Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup

(SAW)

Meeting Notes

December 5, 2025

Roll Call

Karen Middendorp - Chair, Chad VanBennekom - Vice Chair, Doug Baum, Jim Kelts, Joe Kuchnicki, Scott LaCombe, and Larry Toth

DNR Staff – Tim Novak, Anna Centofanti, Jill Sell, Scott Lakosky, Scott Slavin, Greg Kinser, Ron Yesney, Rob Katona, Jessica Roehrs, Cpl. Mike Hearn, Blake Gingrich, Richard Kennedy, Daryl Browning, and Carly Graff

Approval of Minutes

Doug Baum made a motion to approve the October 21, 2025, meeting minutes. Chad VanBennekom seconded; motion carried unopposed.

Approval of Agenda

Chad VanBennekom made a motion to approve the December 5, 2025, agenda as amended. Jim Kelts seconded; motion carried unopposed.

Public Comment

- Karl Davenport brought up the Trails Summit Meeting – conversation regarding open meetings oxymoron about what was said as to what was done.

Business Items for Discussion or Action

Develop Motorized Survey — Karen M./Jessica R.

A non-motorized group did a great survey, gained great insight. Karen Middendorp would like to do that on the motorized side. We would like to have some meetings together and start moving forward.

Off-Season Equipment Use/Sponsors Karen M./DNR

Many people taking pictures, sending emails, coming to the SAW regarding clubs using their equipment in the dirt; this is not acceptable. We bought and paid for the equipment with snowmobile permit dollars. Having the ORV community using the equipment isn't right.

What are the protocols, how do we handle the situation? We have the Verizon records and can use them. This issue will take a while to get a handle on. We need a handbook change. Have a general SAW discussion. Jessica agrees with Karen's sentiments. Jessica has been meeting with Richard, Ron, and Greg and defined general infractions, have documentation, and follow formal steps. Jessica will have a draft ready for the next meeting.

Grooming Reimbursement Formula Karl Davenport

Karl shared a PowerPoint presentation with the group.

In speaking with Richard, the formula works when the paperwork is filled out completely. It is very important to put oil filters, greasing, etc. Karl created the attached PPT outlining the issues with reimbursement, fuel costs, maintenance costs, and zero fuel/reimbursement reporting clubs. With some clubs not reporting routine maintenance and/or parts which is concerning and hopefully they are doing the maintenance for the longevity of the equipment. Maintenance costs have been $.062/mile since 2019, costs have risen since then. Need to ensure the clubs are conducting their maintenance. The contacts should contact the clubs if they do not see any maintenance reimbursements.

The clubs and contacts need to be aware of the issues and get the paperwork in timely and correctly. How is the reimbursement $0.62/mile every year? Clubs need to be made aware of the issue on paperwork and reimbursements. How can some clubs groom without putting in reimbursements for fuel? Would it be good for the clubs and contacts to work together on the paperwork? There needs to be discussion about whether the paperwork is lacking and if things are missing. If maintenance is missing, does it mean the club is not doing any? We need accountability from the clubs and contacts. Will continue to address this issue during trainings with the contacts, can create an update to share. It was asked about having a paperwork class again at the Groomer Workshop. There used to be classes on maintenance. There needs to be enforcement if the paperwork is late, incomplete, etc. Jessica is in the middle, hearing from both sides, volunteers and contacts. Also need to deal with the clubs that do not groom. We need to cut costs to the program, we only have so much money to do everything we need to do for the program. Let's continue to have these types of discussions.

1,000 Mile Challenge Ron Yesney

Lyn Nelson, who works with UP trauma centers, brought this up during the Ride Right Committee meeting.

The challenge started in New Brunswick Canada and now coming to Michigan to see how fast the group could ride 1,000 miles for a fund raiser. Lyn has concerns through the trauma centers, regarding the issues between riders, the challengers, and the trauma network. Ron will find out if there is an event permit necessary. Will they ride on private property or have different starts at different times? The Ride Right Committee is concerned the faster they ride, the more money they make. It is a good opportunity to fundraise, but not in the right way as speed is the factor. Some of the teams completed it in a day or two. Many safety concerns. It sounds a lot like a race but not using the term. We would need to know the route. The organizers are very vague with their information. The emergency personnel through the UP are stressed already, as this is President's Weekend, sled dog races, and the regular traffic. Don Reed and his club in the EUP have issues with the speed, safety, and use of the trail trying to make money. The department needs to know the details about the event, they haven't come to us, we found out from Lyn.

Excessive Grooming Joe Kuchnicki

Every year when we get the data, the Equipment Subcommittee reviews the information and data for equipment requests. The Gaylord club puts on many miles and have put on more miles than the Keweenaw club. Karl has collected the data for week one and two to compare with their neighbors. He also picked a few from the UP and the NLP to compare. Gaylord has 98.5 miles and groomed 4,800 miles. Karen asked if it is time to limit to once a day, lower the horsepower, how do we address these issues. Scott said that we cannot limit grooming, then is it up to the contact to question the high grooming rates? When year after year you see the same club with excessive grooming, how do we address that? Is it because everyone is riding from Gaylord to other trails? Trail 7 camera shows grooming at 6:30 and then again at 9:05. Apparently, a person stood outside and said, "Well, it's grooming season, and I've got to make a living."

MISORVA REPS Karen Middendorp

When working on the bylaws, it would be more suitable for SAW to have 4-year term and the three MISORVA members have 2-year terms.

Change to four years for everyone, but the rest of the three MISORVA members have 2-year terms.

Each year, if it is a one-year program, vet everyone again? Or every two years?

Tim said any changes need to be put in writing and provided 10 days prior to meeting discussion. Changing the bylaws might not necessarily affect the nominations as the chief and director can still determine who will be the representative/s.

If the additional members are not coming to our meetings, it is a moot point.

There is nothing in the bylaws, the need to be a MISORVA representative if the person is in good standing in the region they are representing, they could be appointed by us. The board makes the recommendation.

Updates

Law Enforcement Update (safety handbook) Cpl. Michael Hearn

We have created a new snowmobile handbook taking information from the student manual on safety and riding etiquette and piggy backing information with the Ride Right program.

We provided free training to the sheriff departments that enforce the laws. There are 18 deputies who signed up for the upcoming training.

Katie Gervasi works with LED in marketing and promoting our Snowmobile safety programs among other LED Press Releases, website, and social media promotions. We created snowmobile booklets with QRCs to take people directly to our website. At the outdoor shows, there is a QRC to direct people to our becoming a volunteer page.

For the snowmobile side of marketing and press releases, Katie works closely with the Ride Right program, writes press releases, creates safety campaigns, updates the fatality snowmobile reports. The fatality report is on our website.

Heather Durocher works closely with Katie developing the campaigns and media related promotions.

DNR Northern MI Ice Storm Update Greg Kinser

Due to the hard work from our clubs, staff, local volunteers, and everyone else involved, we have substantially completed 3,220 miles with 70 left. Our snowmobile trails are open. We will be revisiting Black Rock Scramble Area and the non-motorized trails. People have been working long hours since March. We appreciate everyone involved and all the hard work done. A great collaboration to complete the task.

The WUP had a similar event, Ron is working with Greg and sharing his experience. We are determining how many miles each club has and how many miles need cleaning up. What is the best way to help with the clean-up effort, getting staff out there with snowmobiles, and

equipment out to clean up the area. A few clubs are requesting a lot of assistance as the storm was regional. Ron has also stressed safety with the club, take it easy and slow.

DNR Develop Forms — Chad V./Jessica R.

Jessica shared an equipment inspection form for the at the end of the season completed by the contact. Also, a form for new pieces of equipment, trading, or transferring equipment to another club. PRD has a document that we can tweak. (GET THE DOCS from Jessica) We would like to cover the ag tractors and the specifically designed snowmobile equipment to help our contacts inspect. We can take the forms in place and vet them through to our subcommittee and forward them to the Equipment Subcommittee to make sure we don't miss anything.

LUOD Snowmobile Width — Nicole Hunt

No update

Snow Equipment Subcommittee — Joe Kuchnicki

Everything has been covered in the previous conversation about excessive grooming

Pinney Bridge — Greg Kinser

For this season, Antrim County has issued a road permit for Pinney Bridge stipulating no signage and no grooming. No different than before.

On the M66 portion, MDOT will not issue a permit for a designated snowmobile trail on M66. Snowmobiles may ride the road and are allowed to ride to the rest of the designated trail.

Karl asked if there could be an arrow sign to point north. Apparently, a family went south on M66. We could investigate signing on state land in that area.

Carmeuse/Rogers City Spur — Greg Kinser

We established an interim snowmobile trail. Since then, we have been working with Carmeuse to get a designated trails through their property. We are drafting a memo for the director to change the current portion of the trail to move to the corridor that we could use.

Verizon Fleet — Jessica Roehrs

Jessica walked the group through the system and showed them how to use the it for looking at where the equipment is and what they are doing. The club and contact are only going to see the equipment they are responsible for. The basic updates: four clubs need either new units or service. Jessica will speak with the clubs not participating properly.

There is a great dashboard giving an overview of all our trails listed by clubs and how many miles they cover. The public facing dashboard shows much of the same information.

How can the data be used to benefit the clubs? The long-term goal is to trust the data for mileage and feed that into the grooming reports. We are verifying the mileage data we are capturing. When we are confident that all the data is working well, we will hopefully transition to electronic recording of the data.

For trail changes, make sure you get with your contact.

How much has been spent on this Verizon project, initially a unit for each tracker at $50/piece and purchased about 50 more for replacements. What have we paid Verizon and when will we get to a point where we save money in the program. We pay $3,300 a month to Verizon. We looked at eight different programs and went through the state purchasing procurement process for the bidding. The first go around, no company could not get through the DTMB security process. We ended up with Verizon because the State of Michigan has a contract with Verizon. How much money has come out of the snowmobile program. $3,300 for 2 1/2 years for Verizon, Jessica's salary, the units, etc. We continue to review the Verizon system so the clubs can be paid for the miles groomed. If we get to a point where we aren't sure we are making it work for our program, we will discuss. Seems like we are in $75K so far with the current program. The first go around, prior to COVID, we lost a lot of time and money with a different company. There are other grooming companies out there, but again they would not pass the security issues.

We have started weekly Monday Q&A sessions for grant sponsors

Ride Right/Gas Station Marketing Funding Ron Y./Heather D.

A lot of the work the committee does is to make recommendations that Heather and Katie work to put together what we want.

November's press release had the number of landowners at 1,900 people who allow their land to be used by snowmobilers.

Another PR will be going out before Christmas about buying your permit and did you know what your permit pays for.

We put out our lead right video again. As the first five fatalities from last year were women and with 20% of women being riders, we focused on lead right, following in the group giving the leader reminders.

We have new SWAG this year, a towel with the RR logo

Trail permits will also print out the RR message at the POS. On our license stock, one will be the trail permit and the other the messaging.

We have RR posters which will be mailed to snowmobile dealers and rental agencies this year.

Clubs liked the poster but wanted a sign to put outdoors. They are now available in the sign order, please order them.

Our RR page is online and has a toolkit with graphics and resource items we can share with the clubs for their social media

We created a successful safety messaging on gas pump toppers, nozzles, and posters. The cooler clings didn't work out so well. The social media campaign had ads which were viewed over 2M times. This year we will update the campaign with new images. It was asked if manufacturers we helping to fund the safety efforts.

2026 Groomer Workshop Karen Middendorp

Will be March 24, 25, 26 mid-week

SAW Committee will be there, will have roundtable discussions, and with an additional grant will have two additional members from every club in addition to the DNR sponsoring two members from each club.

Adjournment

Doug Baum made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Larry Toth seconded; motion carried unopposed at 3:48.