Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup

Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual meeting
Date: November 30, 2023

Roll call

Present for the Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup (committee):

- Don Britton, chair
- Jim Kelts
- Joe Kuchnicki
- Scott LaCombe
- Karen Middendorp

Present for the Department of Natural Resources (department) Staff

- Bobbi Audette
- Jacklin Blodgett
- Anna Centofanti
- PJ Costa
- Michael Desnoyer
- Blake Gingrich
- Cpl. Mike Hearn
- Rob Katona
- Greg Kinser
- Scott Lakosky
- Brian Mensch
- Ron Olson
- Tim Novak
- Paige Perry
- Jessica Roehrs
- Scott Slavin
- Doug Rich

- Matt Torreano
- Ron Yesney
- Monica Weis
- Kristin Wildman

Chair Don Britton called the meeting to order at 1:30

There was a moment of silence for Mr. Jim Duke.

There was a moment of silence for Mr. John Simler

Karen Middendorp made a motion to approve the September 7, 2023, meeting minutes. Jim Kelts seconded; motion carried unanimously.

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

Jim Kelts made a motion to approve the meeting agenda as amended. Karen Middendorp seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Meeting minutes

Public Comment:

Written comment and in person - Joseph Shaffer

ACSORVA Trail Reroute 10.2.23.pdf

Karner Blue Butterfly – listed endangered 1992, not many know of the butterfly. DNR closing trails due to the butterfly.

Sept 4.7 miles will be closed on the Allegan pipeline through the SGA one of the best parts of the trail. Re-route on 6.5 miles on plowed roadway. Notified a few months ago without the opportunity to discuss a re-route. Trail on the pipeline on for 50 years, we only use 100 foot wide of the pipeline. Working with a Michigan senator. Common threat is wood plant encroachment,

we maintain keeping the woody debris in check. There is a lack of lupine flowers which the butterfly utilizes. The current situation misses the mark – if we knew in the past –

Asking for a one-year delay to work with the DNR for a viable re-route.

Keep the trail off the road.

DNR to meet with us to discuss the reroute.

Response: Karen would like to have a one-year hiatus, people would not ride five miles of dirt road.

Tim Novak - From conversations with the Wildlife Division, keeping the trail on the grade is not an option, it would be in violation of federal law. MNFI completed this year located the Karner Blue Butterfly and Blue Lupine along the trail. We can have a conversation of a better re-route.

Written – Bill Hansen

Large registration numbers to be visible from a distance. Viable option but will take time to institute.

Jim Kelts made a motion to add the registration number discussion to today's agenda. Karen Middendorp seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Business Items for Discussion:

Lake Linden Ribbon Cutting Ceremony – Ron Yesney:

Glad to see it come to fruition.

Major project with five construction companies

Many entities involved with this project.

Good turn out this morning

Tracked Machine Use/Revise Handbook Policy – Tim Novak:

It's come to our attention that some clubs were using tracked machines without adequate snow. We adjusted the handbook to address tracked snow machines. Some are using them – will send out a memo reminding clubs to follow the policy in the handbook. What is adequate snow – need to determine the amount. Either swap out the tracks for wheels or it stays in the barn.

Chair Britton – without snow in the tracks, there isn't lubrication to keep them running properly. Would the DNR alert the public to this information as well, it would be helpful. Quote the handbooks. Track issues are cost prohibitive, cuts back on the ability to purchase new equipment and maintenance.

Joe Kuchnicki made a motion to have the Equipment Subcommittee discuss tracked machine use and provide the DNR parameters of adequate snow. Scott LaCombe seconded; motion carried unanimously.

When purchasing an agriculture tractor, it comes with the wheels, can switch out to the tracks. Some clubs do not have agricultural tires, they would have to put in a request for equipment.

Joe Kuchnicki – about 15 years ago, we weren't using equipment for maintenance. If we have adequate equipment to do the brushing and signing, we can use our brushing and signing money.

Snow Season Open Season Date Change - Don Britton:

December 15 through April 15 had occasions from the DNR to extend the season and during muzzleloader season.

Don would like Jim Kelts to head a subcommittee for discussion.

Would like to include users, ORV, and the community.

Will have to bring this to the legislators.

Interest from the UP: Keith Lynch ORV, Winch Diller, Chad VanBennekom

Interest from the LP: Karl Davenport

Karen will seek input from several entities in the LP.

Will stay on the agenda for an updated report.

Large Registration Numbers – Don Britton:

Numbers need to be more visible when the machine is operating 6 inches x 3 inches, like a boat registration – dictated by the Secretary of State? Ron Olson said we will find out the history as why it was changed.

Would be beneficial from a law enforcement aspect.

Karen Middendorp made a motion that SAW recommend that the registration should go back to the original size. Jim Kelts seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Snowmobile Financials – Michael Desnoyer:

SAW Financial Update 11.30.2023.pp

Michael will run some detailed reports for the SAW regarding CSS&M dollars. They are discretionary spending dollars for paint, signs, repaired, etc. Is the number up by $150K due to a project? We bought some new snowmachines for the program.

Jessic Holley-Roehrs will get information regarding historical machines.

Updates:

LED Update – Cpl. Mike Hearn:

LED's new Chief is Jason Haines

Novi Snowmobile Expo – LED had a booth for three days, went well. Vast majority of people contacting us at the show asked ORV questions.

Thanks to those who held the safety class in conjunction with the expo. Snowmobile safety classes, had to cancel a few due to low participant numbers. Our instructors are volunteers, and they do their best to let people know that they are holding classes. We can't pin the blame for lack of students taking classes on them.

- Questions asked by SAW board: Should we have the classes online? Maybe model it after the hunter safety class where there is a field test as well.

- Hearn Response: Snowmobile laws haven't changed, and they are very lenient, especially for our youth. Might need to have youth snowmobile safety classes a mandatory requirement through legislation, like marine/ORV safety.

Cpl. Hearn will get a comparison of other state's programs and requirements and share at the next meeting. Seems there is a shift in the sport and youth participation is going down.

Snowmobile training for other LED entities will occur in Munising. Making a great effort to standardize enforcement across the state.

Wheeled Legislation – Karen Middendorp:

Still working on it, removed the snow caveat from an enforcement issue. Will keep the dates. Hoping to move it through the house and senate at the same time.

Trail #2 – Ron Yesney:

The DNR met with the city of Wakefield and came to an agreement to keep the trail on old US 2 with some conditions.

The local club and city had some issues which we mediated.

The portion of trail on the road will not be groomed due to the conflicts between the grooming and the plowing of the road.

We have a one-year agreement with the condition we work on widening the road and permanently move the trail off the road.

Next year to start on a grant to widen the road.

Need some culverts, fill, and guardrail movement would be involved.

Need to engineer the project.

Miners Castle – PJ Costa:

Recap: Alger County Road Commission is repaving H 58, and they want us off the road. We tried to find alternate re-routes, one route was to go through the conservation easement and on through Timber Products land which is not ideal for them.

Two bridges, an easement from ManuLife, and an agreement from Timber Products along with about $2M in funding.

Before deer season, we sent a letter asking Alger County if we could continue the trail along H 58 until we have a re-route in place.

Visitors' Bureau willing to do what is needed.

The County can restrict the road if they sign it. Do they have the authority? The road commission has precedence as they already closed H 15.

The way we've been interpreting the law is for us to designate the trail, however; the road commission needs to weigh in on it.

Will be an on-going agenda item.

It would be interesting to review Bill Manson's video from five years ago of the trail segment on H 58 and compare it to what is on the ground today.

Verizon Fleet Management – Jessica Holley-Roehrs:

161 of our machines are loaded on the landing page. About 20 machines need to have the hardware installed and we are getting back on track with the process.

Jessica is getting feedback from the clubs and sending installation issues to the company to fix.

We have troubleshooting to complete. We are running the tracking which is not accurate. A few settings have been fixed, especially the issues with road mapping. Low signal areas and how it impacts the data and when it comes back online, is it accurate.

Next phases to get the data and use it. Help and teach the clubs on how to utilize the system to help them with their reports.

Question for the SAW, the first year we did not mandate that tractors that were 100% club-owned install the hardware. General participation from clubs that own their equipment, however; we have a few holdouts. Would like to see the 100% club-owned machines if they get paid to groom, they are required to have the hardware installed. They would not get paid to groom if they are using their 100% club-owned machines if they did not install the hardware.

Joe Kuchnicki made a motion that any machine being reimbursed for snow grooming must have the hardware installed. Scott LaCombe seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Exceptions can be worked out through the local contacts. Could have a power source to be plugged in to a unit.

Tim Novak will discuss the SAW recommendation with Richard Kennedy and others. He will get the information/decision back to the SAW.

Ron Olson suggested that when this goes live, maybe need a subcommittee to discuss what information goes to whom. Create a standardized policy and work out some of the issues beforehand, maybe next September.

Data will be saved to the cloud at least for seven years in case there are any issues when we go paperless.

Ride Right Update – Ron Yesney:

Media blast last week to buy your trail permit, where your dollars go, and our ride right messaging. Ron had an interview with TV6.

Signs

Grant sponsors want a sign to put up, posted in places where people are stopped at trailheads and intersections utilizing the posters on plastic backing for next year. A person with a helmet, no ORV/Snowmobile

Lead Right

A video is in the editing process, hopefully out by January.

We are promoting safe snowmobiling to get home safely to friends and family.

Working on the possibility of billboards downstate, working with Marketing and Outreach

MISORVA seeking the possibility of using the Ride Right logo for a billboard, Karen will work with Ron.

FRD/PRD Transition Update – Blake Gingrich:

We are on track introducing the new local contacts during the pre-season meetings.

October 2024 PRD will be on their own with the paperwork.

We are rolling out our virtual training schedule, which will be recorded, on various forms and topics.

Going forward, PRD will have direct oversight of our staff, which should help going forward.

It was asked why the pre-season meetings are no longer mandatory.

The SAW would like to see more interaction in-person with the clubs and contacts.

Karen Middendorp made a motion that the DNR investigates making the pre-season meetings mandatory for the clubs and contacts. Jim Kelts seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Allegan State Game Area – Karner Blue Butterfly Management – Kristin Wildman:

The change came about for a re-route from the monitoring of the Karner Blue Butterfly (KBB). In fact, this re-route should have happened earlier.

We are constantly learning more and adapting to manage rare species.

Listed federally since 1992, Michigan had them in the conservation plan in 2009.

Historically in oak savannahs, right of ways

The larvae feed exclusive on wild lupine and the eggs over-winter at the base of the plants.

How will we minimize our impact from 'taking' the KBB which is a federally protected species, keeping in line with the criteria of the federal laws/habitat conservation plans through habitat management.

Through our management of the recovery of the species, we are always monitoring the situation and have surveyed the Allegan SGA occupied habitat and inventoried the species. The KBB population is in decline. Legally we need to eliminate or minimize mortality and adjust management objectives on state owned land.

Working on the KBB species management in the Endangered Species Act.

Further discussion ensued regarding the re-route of the snowmobile trail.

Greg Kinser suggested that perhaps a meeting at a local level, should be set up for with everyone involved to discuss the matter.

Equipment Subcommittee – Don Britton:

Will be meeting to discuss track use without adequate snow.

Groomer Workshop – Karen Middendorp:

Moving a week earlier due to DNR training

Will be mid-week Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Allowing our sponsors who groom on the weekend to attend.

Local clubs will be involved with the workshop.

$81/night, Karen will send out an early registration

The DNR will sponsor two people from each club and another group will sponsor two people.

The SAW meeting will be on Thursday the 29th.

SAW Vacancies – Tim Novak:

Send applications to Anna Centofanti, Jessica, or Tim

Open until January 8th.

Round Robin/Closing Comments:

Joe Kuchnicki appreciates the work done on the Ride Right program with the Lead Right aspect.

Jim Kelts said we need to look at the Allegan SGA issue.

Karen Middendorp echoes Jim's thoughts, this can happen to any one of us. No one is going to ride the five miles of dirt road it will destroy their trail system. Somehow, some way we need to fix this.

Scott LaCombe said grease your machines, change your oil, and treat it like your own – you were given a grant to purchase that machine.

Adjournment:

Scott LaCombe made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jim Kelts seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 4:55.