

OFF-ROAD VEHICLE ADVISORY WORKGROUP (ORVAW)
MEETING MINUTES
May 13, 2020
MS Teams Meeting / Audio Conference

ATTENDEES:

ORVAW

Thomas Dunn
Paul Hittie
Curt Brower
James Hunt
Jim Maike
Keith Lynch
Don Helsel

DNR

Paul Yauk
Jackie Blodgett
Jessica Holley
Anna Centofanti
Greg Kinser
Ron Yesney
Rob Katona
Paul Gaberdiel
Jeff Kakuk
Jill Sell
Amy Swainston
Scott Slavin
Paige Perry
Thomas Wanless, DNR, LED
Kristen Thrall, USFS

Meeting was called to order at 5:01p.m. by **Committee Chairperson, Thomas Dunn.**

WELCOME AND INTROUCTIONS

Committee Chair, Thomas Dunn introduced himself and asked the committee members to do the same. Members James Hunt, Jim Maike, Curt Brower, Keith Lynch, Paul Hittie, and Don Helsel introduced themselves with a short description of their experiences in the ORV communities.

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Committee Chair, Thomas Dunn, made a motion to approve meeting minutes from the February 21, 2020 meeting. Thomas Dunn asked for a correction on page three, under maintenance expectations, change wording to **asked about** trail locations, remove requested. No other changes were mentioned. Jim Maike is first to motion with Keith Lynch to second. All are in favor, motion approved.

Committee Chair, Thomas Dunn, mad a motion to approve the May 13, 2020 meeting agenda. Ron Yesney, DNR, asked that under actions items a and b, move to business items for discussion. Committee member, Keith Lynch asked to add residential speed limit on Felsch Grade. Ron Yesney asked that action item c, plywood camp road, be removed as the DNR has not had a chance to investigate this item. Committee member, Curt Brower, asked to add under action items, Silver Lake cleanup efforts utilizing volunteers. Nicole Toman responded to Mr. Brower, stating she has a request to clarify volunteer efforts with staff on temporary furlough, and will get back with Curt once she has an answer. Thomas Dunn said we will not add the item to the agenda as this falls under the COVID19 update. Committee Chair, Thomas Dunn asked for motion to approve, Keith Lynch is first to motion with Curt Brower to second. All are in favor, motion approved.

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COVID19 UPDATE (agenda IV; updates)

Jackie Blodgett, DNR

Jackie Blodgett provided updates surrounding the impacts from COVID19 restrictions in place. She echoed Nicole Toman's comment, that a request has been placed to the Director if furloughed staff can be utilized as volunteers. State Parks have started ground maintenance. DNR staff have pulled together critical project requests and those are being processed for approvals. Many clubs are uncertain with grants and the current spending freeze. Any funding has to be approved, by writing. Ms. Blodgett hopes to have more answers soon, although the processes has been taking longer than usual. The Governor's Executive Order (EO) dictates May 28, 2020 as a release for field staff. However, each week brings new circumstances, and the DNR is trying to work with all the changes daily. Thomas Dunn said he knows some groups have been trying to keep trails safe. Ms. Blodgett stated trails have remained open, including boating access, and day use areas are open. Amenities are closed, along with camping. Ms. Blodgett said with a limited staff, PRD has been managing to keep areas open. There will be a need to add temporary staff to reopen campgrounds and address other recreational areas. Some of the known reopen dates are June 10, Forest Campgrounds, June 22, for State Parks. Ms. Blodgett pointed out that if we cannot hire extra staff because of budget and spending freezes, it may affect current timelines.

ACTION ITEMS

Marketing and Video Efforts

Jessica Holley, DNR

Jessica Holley started off by letting the committee know that Doug Donnelly is no longer with the DNR, which is a result from COVID19 and restrictions that were put in place. Ami Van Antwerp, DNR, will fill in for these efforts. Ms. Van Antwerp will take the lead on press releases, keep up with safety concerns, and general information. Ms. Holley mentioned that there will be fewer resources available for marketing due to spending freezes. Posters and placemats are on hold. Marketing and outreach are hesitant to push the free ORV weekend due to travel constraints related to COVID19. Ms. Holley to convey they will continue to assess this situation, promoting when it makes sense. There was a video taken last summer to be used as an infomercial, but still waiting on edits and a final product. The public interactive map was updated to show alpha naming systems in the Upper Peninsula (UP). Trail closures are updated on the public DNR web page. Ms. Holley has heard that the Trail specialist are taking calls and responding as best as they can with the current situations and impacts.

Thomas Dunn asked if volunteers take care of trail maintenance, would there be any issues or complaints. Please get back with him.

MAGG / Motorized Automated Grants Given

Jessica Holley, DNR

Jessica Holley reported that she received a communication regarding the COVID19 spending freeze that MAGG has been halted until further notice. Ms. Holley said the program was at the point to submit ORV grant applications online. Ms. Holley appreciates all the support and people that were ready to submit their applications online, however at this time all applications will be submitted by electronic "paper" file (email). She will continue to work in the MAGG program, cleaning up data and fine-tuning

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procedures. Curt Brower asked how far are we from completion? Ms. Holley responded two-thirds complete.

ORV HANDBOOK

Don Helsel, Committee Member

Don Helsel started by asking Thom Wanless, DNR, to please give an update status. Mr. Wanless said Law Enforcement Division (LED) has met with park staff to discuss issues with signs being outdated. Staff wants to keep the diamond snow marker on the mixed ORV trail for awareness. COVID19 has stalled the process and Mr. Wanless is hoping to put finishing touches within the next couple weeks. Printing is a concern, due to the spend freeze. Early June is the target date to move forward. Don Helsel asked what the dollar value is to print, approximate figure. Mr. Wanless recalls the budget was approved for 60,000 units at .38 cents each, which is funded through LED. Don Helsel asked if there is any reason why you can't go forward with the approval process? Mr. Wanless believes a PO will need to be in place before approval can be submitted, but he will look into this. Paul Yauk said as soon as we have the figures, since this is health and safety, we can move forward with the approval submittal. Separate to the ORV Handbook, Mr. Wanless want to share that volunteers will be addressed by an LED perspective, keeping social distancing and restrictions according to the Governor's EO. Ron Yesney, DNR, reverted back to the ORV Handbook and said his staff asked to work with LED in compiling a new an updated version. Rob Katona, DNR, said the group incorporated most of the requests that ORVAW submitted, and met objectives for both divisions. Mr. Katona feels this updated version should be superior than what was in place prior. Don Helsel asked Ron Yesney if the orange signs should be taken down. Mr. Yesney confirmed yes, they need to come down. DNR internal inspections should identify these signs.

Committee member, James Hunt, mentioned he knows the signs in his area were taken down, and somehow the signs made their way back up. West Higgins and Missaukee areas. Committee member, Jim Maike acknowledges how important these handbooks are for the public safety. Mr. Wanless finished by saying the online version will go live as soon as all the approvals are in place.

UPDATES

Budget

Paul Yauk, DNR

Paul Yauk mentioned COVID19 has taken over everything. He continued with saying despite the restrictions in place, people want to enjoy the outdoors, and the DNR is doing their best to address projects and pay the grant sponsors. License sales are up. Paul Yauk ended by expressing appreciation to the ORVAW group with their help in getting messages out about trail use and safety.

Mr. Huston

Thomas Dunn, Committee Chair

Thomas Dunn wanted to provide a follow-up from February's meeting where Mr. Huston spoke about his concerns with ORV rules and safety. Mr. Huston has spoken with Ron Yesney, and Greg Kinser, and will be working with a regional trail specialist. Mr. Huston has released his own Public Service Announcement (PSA) focused on; a) riding power lines; b) if you don't know the rules, don't unload. ORVAW has no issues with Mr. Huston communicating this message.

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Thomas Dunn asked Nicole Toman, DNR, if she has had a chance to review the Grayling Trails, a request from February's meeting. Nicole Toman said that she has not had a chance and will still need to get with FRD. Ms. Toman will get that information and relay to Anna Centofanti, DNR, to communicate.

Holly Oaks

Paul Hittie, Committee Member

Paul Hittie reported that Holly Oaks, will hope to open in the fall, opening is delayed due to COVID19. The park is going to be a huge success.

DNR STAFF UPDATES

UPPER PENINSULA

Ron Yesney, DNR

Ron Yesney assisted with the work on the new ORV Handbook, Don Helsel already covered the key points. Mr. Yesney reported that critical project requests are being submitted for approval to continue work that is currently on hold due to COVID19. One request will enable clubs to perform their spring maintenance.

Paul Gaberdiel, DNR

Paul Gaberdiel is bringing attention to expect high water issues to be present this spring.

Rob Katona, DNR

Rob Katona reported beaver issues, heavy snowfall created issues with a lot of brush and trees down. He has been in contact with local clubs to navigate these issues and waiting on funding to be approved.

LOWER PENINSULA

Greg Kinser, DNR

Greg Kinser commented that this is a unique time with COVID19 taking over 98% of what we're doing and working on. He has been working attentively on submitting approval requests for trail maintenance with clubs. Mr. Kinser mentioned the press release advising ORV users of current trail situations. He reminded users to slow down and be aware trail conditions are not what they are used to. Mr. Kinser has received a lot of responses from the press release and has been working on the replies. He'd like to reinforce Tom Wanless statement of complying with the Executive Orders, and please continue to exercise patience while we work through these processes.

Paige Perry, DNR

Paige Perry said she is working with ORV grant sponsors and their submittal of applications. Trail use is heavy, and she is aware that there is some cleaning going on. Ms. Perry remarked that because the weather has been good, that this encourages the riders to use the trails. She asked the users please get in touch with trail specialists when there are known issues. Tom Wanless asked Ms. Perry to let him know when Mr. Huston reaches out to her, that there are a few places that it is illegal to ride and this needs to be known.

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Amy Swainston, DNR

Amy Swainston reported that she is aware of damages to restoration sites, that have been reported by other trail riders, LED, and staff. She has started a list of resource damage sites to keep an eye on those locations.

Scott Slavin, DNR

Scott Slavin is working through grant applications with local grant sponsors. Mr. Slavin stated ORV routes in Lake City are seeing heavy use and he is partnering with Law Enforcement Division (LED), along with the local County Sheriff. Mr. Slavin remarked this to be the highest use they have ever experienced. Reports have been received on accidents, injuries, trail heads exceed parking capacity, and parking on the shoulder of the roads. Mr. Slavin has spent time on the phone with grant sponsors and cycle clubs discussing downed trees and trail hazards. Mr. Slavin reported some folks are cleaning up the trails on their own. A couple projects with bridges are currently on hold with hopes to start up soon. Additionally, high water issues are impacting the trails again this year.

Jill Sell, DNR

Jill Sell reported that she does not have many ORV trails, that in her region most trails are nonmotorized. Ms. Sell remarked the trails are experiencing the same issues as other trails. Spring maintenance and trail projects are on hold.

Kristen Thrall / USFS

Kristen Thrall from United States Forestry Services provided an update for their division. The group has had a pandemic team in place and are working through changes. Unlike the DNR, the USFS has onboarded all of their seasonal employees already. A lot of the trails have already been cleared. Funding issues are moving staff around to address work in other places. Some trails still need some clearing. Ms. Thrall mentioned she appreciates the assistance with the grant applications from Paige Perry, DNR. Ms. Thrall commented that they have noticed heavy use during the week and on the weekends. Paul Yauk, DNR, said he appreciates the partnership with USFS and ORVAW.

Jeff Kakuk, DNR

Jeff Kakuk reported he is experiencing the same as what everyone else has mentioned. A lot of projects currently are on hold that have or need to go out for bid. He feels Mother Nature was gentle this past season on trail infrastructure.

Paul Gaberdiel, DNR

(See attached documents)

- Drummond Island / East Marble Head Trail Project
- Seasonal ORV Restriction

Paul Gaberdiel presented for discussion, documents and information for trail reroutes on Drummond Island and proposed seasonal ORV restrictions. Thomas Dunn asked if the ORV restriction is targeted for the UP? Mr. Dunn remarked that in the LP, riders can use the trails 12 months/year. Paul Gaberdiel is recommending a statewide approach and trails can be opened as needed. Mr. Dunn asked who decides what trails open and when. Mr. Gaberdiel responded that this proposal is in infancy, as a proposed land

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use order and will need to go through a division review. Mr. Gaberdiel commented the purpose for discussing with this group is to receive the input from ORVAW.

Ron Yesney mentioned he will distribute more information on the trail(s) at Drummond Island for reroutes.

Circle back to Silver Lake

Curt Brower, Committee Member

Curt Brower started off by saying he appreciates the work local DNR does. Mr. Brower provided updates for Silver Lake Park, currently closed, which typically opens on April 1. Mr. Brower stated the users are going elsewhere, and most likely is partially the reason there is high use in other areas. Mr. Brower expressed concerns about the critical project for the up ramp, if it is not completed by June 3, up and down will share the same ramp, expected back-ups will be an issue. Right now, June 3 is the opening date, and a tentative clean-up day for May 30. A lot of debris has washed up from Lake MI, and he wants to send out information as soon as possible so the turnout is successful. Mr. Brower mentioned the ORV normal activity is usually high right now, and due to the inactivity, the piping clover may be nesting in dunes area. This may have to be addressed if they have nested in the dunes area as they are a protected bird. Mr. Brower added that the joint committee meetings that took place in February spurred conversations with the equine group, and they are discussing using the dunes before or after the season. Additionally, he learned about expired groomers from the Snowmobile Advisory Board, and the SLP association ended up purchasing a groomer to use at Silver Lake.

Rob Katona, DNR

Rob Katona brought up concerns with speed limits on routes in Delta and Menominee Felch Grade. Noting there have been numerous complaints about speed. He is discussing with LED and local law for both counties, enacting a speed limit to reduce to 25mph in residential areas. Mr. Katona reported they are gaining support for what is being requested. Keith Lynch commented he has been fielding calls and does not want to see something happen, the situation has been escalating with residents digging ditches across trails and parking vehicles on trails. Thomas Dunn asked Rob Katona to send him the coordinates.

MEETING DATES

Next meeting date is September 16, 2020. No decision has been made on the location due to COVID19.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

Meeting adjourned at 7:10 pm by chairperson, Thomas Dunn