

**Minutes of the
Michigan Trails Advisory Council
April 7, 2015**

The regular meeting of the Michigan Trails Advisory Council (MTAC) was called to order by Chair Frank Wheatlake at 10:00 a.m., on Tuesday, April 7, 2015, at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center, 104 Conservation Drive, Roscommon, Michigan 48653. The following members were present: *Frank Wheatlake, Jim Dickie, Jim Duke, Tom Dunn, Mike Foote, Tim Kobasic, Nancy Krupiarz, Bill Manson, Sarah Nicholls, Jason Rolling, and Drew YoungeDyke.*

The following Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff was present: Paul Yauk, Darlene Moore, Peter Gamberg, Andrew Turner, Anna Sylvester.

Chair Wheatlake welcomed new committee member Sarah Nicholls. Sarah introduced herself to the members and audience.

ACTION ITEMS

MOTION: Mr. Tom Dunn moved the motion to approve the revised agenda. Mr. Mike Foote seconded and it carried unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Jim Dickie moved the motion to approve the October 28, 2014 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Nancy Krupiarz and it carried unanimously.

UPDATES

Mr. Paul Yauk introduced himself as acting State Trail Coordinator, replacing Mr. Jim Radabaugh who retired at the beginning of the year.

State Trails Plan – Mr. Yauk reported they are filling the gaps that were left with staff retirements. The U.P. Land Coordinator position has been filled with Mr. Darrell Welch, who will be working on acquisitions, easements, and land issues. Mr. Ron Olson, Chief of Parks, wanted to let everyone know that they are gathering information from staff on how they would like to see this new trail program move forward.

Grants – Mr. Yauk stated they applied for some Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants last year. They received a \$2.9 million grant in Oakland County and are looking at a partnership with Oakland County Parks to build a new ORV scramble adventure park. The second one is a snowmobile/walk/ bicycle trail in southwest Michigan, called the Fruit Belt Trail.

Iron Belle Trail – They received some general fund dollars for this trail. Once the trail plan is together they want to get more people on board. They have sent the grant program requests out last week and those are going to partners so they have the opportunity for some of those critical dollars now.

Staff Updates: - They need everyone's thoughts and opinions on the future of trails. They are looking at staffing key people in the U.P., northern lower Michigan, Bay City south, and a go-to person in Lansing.

Iron Belle Trail Presentation

Mr. Yauk gave a presentation on the Iron Belle, which will be Michigan's showcase trail. It is 2,000 miles long. They now have 12,000 miles of trails: equestrian, snowmobiles, hiking, ORVs. Iron Belle starts in Ironwood Michigan and it ends at Belle Isle.

Question and answer:

Are the trails going to cross private property? Yes they can cross private property, and we have to have an agreement. We are not going to cross a private property without permission.

Is there a permit process for events? Yes, there will be and there are a lot of partners to work with. If it is on U.S. Forest Service land, there is a process for that. We are working through it and making sure we do it right.

For the biking trail, is the goal to have it a separate facility, or are parts of it going to be a separated non-motorized facility and on-road route? Both. There are a lot of trails and we will also partner with right of ways along roads; it is going to be a big partnership.

Has the DNR developed a timeline? We cannot give an exact answer because we do not own all of the property. Fortunately, we are able to match federal dollars with state dollars and local dollars. Getting agreements locally is the hard part.

Have we approached the tribes for support? The tribes approached the committee at the Governor's Council, they want to be a part of it, and we are excited to work with them.

Is there discussion on how to address, once you have your easements, liability problems? Most of the landowners with agreements feel comfortable with the Recreational Use statute for the trail on their property and we have not seen a lot of concern about liability for running events on property.

What is a landowner's benefit to have a trail on their property? Mr. Yauk responded that we will clear this up. Chair Wheatlake would like to make this a topic of discussion at the next meeting – liabilities and benefits to landowners.

Mr. Yauk provided a copy of the map, which can be found on-line at www.Michigan.gov/dnrtrails.

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Interactive Trail Mapping Presentation

Mr. Peter Gamburg reported that in working with the Iron Belle Trail, they are going to be developing a trail viewer with interactive maps for people that are interested in the trail. The DNR is coming out with an open data portal. The idea is to get the DNR's trail data to the public for use. Once this statewide viewer is active, it would be a matter of educating the locals to have them submit data to the department on other trails so we could add it to the state trail data. The DNR is anticipating all of our new trails layers to be available on the portal, which should be live this month, available on the DNR website.

Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan

Ms. Sarah Nicholls presented the Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan. Travel Michigan hired her to facilitate the process. An entire year was spent developing the plan; they went through a

process of establishing a vision for the industry, setting a series of eight goals. For each goal identifying a set of objectives and strategies related to each goal. Across the course of a year, about a thousand people participated in one or more of these different planning activities. The summary of the plan was handed out and a couple more documents can be found on-line.

The committee wanted to identify what are some of the most potentially lucrative niche areas for us as a state and what can they do to help those activities grow and develop. They surveyed groups in cities and counties around the state that are charged with bringing in more visitors to that particular geographic area. They came up with a list of the most rapidly emerging activities. Biking was at the bottom of this list but identified as the most rapidly emerging activity. They focused on bicycling tourism as one of the niches where they can work with the bicycling community to develop a marketing plan to increase and improve bicycling tourism offerings.

They have also developed a template and encourage other niches to follow their own marketing plan. Given her goal on the Equine Trails Subcommittee, they decided to support this process for equine tourism as well.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Andrea Ketchmark, Director of Trail Development, North Country Trail Association. The North Country Trail is a national scenic trail, one of only eleven, that runs from New York to North Dakota and is 4,600 miles long. She represents the North Country Trail Association that is a chapter-based association that works with their National Parks Service partner, and all of their other land management partners, to get the trail on the ground. They want to be sure that the North Country Trail maintains its designation and its status as an important trail. If there is anything they can do, just let them know.

Eric Sandeno, Regional Supervisor of the U.S. Forest Service of Milwaukee stated that the North Country Trail goes through three national forests in Michigan: The Hiawatha, Ottawa, and the Huron Manistee. The Park Service administers the trail but while it travels through the three national forests, the management of the trail is up to the National Forest. A lot of what they are here for is to make sure that the interests of the North Country National Scenic Trail are not lost. At the same time, be sure that each of the national forests have the national forest management plans in place.

Question and answer:

What is the timeframe for the Forest Service's approval of the Belle Isle trail for hiking? Is that already approved use through the Forest Service? Mr. Sandeno responded they have agreements with the Parks Service and the North Country Trail Association as far as their management goals. Their ultimate goal is to work with the DNR and develop a similar MOU to ensure that it links back to the MOU they have on trail management. People can use the trail, as long as they know the rules and requirements of it. It does not have to go through NEPA because it is an existing trail on the ground.

The second part of it is new. Will that have to go through that process? Is there going to be a new MOU to get that done? Mr. Yauk responded that the DNR will be working with partners on the biking. On the hiking side they are going to be working closely with the North Country Trail. On the other side they are going to be working with MDOT and trail partners, and using existing trails whenever we can.

Are there any gaps in the North Country Trail? Ms. Ketchmark responded 400 miles, or about 30%. Does the Park Service take care of the trails that go through the national forests? Are

there multi-use trails going through the national forests? Mr. Sandeno responded yes, and the designation of the North Country National Scenic Trail is a non-motorized trail. We have snow machines that go through the national forests but are not part of the North Country Trail. Ms. Ketchmark said there are portions that are open to mountain bikes. Even though we are calling it the hiking route, there are several portions, on DNR land, on state forests, and on the national forest that allow mountain biking, but it is not exclusive. You can hike the entire portion, but there are little pieces of other use. There are paved bike paths within designated North Country Trail. Mr. Sandeno said there are also some portions where biking is not allowed and there is a portion where stock use is not allowed. We just need to make sure that people have access to all of the information available so they know when they are on these segments and what they can and cannot do.

Gerry Reese, President, Schoolcraft County Motorized Trails Association - They are tasked with developing an ORV trail system to traverse the Upper Peninsula. They have put a proposal on Hiawatha National Forest's desk for their review and approval so that they can then submit it to the state for their approval. Until this is done, the eastern Upper Peninsula is not connected to the western Upper Peninsula.

Mr. Reese wanted to stress the need for collaborative efforts between the non-motorized communities and the motorized communities because sharing resources will help move the process along faster. Mapping is absolutely instrumental in trail development proposals and a need to keep those maps current for sustainability. They are asking this committee is to take a serious look at how we want to manage mapping data.

Chair Wheatlake asked, as far as monetary issues, who is going to maintain, build, and repair? Mr. Manson responded that it is a work in progress because they have some major bridges that need repair. The department has been working with them.

Mr. Reese said they are looking at commemorative rides coming up in the future and celebration of the success of this Rails to Trails program. What they have learned is collaborating with two different brand sponsors in two different worlds is that they've been able to upgrade and improve that trail system by having that collaborative effort in two different grant program.

Users will come to an area and they are concerned about what they can legally do or where they can appropriately be. Mapping and signage are key. Mr. Kobasic suggested the DNR adopt this and partnership with them.

Mr. Rolling asked Mr. Kobasic if this dovetails with his resolution. Mr. Kobasic thinks it is separate and they need more work, especially the permit process. He has worked with Forest Service, but said the problem with policy in event applications, or policy with designation, is you go to the three entities, and you get three different interpretations. It is a subjective policy. The event permit process takes a minimum of a year. He has written a resolution, it was passed in Region 1 in relation to the Hiawatha, and is being forwarded on to those users in the Huron-Manistee. It calls for them to enact a MOU with the DNR in the permit process.

Chair Wheatlake asked Ms. Kristen Thrall and Mr. Sandeno of the U.S. Forest Service if there is some consistency within their region, or are they looking at consistency. Ms. Thrall said with recreational Special Use Permits, they do have the same national policy. Under 75 people non-commercial you do not need a permit, over 75 people or commercial, that is their national policy. Special events are a discretionary use so they are reviewed, they go through a NEPA process, and the officer signs off on them. So they have the same policy, but it is a discretionary use.

Chair Wheatlake asked if it is still subjective within each of the local forests. Ms. Thrall said correct. She addressed this at the ORV Advisory Workgroup meeting. A MOU is a non-binding agreement and a Special Use Permit is a very specific agreement between the Forest Service and the entity. Those two cannot come together.

Chair Wheatlake asked if the department was involved in this and if we have a consistency in our permitting process on state forest land. Ms. Anna Sylvester responded that they have consistent policy, but each management unit has to assess different things based on the event. Chair Wheatlake asked if we lack consistency everywhere. Ms. Sylvester responded yes because it is at the manager's discretion. Mr. Kobasic replied that it was just amended and that it is still the same basic fundamental rules that are in place at protecting the resource, and there is a lot of uniformity within the state of Michigan.

Chair Wheatlake stated that he is not sure this committee can take a position; but understands the frustration and that each individual group has to work towards trying to come up with a resolution. He suggested that they continue from a workgroup perspective and converse with the committees.

STAFF REPORTS

Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup

Ms. Nancy Krupiarz reported they need a new representative for mountain bikers, because committee member Laura Papenhagen has been unreachable. They have a willing person who would like to step in, Brindley Byrd, who is from the Lansing area who is very active in the Michigan Mountain Biking Association. Chair Wheatlake asked Mr. Paul Yauk to check to see if anyone has an interest in the position and on the interview process. Legislative Day - A third of the legislature is new and she wants to educate and show a united front. Mid America Trails and Greenways Conference - has motorized sessions there as well as non-motorized. Michigan held it in Kalamazoo in 2008. This year it is in Des Moines, Iowa. Chippewa Hills Pathway and logging procedures – their group does not seem to be satisfied yet on the policy on how it is being implemented.

Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup

Mr. Tom Dunn reported that they are moving forward with projects; giving lower cost projects their first priority. The subcommittee is working on getting the priority list to the department. The group also discussed starting dialogue with the department on reopening the forest roads in the Upper Lower Peninsula to bring it more in line with what is happening in the U.P. They are moving forward with trail markers - removing them off trees and on to carbon fiber posts. Silver Lake Voucher Program - has changed drastically since its inception. It is moving forward with the direction of Ron Olson; a task force is working with them and is coming along nicely. They discussed the off-road park in Oakland County on Groveland, with the Governor's announcement of funding for that. They have the 11th Annual Arbor Day tree planning, held Sunday, April 26th in Kalkaska, as part of the Kalkaska Trout Festival. October 3rd Trek the Mighty Mac is an opportunity to showcase the opportunities for ORVs in Michigan. They are working with Mackinaw and St. Ignace to allow the ORVs to cross the bridge that day. Chair Wheatlake asked Mr. Dunn how much revenue they generated in the course of a year and Mr. Dunn does not have true figures at this point. Mr. Paul Yauk said he would look into it.

Equine Trails Subcommittee

Mr. Mike Foote reported most of the grants that were applied for were moving forward in the process; eleven total. One was electricity at an equestrian campground. Mapping was covered nicely and he hopes they can get some more information on it to share with other people. They had a presentation by Dr. Christine Hanaburgh of the DNR who did a wonderful job at explaining Pittman-Robertson/Dingell-Johnson (PR/DJ) lands that are covered by, purchased, or managed by federal obligations. Equestrian trails, forestry, and logging operations - They had an incident where some shore-to-shore riders ran into a logging operation, and there were some concerns there about how safe it was, how the equipment was being run, where the logs were being stacked up, etc. in terms of the effect on both the safety and quality of the ride on the shore-to-shore. They had several meetings with DNR Forestry and others, and as a result a document called the Logging Operations was produced for recommendations to loggers. Chair Wheatlake asked if anything was accomplished from the equine perspective at Pigeon River last year. Ms. Anna Sylvester responded they did quite a few projects in the campgrounds and are working on more. They did some connector trails last year. There is a draft work plan from the equine community that the equine subcommittee has that is going to the advisory committee this Friday for their approval.

Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup

Mr. Bill Manson reported that one of their SAW members from Region 2 and vice president of the Michigan Snowmobile Association, Al Green, passed away and will be sorely missed. He has been replaced by Joe Kuschnicki of Petoskey. They did not open trails in the northern lower peninsula or southern peninsula until after January 10th, so the busy week between Christmas and New Year did not happen other than the west end of the U.P. Trail permit sales were just a touch above. They are sending out oil sample kits to get baselines on all of the equipment; trying to do preventative maintenance. They voted to put GPS units in all new pieces of equipment that they purchased. They have had issues in Munising with grant sponsors; trails are either really good or really bad, no in between. They got a resolution taken care of and the trails did a 180 degree turnaround. Equipment purchasing – Their funding is running out as the cost of equipment has risen. They are going to have to do something proposal wise as far as raising their trail permit or groom less. Due to the large amount of snow in the west U.P., they had a big influx of out-of-state snowmobilers and were getting a lot of complaints from the western end of the U.P. about modified sleds. The department stepped up along with the sheriff in that area, and started enforcing hard but maybe a little too late. A few landowners pulled their permissions due to loud noise and trespassing. They are going to be working all summer long with DNR Law and sheriffs to come up with a plan. They have some budgetary issues coming up. Last year they bought 13 pieces of equipment. This year they should probably have about the same amount of money left because they did not groom as much. They have made proposals through the association to the SAW committee and started laying it out to some of their legislators that they want to raise trail permit fees, along with a few other items like banning wheeled vehicles from snowmobile trails during the snowmobile season (They have four-wheel drive motors that are rutting the trails and making them dangerous).

Law Enforcement

Cpl. Morey reported they currently have a recruit conservation officer academy underway at the State Police facility. Forty-four new officers were hired in January and they are down to 37. They have begun the hiring process for a recruit school in January of 2016. Getting all of these new officers on board will help fill the holes and gaps in enforcement that were discussed today. They have two ORV instructor academies planned this year. Those will both be held at the RAM Center. If you know anyone that has an interest in becoming an instructor in the ORV

program, they welcome their involvement. In regards to the Rec Safety Section, two employees, Michelle Hedin and Rudy Lawrence, have moved back into the Law Enforcement Division and he think it is going to be a much more efficient and positive interface with the public for the safety programs. They have asked John to entertain and see if it's feasible to allow them to set the training. Those of them that are certified can perhaps handle the program at the facility, or a volunteer sponsor, so they can recruit from within the U.P. It is a big cost there to have law enforcement come up and bring all of the equipment with them.

Non-motorized

Mr. Jason Rolling report that a lot of Land Use agreements are in the works and it is becoming a big discussion about what the act does and does not cover. There are a lot of people giving their land up that are very confused. Part of an organization just bought a 150 foot easement that covers 1,700 acres; it closed last week; securing a ski trail from Marquette to Ishpeming, with only a couple land owners in between that they have land use agreements with. Mr. Rolling requested that Land Use Orders be put on the next agenda, and Chair Wheatlake agreed. Mr. Rolling continued that the mountain bike community is very split right now. They follow different organizations and there are a lot of things that are being done in Minnesota and other areas that are taking precedence away from the loyalties towards Michigan organizations.

Nancy informed everyone that there is a forum in Detroit on June 24th for the National Designated Water Trails, of which Michigan is the only state that has two. The Huron River Water Trail was recently designated. She thinks Ann Arbor was chosen for the site for the forum.

Drew said going back to the Gold Standard, he had emailed Sandra with the BMPs and the negotiating that the equine groups had done with the DNR and if she thought that we ought to table the formal Gold Standard proposal to see how that works out and she replied this morning that we as a subcommittee should focus on making sure that those BMPs will be evaluated.

Drew said there is a gentleman on the Escanaba River, Robert Mada who has been trying to develop that as a white water destination. It is a potential water trail destination that he is trying to get through and he is running into some issues.

Sarah wanted to mention that Travel Michigan will be redeveloping its website over the next year or so. The new website will be much more activity-based.

MOTION: Mr. Dickie moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:15 p.m. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foote and it carried unanimously.