

**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
EQUINE TRAILWAYS SUBCOMMITTEE (ETS)**

MEETING MINUTES

May 24, 2011

Approved June 16, 2011

**MSU Diagnostic Center for Population and Animal Health
4125 Beaumont Road, Lansing, Michigan 48910-8104**

PRESENT FOR THE ETS

Sandra Batie, Chair
Michael Foote
Jan Herrick
Jane Carmichael (via phone)

ABSENT FOR THE ETS

Richard Kleinhardt
One Vacancy – Rebecca Thompson Behm (resigned)

PRESENT FOR STAFF

Jim Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, Forest Management Division (FMD)
Annamarie Bauer, Trail Planning Specialist, FMD
Paul Curtis, Park Management Plan Administrator, Recreation Division (RD)
Earl Flegler, Public Lands Specialist, Wildlife Division (WD)
Daniel Eichinger, WD
Donna Stine, Policy Coordinator

PUBLIC ATTENDEES

Mike Stinson, Pigeon River and Beyond, and Back Country Horsemen (BCH)
Gabrielle Hume, BCH
Melva Parker
Gale Moore
Marsha Putnam, Sleepy Hollow Trail Raiders Association

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Batie called the ETS meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

APPROVAL OF THE MAY 24, 2011 AGENDA:

Chair Batie changed the order of the agenda by moving the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC) meeting report to the beginning of the meeting. She also added two items to the agenda including an update from Gabrielle Hume regarding a special assignment, and an update on the trails book project. **The agenda was approved as modified.**

APPROVAL OF MARCH 18, 2011 MEETING MINUTES:

Gabrielle Hume's name had been misspelled as Gabriella. The correction was noted and the minutes modified. **A motion was offered by Jan Herrick and supported by Mike Foote to approve the minutes of the March 18, 2011 meeting as corrected. The minutes were unanimously approved.**

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION***REPORT OF THE MSTAC APRIL 20 MEETING:***

Chair Batie gave an overview of the information provided to the MSTAC, which included the following.

- Surveys
- \$1,000 Funding Assistance from the Michigan Horse Council (MHC)
- Meeting with Director Stokes regarding Pigeon River Country State Forest (PRCSF)
- Marketing and Promotions
- Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant Application
- DNR Progress on the Review of Areas Defined in the Legislation Concerning Riding Restrictions
- Positive Interactions Between the Horse Community and the DNR, Previously Presented by Therese Kline

Mike Foote added the discussions with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concerning use of lands acquired and/or managed with Dingell Johnson and Pittman Robertson (DJ & PR) funds. One of the main issues is the lack of personnel and money to monitor/enforce horse use/activity. He added that existing resources (funds, personnel, etc.) cannot be used for other purposes/enforcement related to horse use.

There was additional discussion on the survey. **Chair Batie** provided a summary of initial survey results and indicated that **Sarah Nichols** from Michigan State University will be providing an analysis of the data. She indicated that a tremendous amount and variety of information had been gathered, and that there will be capability to look at various combinations such as specific interests and uses based on geographic location etc. She then asked for input and additional comments from **ETS** members. Members indicated they were pleased with the progress and the information that had been collected.

JUNE REPORT DISCUSSION (Main Components and Outline, and Process of Writing and Agreement of Inclusion or Recommendations):

Chair Batie asked the **ETS** to focus on the process of writing. She offered to write the first draft and send to the **ETS** for review via e-mail due to the tight timeline. She indicated that decisions would need to be made at the next ETS meeting in June. **Jane Carmichael** indicated she was an English major and would be happy to edit the draft version.

Chair Batie asked the ETS to consider a title. **Jane Carmichael** suggested the *2011 Report*, however, emphasize that the report was the beginning and not the end to leave the door open for the future (noting that the current effort was not as well resourced as the ETS would have liked).

There was additional discussion about the content of the report including a cover letter, preface with appreciation, table of contents, etc. **Chair Batie** referred the ETS to the outline for details. The **ETS** expressed satisfaction with the report content and effort to date.

Chair Batie reminded the **ETS** that they report through the MSTAC.

Mike Foote suggested that the ETS have discussion with the DNR concerning the definition of "sustainable" for equine trails. He expressed a need for a uniform code or standard. If an agreement was reached and the result shared with the equine community, it would bring credibility to the process.

Chair Batie brought up the user conflict incident at a recent event at Waterloo Recreation Area. She will discuss potential solutions for conflict resolutions with John Gonway, Chair of the Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup (NAW).

Chair Batie broke away from the report outline to allow Paul Curtis to provide his information prior to breaking for lunch.

STATE EQUINE TRAIL PLANNING UPDATE:

Paul Curtis provided an update on the State Equine Trail Planning efforts. (Refer to the attached report for details.) He also provided his staff report updates at this time.

Chair Batie moved on to discuss the importance and value of volunteers. **Gabrielle Hume** is working as a volunteer on a special assignment to research information on equine facilities in the state. **Gabrielle Hume** reported that much of the data that is available is either incomplete or inaccurate. She emphasized that if you did not physically know where you going it would be difficult to find your way, as there is often no address or phone numbers listed for the facilities. The DNR indicated that information for state facilities will be reviewed and information verified.

Chair Batie returned to the report outline. There was discussion on looking to other successful models, the role of volunteers, the need for uniformity (code of conduct), and law enforcement. **Donna Stine** mentioned that the DNR once had a Volunteer Conservation Officer Program that no longer exists. She added that Conservation Officers have taken a "soft enforcement" approach at the PRCSF as a means of transitioning into the changes impacting recreational use including horse use.

There was general discussion regarding user conflict resolution and the need for improved communications with the equine community, including the possibility of a partnership newsletter and use of websites. **Mike Foote** asked if there were general statewide guidelines or rules. **Jim Radabaugh** indicated "trail etiquette" are general guidelines to all users, but Land Use Orders of the Director (LUOD) are site specific (referring to the example for snowmobile use for speed limits on the section of rail-trail along Mullet Lake).

Jane Carmichael asked who the intended audience is for the report. **Chair Batie** responded that the initial target is the MSTAC and that it will be a public document with potential for wider distribution. The ETS will need to approve and support the report. Approval will take place at an ETS meeting and the final report to be completed by July 7, 2011. **Chair Batie** asked if the DNR is available to assist with report formatting. **Jim Radabaugh** indicated yes.

Jan Herrick asked if snowmobile easements over private lands could be expanded to allow for equine use. **Jim Radabaugh** indicated that many of these agreements are seasonal, from December 1 through March 31, and are held by the local snowmobile grant sponsor.

Chair Batie indicated that the ETS will need to determine the rules for inclusion for report content. After a brief discussion, the **ETS** agreed that decision-making will be determined by a majority. The method of inclusion should be identified in the report as a qualifier indicating that inclusion was by majority and that it may not necessarily have been unanimous.

PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY STATE FOREST (PRCSF) PROPOSED MEETING:

Donna Stine distributed the *Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Trip Report PRCSF June 16 and 17 2010* for review only, noting that the report addresses other recreational uses and is not exclusive to equine. Director Stokes has requested **Donna Stine** check to see if there was a way to increase equine use at the PRCSF. Areas that will be reviewed include three dispersed camps that were closed and some of the management roads. **Chair Batie** was asked to create a subcommittee to participate in the effort to see what might be possible for increasing use at the PRCSF. This information/recommendation will be included in the ETS report to MSTAC. Richard Kleinhardt and Chair Batie will serve on the subcommittee.

Chair Batie thanked Director Stokes for making the *Trip Report* information available and for the efforts to increase opportunities at the PRCSF. **Donna Stine** emphasized the importance of compliance with USFWS indicating that if the DNR is found to be in diversion, all funds (approximately 27 million dollars) could be in jeopardy. The **ETS** indicated that they do not want to take a position that would imperil funds. The ETS will be kept informed of the subcommittees meeting schedule, which will not be a public meeting.

Chair Batie allowed public comments/questions.

Gabrielle Hume stated the big issue with the closure of the dispersed campsites at the PRCSF is that the designated campground sites do not accommodate the larger rigs. She believes that the group trail camps require a minimum number of rigs and an event permit, so with the closure of the dispersed sites there aren't any sites for the larger rigs.

Melva Parker asked what the report says about the spread of invasive species by equine. **Donna Stine** indicated that the report was not clear on this issue.

The following general discussion took place.

Chair Batie informed the ETS that Therese Kline was getting an estimate to prepare a trail book similar to the *Wisconsin Horse Book*. A meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 26, 2011, to discuss mapping data needs. **Mike Foote** indicated that the intent was to create a book that would replace the *John Fatel Horse Book*. There was discussion about funding including the possibility of grant funding and advertising. It was determined that the advertising would not be cost effective for this project and it was not the original intent to seek advertising.

Chair Batie asked about the status of filling the ETS vacancy for travel and tourism representative. **Jim Radabaugh** indicated that filling the vacancy was 'in process' and the information had been forward on for review and action.

Chair Batie expressed her appreciation to the MHC for their overall assistance and support.

STAFF REPORTS (by exception)

Paul Curtis provided an overview, during the morning session, for the following facilities. (Refer to the attached report for details.)

- Highland Update
- Closed Campground Facilities Update
- Fort Custer Update

Jim Radabaugh gave an update on the proposed state forest campground closures due to the reduction in General Fund support. The process has been put on hold while DNR attempts to work with local units of government and the legislature looks at restoring general funding.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Mike Stinson informed the ETS that he had attended the "Leave No Trace" training and that he will be sharing his knowledge with others through various workshops. He is scheduled to present on June 18, 2011, at the Waterloo Recreation Area.

Marcia Putnam expressed concern regarding potential limitations for horse use on the Ionia to Owosso (CIS) Rail-Trail. She also expressed concern regarding future maintenance or lack of it if uses are separated. The **DNR** indicated that the planning committee, under the leadership of the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program, would be posting the recommendations on the DNR website later this year for public review and indicated that comments are still being taken.

NEXT MEETING

June 16, 2011, at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center

The meeting adjourned at 3:10.