

**Minutes of the  
Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council  
April 8, 2014**

The regular meeting of the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC) was called to order by Chair Frank Wheatlake at 10:02 a.m., on Tuesday, April 8, 2014, at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center, 104 Conservation Drive, Roscommon, Michigan 48653. The following members were present:

*Frank Wheatlake  
James Dickie  
Thomas Dunn  
Drew YoungeDyke  
Tim Kobasic  
Sandra Batie  
Mike Foote  
Jason Rolling  
Nancy Krupiarz*

The following Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff were present: *Donna Stine*, Executive Office; *Jim Radabaugh*, *Anna Sylvester*, *Jacklin Blodgett*, *Tim Schreiner* and *Todd Neiss*, Parks and Recreation Division (PRD); *Dennis Nezich*, *Bill Sterrett* and *Steve Milford*, Forest Resources Division (FRD); *Corporal John Morey*, Law Enforcement Division (LED); and *Loretta Cwalinski*, Finance and Operations Division.

Three new members to the MSTAC were acknowledged - Tim Kobasic, Jason Rolling and Drew YoungeDyke.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

MOTION: Mr. Thomas Dunn moved to approve the April 8, 2014 meeting agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Timothy Kobasic and it carried unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Thomas Dunn moved to approve as corrected October 29, 2013 minutes (typographical error noted on page 4 - "SAW recommended a 'Bridge' Ahead warning sign"). The motion was seconded by Mr. Michael Foote and it carried unanimously.

#### **ORV Event Criteria for MSTAC Approval**

Ms. Anna Sylvester referred to the ORV Event Criteria that PRD has drafted for the motorized recreation events, based on number of participants. Minimum fee is approximately \$350. Groups still need to notify DNR even if there is no permit required – this can prevent any issues of overlap, conflict or safety concerns. Five year permit is available if event will be ongoing every year, but still requires appropriate fee every year along with updated contacts.

MOTION: Mr. James Dickie moved to table the discussion until next meeting in order for the Council to have time for review. The motion was seconded by Mr. Dunn and it carried unanimously.

Ms. Kristen Thrall with the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service added a correction about their event permits - if non-commercial use under 75 people, they don't require a permit.

Consensus by the Council was that they would have liked to have been more directly involved in these decisions. SAW & ORV groups will both meet before next MSTAC meeting to review and discuss. Mr. Jason Fleming will be involved.

Mr. Jason Rolling asked about the insurance and \$2 million rider; he's looking for more information on what that entails. Chair Wheatlake requested that Mr. Fleming explain those requirements, and share with the group – motion to table the discussion until next meeting in July carried unanimously.

## **UPDATES**

### Trails Implementation Plan

Ms. Donna Stine reported the first biennial trails meeting in Traverse City had about 150 attendees - a summit to identify what the groups were going to focus on and share what was going to be accomplished. Next meeting in 2016 will be primarily for trail providers and maintenance.

Disappointment was voiced that ORV members were not originally included in the breakout discussion. They'd like to see in this report their list of priorities with concerns and cost savings to State of Michigan in an outline and see them addressed - sharing costs for multi-use maintenance and equipment should be a priority. Ms. Stine will look for their outline for the plan. She added the 'shared maintenance' idea will be a priority this year.

Ms. Sandra Batie commented she thought it was a good start and well done, but for the next one she'd like to see milestones – something to gauge success along the way.

Ms. Nancy Krupiarz asked if there will be a report of results from workgroups. That was in the e-mail sent but unfortunately the notes were not originally taken with as much detail as could have been.

In addition, Ms. Stine reported on the mapping summit - Thirty-five groups working on trail mapping, including the UP. discussed the need for common trail mapping. Agreement was made to look at common attributes for all trails and all would like to see a statewide portal (in discussion with Pure Michigan). UP was included. Trail portal timeline is this year, but it's an ambitious goal.

### Governor's Conference on Tourism

Mr. Jim Radabaugh summarized the conference which took place in March in Traverse City - largest attendance ever. Trails and Economics presented by Mr. Radabaugh, Ms.

Krupiarz and Mr. Johnathan Campbell (owner of Lake Effects w/new app called Wilds of Michigan for western UP). Several events going on at the same time as their presentation, but their attendance was high. Governor Snyder Skyped in on the third day and talked about trails, and how significant they are in our communities. Bicycle tourism groups and marketers will be getting together for developing and marketing efforts for the state as well. UP groups were included.

Mr. Radabaugh added that Pure Michigan marketing strategy will include China this year. They believe this is the next biggest market, in particular international college students and their parents. He asked the group to think about marketing and how to present ourselves to the international market.

## PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Mr. Bill Lucas stated they are working on a trail in the Cadillac area, and is still making new contacts to move forward.

## BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

### Synopsis of MSTAC 2013

Mr. Radabaugh reviewed many of the group's accomplishments over the last year:

- Equestrian Plan, then
- Michigan Comprehensive Plan.
- First biennial Trail Conference was this year
- Restructuring of the terms of MSTAC members
- Launch of the Governor's showcase trail – we have been anointed as the Trail State, and successful at conveying that message.
- Non-motorized Workgroup helped launch a package on five bills for Comprehensive Trail Plan, along with passing of the new ORV fees structure.

He will bring everyone up to speed on number of trail miles expected for the Showcase Trail – they are still working on identifying those miles. He also mentioned Trust Fund grants trails projects, updated locations of some of the compacted limestone and asphalt for trail improvement this summer and the grant programs they are funding the projects. .

### Senate Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Committee

Mr. Radabaugh reviewed the five bills introduced and included a handout for the Council's reference. They are working with the Senate updating the Michigan Trailways Act language from 1994 that will reflect the Michigan Comprehensive Trail Plan. Discussion continued with SB 877 regarding access to persons with disabilities; Chair Wheatlake suggested having someone come talk to the group about these accessibility issues. Mr. Radabaugh will make that happen and has asked the group to forward suggestions/contacts to him. This will be an agenda item for next meeting.

Mr. Rolling asked if amongst all the bills introduced if there was any discussion of accessibility, easements and liability for events. Legislation would be helpful for

protecting those landowners affected, and should be discussed soon. In question is the Recreation Trespass law and land use agreements. Ms. Stine will bring that information back to the Council.

In addition, the MSTAC name will be changed to MTAC.

#### Review MSTAC Role in State Implementation Plan

Ms. Stine reviewed the MDNR's State Trails Implementation Plan handout (which is also available on the DNR website at:

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/State\\_Trail\\_Implementation\\_plan\\_440355\\_7.pdf?20140501142146](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/State_Trail_Implementation_plan_440355_7.pdf?20140501142146)

Staff assignments have been made for completing each of the projects in the Plan, but have not been announced yet. She reviewed priorities – develop and identifying funding sources, trail connections, and then how to prioritize those. There needs to be more representation to the MSTAC from other organizations i.e. MDOT (largest funding source) and USFS, utility companies, possibly oil companies. Another issue should be tracking trail progress and also planning for 2016 biennial summit. The DNR is creating a water trail program, working on a conflict resolution process, as well as funding and a comprehensive maintenance plan toolkit that will all be brought to the group.

Mr. Radabaugh and Ms. Stine are working with Quality of Life Leadership Training and linking trails to better health. If the health provider community becomes active in promoting trails and benefits to health, it's just another avenue. There are other successful programs for better health and outdoor activity, but this is just another avenue for linking those activities. Ms. Stine asked what priorities from the conference and trail plan and implementation plan the group would the group like to focus on.

Chair Wheatlake asked for input from everyone on priorities and suggested to limit the choices to four or five items.

1. Priority Trail Connections
2. Increase communication with people who influence trail usage
3. Track trail plan progress
4. Plan for 2016 trail conference

(Sandra Batie will propose a fifth item to be discussed shortly.)

Mr. Dickie asked about the already existing trail progress charting process? Ms. Stine said it is only a subset of all the plans. It was suggested that there be common criteria for priority connections - each group will bring forward the practical items to the group to review and discuss.

Ms. Blodgett presented a power point regarding the Trails Summary budget - where the programs were at in 2013, where they're going for 2014 and 2015. This season's snowmobile permits sales were an increase over last year. Overall financially this year was a good year for the snowmobile program.

She summarized cross-country ski pathways and the equestrian trails and the \$300,000 Trust Fund Grant. ORV license - new rates took effect March 1, 2014. The season is just beginning, so the license sales are projected to increase and too early to project total sales – overall looking good.

Governor's proposed budget for 2015 is \$2.5 million which includes several ways to provide more access, repair of infrastructure, mapping and Showcase trail. Ms. Blodgett closed with encouraging everyone to support, to be an active participant and contact your representative to support the Executive Budget!

For clarification there is a separate grant fund for law enforcement costs; that would not be included in either the ORV or snowmobile programs expenditures. Ms. Blodgett will provide more of the information that wasn't broken down with each of the programs later.

### Proposal to Create Gold Standard Trails Committee

Ms. Batie presented handouts for her discussion and explained the background of this request. She feels logging practices are very problematic, along with Kirtland Warbler habitat and rerouting of logged trails. After some research she realized there was no protection system in place for some trails, in particular the Shore to Shore. She also feels that those changes basically cannot happen through the current forest management process. See attached Draft Proposal.

MOTION: Ms. Batie moved for MSTAC to create a committee of trail users and DNR representatives to develop criteria for the selection, designation and criteria by which they should be managed of a limited number of State trails (e.g. *Gold Standard Trails*) that provide unique recreational experiences and which have national significance. The management objectives for *Gold Standard Trails* are to assure the long term sustainability and protection of these trails' scenic, amenity, historic, cultural, wildlife and/or recreational attributes. The committee will recommend to MSTAC which trails should be so designated as Gold Standard Trails. The motion was seconded by Ms. Krupiarz and carried unanimously.

Discussion continued on logging practices, along with benefits of cuttings as well as the challenges that alter trails, their beauty and the draw of those trails. Creating a buffer zone in cuttings would be highly beneficial.

Mr. Sterrett explained their challenges with all trails involved in timber sales and added FRD is always trying to keep the channels of communication open for those users. They also are continually refining their process as well to make improvements as new challenges come along. Discussion continued.

Mr. Nezich added that there is a group currently in discussion about those very concerns, and will be meeting today after MSTAC. Also, they are currently working on improvements with staff as well. Mr. Wheatlake suggested three MSTAC members sit in on some of the meetings Mr. Nezich referred to. They will be Ms. Krupiarz, Mr. YoungeDyke and Ms. Batie. Target timeframe for discussion will be six months to create new policy. Discussion continued over Forest Certification and timber harvesting.

Gold Standard status and criteria was discussed - Mr. Rolling would like to discuss separate land designation for trails first, before the sub-committee gets together.

Chair Wheatlake would like to have a committee get together and create a dialogue with the DNR with a six months opportunity. Define Gold Standard.

Mr. YoungeDyke, Mr. Manson, Ms. Krupiarz, Mr. Foote, Ms. Batie have all volunteered for the sub-committee, they will report at the next meeting on their progress. Mr. YoungeDyke has volunteered to convene/chair the committee.

#### Goals for MSTAC 2014

1. Identifying Priority trail connections
2. Invite other trail interest groups
3. Track implementation process

MOTION: Mr. Dunn moved to make those three goals MSTAC's priority. The motion was seconded by Mr. YoungeDyke and carried unanimously.

Ms. Kristen Thrall, Recreation Program Manager with the USDA Forest Service said that they recently met with MDOT on process on new legislation and connecting ORV routes; their attorneys continue to work on those details. They also will be getting together with DNR staff to discuss ORV Trails Program. There will be a new Forest Supervisor in Huron Manistee – Leslie Auriemmo. Also, there will be a meeting with AuSable River Trail Forum May 14th in Mio, along with DNR staff to come up with an official water trail there.

#### Subcommittee Reports

Non-motorized Workgroup – Ms. Krupiarz reported that they came up with criteria for priorities, gave input to State Trails Plan, added more representatives, and formed a sub-committee for water trails. This year they hope to be looking at how to generate more dollars for non-motorized, and identify priority connections.

#### Equestrian Trailways Sub-committee

Ms. Batie updated the group along with sharing a handout summarizing their progress (see attached). They have had two meeting since last report, elected Joni Gleason as Vice Chair, compiled several letters of support, thanks and communication and had several other committee member involvements in various meetings and summits.

#### ORV Sub-committee

Mr. Dunn reported that their last meeting was last month – had a proposal presentation by the DNR for Silver Lake voucher program, waiting to hear back. Accomplishments are fee increase package passed. ORV legislation relating to liability resolved. They will continue working on connectors across the UP. ORV free riding weekends (coincides with free fishing weekend), along with DNR demo rides. Their goals are priority connections, pilot program on signage in the UP and discussed how they'll pay for it. Also looking at funding sources, but with increase in cost for permits, concerned about decrease in sales - looking for outside sources/sponsorships. Lastly, RTP is up for re-appropriation on the federal side, he asked for everyone to contact legislators to protect RTP fund in the federal budget.

Mr. Kobasic added he'd like to thank the committee for having a meeting in the UP and wanted to thank Cpl. Morey for instructor training in the UP as well.

#### Snowmobile Sub-committee

Mr. Dickie reported for Mr. Murray in his absence – At the February 27 meeting, the group discussed wheeled vehicles in winter tearing up the trails - that will be addressed. Better maintenance practices; when, how etc. They reviewed complaints to MSA office regarding grooming (improvements have been made since then). Also discussed was tracking of equipment and trade-in costs, storm damage done to trails that were not reimbursed and Rogers City trail (through the quarry) is currently being reviewed by the Attorney General's office. Discussion continues on a bypass around Cadillac. Grooming practices, when and how often; daily, every three days - opinions differ. Overall it was great snow season, one of the safest in years (improved signage). Twenty-three fatalities the previous year, this year there were 14. Seven involved drugs and/or alcohol.

Chair Wheatlake referenced a letter presented from Jason Fleming for SAW's recommended re-appointments: Lee Murray (to continue as Chairman-At-Large), Al Green and Bill Lucas. Chair Wheatlake requested Mr. Radabaugh go ahead and make those appointments.

Cpl. Morey reported there has been a change in the reporting/investigating for fatalities – any unknown information needs to wait for official accident report. There are possibly six more fatalities; waiting on those final and complete reports.

Upcoming there are three more ORV instructor academies. Also, reference individuals with disabilities - last year there was an instructor with disabilities that completed the academy.

Carolyn Kane is no longer a member of MSTAC; Chair Wheatlake asked if anyone is interested in the position of Vice Chairman, please contact him.

MOTION: Ms. Batie moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Krupiarz and carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

*Next meeting scheduled for July 8, 2014 at the RAM.*