

**EQUINE TRAILS SUBCOMMITTEE (ETS)
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 17, 2020
Microsoft Teams Meeting
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm**

ATTENDEES:

EQUINE TRAILS SUBCOMMITTEE

Amy Scharmen

Jenny Cook

Kristie Walls

Karen Bahrman

ABSENT:

Richard Kleinhardt

OTHERS:

Bob Wilson

Caryn Robinson

Karen DeOrnellas

Chris Blievernicht

Joy VanDrie

DNR

Paul Yauk

Nikki Van Bloem

Annalisa Centofanti

Nicole Toman

Jason Fleming

Jill Sell

Greg Kinser

Elissa Buck

Michelle Coss

Paul Gaberdiel

Scott Slavin

Rob Katona

Paige Perry

ETS Subcommittee meeting was called to order by chairperson, Amy Scharmen, at 1:04 p.m.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Committee Chairperson, Amy Scharmen, introduced herself and asked the rest of the committee to do the same. The following committee members were present and introduced themselves; Jenny Cook, Kristie Walls, and Karen Bahrman.

ACTION ITEMS

Amy Scharmen asked for the approval of the draft meeting minutes from the February 21, 2020 meeting. Committee member, Karen Bahrman asked for the spelling of her name to be corrected. Both committee members, Kristie Walls and Jenny Cook, moved to approve, with all in favor.

Amy Scharmen asked if any June 17, 2020 agenda items needed to be taken out of order. Kristie Walls commented and said the committee had voted to make this an ongoing privilege of the chair, so it was not needed.

There were no additional agenda items to be added. All committee members were in favor.

A motion was made to move Bob Wilson to first on the agenda, under Business Items. Jenny Cook and Kristie Walls moved to approve, with all in favor.

BUSINESS ITEMS

Nonmotorized Funding Workgroup

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Bob Wilson, Michigan Trails Advisory Council (MTAC) Chairperson, talked about the recent formation of the Nonmotorized Funding Workgroup. This group is the result from a general consensus discussed at the All Advisory Board meetings, which took place back in February 2020. Bob stated that at the May 2020 MTAC meeting, a resolution authorizing the work group was approved. The Nonmotorized Funding Workgroup is responsible to make an advisement to MTAC by the end of this year. Seven members, 3 from MTAC and 1 from each advisory workgroup sit on the panel and will feed information and ideas to each other every month. The group will hold their first meeting on June 24, 2020. Bob noted that from the Equine Trails Subcommittee, Jenny Cook and Kristie Walls, are members.

COVID19

Nicole Toman (DNR) talked about the impacts of COVID19 and camping. Nicole said State Forest campgrounds are open, along with the disbursed camping. State Park campgrounds are scheduled to open on June 22. The Parks and Recreation has increased safety protocol for staff to maintain well-being for visitors and minding of social distancing. Staff is working on opening concessions. COVID19 safety plans need to be in place with partners. DNR staff protocols are to be adhered by the concessioners. If staff is not working in the field they will continue to telework. Amy Scharmen asked if the advisory board meetings will continue to be online, specifying the next ETS meeting scheduled in August. Nicole replied yes, they will be virtual meetings held through Microsoft Teams. Kristie Walls added that an event in Ionia is now virtual, and a new document from Michelle Coss (DNR) is available. Nicole said there will be no in person events prior to July 1, 2020. After that, limits will be what is allowable per the Governors orders by stages and per region.

HORSE CAMPING

Jenny Cook covered some horse camping concerns and questions. Jenny asked who the replacement or new contact person is that will fill in after Anna Sylvester's departure. Paul Yauk (DNR) said 2020 year in review plans have been delayed. Paul Yauk said there has not been a replacement designated yet for Anna Sylvester. The State has been on a hiring freeze and vacant positions have been placed on hold due to COVID19. Jenny said Anna Sylvester was working on the camping reservation system to include horse camping and defer traditional campers from these campsites. Jenny stated that a survey was to take place identifying the number of horse campers at each campground throughout the year. Nicole Toman said the DNR can pull the numbers for a period of time and share those numbers within the ETS group. Nicole asked the group to send her a list of campgrounds that are not currently reservable. Jenny Cook followed up by saying she assumes that this will not be an evaluation year due to the late start for campgrounds. Paul Yauk recommended Jenny Cook to work with Nicole Toman in formatting the survey. Jenny Cook asked the ETS members to pull together some suggestions for the survey. Kristie Walls asked how to incorporate the in-person reservations into the survey. Kristie suggested to ask for email addresses when the campers register in person, so they can be added to the survey pool. Nicole Toman said this may be possible, and she will have to reach out to operations. Kristie Walls asked to please get back with an answer before the August meeting.

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BUDGETS

Paul Yauk reported on the current budget situation, conveying that the State is \$3.5B in the red. All trail projects have been placed on hold and we need to go through an approval process to move forward. Last week we received approval for some trail sponsors to begin spring maintenance. Due to COVID19, Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) is way behind opening parks and facilities. There is a possible federal stimulus funding that is being researched. All trails have been used heavily and we are leaning on volunteer support to help maintain them.

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

Jason Fleming spoke on the recently released trail approval, allowing volunteers to maintain and work on the trails. There is an acknowledgement document in place for safety, health, and social distancing, which volunteers will need to submit to PRD prior to working. An additional safety plan will need to be outlined and submitted to PRD prior to work being performed. These documents have been sent to the volunteer and friends groups. Reach out to Michelle Coss (DNR), Nicole Toman (DNR), and Jason Fleming (DNR) if you have questions. Anna Centofanti will send the forms to ETS.

GIS MAPPING

Chris Blievernicht (Trailforks.com / Mobile App) was invited by the ETS group to speak about a mobile application that he is the Michigan horse trails administrator for. Chris worked cooperatively with Kim Kennedy (DNR) and had all of the mapping done by DNR staff in the last 2 or 3 years uploaded into the app. This allows trail users to put the app on their phone and find themselves on or near any of the DNR mapped horse trails in Michigan. It also allows tracking your route, and even planning your route, including giving altitude changes and calculating distance for the user. Some trails on federal land have also been verified and uploaded into the app. This app was originally developed for mountain bikers, but all trail users have been added. The application offers many features. Chris provided a demo of the application from his desktop version.

Kim Kennedy (DNR) talked about the DNR interactive equestrian trail map and campground demo display. Kim said this launched in mid-March of 2020 and has seen activity. However, the loss of an intern student has delayed continued progress.

MARKETING AND SIGNAGE

Dakota Hewlett announced that the upcoming Trails Week will focus on safety and etiquette. There will be a tool kit developed for all users. Dakota said he will need the equine user group to review the kit for accuracy. Signage is on hold. Information is needed to compile the number of signs wanted and where they should be placed. Amy Scharmen said she will send Dakota event dates and will like to see an opportunity for photo shoots. Nikki VanBloem (DNR) said to keep in mind of travel restrictions currently in place for DNR staff. Elissa Buck (DNR) added that she has a photo release form she can provide,

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Annalisa Centofanti can send the release form to the ETS group. Jenny Cook asked if a paper flyer can be placed in the kiosk's in the meantime? Dakota responded by saying friends and volunteers can post the paper flyers in the kiosk, that the DNR staff will not have the time right now to address this due to short staff.

ORTONVILLE TRAIL PROPOSAL

Karen DeOrnella's, OREA President, was invited by the ETS Subcommittee to provide an update on the Ortonville Recreation Area Trail Proposal. This is an area which is approximately 5400 acres and offers 25 campsites. The area has approximately 8.5 miles of horse trails. The original plan was to be 27 miles. In March of 2019 a trail proposal was submitted to add approximately 2.5 miles. The proposal was approved. In October of 2019 DNR Stewardship contacted the group that submitted the proposal and declared that the property is fully built out and cannot accommodate any more trails, along with reaching capacity for campsites. DNR Stewardship stated that some areas go through wetlands and cannot be developed. The proposal group has sufficient funding to complete the project and want to know where it currently sits. Nikki Van Bloem recommended to continue communicating with DNR Stewardship and ask them to see if it is a hard NO, or does more work need to be done on the proposal. Nikki Van Bloem will reach out to Todd (DNR) and let him know about this discussion.

ETS TOURISM VACANCY

Paul Yauk provided an update on the vacant tourism position within the ETS Subcommittee. Paul said the current candidate is Joy VanDrie from the Cadillac Visitors Bureau. Ms. VanDrie was on the teleconference and stated that she has experience with equine users and is familiar with DNR staff and their processes. Joy said she is looking forward to working with the advisory group. Paul Yauk followed up by saying this position will also sit on MTAC, representing equine tourism.

UPDATES

ETS REGIONAL REPORTS

Jenny Cook reported that at Bass River, she has met with the DNR manager and discussed starting a friends group. Ft. Custer recreation area is open and going great. Jenny has heard through social media that people want to ride the abandoned rail trail. Jill Sell, DNR Trail Specialists in the area was on the teleconference and suggested contacting the VanBuren Park Manager, in addition to emailing Jill the information.

Karen Bahrman reported on the Central Upper Peninsula stating the most of the main horse trails are on federal land. The winter has been really hard on the trails. Friends groups have been busy with clearing. Thunder Valley remains somewhat of a problem, as there is really no land to expand. A couple loops are planned for the Thunder Valley trail which will add approximately add 3 miles. In the Eastern Upper Peninsula there has been discussion on repurposing a closed campground for equine users. However, it has been determined that this land is managed by United States Forestry Services (USFS). Rob Katona (DNR) said the Thunder Valley connector has been approved.

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Amy Scharmen reported that Pinckney Trail Riders need maps from DNR in order to make a road crossing sign. Numbers and maps have been ordered but not sure when they will be received due to COVID budget restrictions. Amy said a disruption in a campground staging area was reported to the RAPP line. The Conservation Officer that responded asked the horse camper to leave. Amy felt the situation was not dealt with properly. Hopkins Creek trails are open and in good condition, although some ORV's were reported riding on the horse trails. Horse campers are ready to use the parks due to COVID19 delays.

DNR STAFF UPDATES

Greg Kinser stated that staff is going through the approval process for projects on the ones that have been placed on hold. Mr. Kinser said to remember projects are on pause and not cancelled. Friends and volunteers groups have just received approval to begin clearing trails.

Jill Sell reported the Kal Haven trail projects are in the engineering phase and has been placed on hold due to COVID19.

MEETING DATES

Amy Scharmen, committee chairperson, said the next meeting will be on August 19, and planning it to be a virtual meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

Committee Chairperson, Amy Scharmen, adjourned the meeting at 3:42 p.m.