Snowmobile Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Location: Lake Superior State University/Virtual Meeting
Date: March 2, 2023

Roll call

Present for the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAW):

- Chair, Don Britton
- Barry Bethke
- Keith Churill
- Jim Kelts
- Joe Kuchnicki
- Scott LaCombe
- Karen Middendorp

Present for the Department of Natural Resources (department) Staff

- Bobbi Audette
- Anna Centofanti
- Michael Desnoyer
- Cpl. Mike Hearn
- Sage Hegdal
- Jessica Holley-Roehrs
- Nicole Hunt
- Rob Katona
- Richard Kennedy
- Greg Kinser
- Scott Lakosky
- Brian Mensch
- Tim Novak
- Paige Perry
- Jill Sell
- Scott Slavin
- Matt Torreano
- Monica Weis
- Ron Yesney

Chair Don Britton called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM

Karen Middendorp made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 1st meeting. Keith Churill seconded; motion carried.

Scott LaCombe made a motion to accept the March 2nd agenda Jim Kelts seconded; motion carried.

Karen Middendorp made a motion to allow the Chair to take agenda items out of order. Jim Kelts second; motion carried.

Meeting minutes

Public Comment:

Jim Blouin, from Wisconsin. I've been snowmobiling in the Mass City, Greenland, Twin Lakes areas since 1985. Recently, I spent 6 days riding Feb. 20 to 26, the area noted a BIG-TIME improvement. Snow trails are finally flat, wider, next to roadside versus down the road. These trails are Rt. 3, 13, and 12. They are heavily traveled and connect Ontonagon to Sidnaw to Houghton. The crew of the Superior Snow Club has groomed every night, every trail everywhere in the area versus once every 3 days. The double wide and flatness on Trail 12 keeps folks on the trail instead of wondering off in fields and trespassing. I'll be spending my money in Michigan versus Wisconsin. Thank you for keeping the Superior Snowmobile Club well-funded and snow trails open.

2023 Groomer Workshop - Karen Middendorp

An increase from about 30 to 38 clubs represented this year.

Working with our sponsors and DNR on issues

Thanks to the DNR for paying for two attendees from each club to attend.

Ride Right Campaign – New for 2023/2024 - Ron Yesney

New poster has been successful. A letter was sent from Tim Novak this year asking our sponsors to post more posters in places that snowmobilers frequent.

SAW approved ‘Stay Right’ confidence markers to be posted one at least every two miles. This has been successful but next year we will be stressing the once every two miles aspect.

Placemats were not ordered, not enough partnership from sponsors to distribute them.

New campaign for next year targeting ‘Leading Right’ due to the recent fatalities, the first four fatalities were women who were trying to keep up with the leader.Trying to reach the lead riders to ensure the safety of the group, riding to the ability of the most novice riders – inexperienced, women, children.

We’ve been targeting riding sober, riding on the ride, and ride to make it home safely.

Discuss with Ron if you have suggestions about a slogan or ways to message this.

The lead is more important than speed was suggested.

Lead for the least, not for the beast was suggested.

Also have this as a component in the safety classes – vast majority of fatalities are due to a loss of control.

Financials - Michael Desnoyer

(Copies of the financial presentation can be sent out if a request is received.)

Recent increase from $48 to $52 price increases every five years.

Looking into the last 25 years of purchases

The snowmobile fund gets 2% of the 14% of the gas tax, 80% goes to Parks and Rec water fund, and the rest to Parks and Rec improvement fund.

Do we need to get a re-adjustment?

$4.8M in the fund, $5.6 last year – due to decrease in permits and registrations

Permits to date – 29,436 a 19% decrease from last year.

Registrations to date 11,788, last year 12,574 – decrease 13%

Slight increase in the gas tax revenues from last year, received quarterly.

Returned grooming dollars from FY 22 returned able to use some to spend about $2M for nine new program machines.

Snowmobile improvement fund FY22 $5.7M unreserved balance

Encumbrances - grant carry forward or a purchase, intending to spend but not shown in the balance as they are reserved to spend.

Common cash earnings able to invest those funds like a 401K account, in FY22 received $80K, expected to bring in $300K this year.

Expenditures appropriated, authorized to spend $1.9M anything unspent goes into the snowmobile improvement fund in the unreserved balance.

Who is requesting the amounts for appropriations Fiscal Years 21 and 22 spent about $1.5M each?

FY 23 is down by $100K by this time last year.

Expenditures int the grant funding line item is down from 959 to 1.1M

Capital outlay – three years to spend, up to four on special projects $2.1M this year, $1.9M last year.

Projected to have $5.9M in the fund, increase of $200K.

Grant Deadlines – Richard Kennedy

Sign order due Jan 1st

Grooming reimbursement reports due the 15th of the next month

Equipment status report due April 14th

Final bills due for the year April 15th to Bobbi

Penalty imposed after April 30th.

No payment after May 30th

Grants for one year - completed by September 30th.

Advances requested by September 1st executed by September 15th.

No extensions or the grant will lapse and likely not funded.

July 1st grant applications, special maintenance, site control, and insurance

Field Unit Contact Transition 2023/2024 - Greg Kinser

Forest Resources Division has been important to the program serving as unit contact, will be transition the role to PRD staff.

In 2012 started the transition of trails and campground back to PRD, the snowmobile contacts are the last component.

Working as a phased approach, three year process

Moving forward this year on strategizing, mentoring, a few contacts have transition to PRD with Van Riper, Roscommon, Cadillac, and Lake Gogebic

Next year working together to train and establish the relationships with the club.

Planning to supplement hours and hire new staff based on the need and resources for the snowmobile program with our Parks staff.

Need to include FRD staff at club meetings to help with the transition and complete trail inspections, etc.

Moving the wages monies using the same funding to pay Parks staff versus FRD staff.

FRD reimburses the difference for the Fire Officer pay rate versus a seasonal ranger pay.

Updates

LAW Update – Cpl. Mike Hearn

Mid-December graduated 12 LED Recruits, 3 more certified LEOs – 15 new COs added in 2022.

Held a LED snowmobile training mid-January at the Porcupine Mountains

16 fatalities for the year, numbers are static over the last several years.

Last year there were 26 in-person education classes with 326 students attending.

10 classes were cancelled due no enrollment.

1,700 kids took the online class.

Big advantage for in person class, produces a better student rather than sitting behind a screen.

Every four years we recertify all our volunteer safety instructors, which we had to re-certify last year.

97 actives in the snowmobile program

Huge demand in the central Upper Peninsula

The new online process for the instructors is not that difficult once it is done a time or two.

Classes are found on the DNR website.

Post messaging about the classes as much as possible, clubs post the information on social media for best enrollment numbers.

USFS Update – Megan Nelson

Our trails program exists on Federal lands thanks to the DNR and club sponsors.

Work with the USFS on bridge replacements, culverts, etc.

Get us in the process early as we need to complete work on our end and do not want to hold up the process for you and the grants.

Will get a contact list out to the SAW Committee

Thank you for attending the Groomer Workshop, this is the first time we have USFS representation.

Verizon Fleet Management - Jessica Holley-Roehrs

Shared the program administration screen with all the active units, the club will only see the units they have in the club, DNR contact will only see the ones they are the contact for

Details and information on the vehicles

Working on the hardware installations, not yet fully installed

Working on the system set up with the clubs.

There are areas and pieces of equipment where they are completed and not showing up on the system, some wiring issues.

Some clubs have disconnected their units, working to get them back online.

Will be using this year's ESRs to fill in some of the blanks on our equipment data set ups, ensuring things are correct in the system to help track our

inventory, odometer and engine hours and moving forward helping with our maintenance needs.

Will be uploading photos of the equipment.

Looking at the current data collection and analysis to use for the future.

GIS mapping reports ensuring they are lining up with what we have on the ground from the unit pings making sure the GPS system is tracking properly.

Will be getting a notification when things don't line up.

Discrepancies

Could be due to trail closures - notify the public, ensure we have permissions to cross the property.

Could be due to technical issues with the Verizon tracking, one club was tracking the grooming with a cellphone and comparing it to the Verizon tracking.

What is the date the clubs must comply?

This year is the test and tune season.

A letter will be going out next season, the clubs will be held accountable, to be reimbursed for their mileage, for program owned vehicles the units must have the hardware installed and used barring any technical difficulty.

We will still be conducting comparative data.

We will come together and figure it out to move forward with any clubs that are having some pushback on the installation of the units.

Contact Jess if you are still having issues with login.

Jess can help rest your password.

If having further issues, contact tech support with our account number and your username which would be in the password reset email.

Will continue training over the summer – need to be logged in and have the hardware installed and operating.

Greys Lake Dual Sporters (Canada Creek Replacement) – Paige Perry

A new sponsor after Canada Creek Ranch stopped last year, will apply for grants next year for 68 miles of trail – 57 miles is dual use.

GLDS is an ORV sponsor for 23 years, stepping up to cover for snowmobile will work to improve the paperwork aspect.

Jennifer Hansen the unit contact has been working with the club and onboarding.

Positive reports along with their fair share of experiences/struggles like all our clubs have been dealing with this winter.

Very supportive with the community

Unfortunately had a fatality in their first year.

Might need to investigate our brushing and signing reimbursements as they will be exceeding it this year.

Pinney Bridge Road – Greg Kinser

Grayling construction crew on deck to do some of the work.

Working with the road commission and MDOT on permits, road commission working on some encroachments, and the utility company on moving some utilities from within the right-of-way (ROW)

Moving the overhead utilities closer to the road to delineate the trail from the road, road commission working with them as well.

A lot of moving parts that could impact us along the way, projected to be completed by next season, hopefully by August.

Is the lawsuit with the road commission and shooters affecting this project?

Unsure as of this time we are not a part of the issue, it is related to the encroachments in the ROW.

Seems in court, they did mention 150 days for discovery and scheduling something after that for mediation, may include the DNR at that point?

Lake Linden Construction Funding/Bidding – Ron Yesney

Mostly good news, bid packages are out.

Broke up the project in smaller pieces allowing an opportunity for bidding from smaller local contractors.

Bad news, bid packages coming in higher at 170% over estimate.

Funding sources - $8M with $4M GF and $2M ARPA, $1.5M from the Land and Water Conservation Grant funding along with other sources were covered with the initial engineering estimates covering the project.

The project is coming in about $10M with a $2.4M gap.

We are seeking additional funding sources and looking into shifting funding around to complete the project in its entirety now rather than come back later.

$1.15M unappropriated money remains in the balance fund and a supplemental was not requested, we will be reprioritizing projects and funding what we can do to move forward on this project and advance it as we need the funding secured now

The sixth and final bid package is projected at $1.4M

Waiting on permitting from the US Army Corps of Engineers should be in place soon.

Construction should be started, and we should have a better understanding on the funding by the June SAW meeting.

Miners Castle Trail / H58 Reroute - Ron Yesney

Alger County Road Commission said as of 2024 once H58 is resurfaced, they will not allow a designated snowmobile trail to utilize H58.

Paul E had a trail proposal in place for and alternate reroute to build a bridge over the Miners River

However, we found out there is conservation easement across the property protecting the land from future development.

Allows for a reroute, but not structures.

The conservation easement person in FRD deemed the bridge as a structure, others see the bridge as an improvement, or is it both?

Our UP Deputy Director, Stacy has been involved and brought it to the Director's attention.

Stacy will be having conversations with the Alger County board.

We will have an Attorney General opinion to see, if due to the conservation easement language, could we put in a bridge.

The other option brought to SAW last June for $1.5M to run along the ROW and install seven culverts is a distant vision and not likely to happen.

A different option to have ManuLife, the owner of the property, put in a bridge on their property for forestry purposes and allow us to use in winter.

The National Park Service wrote a letter of support to have the designated trail remain in place.

Ron will let the SAW know if there is anything they can do to offer support.

Equipment Subcommittee - Don Britton

Karl Davenport compiles information from Richard's annual report for overages and shortfalls

Karl talks with the clubs regarding maintenance and routine costs – engine oil, hoses, wiper blades, etc.

Need to get parts and maintenance costs for each machine to get accurate information to see how much it really costs for each machine.

The costs for reimbursements could go up if we report the actual true cost of doing business.

Joe Kuchnicki mentioned that the clubs who are not filling out their paperwork is truly hurting everyone else, we need the data to support increasing the $5.20/per mile.

Don Britton talked about fuel costs, one club had 70 cents and another over $3.00/mile.

The lack of data skews the numbers, we can't change the formula because the data is not there to support an increase, need to show documentation.

If there aren't costs for engine oil or other parts/maintenance, shouldn't the unit contact raise a red flag.

When you go into the spreadsheet by the day for grooming, you can input information on that day – can put it at the end of the month on the last week of reporting if it goes on the weekly report.

End of March, under contingency add up all the DEF invoices and add receipts and cancelled checks.

Richard Kennedy wants people to do their best, be through, and record the expenses, we discuss this at every meeting.

Richard will discuss this in detail during the Groomer Workshop

Trail Closures/Re-openings – Ron Yesney

Trail 15 closed between Amasa and Iron River bridge failing, working on getting a permit with EGLE. Hoping for a temporary bridge for next year.

Trail 5 Big Bay just reopened.

Working on Trail 16 getting a permanent opening

Trail 109

A piece of property north side of 38 that we were unable to use last year, the school board sold the property with a permanent easement will need to do some work this summer. South side of M38 easements verbally committed, when time for written easements no one committed, there is a plan in place.

Trail 122 in the Keweenaw between Lake Linden and Gay reopened on March 1st.

DNR Regional Trails Specialist Project Highlights - DNR Staff

Ron Yesney

The Bill Nichols trail opened with a temporary reroute due to a slump.

Jeff Kakuk worked with our construction crew to get the work completed in the nick of time.

Freda: Once Lake Linden is financed, we will bring the issue to our management team this spring.

Trail 2 worked with city of Wakefield, so far so good everything working as of now, hopefully will have the trail next year as well.

Rob Katona

Trail 16 there is a permission gap in the trail, have a good re-route in that area avoiding going into Wisconsin.

Trail 8 Clowry Trail bridges in Marquette County have been awarded.

Trail 15 Baraga to Chassell the bridge will be constructed this summer and opened for next year.

Bill

Trail 5 large culverts that are failing.

Trail 6 in Wexford County, bidding next month.

Manistee River Bridge moving forward.

Will update the construction at the June SAW meeting.

Greg Kinser

Looking at the Tower Pond Bridge assessing the needs

On the equipment front, we have been allocated a sizable amount for purchasing motorized portable bridges.

Trails Staffing Update – Tim Novak

Blake Gingrich and Sage Hegdal new Trails Specialists

Have filled non-motorized grants position that Dakota held.

Will be soon filling the property analyst position Pat's former position.

Interviews taken place.

Title analysis will start again to help on ownership questions.

Round Robin/Closing Comments - SAW:

2 Next meeting June 22nd

RAM Center

September meeting possibly at the US Forest Service in St. Ignace

November

Scott LaCombe thanks everyone for attending.

Karen Middendorp the partnerships with the riders, DNR and MISORVA has been going great, nice to work together.

Jim Kelts enjoyed his first meeting on the Committee.

Barry Bethke what happened with the club in Curtis? It has been reorganized and rolling along.

Barry Bethke made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:19 PM. Karen Middendorp seconded; motion carried.