

******FINAL DRAFT******

Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup

September 11, 2019

Meeting Notes

The regular meeting of the Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup (ORVAW) was called to order by Chairman Thomas Dunn on September 11, 2019 at 8:13 am. Members present: Chairman Dunn, Don Helsel, James Hunt, Keith Lynch, and James Maike

The following Department of Natural Resources (DNR) present: Paul Yauk, Jessica Holley, Jacklin Blodgett, Doug Rich, Greg Kinser, Ron Yesney, Paul Gaberdiel, Rob Katona, Jeff Kakuk, Anna Centofanti, Sgt. Mark Leadman, and Cpl. John Morey.

Representatives present: Paul Hovela, US Forest Service

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Thomas Dunn welcomed everyone and asked them to mute all cell phones. All in attendance introduced themselves.

ACTION ITEMS

*MOTION: **Mr. Keith Lynch** moved to approve the June 12th and June 27th meeting minutes. **Mr. Don Helsel** seconded; motion carried.*

*MOTION: **Chairman Dunn** asked to take agenda items out of order at the September 11, 2019 meeting. Motioned by **Mr. Helsel**, seconded by **Mr. James Maike**, motion carried.*

*MOTION: **Mr. Maike** made a motion to amend the agenda, **Mr. James Hunt** seconded, motion carried.*

The Workgroup requested a moment of silence for remembrance of the 9/11 event.

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

ORV Funding/Budget – Yauk/Blodgett

Moving forward with the \$1M FEMA reimbursement for the Houghton County Flooding, October 31st is the deadline.

We are down 4K ORV stickers from last year but are seeing an uptick in Trail Permits, we had a slow start in spring.

No further information on the Open Recreation Budget - S.B. 372 we are having conversations with legislators.

There might be a delay in the state budget which would affect appropriations to the ORV fund.

Alpha Naming Project – Yesney

At the July 27th meeting, discussions continued on the alpha naming convention for the developed interconnected routes which create a network as in the snowmobile program. MI-TRALE worked alpha signs on their trails over ten years ago, designating the snowmobile trail with numbers and ORV trails with alpha. The project we are working on will cover ORV routes with the possible addition of an ORV symbol or 'ORV' on the markers. Mr. Maike asked what challenges we see and what are our educational efforts. **Mr. Ron Yesney** agreed it is difficult for users to know where they are on the ground, the project along with maps will help our users. **Mr. Paul Yauk** stated the program is having growing pains and this will take time to catch on. **Ms. Linda Schulz** asked if confidence markers will be used in conjunction with the new signs and would we still need an ORV symbol or 'ORV'. It was deemed necessary since this will help prevent confusion. It was discussed to make the signs yellow, like the triangles. A pilot project of the alpha black and white signs worked well, they were easy to see, would not fade, and not too distracting.

Workgroup Reports

Mr. Lynch discussed the progress with his work with SORVA Delta, SORVA Alger, US Forest Service, and the DNR on creating an east-west connector through the Hiawatha National Forest. We have approval to start the first of the year on this undertaking of hundreds of miles. Tread Lightly is involved with the project as well. How would we incorporate this project into the DNR budget? The DNR would review and create Trail Development Proposals for the trails crossing state land. We will connect our most critical route systems through the Trail Proposals and then be able to maintain and provide enforcement. **Chairman Dunn** said this is a lengthy process and we are working with other entities to provide financial assistance to pay for signs, roadwork, etc. Even if the connectors are not on state land, it is a great idea to pursue them.

Reprint of Handbooks – Holley

We have less than 30K in stock. The process to create updated handbooks is a long process to vet and approve. We should work with LED sooner than later to review the current book with updates. **Ms. Jessica Holley** will coordinate a meeting with **Mr. Jim Kelts, Helsel, Maike,** and LED.

UPDATES

Trail Plan Update

Mr. Yauk spoke about the comprehensive PRD Trails Plan. Many changes since the current and we are working in elements of the State Parks Strategic Plan, inclusion of both motor and non-motorized, and encourage participation and feedback from this Workgroup. Chairman Dunn since the current plan was created, we have additional miles of trail, side-by-side usage increased, P.A. 240 and P.A. 288 opening county and state forest roads to ORV use allowing access in southeast Michigan. Slowly we are accomplishing our goals and what we need is marketing with easy maps, places to go,

and designated trails. Mr. Hunt mentioned the DNR Press Releases on trail closures are beneficial to marketing.

Provide an overview of regional trail conditions

Mr. Yauk started out by thanking Trails staff, our partners, sponsors, and the dedicated people in program. He thanked the USFS and DNR-LED for their attendance and involvement with the meetings. The partnership with our sister forestry division. We are making great progress updating and using our tools like the GIS infrastructure database, mapping program, and the automated reimbursement program. In 10 years, Lake County went from no trails to be a vibrant area of west Michigan with the partnership with DNR, USFS, and grant sponsors, we can make things happen.

Mr. Doug Rich UP PRD District Supervisor updated the group on the Recreation Passport \$4.1M critical infrastructure projects that include reclaiming McClain State Park by shoring up the property along Lake Superior, the electrical update to the 1960's electrical system at Baraga State Park, and shoring up the road leading into the Porcupine Mountains. We are promoting ORVs in state parks as family friendly destinations in Baraga, Twin Lakes, and Lake Gogebic. Working on an 'organization' camp at Van Riper where groups can ride to Baraga for the night. A listing of the ORV friendly state parks and state forest campground list is on the DNR website.

Mr. Yesney said UP-wide we are adding trail miles, a new single-track in Norway and a connector between Porterfield and Bass Lake. Our grant sponsor, TEAM and **Mr. Tony Harry** in the central UP are very active and helped sign Gwinn to Arnold and Champion to Michigamme. They are working positively with private landowners in purchasing easements and commitments for trail. Our recent trail easement purchases have been snowmobiling only, but now we are working on year-round recreational trail easements. It is better obtaining an easement as handshake deals evaporate. Michigan is a four-season trails state and we are in the process of expanding our trail. A large private corporate landowner is selling property and, we should pursue easements where it makes sense where public land is not available.

Mr. Paul Gaberdiel updated the group on the trail and bridge projects in the east UP. The Doty Bridge project is waiting for new year funding. The Coalwood and Haywire grade projects are almost complete. New trail from Moran to DeTour is now the legal connector for four sections of trail should have mapping and signage completed for next spring, as well as Strongs to Raco. Working Drummond Island road projects. We are working with Hancock Forestry Lands to acquire easements for future connectors.

Mr. Jeff Kakuk said the \$500K construction projects for five sponsors are either complete or in progress. Three DNR projects will be bid next spring for mid-summer construction. The GIS infrastructure program collecting data on culverts and bridges is beneficial for long-term planning. **Mr. Yauk** agreed that this is getting ahead of the game in planning and prioritizing road and culvert bridge work not only in the ORV program, but in the state parks system as well. **Ms. Schulz** admits that with one phone

call to **Mr. Kakuk**, she can get all the specs on a culvert in order to plan on how to get it fixed.

Mr. Lynch spoke about a few south central UP projects, namely the Forest Island Trail connector approval it is half trail and half route that we will receive bids on removing the boardwalk. The Escanaba-Hermanson Trail washout has been fixed. On the Norway Trail, the north loop was closed for years and progress is being made. About 40 miles of trail has been added to the system. In the past, trail went through low-lying areas to avoid the roads and logging operations and were routed on boardwalks in many places. We are now attempting to re-route the worst areas and if necessary, use larger structures crossing wet areas. **Mr. Harry** said a re-route on the Gwinn to Arnold trail is working quite well. **Mr. Rob Katona** added that grading and gravel projects are occurring. We are receiving bids today on work to repair bridges, a box culvert, re-decking on the Forest Island Trail. The Forest Island Trail re-routes have received positive feedback.

Mr. Greg Kinser spoke about all the administration process, P.A. 288 review, event permits, proposals, and reimbursements occur behind the scenes with all the great work on our projects. Our grading projects are in progress and the Fredrick Route is almost complete. We are fixing roads and trails on small, local levels with fixing roads and holes. Our restoration project in the Roscommon area is seeking out connectors to provide users trail access to food, gas, and lodging. The west Missaukee junction trail is almost completed, we are re-routing trail around logging areas, and this should be open in spring. Restoration is also occurring on the Little Manistique Route hill climb, the Tin Cup Trail, and North Country Trail. Salvage tree harvesting clearing storm damage is occurring along the Evert Cycle Trail as other affected areas. We are working on issues from the wet spring weather in Lake County. New trail development is underway in Roscommon to Higgings, and Grand Traverse area will add about 42 miles.

MAGG – Motorized Automated Grants Given – Holley

In discussions with the LEAN Team, several years ago, the effort was to streamline our trails program processes. Ms. Holley was part of the team reviewing our grant process and we are currently moving away from our paper driven process to using technology for efficiency and timeliness. We are integrating the state accounting system to build a web based program both for snowmobile and ORV forms, training, applications, reimbursements, and a final transition to in the fall/winter 2020/21.

A soft roll-out is planned to get users acquainted with the program. All information will closely follow our paper forms. Initially designed to capture the most pertinent information future roll-outs are planned with the possibility of adding sign locations. MAGG will also track the grant timeline for sponsors and DNR staff, show balances on the grant, and show a breakdown of deposits. Clubs and DNR will have access to all the information.

Marketing Efforts Update

The 'Know Before You Go' snowmobile marketing campaign was very well received; we are working on a similar campaign for ORVs. We will be incorporating some of the same elements in the 'Ride Right' messaging, create a video showing how trails are created, maintained, used, and enforced using people from the clubs, public, and DNR staff. Looking to have messaging in place early spring of next year.

LED Update – Sgt. Leadman and Cpl. Morey

Not wearing seatbelts on side-by-sides is one of the most common issues noted for user groups of all ages. **Sgt. Mark Leadman** also said lack of helmets for juvenile ORV riders is also seen. Marquette County has seen many accidents with young riders, one involved a fatality when an ORV tipped over, the juvenile was not wearing a helmet. We should recommend wearing helmets in our marketing campaigns. In areas where trail is shared by other users, there is some conflict between bikes and ORVs, ORV users have issue with trail that they pay for by purchasing ORV permits. There have been many permitted ORV events on Cleveland Cliffs property with very little issues.

Cpl. John Morey informed the group that many of the conservation officers are relatively new, in the last five years LED hired about 100 officers. **Mr. Helsel** encourages local conservation officers to attend MI-TRALE meetings and we should encourage all clubs to invite local law enforcement to attend.

Mr. Harry started an ORV safety program in Marquette County targeting the local schools to educate the youth in not making the same mistakes their parents did when operating an ORV. He stresses helmet and eye protection along with how to operate ORVs safely.

We need to recruit more ORV instructors; **Cp. Morey** said the Lower Peninsula is very active and the recent class was full. The class in the Upper Peninsula was not as well attended. We need to spread the news and encourage people to become certified instructors.

With regards to safety issues, New Hampshire legislated to allow child safety seats in side-by-sides, which goes against industry safety standards. If we want to change any enforcement issues, we need to have legislation passed and become law.

USFS Update – Hovela

Mr. Paul Hovela spoke about the 2017 Comprehensive Trail/Forest Plan and received public input from OHV users. In 2019 mixed use access on was reviewed with OHV on non-designated roads and the findings should be implemented next year. Allowing OHVs trails in the Hiawatha National Forest is a long-term effort and we are moving forward. This year is the 50th anniversary of the Haywire Grade which will host many events in celebration. Region 9 of the Forest Service partnered with Tread Lightly. **Mr. Yauk** acknowledged the efforts of **Mr. Hovela** and thanked him for being part of the process. **Chairman Dunn** asked that **Mr. Hovela, Katona, and Lynch** work on mapping the trail gaps in the Hiawatha.

Snapshot of ORV Licenses Compared to Last Year – Blodgett

We had a decrease, about 4K in licenses and an increase in trail stickers. Good trails contributed to the increase. In-state users know we have good trails, we need to better

get our message out to other states. We provide Pure Michigan information, but to have a campaign with them is costly. We need to educate our users with more accessible and better information on laws, where to ride, and mapping. With a limited staff, we can only attend a few of the industry shows. Perhaps sponsors could attend shows out of state with travel reimbursement. **Mr. Yauk** will bring those concerns to Lansing. Many of the sponsors team up with the local chambers of commerce and share DNR information.

Grant Process Changes for 2020 Cycle – Yauk

Last year there were issues with grant funding. We are updating the process for both ORV and snowmobile programs to get funding out sooner. When the 2020 fiscal year budget is in place, we are planning on distributing the grants soon thereafter. We know what we need, just waiting on the funding. MAGG will be beneficial in the process. **Mr. Lewis Schuller** asked about the discrepancies in the Grant Handbook and signage documentation he sent to **Mr. Richard Kennedy**. **Chairman Dunn** asked that **Mr. Lewis, Hunt, and Lynch work with Mr. Kennedy** on this issue. It was also noted that nine of the sponsors have not yet returned their paperwork, which now is well past the May 1st deadline. When the paperwork is late, **Mr. Kennedy** sets aside the current grant process to catch up on the latecomers. It was discussed that the Workgroup nor **Mr. Kennedy** should be required to repeatedly follow-up. It was noted that this same issue occurs in the snowmobile program. MAGG would also help with this issue. **Chairman Dunn** will email the nine sponsors and request they submit their paperwork.

PRD Plans for Both ORV and Snowmobile Programs – Yauk

We are changing how we do business in the future and again the new MAGG program will be beneficial. Our paperwork is similar between the two programs and that is helpful to clubs that are both ORV and snowmobile. Brushing and signing was discussed regarding the nature, time, and overlap of both clubs completing work on shared trails with respect to the handbook and program costs. Would it be beneficial for one program to do spring maintenance and the other in fall? We need to get better clarity from the Department on signage standards between ORV and snowmobile. **Mr. Kinser** said this is an opportunity to pull the sponsors who maintain the same landscape together and have these types of discussions. Since **Mr. Kennedy** is the single person maintaining the grants and funding, is there a mechanism in place if **Mr. Kennedy** were out of the office for an extended period?

Keweenaw Trail Repairs – Yesney

There is approximately \$25M in damages with the first year devoted to triage for health and safety concerns and working on opening the Bill Nicholls and Hancock to Calumet Trails. This year we are working with contractors to analyze and design engineering responses for the remaining work. The project repairs should be complete within four to five years. We are receiving 75% funding from FEMA. It was asked if some of the trails and/or routes would be abandoned or re-routed. There might be a possibility, we are waiting to hear from the consultants on the feasibility of the trail system.

ACTION ITEMS

UP connector mapping of where gaps are on the Hiawatha – **Mr. Lynch, Hovela, and Katona**

Reprint and update handbooks committee – **Mr. James Hunt, Maike, Jim Kelts, Ms. Holley and LED**

More information on marketing - Pure Michigan/Social Media (Out of State focus)

Signage handbook committee (**Mr. Maike** snow aspect) as book is now combined ORV and Snow

Chairman Dunn to contact “silent” grant sponsors on 2020 grant intentions

Ms. Anna Centofanti to send Doodle Polls for 2020 meeting dates

Jan -21st or 22nd phone conference or SKYPE meeting take place before Michigan

Trails Advisory Committee

*MOTION: **Chairman Dunn** moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:29, **Mr. Hesel** seconded. Motion adjourned.*