

FINAL DRAFT 1.6.2020

Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup

Foggy's Steakhouse, Christmas

December 5, 2019

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present: Chairman Lee Murray, Mr. Barry Bethke, Mr. Don Britton, Mr. Jim Duke, and Mr. Joe Kuchnicki

DNR Personnel Present: Jake Burton, Michael Desnoyer, Paul Gaberdiel, Rob Katona, Brian Krease, Gregory Kinser, John Morey, Ron Olson, Jay Osterberg, Sam Salo, Jill Sell, Matt Torreano, Nikki Van Bloem, Monica Weis, Paul Yauk, and Ron Yesney

Attendees: Hank Armbrrecht, Ron Corbett, Rex Hyrns, Don Reed, Rick Brown, Jim Kelts, Steve Veltman, David Nuechterlein, Aaron Cook, Bob and Karen Middendorp, John and Kaye Houk, Jan Murray, Roger B. Kilbury, Steve Barnett, Ken McCrudy, Bill Stenenge, Tim Smigowski, Keith Lynch, Dave Campo, Jim Dickie, Karl Davenport, Paul Scanlon, Bill Hansen, Connie Diller, Brice Burge, Karyn Hautamaki, Scott LaCombe, Mark Pankner, Russ Alger, Matt Lohone, Bryan Van Nett, Randall Ackerberg, and John Henmann

Chairman Lee Murray called the meeting to order at 9:58 AM with a welcome and introductions.

*A motion was made by **Mr. Barry Bethke** to approve the October 18, 2019 meeting minutes, **Mr. Jim Duke** seconded; motion carried.*

*A motion was made by **Mr. Duke** to allow the Chairman to take agenda items out of order, **Mr. Joe Kuchnicki** seconded; motion carried.*

*A motion was made by **Mr. Don Britton** to approve the December 5th agenda as amended, **Mr. Bethke** seconded; motion carried.*

Penny Bridge Road Signage Issue

Penny Bridge is a seasonal county road with a private property landowner who is claiming ownership of the road. **Mr. Karl Davenport** discussed the issue of signing the road to the standards of the Signing Handbook and the fact the landowner claims ownership of the road/right-of-way (ROW). The signs are being removed; the landowner has brought signs in to the local DNR office stating the club has no rights to post sign on his private property. We need something in writing saying the club can ignore the signing protocols in the Signing Handbook. **Mr. John Houk** said the county road commission has jurisdiction of the ROW and they will allow the area to be signed and **Mr. Davenport** has a permit from the county stating such. The landowner says it is not legal. **Sergeant William Webster** is dealing with the situation and doing due diligence with **Mr. Davenport** and the road commission. The landowner owns the entire roadway and allows the road commission to use the road as a seasonal conventional motor vehicle use. The deed from the landowner gave the road commission permission to use the road. By law, he is not required to allow other signage. The DNR turned over enforcement issues to the Antrim County Sheriff's Department. **Mr. Britton** says Marquette County owns seasonal roads and the clubs can sign them. **Mr. Davenport's** issue is different in that the road is privately owned. The owner is allowing snowmobile use, but not signage. How does this affect the club's liability? There is a 'Sharp Curve' sign on the straight-away on the dirt road

where the T intersects with M 66 at stop sign. **Mr. Davenport** removed as many signs as possible and wants to keep a 'Right Turn' sign in place. **Mr. Bethke and Mr. Davenport** will work on this issue. **Mr. Greg Kinser** said this is a complex situation with a lot of history where everyone is trying to do the right thing and we need to remember to work together to figure out the best solution, maybe a possible re-route? UPDATE/CLARIFICATION: the road is a seasonal road owned by the county and the private landowner owns the property on both sides of the road.

Carmuse / Rogers City Update

Mr. Kinser said there are continuing discussion on a potential land exchange. The county has concerns with safety and wetland reserves, we talked about options and alternate approaches for the long-term trail. **Mr. Dave Campo** said his alternate re-route trail proposal has been approved by the DNR and still requires MDOT and Presque Isle County Road Commission (PICRC) approval. **Ms. Paige Perry, Mr. Campo**, and Rick are working on the MDOT permit requiring tree removal and culvert replacement among other issues. PICRC would not give support to the trail proposal, requesting a letter to allow for signage on CR 638 and Swan River Road. **Ms. Perry** is continuing to move forward with the proposal. We will put up a sign of the proposed re-route before getting onto the MDOT property, perhaps this could alleviate any issues with the county.

Bear Creek Update

Our grant agreement for \$180,000.00 between the USFS and the DNR for the USFS to manage the project has been approved. The agreement between the USFS and the Lake County Road Commission (LCRC) has been completed, LCRC ion will be able to start work immediately upon approval of the EGLE permit. The wetland mitigation permit was changed to naturally area designation which will save a significant amount of funding but is now taking EGLE longer to review. EGLE is requesting several changes to the permit along with construction design changes that my increase the likely hood of an accident, **Mr. Scott Slavin** is working with the USFS engineer and EGLE to make the appropriate changes. Due to the unforeseen permit issues we have not started any on the ground construction **Mr. Slavin** hopes to have more information on the permit after I meet with EGLE and the USFS next week. **Mr. Paul Yauk** is pleased by the cooperative efforts between the USFS and LCRC, this will be a nice trail.

Groomer Workshop Funding and Sponsorship

This issue presents itself often, with broad continued funding of the workshop, funds are better spent on the pre-season workshops which brings all the clubs together. **Mr. Yauk** touched on the money spent during the year for grant sponsors, foresters, and PRD staffing.

***Mr. Kuchnicki** made a motion to make a recommendation to include in the sponsor grants that two people attend the groomer workshop for education and training, registration being paid through the snowmobile grant program, **Mr. Britton** second; motion carried.*

Supplemental Spending Update and Monthly Financial Report



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Mr. Yauk spoke of the vacancies on the Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup, resumes have been solicited and hoping to have the new members on board soon.

The 'Did You Know' campaign disseminates information as well as giving credit to the volunteers and clubs getting things done.

We are making headway on easements, funding coming from the gas tax. It was asked if there is a Master Plan for easements, how are we going about securing connections between large tracts of public land in perpetuity for access. **Mr. Yauk** spoke about the contractors on board to help secure permanent easements. **Mr. Keith Lynch** asked if the DNR is working with the timber companies before they sell off their land, yes, we are working with the new corporate landowners. It was asked how much is in the trail easement fund. **Mr. Yauk** said the \$6m supplemental monies will be available on December 14th with \$2.5m to replace nine to ten groomers, \$1m for repairs, \$200k for temporary bridges, \$2.3m for capital outlay. **Mr. Yauk** said the process for obtaining the new groomers would be if the machine is ready to go purchase now, otherwise order for next year. **Mr. Yauk** discussed what determines the carry over amount and why we carry money over by stating we put the \$6m supplement in reserve plus the amount to cover the two year period of the special maintenance grants. We do want to spend the money in the program for a safe trail system.

Mr. Yauk talked about the enforcement slide saying not only do we have boots on the ground we have educational efforts as well.

Many projects have been funded including the major repair along Lake Superior utilizing both snowmobile and IronBelle funds. Trail 8 repairs have used ORV funding to fix the whup-its. The Clowry Grade has eight bridges that are failing and was closed two years ago because one fell into the swamp. The Betsie River 300 foot super structure and trestle bridge will be repaired along with the decking for \$1.3m. \$1.5m will be used to replace the Hersey River Bridge. We are working with our trail specialists for projects and looking for additional funding sources for acquisitions and development. Michigan Natural Trust Fund (MNTF) dollars are available to the state and counties for matching funds. **Mr. Jim Kelts** asked about the bridge in Cheboygan over the Black River; it was held that the bridge needed to support the weight of a train in the possibility of the railroad resuming operations. **Mr. Kinser** said we are moving forward on a temporary bridge as the bids came in too high due to USFS specifications which are limited by the design criteria, not for any weight capacity issues.

The 'Ride Right' campaign was started by Luce County and the DNR is working with them MiSorva and local clubs to bring a consistent safety message. Posters and placemats are available with the message funded by monies from the promotional and safety funds.

Tracks and Tires

Newer Soucy tracks have a longer life span. Pisten-Bully units are not used as much for maintenance. **Mr. Paul Scanlon** from Pisten-Bully said tracked machines can be used in summer. There are steel-barred summer tracks that run about \$35 – 40k a set requiring an additional hydraulic fluid cooler costing about \$10k. Who will pay for the tracks and cooling system? Would the funds come from ORV maintenance? How would using and paying for maintenance handled by the dual clubs? Use the MDOT Schedule C for cost reimbursement rates.

If the units are housed indoors, that would help extend the life. At least remove the tracks and cover or store them. This would also help with trade-in values. The Equipment Subcommittee will research housing and storage of club machines.

Mr. Yauk spoke about the equipment inspections. There are about 170 pieces in the field, some have been inspected already. We need to know the condition of the unit and use the information for planning future decisions. This is a priority for this season. The Equipment Subcommittee recommends that field contacts and a SAW Committee member work with the sponsors to inspect the units. This will also tie-in with the equipment failure rate research conducted by Michigan Technological University (MTU). MTU bid on the equipment failure rate

study for the DNR. **Mr. Yesney** said the equipment inspections will give additional information for MTU to use in their study.

Mr. Russ Alger from MTU is the head of the DNR equipment failure rate study who is working with **Mr. Tim Smigowski** to first gather data by reviewing maintenance records from the past five to ten years to find the failures to characterize and find commonalities. Once the data is reviewed, the next step is to define the failures and the best way to fix them. **Mr. Alger** will then set up times to discuss and meet with the clubs. This will enable MTU to recommend on how better to fix and make the equipment last longer thereby saving the program money. **Mr. Britton** asked if the end results will be made to the manufacturers to make recommended changes to equipment? **Mr. Yesney** answered by saying first we need to see what we can do for the program and yes ultimately, we want a better groomer. **Mr. Kuchnicki** said all of this will be valuable information and a great opportunity to work with the clubs. Parks and Recreations **Chief Ron Olson** said we made this decision to work with MTU for better efficiencies in the program. MTU has been using technology in building ice roads, maybe they can lend some of their insight to our issues. The DNR will be the holder of the MTU information. **Ms. Karen Middendorp** asked if **Mr. Alger** and **Mr. Smigowski** would be willing to attend the groomer workshop in March, both agreed, and **Ms. Middendorp** will coordinate with them.

Equipment Liability Insurance

Mr. Yauk said it is a good idea to look at other agents to save money but be certain the policy is the same as you currently have. Be clear and ask questions before going with another agency.

Grant Fee Reminder/Trail Proposal Database

It was stated before that **Mr. Richard Kennedy** is receiving information too late. We need to have information in by the deadlines to see where we are at the end of the season to plan for the new grants and where we can spend our funding. **Mr. Davenport** said this should include everything as we need an accurate picture of where the program money is and going. To clarify, end of season submittals include brushing and signing, grooming, land lease payments, snow plowing, porta-john rentals, and groomer utilities. If your comp and liability are paid early, those are also due. Special maintenance, major repairs, equipment, and contingency are not part of this requirement.

Ms. Nikki Van Bloem said we are working on communication efforts and have created a standardized letter when a trail proposal is entered in the database. The letter will have a timeframe, levels of approval, and timelines giving the clubs an indication of the proposal movement through the process. Trail specialists have more leeway and input on the proposals and can defer approvals if necessary.

Trail Plan Update / February 2020 Meeting

Phase I consists of meeting with our consultants to review the 2018 plans, coordinate with the other divisions, evaluate the 2013-18 Plan, and to survey all five of our trail advisory workgroups.

Phase II will entail drafting goals from the other divisions and advisory workgroups in order to receive public input by next winter. We will then go back to the divisions and advisory workgroups and incorporate the information into a final draft for review.

Ms. Van Bloem said the plan should be vetted and final by the summer of 2021 with the information gathered from all the sources compiled in a comprehensive, goal specific plan for each grouping under broad categories, such as funding then specific user groups. Funding for the plan is coming from the recreational trail program which is federal dollars for motorized, non-motorized, and diversified use since this trail plan is for the mixed use, we can use that money. No money will be coming out of the snowmobile program for the plan.

Ms. Van Bloem said the priority is to receive input from the SAW, SORVA, MTAC, NAW, and ETS advisory workgroups. We are holding joint meetings with all the workgroups February 21st and 22nd at the RAM Center with our consultants discussing with each the old plan and how to move forward with a new plan. We will be forming draft goals keeping the good from the old and adding new ones. Also, this is a time for each workgroup to hold a working Subcommittee business meeting and bring the other Subcommittees to the table as we have the same real estate and same goals for trail use. The idea is to work collaboratively and how best to address any issues that may arise. **Ms. Van Bloem** asked that the SAW Committee combine the winter business meeting with the trail plan update meeting at the RAM Center. This would allow for a 2020 meeting schedule of February 21st or 22nd, June 25th, October 15th, and December 3rd. It was questioned if the three vacancies would be filled by the meeting and if new members would be up to speed. **Chairman Murray** cited Article 1 Section 5. to adopt the schedule for the following year. **Chairman Murray** proposed to keep the business meeting on March 5th as mentioned at previous meetings, to coincide with the groomer workshop and call a special meeting at the RAM Center or authorize expenses paid for the SAW Committee to attend the groomer workshop to provide SAW representation. **Mr. Duke** said the SAW/DNR roundtable discussions are the focal point and highlight of the groomer workshop. **Mr. Davenport** added that many people have not been to a SAW meeting and the groomer workshop exposes these folks to the SAW members and pertinent discussions they otherwise would not be a part.

Free Snowmobiling Weekend

The Department will take the amended SAW recommendation letter and initiate the conversation, be mindful, if we open legislation, there might be unintended consequences. **Mr. Yauk** also asked the SAW Committee to identify a specific weekend, perhaps with the International Snowmobile Association (ISA) conference, encouraging more people to participate.

DNR Staff Updates

Chief Olson record high water levels and the recent weather has affected our trails. We are receiving FEMA grants for some of the Houghton County flood projects. We will continue to work with MiSORVA and move forward with the association. We are switching over to the automated grant process to create a faster more efficient way of managing the grants. At the ISA conference we spoke about trail planning, snowmobiling interest is down from seven to ten years ago. It is a challenge on how to run a quality program within the means we have today. We need to reinvent how things go and to bring the activities to where people are, make it easier for them to ride. What you don't know, you don't know. Try to broaden our activities. Backcountry snowmobile riding might bring in fat tire bikers, we should include them in the conversations like we have between downhill skiers and snowboarders. Both user groups can co-exist and create better opportunities for both sports. We need to focus on where we want to be in three to five years and decide which is more beneficial arguments and blame or embracing our ideas and issues.

Mr. Brice Burge with the Munising News took an opportunity to ask **Chief Olson** about the line item vetoes slashing county funding in the UP. Mr. Burge stated each county in the UP lost approximate \$500k in funding, how does the DNR plan to address the issue when land is taken off the tax rolls for trails and easement purposes. **Chief Olson** replied saying the budget process is in flux and we would have to look at the big picture if we would add more land and if needed, how to backfill the loss of revenue. Hopefully the budget process will address the loss of revenue to the counties. The DNR has enough land and adding more would change our approach to maintain and plan accordingly. We must address what we know, and right now the

budget is a huge balancing act. **Mr. Yauk** said that the landowner keeps the parcel of land when the DNR acquires an easement for trails, the property is still on the tax rolls.

Mr. Brian Bennett asked what is the theory of the snowmobile program going toward private industry? **Chief Olson** explained that users take care of what they use, private businesses tend to chase the money. Our program is a fee system on public lands, if private industry ever where to run the program, there would be restrictions in place. Right now, we have an efficient process, good government, taking care of the needs of the fee based program.

Mr. Yesney

There have been some changes in the clubs, UP Central and Hiawatha Trails have split some trails and the club in Ontonagon quit and we are in the process of helping the new people pick up the pieces and transitioning to get up to speed.

Mr. Matt Torreano

Three trail closures in Houghton County :

121 the Freda Grade will be closed for a few years 120 the Freda Loop

3 the Lift Bridge to Lake Linden – the section in Dollar Bay is currently open and can access from Trail 17 from Calumet to Lake Linden – the planning, scope, and scale of work will be spread out over several years.

Houghton to Chassell, which is not a snowmobile trail, is closed indefinitely we hope to begin construction on the corridor soon.

All these projects are reimbursable by FEMA

Snowmobile easements – we are utilizing the contractors to secure easements on corporate land, the contractors also keep an eye out for land sales in general. The new owners of Weyerhaeuser land are very interested in selling snowmobile easements and we are looking to acquire about 131 miles, some of which is multi-use.

Keweenaw Land Association is willing to sell 55 miles across their land.

The US 41 tunnel project in Marquette is completed and we have one owner on board and working with the other for the easements.

Mr. Paul Gaberdiel

The recent weather brought wide-spread storm damage to the area and we are working to open the trails. We have an RTP grant to bid out the construction of the Doty Bridge in the spring.

We are still working on the Seasonal Restrictions LUOD for presentation to the Section Chiefs of PRD. The bridge to re-route traffic off the section of H 58 through Hancock Forestry land is set for engineering in 2021 and funding for construction in 2022. We have 15 miles of new trail from the Sunrise trail into Seney to ease the flow of traffic.

Mr. Rob Katona

We have secured critical easements on Trails 14 and 8. We are working with landowners on easements or a land transactions. We had a minor re-route on Trail 2 in Dickinson/Menominee Counties. We are in the process of clearing the trails from the two storms that produced heavy, wet snow.

Backcountry Trail Riding Workgroup created a draft educational poster and sought input from the wildlife and forestry divisions to help with our message, especially with trespass issues. The new trespass signs are available for problem areas.

Mr. Duke asked if the re-route for Trail 109 is ready, yes, it is open.

Trail 11S is closed from Wakefield to Wisconsin. Trail 5 north of Champion is temporarily closed and will be intermittently closed this season due to logging on private land.

Mr. Kinser

The Northern Lower Peninsula trail specialists have been in communications with **Mr. Torreano**. We are currently focusing on maintaining the existing trail and connections, cementing the trails we have on the ground rather than acquiring more trail, for the moment. **Mr. Kinser** thanked the clubs for giving information to us on the connectors/sections in most need of easements. We are working on keeping the dialogue and communications open with the issues in Gaylord.

Mr. Slavin

Winter Storm November 28th: Lake, Manistee, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Wexford, and Oceana Counties were effected by a winter storm this past weekend causing trees and limbs to break and fall onto our snowmobile trails. DNR crews and clubs are out clearing trails for the start of the snowmobile season.

Projects on the Little Manistee/SNW Trail 344 Lake County: Due to flooding in July two portions of the Little Manistee Route/SNW trail 344 in Lake County have been re-routed for ORV traffic due to large hazardous washouts and exposed high voltage power lines. On November 9th construction started on both locations and are now complete, opening the trail for traffic just prior to snowmobile season.

Fife Lake Trail 5 Re-Route: Early this year we lost private land permission on Trail 5 in Grand Traverse County. This key connector cut off Fife Lake from Traverse City. FRD and **Mr. Slavin** developed a re-route on state lands that would by-pass the private landowner. The re-route was completed in October and is now open for the 2019-2020 season.

Ms. Jill Sell

South Haven has some snow but not much elsewhere. Kal-Haven is open now and has the regulatory signage; engineering has been requested for surface improvements. Landowners are concerned about sled regarding the Gobles, Allegan, and Plainwell trails in the MDOT ROW, sleds are riding on the private property. We are working with the new trespass signs and LED for extra enforcements.

Mr. Yauk

MAGG is moving forward.

It was asked if the Committee members whose term is expiring would like to be re-instated all would like to serve another term: **Mr. Duke**; **Mr. Britton** would like to represent the Grant Sponsors; and **Mr. Kuchnicki** would like to be a member At-Large.

An appreciation of service letter will be sent to **Mr. Bill Manson** for his years with the state trails program. **Chairman Murray** recognized **Mr. Manson** by acknowledging his impact and influence on the snowmobile community in Michigan, the nation, and the world.

Recognition of the Chairman

Chief Olson presented **Chairman Murray** with a Trail Champion plaque for his 24 years of service by saying **Chairman Murray's** leadership kept the Committee going in the right direction, he understands the why's that benefit the end results. **Chairman Murray** is a great parliamentarian who keeps things civil with a positive discourse.

Public Comment

Mr. Rex Hyrns asked who owns the railroad grade in Strongs? The federal government is asking for the \$950 payment. **Mr. Yesney** stated that conversations were started last spring. **Mr. Hyrns** also wanted to ask if enforcement in his area could be conducted on speed in the curves and riding low on the trail rather than noise enforcement. Manufacturers are building machines to beat the sound testing; it would be better to put the efforts toward speed and riding

low. **Acting Lieutenant Jerry Fitzgibbon** responded by saying LED will continue to address noise complaints, however, if there are problem areas, let us know and we can target our patrols. This is a great way for LED to become aware of issues by citizens bringing concerns to LED.

Mr. Houk brought up the issue with the Swan River Bridge issue. In meetings with the road commission, **Ms. Perry** said funding is in place for bridge replacements, the study and recommendation has been completed. What are the next steps? **Mr. Kinser** said the \$50k for surveying and engineering has been funded this year and the \$300k for construction will be funded for 2021. **Mr. Houk** also thanked **Chairman Murray** for all his years of service and presented a plaque from the Presque Isle ST (CLUB NAME)

Upcoming Meeting Dates

Based on the discussion of the Trail Plan Joint meeting in February the following was made:

*A motion was made by **Mr. Bethke** to hold the regular 2020 SAW Committee meetings as follows: March 5th, June 25th, October 15th and December 3rd with a special meeting either February 21st or 22nd, **Mr. Britton** seconded; motion carried.*

Action Items

Announcement of the new SAW committee Chairperson and members.

2020 Reimbursement rate

Equipment Subcommittee to research housing and storage of the units

Amend the Free Snowmobile Weekend letter as requested and identify specific dates

Continue updates on the Carmuse project and Penny Bridge Road signage issue

Roundtable

Mr. Britton asked everyone to be patient while the clubs open the trail from the recent storm damage. They are making progress, but a few areas are still covered with downed trees.

Mr. Duke thanked **Chairman Murray** for his years of service.

Chairman Murray said in a just society there has to be order. That is, we have rules and laws. Mr. Robert's recognizes this when he wrote Robert's rules of order. Whenever there has been disagreement in an organization, we have since 1876 recognized and relied upon these rules of order. The SAW mandate as stated in the MTAC Rules of Procedures, Article III – Duties of the members of the Council, Section 9, Parliamentary Authority: "All meetings shall be governed by any statute pertinent to this Council, using simplified **Roberts Rules of Order**."

I encourage all the current members of the SAW to bone up on these rules as you move forward with your work on this workgroup. I have a handout that might be of use to you.

It has been a pleasure working with this group for the past 24 years and I wish all of you, the DNR staff and leadership, the Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup members my very best going forward, and I wish you all a very Merry Christmas.

*A motion was made by **Mr. Kuchnicki** to adjourn the meeting, seconded by **Mr. Britton**; motion carried.*

Meeting adjourned at 2:56 PM