, DNRE Administration Division Chief of Finance will be attending the December meeting and explain many aspects of program funding. He suggested to the club to resubmit every year.

Mr. Manson asked about the approval process and the grants given; the ones shown listed are the ones approved and itemized out.

Mr. DeBrabander said that even if a trail proposal has been approved, there may not necessarily be funding available to develop the trail. The fact that the funds were not listed on the grant does not mean the request was ignored. It does mean the request was evaluated and not approved.

Discussion on Reimbursement for Summer Storage of Program Groomers

Mr. Manson said this topic was brought up at request of executive committee from MSA because equipment has been seen sitting out in the elements. What can be done for grant sponsors that don't have any storage available – in essence they are affecting everyone in the program by not protecting their equipment.

Mr. Wood said their club doesn't have storage facilities but try to keep their equipment indoors in off-season (donated). Their cost could potentially be \$150 per month to store a groomer and drag.

Mr. Green added that they're not trying to get buildings paid for but to encourage the sponsors to work on getting storage and take care of their equipment.

Mr. Manson said he doesn't want to discuss necessarily the cost of storage but to encourage searching for free storage. Should it be in the handbook to say the new equipment must be stored? Discussion continued about storage and care.

Mr. Murray would like to come up with some guidelines, send out in a letter to all the sponsors for proper care of equipment; getting a shelter built – a cost estimate to share with groomers is another suggestion.

Bud Martin suggested that a plastic barn would be a reasonable shelter; Camper World has several sizes available.

Mr. Britton suggested looking at utilizing the \$600 utilities reimbursement for storage.

Mr. DeBrabander pointed out that the trail sponsors have the experience and expertise to care for the equipment and could develop guidelines. He stated there will be resistance from the Department regarding funding of storage.

Mr. Murray said that in a few months the SAW can get those recommendations and suggestions gathered – **Mr. Green** volunteered to assist with those guidelines.

Update on Process for Developing Contracts with Groomer Manufacturers / Dealers

Mr. DeBrabander said they are in the final stages of reviewing these documents – there were three former SAC members and Department staff on a committee discussing groomer specifications related to heavy duty track, light duty track, light duty wheeled and heavy duty wheeled models. There were requests for bids sent out for those four types of groomers, bids were received and scored, and they are making their final decisions at this time.

Update on Motorized Trail Sign Handbook

Mr. DeBrabander said they are planning on taking recommended changes to FMD Management Team at the end of month, if approved it will go to LED and Office of Legal Services. Recommendation was for removing a number of warning signs. The change would not be in affect until next snowmobile season.

Mr. Green asked about side intersection sign – he feels that one should really remain for two groomed trails intersecting. He will send an e-mail to Mr. DeBrabander with his concerns. There was much discussion regarding the proposed changes. Mr. DeBrabander will make contact with SAW members and work on additional clarification on side intersection and trail curve/turn signs.

Declining Trail Permit Sales – How Should We Adjust the Program

Mr. DeBrabander advised that sales of trail permits have dropped 30% in the last ten years. The overall economy has made an obvious difference as well as fewer riders – just something to keep in mind when expanding the snowmobile trail program. Would like to hear what the SAW's ideas are for the future.

Mr. Duke said that he disagrees a bit with that observation in that he feels there are not less riders; he sees an increase in rentals – particularly in the UP. He feels the cost of owning your own sled is a deterrent.

Mr. Murray asked if we still have trail counters out on the trails. The answer was yes and if anyone wants information on a trail counter they should call their field contact.

Mr. Green said that he agrees – snowmobile usage is not necessarily down, just different. He said the grooming should maybe be adapted for those changes of less traffic during the week, more on the weekend. Discussion continued.

Mr. Manson wanted to clarify how to cut back on grooming. He just wants to make sure that there's no specific reduction on how often trails are groomed – they should be groomed when they need to be groomed. Trails should be groomed responsibly.

Mr. Murray said that if rentals are up perhaps there's an avenue to get additional fees from those trail users somehow, or the rental companies.

Update on Status of Permanent Trail Easement Fund

Mr. Manson said he doesn't have much to report – money is being put into the fund but it can't be used until the Administrative Rules are established. The existing rules are being amended. There was a public meeting held this summer that he attended, they went back to LuAnn Klont, Administration Division Assistant Chief, Finance, and in legislature currently, then back to the Attorney General's office.

Major Repairs Warranty Deductible

Mr. Manson mentioned that the \$1,000 deductible is still in the handbook.

Mr. DeBrabander explained the reasoning behind keeping the \$1,000; previous SAC minutes were reviewed. He added there needs to be some incentive from the clubs to take care of the equipment and take responsibility for maintenance. Discussion continued on proper maintenance and keeping good records. Comments were made for both sides of agreeing and disagreeing with the \$1,000.

Mr. DeBrabander added that their original discussion started with warranties and then extended warranties; that's how the decision was made. There would be no financial incentive left on the clubs to take care of equipment if there were no monetary responsibility on their part.

Motion was made by Mr. Manson seconded by Mr. Wood that SAW advises the Department to amend the handbook and remove the \$1,000 deductible requirement on the extended warranty, and also require that an annual oil analysis be done on the engine and transmission and the results kept on file with other equipment records. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

One key reminder is to make sure you get equipment warranties extended, if possible, before the warranty expires.

Mr. DeBrabander will advise SAW at the December meeting regarding the amendment. Discussion continued over oil analysis and record keeping.

Trail Sponsor Administrative Time Reporting – Did We Capture It?

Mr. DeBrabander said he discussed this with Richard Kennedy, State Trails Operations Specialist, FMD, and that very few folks are reporting their administrative time. **Mr. Manson** thought those numbers were being tracked, he thought it was on the reporting forms and wanted to see how many hours were reported.

Mr. Green indicated that he was actually the person who was to follow through with the record tracking but had not had the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Murray asked **Mr. DeBrabander** to advise at the next meeting what it would take to get that information captured on reporting forms.

Update – Military Hill Bridge Proposal

Mr. Duke advised he doesn't have all the information on the status of the bridge but in order to get a bridge across the river it had to be a joint effort since state land was on one side, Forest Service land on the other. The Forest Service and the state completed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) but nothing more has been accomplished. The five year MOU expires next March and possibly the environmental assessment. He's hoping to either move forward or ask for an extension. **Mr. DeBrabander** will look into it and advise.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jim Dickie noted a concern about a trail maintained by the Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club that has been washed out. Sand on the surface of the trail has been washed out and left rocks on trails, which is problematic. His concerns are primarily safety related and would like to see a permanent solution. Great Lakes Initiative Grants might be available for a demo project on how to stop erosion on the eroding trails.

Norman Rockwell, Ogemaw Hills, discussed Trail 6 that goes all the way to Lake Huron. Their group was told originally by a contractor that it would potentially cost over \$20,000 to make the trail smooth. A second contractor estimated over \$40,000. Their request for a grant for repairs on this gully washout was not approved? They want to fix it permanently but need help to get it done. Discussion continued.

Mr. DeBrabander stated that **Bill O'Neill, Field Coordinator, FMD**, suggested that **Dayle Garlock, District Supervisor, FMD**, could visit the site with the club and give input for a solution. Another caveat about getting outside sources for funding on the repairs is to involve those land managers first. **Mr. DeBrabander** will update at the December meeting.

Mr. Dickie said that he was contacted by one of his constituents about having the snowmobile safety program available on-line.

Cpl. Morey said there is an on-line company that provides safety classes but the Department has not completed an evaluation of the information.

Danny Dagge asked about the status of the Gaylord trail.

Mr. DeBrabander understands that not all of the private land owner permissions were obtained in the Lakes of the North area. The County Road Commissioner's office has said they don't want the trail on the Mancelona Road right-of-way. A trail reroute has been developed but there are issues with getting approval and funding for a new bridge over a tributary of a

designated natural river, and locating a trail through the Deward Tract. Discussion continued on possibilities and road blocks.

Mr. Green asked about the railroad connecting the corridor between Copmish and Mesick.

Mr. DeBrabander said they are still waiting on the costs of the project. The project was assigned and waiting for the consultant's proposal; due the end of November.

Mr. Manson asked that an update be given on the M-65 Bridge. **Mr. DeBrabander** indicated the M-65 connector was approved by the Department on September 28. There is a long list of conditions that came with this proposal from MDOT and others.

Mr. DeBrabander read a Notice to Proceed on the Black Mountain trail relocation.

The meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.