SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY WORKGROUP (SAW)

Meeting Minutes

May 16, 2024
1 – 4:30 p.m.
Grayling Township Hall

Welcome – Roll Call

PRESENT FOR THE SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY WORKGROUP:

- Don Britton, Chair
- Karen Middendorp
- Jim Kelts
- Scott Lacombe (absent)
- Douglas Baum
- Chad VanBennekom
- Joe Kuchnicki (virtual)

PRESENT FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES (DNR) STAFF

Tim Novak, Scott Slavin, Matt Torreano, Ron Yesney, Blake Gingrich, Jessica Holley-Roehrs, Peter Costa, Greg Kinser, Heather Durocher, Nicole Hunt, Annalisa Centofanti, Michelle Ballard, Christopher Stark, Paige Perry, Jill Sell

Meeting minutes

ACTION ITEMS

Meeting called to order at 1:00 p.m.

Motion made to approve the February 29, 2024 minutes by Karen Middendorp, seconded by Jim Kelts, with all in favor. Motion carried.

Motion made by Karen Middendorp to modify agenda, adding items, seconded by Don Britton, with all in favor. Motion carried.

Additional Agenda Items:
Under Business Items for Discussion
a.) Width Restrictions Snow Trails (Karen Middendorp)
b.) Prevailing Wage (Don Britton)
Under Updates
k.) U.P. Central

Motion made to approve the May 16 agenda as amended by Doug Baum, seconded by Chad VanBennekom, with all in favor. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Anderson
Mr. Anderson is recommending that the SAW committee not approve any new ORV trails/routes due to the proposed wheeled motorized bill. Ron Yesney, DNR, pointed out there are several new ORV trail proposals in the DNR data base right now, in process, and will be connectors if approved. Karen Middendorp suggested adding a seasonal date restriction placed on multi-use snow/ORV trails/routes. Greg Kinser, DNR, said most likely implementing a date restriction will require a Land Use Order of the Director (LUOD). Paige Perry, DNR, expressed caution with this recommendation due to impacts that may be created in areas where improvements are in the works. Chad VanBennekom added, in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) this may damage partnerships with ORV users regarding seasonal date changes, adding restrictions.

Joe Bartlett
Mr. Bartlett would like to know how trail users can submit resource damages to the DNR. Nicole Hunt, DNR, replied that incident reports can be submitted, or send detailed documentation of the damages with clear explanations describing damages.

Mr. Bartlett asked if the Snow Trail Improvement Fund is based on percentages or a fixed amount. Karen Middendorp said it is a fixed amount, adding the program needs to keep a certain amount in the fund at all times. Mr. Bartlett wondered if it is fair to keep the same amount in reserve when the season has not been desirable, and the funds should be based on a percentage to better distribute.

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

WIDTH RESTRICTIONS SNOW TRAILS
Karen Middendorp
Karen has received feedback that machines with wider tracks are being used on the trails and these machines should not be classified as oversize snow machines to be used on snow only trails. Thoughts have surfaced about exploring a Land Use Order of the Director (LUOD) to restrict

wider tracks on snow trails (max of 48" width). Tim Novak, DNR added the legislative definition of a snowmobile is

vague, any motorized vehicle that is designed for travel on snow, has tracks, and its intended use for snow than meets the definition for a snowmobile.

MOTION
Motion is made by Karen Middendorp to ask that the DNR look into drafting a LUOD which will restrict tracks to 48" or less on snow trails, Jim Kelts seconded, with all in favor. Motion carried.

PREVAILING WAGE
Don Britton
Don expressed that he does not understand the restrictions for the requirement of prevailing wage. Nicole Hunt, DNR said staff does not have a clear direct answer and are working on gathering more information. DNR staff will provide an update when more information is received.
***Keep topic on agenda.**

UPDATES

USFS UPDATE
None

SCTC RESOLUTION – PERMANENT TRAIL EASEMENTS
Snow Country Trails Conservancy (SCTC)
Karen Middendorp
Karen mentioned the SCTS passed the Permanent Trail Easement Resolution and during the last SAW meeting discussions cited conflict. Ron Yesney, DNR, said he is not sure if the language is enforceable according to the resolution. Nicole Hunt agreed the language in the resolution is not enforceable if that is what the intended goal was. Matt Torreano, DNR, added if any LUOD was implemented, it will only be enforceable on State lands and does not carry over on private lands (easements). Internally, DNR staff is working on reviewing and cleaning up language in administrative rules to clarify land that is managed by State whether owned or leased. Karen Middendorp said extra grooming costs are being covered by the snow program from wide width vehicles (wheeled vehicles) and not sure how long the program can sustain with these added expenditures.

MOTION
Motion is made by Karen Middendorp to take agenda items out of order, Chad VanBennekom seconded, with all in favor. Motion carried.

U.P. EASEMENT UPDATES
Matt Torreano, DNR
A while back Matt met with local company, Longyear in Marquette, land manager about selling permanent trail easements to the State. Discussions fizzled due to development plans. Recently,

Matt has met with Longyear and resumed discussions on selling the easements again. He is hoping to keep moving forward and finalize by end of summer. Snow trail needs to permanently

move due to upcoming development plans. This easement is very important to the communities and will be challenging to work through as it crosses two bodies of water and an existing dam with adjacent flume.

Matt and Rob Katona, DNR, are working on developing a document to go to Cliffs Dow for potential easement changes.

Matt Torreano will provide an update at the next SAW meeting.

DNR LOGO ON SIGNS/TRAIL CLOSURE SIGN

Jessica Holley-Roehrs, DNR

From the last SAW meeting, discussion took place about placing DNR logos on snow signs to help deter sign stealing. Jessica Holley-Roehrs has checked into the expense and discovered new dyes will have to be made and it will be costly. DNR staff and SAW members talked about super sticky decals to place on signs identifying sign ownership (DNR logo). Jessica confirmed that decals are less expensive than printed signs.

SAW members briefly discussed the trail closure signs, for any reason, or temporarily. Members cited this past winter, gates were closed, due to lack of snow and riders were not abiding by closed gates or signs when snow was present. A suggestion to add a sign that reads "Trail Closed Due to Poor Trail Conditions" for temporary closures. Karen Middendorp expressed that she does not see the need to add another sign with more language and cannot support costing the snow program more money, trail closure is good enough.

Jessica will check with DNR Law Enforcement Division (LED) for a recommendation sticker size and design. Chad VanBennekom said there are issues with people placing any type of stickers on sign fronts and recommends not placing another sticker on the front of a sign. Douglas Baum voiced that logos on signs makes them identifiable where they originated and if they were stolen and his opinion is it's important to have the logo on the sign. Jessica added that it is questionable whether LED can enforce citations without witnessing the act.

MOTION withdrawn.

Motion is made by Douglas Baum to add DNR logo identification stickers to the back of snow stop signs, Jim Kelts seconded, will all in favor. Motion carried.

MOTION withdrawn.

Motion is made by Jim Kelts to use "Property of DNR (logo)" sticker. Jim Kelts requested to withdraw the motion.

Jessica added the expense for stickers can utilize snow sign funds after approval is received from finance and she will pursue the cost and report at the next SAW meeting.

Ron Yesney, DNR, added his opinion to have the print die changed and avoid using stickers.

SNOW EQUIPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

ADD DNR STAFF

Current Members:
Don Britton
Joe Kuchnicki
Karl Davenport
Scott LaCombe
Richard Kennedy
Jessica Holley-Roehrs
Two DNR staff have been added:
Blake Gingrich
Peter Costa

TRACK ISSUE

Karl Davenport
Karl provided an update on snow tracks and club sponsor use when the equipment should or should not be used. Snow equipment manufacturers (across the board) recommendations were discussed and considered. Manuals recommend visual inspections of tracks and wheels should be performed regularly, tracks should be tensioned every 250hrs, alignments every 250hrs, and at 500hrs replace the oil. Karl said this is still a hot topic of when they should or should not be used amongst the club sponsors. Joe Bartlett added heat is what really kills the tracks and any use on hard surfaces is detrimental. At a minimum we should follow the manufactures recommendations. Equipment owners should abide by their manufacture manuals. Karl stated the tracks are the most expensive part to repair.

Chad VanBennekom asked if there are any repercussion from not abiding by manuals and how can we get more clubs to administer preventative maintenance. Chad added that snow trail permits increase very little over the years, and yet equipment costs are increasing enormously ever year.

The recommendation is easy areas to groom should use snow tires, however, most club sponsors like tracks. In the future, the use of either tires or tracks may have to be assigned to the club sponsors.

Douglas Baum asked if the club sponsors have to abide by equipment rules. Jessica said, yes, it is spelled out in the grants and there is a failure to perform notification if they are not adhering.

Chad VanBennekom recommended PRD unit contact staff perform the following:

1. Yearly inspection on equipment.

2. Be present or verify new equipment deliveries and identify any items that fall through the cracks (tires not being delivered).

Doug Baum suggested adding these responsibilities in the grant language agreements, including equipment inspection record expectations.

Ron Yesney stated having PRD unit contacts perform inspections is a step forward in the right direction. With the FRD/PRD transition there will be more direction that can be passed on to the PRD unit contacts and work on creating a routine maintenance form.

MOTION
Motion is made by Chad VanBennekom for the DNR to investigate adding a yearly equipment inspection form and routine for each program owned equipment by PRD unit contacts and PRD unit contacts be present for delivery of new equipment with a new equipment checklist, Doug Baum seconded, with all in favor. Motion Carried.

MOTION
Motion is made by Jim Kelts that at the next SAW meeting the DNR will provide an answer on drafting an LUOD regarding wide tracks, Doug Baum seconded, with all in favor. Motion carried.

Nicole Hunt reminded the workgroup that local law authorities cannot enforce LUOD's, only DNR LED can enforce. Nicole also stated that internally, DNR staff has created a workgroup and is reviewing the land administration rules. She mentioned the internal workgroup can discuss the inclusion of local authority enforcing LUOD's. Nicole advised the administrative rule process will be the route to take opposed to an LUOD (will expand out further). The Department administrative rule process goes through the Office of Regulatory Reform (ORR), public hearings, and legislative reviews.

Jim Kelts suggested that the U.S. Forest Service establish the same snow seasonal restriction dates. Nicole Hunt recommended gathering reps from the U.S. Forest Service, DNR, and SAW to being this conversation. Tim Novak, DNR, supports this suggestion and will work on facilitating a meeting with these groups. Matt Torreano, DNR, noted that in the past, this conversation has taken place, and a common agreement was not met between the groups.

CARMEUSE
Conversations are moving forward. Swan River bridge is also in process and is on a list for engineering. A temporary snow route is in and ready to be open when we have snow.

MINERS CASTLE
Ron Yesney, DNR
Letters have been exchanged between Alger County Road Commission and Parks and Recreation Chief, Ron Olson. Alger Counties response did not say a lot. A meeting is set with Alger County Road Commissioners (June 10, 5 p.m., in Munising), and business owners will be present. Ron

Yesney is planning on attending this meeting as well. The local DNR trail specialist, DNR trail coordinator, and others have explored options for a reroute and there are not any viable options found. DNR staff will provide a follow up at the next SAW meeting.

VERIZON FLEET MANAGEMENT

Jessica Holley-Roehrs, DNR
Jessica is planning to move forward analyzing the Equipment Status Reports (ESR), matching the ESR report data with the data in the Verizon system, ensuring data is accurate. Four or five machines still need trackers. New equipment will be coming in and will need trackers installed. Jessica is still hearing about battery issues, and she is working on resolving. She has had discussions with Verizon on setting up a maintenance schedule and will need to set parameters for the various machines. Grant sponsor training will follow any new enhancements to the Verizon system.

FRD/PRD TRANSITION UPDATE

Greg Kinser, DNR
Beginning FY25 (Oct. 1 2024), the FRD/PRD transition will be complete. All snow unit contacts will be PRD staff. FRD is still providing support when needed. All the pieces are coming together, and positive feedback has been received. Going forward and at some capacity, FRD staff will be working with PRD staff in a more structured way.

SOS REGISTRATION STICKER SIZE CHANGE

Tim Novak, DNR
PRD staff is working on setting up a meeting between Secretary of State (SOS). Tim will provide updates as they become available.

Greg Kinser, DNR, wondered if an administrative rule can be administered to add registration numbers on the snow vehicle similar to a boat registration number on a watercraft, at the owner's responsibility.

WHEELED MOTORIZED BILL 4559

PAST DRAFT LUOD CLOSING TRAILS NOV. 15 – MAY 1

Karen Middendorp
Karen is not anticipating any movement on this house bill until after summer break.

PAST DRAFT LUOD CLOSING TRAILS NOV. 15 - MAY 1
Greg Kinser, DNR
In the past, a workgroup was formed and and came up with a draft LUOD, similar to the Wheeled Motorized Bill 4559, which did not receive a lot of traction and actually put trail user groups at odds. Karen Middendorp said the SAW minutes from 2009 reflects the draft LUOD being recommended. This is not a new problem, and because of the recent ORV explosion, more awareness and demand for change has been acknowledged.

U.P. CENTRAL TRAILS

Ron Yesney, DNR

Ron stated that U.P. Central Trails, a grant sponsor responsible for maintaining 110 miles of snow trails, is leaving the program. Though, the good news is the mileage is being split and absorbed by adjacent grant sponsors. The snow groomers will move to Alger SORVA and Moose Country. Ron is working on finalizing the mileage between the sponsors and he anticipates this transition to be smooth.

2024 MEETING DATES

- Aug. 22 – RAM Center Roscommon
- Sept. 25-26 Trails Fall Summit (Lansing)
- Dec. 5 – U.P. (TBD)

ROUND ROBIN/CLOSING

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m.