



## Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual meeting

Date: March 3, 2022

### **Roll call**

Present for the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAW):

- Chair Don Britton
- Joe Bartlett
- Barry Bethke
- Keith Churill
- Joe Kuchnicki
- Scott LaCombe
- Karen Middendorp

Present for the Department of Natural Resources  
(department) Staff

- Kris Bennett
- Jackie Blodgett
- Anna Centofanti
- Cpl. Mike Hearn
- Dakota Hewlett
- Jessica Holley-Roehrs
- Rob Katona
- Richard Kennedy
- Greg Kinser
- Steve Milford

- Pat Olson
- Ron Olson
- Paige Perry
- Jill Sell
- Rob Shields
- Scott Slavin
- Matt Torreano
- Nikki VanBloem
- Monica Weis
- Ron Yesney

Chair Don Britton called the meeting to order at 10:18 am

Barry Bethke made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 2nd meeting. Joe Kuchnicki seconded; motion carried.

Karen Middendorp made a motion to accept the March 3rd agenda. Barry Bethke seconded; motion carried.

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

## **Meeting minutes**

### Public Comment:

Ryan LaPorte

Does not want wheeled vehicles on the trail – there are program signs indicating the trail is closed to wheeled traffic during the season

David Nuechterlein

Asked if a decision is made on the Thumbs Up machines, would this set a precedent?

David mentioned a post on regarding a permit required for Pictured Rocks National Parks, how does it affect the trails leading up to Grand Marais and Miners River. Starting March 1st, you need a park permit to travel through Pictured Rocks with a snowmobile.

Karl Davenport

The Pinney Bridge issue is not on the agenda, as was recommended by the SAW. Kristen Bennett said it has been removed because it is a local issue that is being taken care of by the local resources. The Rogers City Spur updates are in the attached PRD staff updates.

## **Business Items for Discussion**

### ORV Funds – Repair Damages – Richard Kennedy:

Funds available to snowmobile to clubs for maintenance and/or restoration  
ORV damage

18 snowmobile clubs have ORV grants

Recreation specialist in the region is the contact

Six PRD staff available, with two positions currently vacant, to  
conduct inspections unlike 50 or more FRD staff inspecting the snowmobile  
trails

All information and forms available online

ORV has specific formulas on funding to spend

There are restoration grants available when it is dual  
snowmobile/ORV, ORV route, or ORV trail – excluding PA 288 roads open for  
ORV are not available

Looking into funding some of the rutting damages on the roads using  
other money sources

Funds cannot be used on ORV damage on snowmobile only trails  
through private lands where the DNR holds an easement

Restoration dollars are not available for private land

Should the department work on funding ORV damages on snowmobile only trails across private land where we have an easement- it is a conflict with the law, and we should investigate the situation

The clubs, Kennedy, and the contacts should be looking at maps and coming up with solutions

In the past, designated ORV trails were only on state land

We need to open the legislation and re-visit the statute to bring the funds to the designated snowmobile trails - would require a change to the statute to likely to say lands used for public purpose. We could also put more specific language in if we wanted to that would say lands used for public purpose for which the Department holds an easement for public use and access.

With the sunset on the law coming up, this might be a good chance to look at it

Kristen will research to see if we can work within the letter of the law

Deadline May 1st to the specialist, May 31st to Richard

Thumbs Up Groomers – Don Britton:

Problems with groomers running and do they need two groomers

Kennedy

The SAW recommended two machines be purchased for the club

Unsure at this time how are they being stored/protected

Trails 221/222 three segments for 90 miles

2009 machines with 1,00 and 1,200 hours and groomer reports were nil for years

They have a current grant this year and were paid for their grooming utilities Have not groomed at all this year

In the past, a club was required to have a machine for several years before granting them monies

Could we use one of the groomers elsewhere

If they show a need for another machine

We could lease or rent one which takes time to complete and a lot in delivery shipping costs

Work with a farm tractor dealer and rent a tractor for a couple of days

Have the club work with a dealer to see if they could have one on standby

Possibly subcontract with a local farmer

They do not get a significant amount of snow

Could they do half the trail one day and the other portion the next day, alternating grooming every other day having their trail system done every 24 hours

Speak with the DNR contact and club contacts to come up with ideas

It was suggested that a virtual meeting be held with the club, DNR contacts, Don Britton, Jessica Holley, and Karen Middendorp to discuss the issue, asking if they are willing to give up a groomer as we need equipment in other areas with offers of help if they need another machine

## Motion from December 2<sup>nd</sup> to Combine SAW and ORVAW:

It was determined that with all the conversations with the ORV groups, wait until HB 4535 is resolved.

## Lake Linden Funding:

Money set aside wasn't used, could that go back into the grant program

Was a 2021 supplemental, legislature stripped that line, and the money went back

We would need a new supplemental to access that money

However, would need to spend the current year funding and the current supplemental before moving forward on the funding again

The next appropriate time to ask when we used up our old year money and the current supplement has been spent, need to show we have spent the money before asking for more

Karl Davenport asked if we could get \$1.5 million in the budget for equipment next year due to the complexities of orders increasing in prices by 10 - 15%

Kristen said many questions are asked from both management and the State Budget Office

The \$12 million is allocated, but not yet spent

Could we take \$1.5 million out of the contingency fund, if so, Kennedy could not approve any more amendments this year

Kristen understands the need for more equipment, but there is the \$12 million sitting there, waiting to be spent also funds are restricted

Another set of equipment coming online from the rollback monies

Could the clubs ask for grants for equipment and have the money put into the club's checking account to show it has been spent - would need to show a cancelled check to show it was spent

Britton said we could re-visit this in June after we ask for the next round of equipment

## FRD Logging/Trail Right-of-Way:

Kristen has not yet taken the resolution to FRD

Suggested rule of having 3-foot-high stump in LP and 5' stump in the UP, would this remedy the stump issue

Kristen to send the resolution to the SAW committee for discussion and introduce it to FRD

Will bring the feedback and discuss at the next SAW meeting

Joe Bartlett received feedback from the sponsors on stump damage to machines and the proposed resolution

Positive comments

It was also asked why we aren't having the loggers hold to the contract of stumps being cut at ground level

Differing opinions of 'ground level'

Hard to make people do parts of their jobs they are unfamiliar with

Joe Bartlett made a motion to have new hires in the unit contact positions be from PRD and report to PRD; Karen seconded. Motion carried.

Kristen did state that some positions are being replaced with PRD employees

Joe Bartlett asked about the accident on Trail 2 with a logging truck

Ron Yesney did not have much of an update at this point, waiting on the incident report

Unsure if it were a state sale, private landowner, or commercial forest

If the trail is plowed, you should probably need to slow down

Ride as if you do not know what is ahead around the next corner

Require high-visibility lighting in the contract, haul at night, and other ideas

It is a two-way street between the logging industry and riders, work together

Cpl. Mike Hearn said the incident was handled by MSP out of St. Ignace

At this time, it is reported the rider never slowed or braked and might have been under the influence

Joe Bartlett would like to have a meeting between the SAW and FRD on this issue

Kristen will bring this discussion into the conversation on the stump resolution

## **Updates**

### USFS Update – Spring Rosales:

In the Ottawa National Forest

Bridge load reduction signs up

Working on how to replace some of the bridges, many within five years of their life-expectancy

Working with the clubs and DNR contacts

Funding sources include DNR grants, GAOA funds, and other Federal grants

Under-designed initially – especially for construction equipment

Looking into design with heavier load ratings in mind and 16-foot width

USFS initiated the NEPA on 11 bridges in the area

### Funding:

MISORVA – Miracle Million – Karen Middendorp

Created a board of seven

Letters to the clubs letting them know about grants from the Miracle Million for things the program does not pay for

Equipment Supplemental – Kristen Bennett

The Equipment Subcommittee \$2.15 million

The list is out to the clubs and letters out



Returned to Kennedy by March 10th

Waiting to hear from some clubs

What happens if they are not returned?

Richard Kennedy keeps on the clubs and follow-up with the clubs to get their paperwork ink.

## Handbook Subcommittee Update: - Jessica Holley-Roehrs and Karen Middendorp

Had discussions to review the Snowmobile Handbook

Will move into the Signing Handbook and eventually the ORV Handbook to run all three parallel to each other

Clarity of instructions

Changes we may make before bringing up for approval

Looking to the outside review for feedback and suggestions

The Equipment Subcommittee suggested clarification on the insurance  
Kristen said this will probably be a long-standing committee Great work from the committee.

## LED Sound Testing – Seasonal Updates – Cpl. Mike Hearn:

As of February 28th – about 20 tests were conducted

12 patrols across the state with 10 tickets and 9 sound warnings all on snowmobile trails

Current manufacturing trend is for trail rated cans

Can hear them a mile away

However, they pass at the max decibels due to the lower RPMs

Cpl. Hearn now has access to all snowmobile accidents across the state

210 accidents from November 1st to date

The DNR posts information for fatal accidents 10 to date

The major issue is speed – our efforts need to be placed in this area possibly more LED patrols

It was asked if there is information compiled for ORV accidents

We now have the capability to access the data, but we have not put it online

### Groomer Study Update – Russ Alger:

The project has been extended and a date for completion September 1st

Data through 2019 has been entered and queried

Working with Matt Torreano to get the information from the last two years into the system

Survey has been complete and queried

Russ will start making phone calls to set up meetings with the clubs and get this winter's information

Will then have discussions with the DNR and SAW

Once the biggest issues are decided upon, will bring them to the dealers to figure out how to fix them

Russ will have a presentation for the next SAW meeting

### Equipment Subcommittee – Don Britton and Richard Kennedy:

Met on February 28th

Would like clarifications in the Handbook under major repairs to check if machine is under warranty first or would be covered by insurance before requesting a reimbursement

Asking if we can incentivize people for doing their own labor and repairing work on their machines

Possibly having DNR contacts attend sponsor meetings to understand better what the clubs are doing, at least meet once a month during the winter

Encourage this around the state

Could we make it mandatory or at least strongly encouraged, Greg Kinser will discuss with Kristen

Possibly conduct meetings regionally with all the sponsors in the area

Swap stories and parts

Very beneficial for the clubs to share and contacts to learn about the clubs

New machinery and delivery

All applications out and reviewed the 2021 requests

Three clubs have not received their machines yet – Gogebic Area, Gaylord, and Ogemaw Hills

Try to get as many orders in as possible due to issues in getting the machines due to equipment stock

Verizon Groomer Fleet Management – Jessica Holley-Roehrs:

Working with Verizon for over a year to get tests run on our equipment in the field to see it is compatible

The pilot end date was on February 28th and was a great success, despite the lack of snow in some areas

Live maps, alerts, reports, historical data, mobile applications

What we are looking for is cutting costs, safety, streamline monitoring and documentation of maintenance, and increased productivity for the long-term investment of our machines

We can see if the machine is running, the route a machine has taken, can overlay the movement of the machine on our trails using the sets of data points to keep our mapping up to date

Alerts

With geo-fencing, an alert can be sent when a groomer goes through a certain area

Could send an alert to remind the clubs to conduct maintenance

If there is a diagnostic issue

Many reports can be created by choosing the criteria that you are looking for in a spreadsheet, chart, or graph

Can set up a real-time dashboard page for the program by entering data from the green sheets

What did we learn from this project?

- Safety, breakdowns, no-signal, immediate location, and last known location

- Risk management to document trail damage or accidents

- Training for the drivers on how things work, and the data collected

- Current mapping

- Public facing factor option in the future for creating regional maps

- Show important waypoints

Mileage reporting accuracy, easily accessed database can help make more informed end of the year ESR and keeping track of the history on the equipment, and to upload pictures of the unit and drags

Some clubs are using GPS on their own and the feedback is positive

With the proper connections and ask for the rights, we could connect to some of the manufacturers who already have systems on some of their newer machines

Looking to move this forward on this and getting this going, should have more information at the next SAW meeting when this could be implemented

How many additional employees need to be hired and at what additional costs, will be discussed and the information will be shared with the Committee

Many discussions with how this will be beneficial to the sponsors.

Trail Closures – Ron Yesney:

No further trail closures since the last update

Trail 109 still closed for a couple of years and Trail 16

Some Houghton County trails, and the Freda Grade/Loop still closed due to flood damage

Trail 15 running into struggles regarding the bridge Army Corps of Engineers have concerns, may not be open next year

Trail 2 Bear Creek Swamp has not frozen over this year, working on a plan for future use

Only 6,100 miles of trail open out of the 6,500 in the books, might lose some of that trail due to land control or bridges out

## Snow Country Trail Conservancy/Easement Acquisitions

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## Snow Country Trail Conservancy/Easement Acquisitions

– Ron Yesney and Matt Torreano:

Continue to meet bi-monthly to review trails we are working on for permanent easement access and rectify the Spurr Township issue logged and re-routed this year

Lyme acquisition closed 102 miles permanent easement on existing snowmobile trail in Baraga and Marquette Counties \$1.78 million – ORV grant monies on 6 miles designated ORV, where multi-use did a 50-50% with snowmobile funding

Exploring acquiring expansion of trail in areas of private lands cutting off access

Work on the remaining 52 miles on Lyme Timber lands by the end of the year, splitting the purchase between the fiscal years

Working with Minerick on 33 miles in Marquette

Two segments in Gaylord around Lowes which are important trail head and a connector across I 75

Performing title work and getting an appraisal

Working with Hancock in getting site control in the Miners River area in Alger County

The contracts with our consultants ended on February 28th and are seeking bids soon

Free Snowmobile Weekend – Karen Middendorp:

Still stuck in the Senate

Groomer Workshop Results – Karen Middendorp:

Well attended

Different being virtual, not many questions being asked, the element of networking has been lost

Presentations and information are great

Benefit to posting the recording on MiSORVA's website for those who are unable to attend

DNR Staff Updates:

Written reports provided to workgroup members

Round Robin/Closing Comments - SAW:

Joe K thanked everyone for their participation

Keith Churill - Glad to hear Trail 422/Miners River Bridge project is moving forward

Scott LaCombe - Happy trails everyone

Adjournment

Barry Bethke made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:51 pm. Karen Middendorp seconded; motion carried.