



# Non-Motorized Advisory Workgroup (NAW)

## Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual meeting

Date: June 8, 2022

10 a.m. – Noon

### **Welcome – Roll Call**

#### PRESENT FOR THE NON-MOTORIZED ADVISORY WORKGROUP (NAW):

- Andrea LaFontaine, Chairperson
- John Morrison
- Mary Bohling (absent)
- Neal Glazebrook (absent)
- Kenny Wawsczyk, Vice Chair
- Kristen Wiltfang
- Jason Aric Jones
- Lori Hauswirth

#### PRESENT FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES (DNR) STAFF

Tim Novak, Annalisa Centofanti, Dakota Hewlett, Peter Costa, Scott Slavin, Nikki Van Bloem, Jill Sell, Greg Kinser, Kim Kennedy, Nicole Hunt

**Others:** Scott Silvers, Mark Losey

## Meeting minutes

### ACTION ITEMS

Meeting called to order at 10:01 a.m. by committee Chair, Andrea LaFontaine.

Motion was made by Kristen Wiltfang to approve the March 17, 2022 draft minutes, and seconded by Kenny Wawczyk, with all in favor. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Lori Hauswirth to approve the June 8, 2022 agenda, and seconded by John Morrison, with all in favor. Motion carried.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Scott Silvers commented on Ebikes. Scott recently was at a conference where Ebikes was a large part of the discussion and he is wondering if the State is looking at the Federal policy for guidance. Scott mentioned as the mountain bike demographics ages up, users are going to want Class I Ebikes accessible on nonmotorized trails.

Jason Aric Jones commented changes need to be made regarding how the DNR approaches Ebikes on linear trails and natural surface trails.

### BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

#### **STATE TRAIL COORDINATOR INTRODUCTION**

Tim Novak introduced himself as the new State Trail Coordinator with the DNR Trails Section. Tim's background history in recreation is in various capacities, including a bachelor's degree in Outdoor Recreation and a masters in Parks and Recreation Administration. Tim worked with the University of Notre Dame in their athletics department and worked for Rochester Community school's as their District Athletic Director. Most recently, Tim comes from the City of New Baltimore, where he served as their Parks and Recreation Director.

Lori Hauswirth asked Tim from his previous positions, what types of trails has he worked with. Tim said the majority of his experience is with nonmotorized trails.

Jason Aric Jones welcomed Tim.

Kristen Wiltfang offered if Tim needs anything in southeast Michigan, she can help coordinate.

#### **MICHIGAN TRAILS ADVISORY COUNCIL (MTAC) RESTRUCTURE AND BY LAWS**

Jason Aric Jones reported discussions have been taking place with some MTAC members regarding the current structure, recognizing it is an antiquated model from another era. Years ago, MTAC was originally created as a result from motorized issues. Today, MTAC works good in representing motorized user groups and the Equine Trails Subcommittee has established their own legislation,

which covers equestrian trail use. Jason is working with Bob Wilson, MTAC Chair, taking a look at best practices around the nation. Interestingly, in California they had a trails committee and moved to create trails commission. The goal to create a trails commission is to have inclusive representation for trails, especially nonmotorized trails, giving equal stature to various interest groups. Jason is not suggesting this be replicated. Any recommended restructure changes to MTAC will need to be revised in legislation and will be presented to the MTAC committee for review. Part of the structure in MTAC right now has a huge blind spot for natural surface nonmotorized trail representation. With regard to the MTAC structure today and according to evolving current trail activities, like Ebikes, all user groups need to have a seat at the table. Inclusion and Diversity is to include all.

Andrea LaFontaine agrees with the intent and commends the ideas and thoughts.

John Morrison asked if MTAC is open to these discussion and changes. Jason said yes, they are. This has been discussed at the most recent MTAC meeting and the general concept is supported. The goal is not to take away representation, but to have equal representation and balance.

Kristen Wiltfang asked what the timing and next steps are. Jason said a resolution needs to be developed for MTAC's vote of approval. Also, there is not any legislative drafts at this time. First important step is to get MTAC to approve and support a change.

Andrea LaFontaine suggested a vote in support for MTAC to reevaluate their structure, user groups, and trail trends.

Jason Aric Jones summed up the conception for NAW to support MTAC reevaluating the structure of the MTAC so it is more relevant to the current outdoor recreational trails and trends. Andrea added in support of the exploration of MTAC restructuring to make sure it is reflective of current times, trends, and user groups.

Motion was made by John Morrison for conceptual support of the MTAC restructure exploration and seconded by Kristen Wiltfang, all in favor. Motion carried.

Kenny Wawczyk asked Jason with a restructure will there be a representative from each workgroup on MTAC. Jason replied, no, not from each workgroup. Kenny asked are the motorized subcommittees on board with the change. Jason replied from what he sees, there is a level of discord from a number of groups, like snowmobilers and ORV riders. It is important to say does this flow back to the DNR not doing their job or is it just because the structure is simply antiquated, and it is hard the for the DNR to do their job within a framework that really is not relevant. Jason thinks it is the latter.

Andrea LaFontaine mentioned there needs to be a direct connection between MTAC and the subcommittees.

Lori Hauswirth this is a good opportunity to take a look at subcommittees and make sure representation is appropriate and tied in with MTAC.

### **WATER & PURE MI TRAILS**

Dakota Hewlett, DNR, provided a brief update on water and PURE MI trails. Mike Morrison, DNR, is out on extended leave and Dakota will be stepping in during his absence. On April 3, 2022, three new trail towns were designated and announced at the Governor's Conference on Tourism held in Grand Rapids.

1. City of Big Rapids
2. City of Cadillac
3. Village of Elk Rapids

No applications were received for PURE MI trails. Dakota is working on making some changes to the handbooks for Pure MI trails and PURE MI water trails that will soon be posted on the PURE MI website. An application deadline will be posted on the same web site, along with a public announcement providing application information. If you know of any organizations that are interested in applying, have them reach out to Dakota.

Lori Hauswirth asked if there is an avenue for nomination. Dakota replied there is not, although it is an interesting approach.

Kenny Wawsczyk mentioned the North County Trail (NCT) has their own designated trail towns and is wondering what the takeaway is for being a designated PURE MI trail town or Pure MI trail. Dakota said this is a great question and the DNR needs to continue to define. Currently, with a PURE MI trail town designation, there are some tourism and destination opportunities. The PURE MI program is unfunded and the intent is focused on tourism, attracting visitors.

### **EBIKES; POLICIES**

Moved after ARPA project updates.

## UPDATES

### **ARPA PROJECT UPDATE**

Dakota Hewlett, DNR, provided an update on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). A large portion of the fund dollars will be allocated to projects within state parks boundaries. The ARPA funds are divided into 2 branches. One is \$250M that will come directly to the Department for projects the Department does and \$150M for local projects, which a large chunk of the \$150M is already allocated. The \$250M directed to Parks and Recreation is for state park rehabilitation, infrastructure, and restoration in state parks. Dakota has been told just under \$38M will go to trail projects, with most of them being rehab or major maintenance, not development.

Within the \$38M there are seven larger projects identified are as follows.

1. Lake Linden Trail - Houghton County Flooding Incident
2. White Pine Trail - paving
3. Musketawa Trail - resurfacing

June 8, 2022

4. Kalhaven Trail - resurfacing
5. Sterling State Park – trail erosion repair
6. CIS Trail – resurfacing/fixing limestone
7. Betsie River Valley Trail – bridge rehabilitation

There is \$3M identified for smaller projects, specifically non-motorized natural surface trails within the state parks. The final list has not been identified yet, and not ready to discuss at this point.

Andrea LaFontaine asked if all material options are being considered in regard to fixing the limestone on the CIS trail. Dakota said there has been a kick-off meeting with a consultant a few weeks ago and the consultant will be evaluating the trail in the next few weeks, following up with a recommendation for a viable solution.

Kristen Wiltfang asked if the ARPA fund process needs to comply similar to the section 106, or Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) guidelines? Dakota replied yes, they are federal funds, so they do have requirements, although there may not be as many restrictions as the TAP program. Kristen inquired if engineering costs are covered, or just construction costs. Dakota said for the projects the DNR will be managing (seven project listed above), the engineering cost potentially can be covered. However, the DNR has tried to select projects that are shovel ready and will not need design and engineering, due to time and design constraints. Projects need to be encumbered by the end of 2024 and all ARPA funds spent by the end of 2026. Kristen asked what about construction engineering? Dakota replied yes, those costs will be covered for the most part. Kristen followed up asking if there is any justification needed related to areas with low to moderate income and housing. Dakota replied as far as he is aware, those types of justifications are not needed.

Jason Aric Jones does not agree with the funding direction and finds the appropriations unacceptable. Jason said the ARPA funding of \$250M is generational and does not come along too often. Governor Whitmer invited a board member of the Michigan Mountain Biking Association (MMBA) to the press release, Jason cited because the Governor's announcement was about giving money back to the parks and trails and how everyone is using and flocking to mountain biking trails. Of the \$38M, roughly 15% is going to trails. Out of the 15%, approximately \$3M is going to nonmotorized natural surface trails. The lack of nonmotorized natural surface trail designated ARPA funding speaks to the MTAC structure problem Jason spoke of earlier in this meeting. The fact that the money does not flow where the interest lies, the money flows where the structure is, but not where the structure use is. Jason would like an explanation from the Department why only \$3M of \$250M is going to nonmotorized natural surface trails. Jason mentioned the new Master Trail Plan focuses on updating nonmotorized natural trails. Jason added that none of the ARPA money is accessible to external stakeholder groups that maintain these trails. Dakota added he will work on a Department response. Jason added affiliate groups and him worked hard to submit Work Item Proposals (WIPs) to the Department in context with the trail plan. Now, the affiliates are approaching Jason asking for updates on the submitted WIPs. The Department needs to make clear where the WIPs are at and if any funding will be given to these projects. Dakota mentioned

some of these WIPS may have hit the smaller project list. Dakota added, as we work through this funding list, we can have more discussions.

Tim Novak, DNR, mentioned a large portion of this funding has been allocated to state parks for infrastructure, so a portion of the ARPA funds may go to nonmotorized natural surface trails within the state parks and is not recognized as trails. Jason replied saying there is a disconnect with park managers and there needs to be a reeducation addressing mountain bike trails as infrastructure. "Dirt" in the woods at state parks is overlooked.

Lori Hauswirth has the same significant concerns as Jason regarding nonmotorized natural surface trails. Lori is disappointed the ARPA funds are not available to stakeholders and only to local governments.

Lastly, Dakota talked about a \$65M reserve of the \$150M local grant funds. A grant program called SPARK, and administered by the Department grants management staff, will allow for recreation projects at a local level. The SPARK program plan is to operate in 3 rounds of projects. One round will conclude at the end 2022, another round will be added in early 2023, with the final round to take place late in 2023. Local units of government are the targeted primary applicants. Contact Dakota for a web link or more information.

Lori Hauswirth expressed that she is disappointed that the SPARK grants are not available to non-profits and trail partners.

Jason Aric Jones commented he found out about the SPARK program through Bob Wilson and Lori Hauswirth and wondered why this program information was this not shared with advisory trail committees. Dakota said the SPARK program is for public recreation and not specifically for trails.

Kenny Wawsczyk said it is sad to here that only local government can apply for the SPARK grants and he asked if the DNR can apply for local government funding. Dakota believes the DNR cannot apply but will look into it to be sure.

Andrea LaFontaine mentioned since the SPARK funds will be rolled out into 3 different rounds, she is wondering if there will be an opportunity for change. Reaching out to your legislatures may be an avenue to explore the possibility of receiving appropriations for local projects.

#### **EBIKES; POLICIES**

Dakota Hewlett, DNR, proposed to have a general discussion today about Ebikes. The Department receives a fair number of communications from public about eBikes. Each person Dakota has communicated with has a different perspective or idea on how the Department policy the bikes and usage. There are a lot of different opinions, spanning from accessibility use to everyday recreation.

Dakota mentioned a recent announcement allowing Ebikes on the Noqueamanon Trail Network (NTN) mountain bike trails. Lori Hauswirth, Executive Director of the NTN, indicated until this year

there was a no Ebike policy in place. A survey was completed 2 years ago to gauge the feel where people are in regard to a motorized (Ebike) changed. The survey result revealed people are accepting of Ebikes. The NTN is only allowing Class I Ebikes, which only have a speed of up to 20 mph. The challenge is bike shops are not providing concise information as to where you are allowed to ride Ebikes. Laurie was surprised that any negative feedback was very minimal. Laurie stated these instances are situational and Ebike allowed usage should not be across the board.

Jason Aric Jones encourages everyone to read the article from USA today called [An electric bike rode in the backcountry. Now there is a turf war](#). Jason added the article identified that there are no best practices in a blanket form that have worked. We cannot have a one size fits all model. Jason does not want to see Ebikes prohibited for assistance due to accessibility. Ebikes need to be vetted and properly permitted. The Department needs to provide education for Conservation Officers in order for them to enforce policy. Jason said each trail should be looked at specifically to determine whether motorized (Ebike) use is allowed, as nonmotorized trails do not allow motorized use.

Scott Silvers thinks mountain bike enthusiasts will not alter their Ebikes for higher rates of speed. Scott said most mountain bikers will not ride Ebikes any different than the way they typically ride a standard mountain bike, allowing them to spend a day on the trail. Most likely, in five to ten years, this will not be a hot topic of discussion.

Jason Aric Jones added the reality of Ebikes average speed goes up 3-5 mph when riding on a trail. There is a fundamental difference in using a motor for propulsion. The mountain bike community is divided on this topic.

Scott Silvers is in support for the DNR to investigate Ebike usage with test cases.

Dakota Hewlett said Ebike trail use is complex and will involve strategy on a case-by-case by the Department to see how Ebike use will affect trail users.

Lori Hauswirth asked if there is merit in assembling an Ebike subcommittee to work with the DNR on identifying experiences and issues. Dakota likes this idea.

Kenny Wawsczyk inquired if the DNR worked with the forest service on their guidance? Kenny said their guidance makes sense to him. Using what the forest service has developed may be a better approach, rather than come up with your own. Dakota mentioned he connected with forest service staff a few years ago, prior to their newest guidance. Additionally, there is a state law in place to be recognized as well.

Kristen Wiltfang said some conversations had locally have been on the inclines and with the torque from Ebikes, how to maintain the natural surface trail. Also enforcing speed when a lot of Ebikes do not have speed odometers and there are no speed limit signs posted. Lastly, the liability concerns of Ebikes. Kristen suggested these topics for future NAW meetings.

## 2022 MEETING DATES

Sept. 7 (In-person (TBD): Newaygo-Dragons Tail Trail activity); Nov. 17

## ROUND ROBIN/CLOSING COMMENTS

**Lori Hauswirth** reported Dakota assisted with contact information for improving system pinch points on Hartwick Pines trail connections. Greg Kinser, DNR, added he did help with the connections and if there are any other questions related to the Hartwick Pines trail area they can be deferred to Greg.

**Jason Aric Jones** thanked the Department for working with Pottawattamie Mountain Biking Association on opening a new connector for the DTE and Pottawattamie trails between Pinckney and Waterloo areas. The connection will open in a couple weeks and there has been positive input received from the community.

**John Morrison** reported for West Michigan Trails (WMT). Wayfinding for the MDOT Grand Region, working with Toole Design Group, phase 1 is wayfinding guide this year, and phase 2 will be implementation on regional trails. System will work on trails as well as bicycle infrastructure on roads.

River Edges in Grand Rapids, closing 1-mile gap connecting City of Grand Rapids to literally hundreds of miles of regional trails. Expensive gap, construction expected in 2023.

White Pine Trail, 29 miles remain to be paved. Seven to eight miles will be paved this year between Sand Lake and Howard City; remaining 22 miles expected to be under construction in 2023. This will have the whole 94 miles of the White Pine paved.

Grand River Greenway: Ottawa County working hard to connect Grand Haven to Grand Rapids on the south side of the Grand River; connects at least a dozen parks. Going to be a spectacular trail and significant progress is being made on it. The project has taken root in Kent County to extend the Grand River Greenway from Grand Rapids to Lowell and ultimately and even further east. A lot of coordination and organizing to move this project forward very soon.

In Lowell, phased out over '22 and '23, LARA is closing the gap between the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail between Lowell and Greenville, and the Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail between Lowell and Ionia. Closing this gap in Lowell will bring together 125 miles of Fred Meijer trails in the mid-west Michigan region. The Grand River Greenway project will also connect to this system.

Barry County has created a new Trails Master Plan and has invested significant funding into closing gaps on the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail between the Kent County line and Hastings, and farther. This trail will be another significant and beautiful trail in the West Michigan Network.

Toward Muskegon, there are two smaller gaps between the Musketawa Trail and the Laketon Trail, and then the Laketon Trail to the Muskegon Lakeshore Trail. The first gap is expected to be closed this year and significant progress is being made on the second one - not exactly sure of the timeline for that one. Closing these two gaps will create a continuous non-motorized trail route from Cadillac to Grand Rapids to Muskegon to Hart. There is also work to extend the Hart-Montague Trail from Hart to Pentwater.

In Allegan County efforts continue on the Interurban or River to River Trail between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. It will connect the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail to the Fred Meijer M-6 Trail and/or Kent Trails, as well as connecting numerous communities in between. On the west side of Allegan County, I know less of the details but strong coordinated efforts continue in extending the Blue Star Trail from Saugatuck to South Haven.

As all of this is coming together, hundreds of miles of connected non-motorized trails through the beautiful West Michigan countryside and its numerous attractive communities and attractions, along with a unified signage system, West Michigan is going to be tremendously attractive as a destination for bicycle tourism as well as having an incredible active transportation network. It is truly exciting all the trail related work happening in West Michigan.

**Kenny Wawsczyk** reported for the North Country Trail (NCT). A really big project will be completed at the end of this month, adding a bridge over Little Iron River in the Porkies Mountain State Park. This bridge will change the route of the NCT along the southern border, adding a 24-mile reroute with 4.5 miles of new trail. This bridge will add a significant impact on extending the trail.

**Andrea LaFontaine** is catching up on emails from her recent maternity leave.

**Kristen Wiltfang** reported for Oakland County.

The Clinton River Watershed Council hosted a spring Clinton River Water Trail Safety Forum. They shared a promotional video and updated the safety and marketing information on the website: <https://www.crowc.org/recreation/paddling>. The water trail information has also been added to the TOTAGO website (which stands for "Turn Off The App - Go Outside") <https://www.totago.co/>. Users can also use the TOTAGO app to report problems or woody debris on the river to those that maintain the water trail.

The Clinton River Trail Maintenance & Safety Improvement project in the City of Pontiac is well underway. There is a new crushed limestone surface and many intersection improvements along 1.75 miles of trail. This portion of the non-motorized trail is also experiencing a lot of unauthorized ORV and dirt bike traffic. The project team is looking for viable solutions to prohibit these motorized vehicles from the trail.

June 8, 2022

Phase 2 of the MI Air Line Trail is also well underway. The majority of the asphalt surfacing has been completed in Milford and Wixom. The contractors have started to construct the new section path along Pontiac Trail and in Downtown Wixom.

The Paint Creek Trail and the MI Air Line Trail hosted well attended events for National Trails Day.

## ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by John Morrison to adjourn meeting, and seconded by Lori Hauswirth, with all in favor. Motion Carried. Meeting adjourned at 12:03 p.m.