Snowmobile Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Location: Ralph A. MacMullen Conference Center/Virtual meeting
Date: June 22, 2023

Roll call.

Present for the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAW):

- Chair Don Britton
- Barry Bethke
- Jim Kelts
- Joe Kuchnicki
- Karen Middendorp

Present for the Department of Natural Resources (department) Staff

- PJ Costa
- Anna Centofanti
- Jason Fleming
- Cary Foster
- Nicole Hunt
- Rob Katona
- Greg Kinser
- Cpl. Mike Hearn
- Tim Novak
- Paige Perry
- Josh Pellow
- Karen Rodock
- Jill Sell
- Scott Slavin
- Matt Torreano
- Monica Weis
- Ron Yesney

Call to Order 10:01 – Don Britton, Chair

Approval of March 2, 2023, Draft Meeting Minutes

Karen Middendorp made a motion to approve the March 2, 2023, draft meeting minutes. Barry Bethke seconded; motion carried. hair Don Britton called the meeting to order at 10:18 am

Approval of June 22, 2023, Agenda

Barry Bethke made a motion to accept the June 22, 2023, agenda with additions. Jim Kelts seconded; motion carried.

Meeting minutes

Public Comment:

None

Business Items for Discussion

Proposed Land Use Order (LUOD) - Jason Fleming

LUOD – tied to admin rule or statute happening unique at a specific location.

Snowmobiling is pervasive in the state parks, issues in southern Michigan.

Policy “4-inch rule” snowmobiling would be appropriate, less not acceptable was removed from the books.

State Park Management Plan relating to snowmobiling.

In sensitive areas, we would not allow snowmobiling.

Looking to the SAW for guidance in the areas we are recommending restricting snowmobiling.

Will not affect any snowmobile trails, only snowmobile use at specific state parks/recreation areas that are not on designated/groom areas.

Would promote local trail use instead of riding through the park/rec areas.

Perhaps allow some use for the ‘historic’ trail use through the rec area, would need to discuss on a case-by-case basis.

We would restrict riding on several thousands of acres, out of all our public land, because it is not compatible with the management practices, however we would suggest off-trail areas to ride.

Pick the most critical areas.

Historic sites, sensitive areas

Any areas suggested would go through public review.

Hoping to get information out for the September SAW meeting.

Questions:

What damage are snowmobilers doing to the areas?

Some historic areas have been damaged especially at the beginning/end of the season.

Some areas are already not designated or restricted for motorized, hiking, horseback riding use.

Snowmobiling in the park or cutting through the park to get from point A to point B?

Snowmobiling welcomed at the Porcupine Mountains along M107 and South Boundary Road as well as riding at Tahquamenon Falls.

Grant Applications - Richard Kennedy:

Due July 1 to field contacts via email

With the application send site control and insurance

Unit contact to review and will forward to Richard who will put them into the new system this year.

AuSable Valley/Mio – Grant Sponsor Change of 125 Groomed miles - Jim Kelts:

AuSable went to Ogemaw Hills Club stating they are moving and not will continue as a grant sponsor.

Joe Kuchnicki in contact with Dave/Tom, there are some issues with interest, leadership, and how to properly go through the process.

Jim Kelts will contact Dave Klimet and discuss.

Greg Kinser will also make connections with the clubs.

Mio Club does not have a say so on who would or not get the grant would be a group discussion between the unit contact, trail specialist, AuSable Valley members, other local clubs and come up with the best solution – many options to guide on which direction it should go and who would be the sponsor.

Trail Easements - SE and SW L.P. Michigan Annual vs Permanent - Greg Kinser/Matt Torreano

Discussions to identify the gaps in DNR ownership and where we could find opportunities to secure permanent easements in areas that makes the most sense.

In the SE there are many small pieces that need to be tied together, we need to look wholistically – what purchases make sense.

Would it make more sense to purchase annual easements.

If there is a lot of public land trail, we have access - look for the smaller practical private areas.

Madison Janes working on mapping issues and identifying gaps, once we receive the data, we will bring the information to the local clubs to identify the value and prioritize the gaps we need.

How to evaluate where we want to invest, we want to identify a segment where we purchase, bring this to the table for discussions.

Move toward permanent easements instead of annual easements.

In the long run, we would save money as annual easements require administration, we'd have secured permanency, and have some program efficiencies.

Incorporate some flexibility for farmers to move the trail to make it more enticing to farmers to enter a permanent easement meeting our standards.

Snow Field Unit Contact - Greg Kinser:

Work on planning and executing the shift in duties from FRD staff to PRD staff.

Working on vacancies, training, planning, and logistics.

Continue to have some FRD involvement regionally and as needed.

Involving clubs and contacts through this transition.

No duties/process will change, the elements of the program are staying the same only the person who will be the unit contact.

Need to be certain the ESRs are being reviewed before being turned in. Will incorporate the ESR process in the training so the new unit contact is verifying what is on the ESR.

PRD would have more ability to monitor and make sure the PRD unit contacts are completing their duties with the time and capacity to review the ESRs.

Should work better as we are transitioning from FRD to PRD.

Don Britton would like to see more face-to-face between the unit contacts and the clubs. With the transition we will discuss the benefits during the trainings focusing on the value and camaraderie face-to-face meetings.

Insurance and Liability:

As a landowner, allowing the public using their land is the landowner liable? There is a statute for the landowner. Two laws, one relating to ski areas/amusement parks where you pay to access the area to use. Then there is the recreation trespass law where people are responsible for themselves unless there is gross negligence by the private landowner.

The AG opinion: if we are buying an easement, it does not negate that law. The individual member of the public has not directly paid the landowner, the DNR has paid the landowner and that does not decrease the landowner's protection.

Updates

LED Sound Enforcement Upcoming Season and the MUPSA Motion LED Funding Update – Cpl. Michael Hearn:

Frustrated with lack of decibel enforcement in the UP

Lake Gogebic and Houghton County

Mostly cans on mountain sleds.

MUPSA made motion wanting the snowmobile program stop paying for DNR law enforcement unless they would provide decibel enforcement as well.

Why isn't it being enforced?

The only sound enforcement in the state is being conducted by DNR LED

In 2018 LED had a significant presence for sound enforcement with group patrols, public awareness with Press Releases, and Warden's show.

At the March 2022 SAW meeting, a presentation was given focusing on the trends within the sport and division statistics from previous riding season.

About a dozen sound patrols for the season.

We do not conduct the moving test.

Impractical as they would need to move past the CO at full throttle.

However, we do the stationary test bound by the statute associated with the 2004 SAEJ 2567 testing procedure.

2003-07 the law referenced two moving tests, 2007 raised the decibel 86 to 88 with a reference to the 2004 J2567 stationary test.

2015 J2567 was updated revving the machine to 2500 RPM instead of 4000 RPM and lowered to 82 decibels, however our statute still references the 2004 testing. The law hasn't been updated to reflect the updated 2015 J2567 testing procedure.

The industry is evolving, and laws have stayed the same.

Need to update the statute to keep up with the changes.

Sport has shifted from heavy trail sleds to lighter backcountry trail riding.

Where do constituents weigh in on this?

Do we mirror motor vehicle codes?

Some DNR LED concerns

Belts burnt during field testing.

Liability and legal issues

Annual calibration and maintenance of sound meters

DNR LED Mission Statement to protect the natural resources, environment, and the health and safety of the public.

Focusing on the trends with fatality data of alcohol/drug use, trespass with off-trail riding, etc. Sound issues are important, but not to the degree as it

was, we were enforcing in 2018 due to the outdated statute, burnt belts, testing, trail rated cans that circumvent the testing, etc.

Would need to be legislatively changed, perhaps MISORVA could become involved to bring up to the legislature. Need to have standardization.

Why don't you pursue sound enforcements on Harleys and only on snowmobiles?

We lose some snowmobile trail due to noise issues; the private property owner's pull their easements, no one would prohibit the use of Harleys on the highway, it is a different issue.

Sometimes the backcountry riders are using lighter-weight cans and are also causing trespass issues.

Logging Issues in JVTR Area – Karl Davenport:

Off 76 and Sun Lake Road there are large ruts, big mud holes, and snowmobile signs have been damaged on a timber sale that has since been closed.

FRD has said these issues do not happen on timber sales and if they do, they are rectified before the sale is closed.

Karl Davenport emailed the DNR yesterday.

Karen Rodock from FRD spoke about this issue:

It is an active logging sale and a known problem that we are working with the logger.

Some of the logging holes were there before the sale started.

At the time they moved out, there were some restrictions.

Late May they said they fixed up the road and moved out.

They will be going back in July to work with the logger to get the issues fixed up.

The contract has stipulations to protect the trails and routes to protect the trail.

Since the contract is still open, there hasn't been a final inspection to close the trail and they must abide by specifications of the contract before it is closed.

Best to solve issues like this at the local level.

With timber sales on USFS land, we follow our protocol for state sales and then give to the USFS for their final review.

USFS Update - Megan Impson:

Continue working with the local USFS staff through this summer season.

Working with Ron on the Ontonagon District, have conversations while we are in the planning stages.

Megan will get a list together for the local USFS contacts.

The open Huron Forest positions have been filled.

Karen Middendorp asked about the details for training individuals to be qualified to inspect bridges. There is an 8-hour class and 4-hour field training to be qualified to inspect bridges, Megan will send Karen information when she has all the details.

Don Britton would like the inspections to be conducted earlier in the year, so the snowmobile clubs have time to fix any issues.

The complexity of the bridge would dictate what type of inspection is required and by whom. Megan does not have much control in setting up the bridge inspection schedule.

There is a concern from Ontonagon to White Pine about a bridge that might fail, would like to have time to install a temporary bridge if so.

Lake Linden Construction - Ron Yesney:

Good news, all contracts are in place and construction occurring, all things done by December 1st.

Over a $10M project funding through FEMA reimbursement, MEDC general fund, ORV and Snowmobile funds, Land and Water Conservation grant, and ARPA

We put the Freda Grade on hold until the Lake Linden project was underway, will be revisiting the Freda Grade soon.

Six bid packages over the eight-mile section of trail

Bid packages 2 through 6 in process, package 1 will be starting soon, substantial completion date November 10th.

We are repairing a lot of infrastructure – culverts. Dollar Bay, Lake Linden, to Calumet.

Miners Castle Trail / H58 Reroute - Ron Yesney:

We have an informal AG opinion that we can re-route the trail on the conservation easement to a different corridor where there is an existing road and install a bridge.

We had many people review the language and have had differing opinions.

The landowner has a different idea for the route with two smaller bridges.

We have $30k for engineering

May be closed for a year or two while we install the bridges.

This will be the last year for the current trail across the highway.

Equipment Subcommittee Don Britton:

Will be purchasing six new groomers for the season.

There is the possibility for eight more groomers.

Groomer Trade-in – Don Britton/Richard Kennedy:

Hiawatha Trails ordered a new machine, and the manufacturer would not accept the trade-in, so we sold the machine, and it was difficult to get the money back into the program.

Richard Kennedy said his has been done before, send a check to Bobbi.

ESR Reports / Evaluations / Recommendations – Don Britton/Karl Davenport:

Over the last couple of years, things are getting a lot better. Getting a lot of data.

People need to use the correct form and email the forms.

Training for the unit contacts and new clubs.

Complete the forms accurately.

Unit contacts to review the forms for accuracy.

Seeing a lot of pieces and parts that do not need replacing.

The timing of the transition from FRD to PRD will help this issue as this is coming under PRD as we will have more control, there will be full on training for the unit contacts with annual refresher trainings.

Work with the clubs to ensure they understand why it is important to accurately fil out the form.

We are working on integrating technology while allowing the flexibility for those that are technologically adverse. Work one-on-one with a few of the people who are having issues.

Show the clubs the routine maintenance section of what is and what is not reimbursable.

Pinney Bridge – Greg Kinser:

The last we knew it was in discovery mode between the county and the landowner.

Developed portion of the roadway and move it off the roadway, intended late August, may be later due to the complexity.

Engaged the DNR construction crew with $60K.

Staff met on-site to discuss the logistics.

Off the road, across the bridge, and then back off the road.

Working on the EGLE and road commission permits

Will stay out of the river so we will not need a Natural Rivers permit.

Any chance we can put in a bridge to completely stay off the road, may discuss in the future, but working on the current option to utilize the right-of-way.

Barry Bethke is worried someone will again, get hurt. There is no law stating you can't plow a snowmobile trail shut; however, it is a malicious act, and someone may get hurt. They are plowing snow to shut the trail. There is a law about blocking a road, but not a seasonal road or snowmobile trail. What if the landowner plows into the trail on these additional four access areas to the trail? Keep removing the snow that is placed onto the trail.

Maintaining a connector trail into East Jordan is important and we have currently come up with the best solution. It would be great if we could come up with a better solution, if there is a way to stay on state land and find a way to avoid that private property or close the trail.

Do we write a $10K contract to move the snow, do we seek other options that are costly and seek landowner permissions?

Round Robin/Closing Comments - SAW:

Karen Middendorp

Love the partnerships that are forming, glad to see them coming back and rebuilding themselves, SAW, MISORVA, and the DNR

Don Britton apologized for the members that are not here, said the meeting went well.

Barry Bethke made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jim Kelts seconded; motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 1:51 pm.