

Michigan Trails Advisory Council
Minutes
July 23, 2018

The regular meeting of the Michigan Trails Advisory Council (MTAC) was called to order by Chairman Frank Wheatlake at 10:10 a.m. on Monday, July 23, 2018 at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center in Roscommon. Members present: *Chairman Frank Wheatlake, Jim Duke, Bill Manson, Mike Foote, Tom Dunn, and Tim Kobasic.* Steven Davis and Robert Wilson joined via telephone. Jason Rolling was excused.

The following Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff was present: Paul Yauk, Anna Sylvester, Barbara Graves, Michael Morrison, Jessica Holley, Ron Yesney, Carter Helinski, David Lemmien, Scott Slavin, and Gregory Kinser.

Guests: Kristen Thrall, USFS; Lewis Shuler, CCC; Karyn Hautamaki, MSA; Ray Wlosinski, St. Helen Snowpackers; Patty O'Donnell, MDOT; Kenny Wawsczyk, NCTA; William Harrison; Tom Craig.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Wheatlake welcomed everyone and introduced newest council members Steven Davis and Robert Wilson, who both introduced themselves.

ACTION ITEMS

Mike Foote moved the motion to approve the July 23, 2018 amended meeting agenda. Bill Manson seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Jim Duke moved the motion to approve the April 10, 2018 meeting minutes. Tim Kobasic seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

UPDATES

Houghton County Emergency Trail Repairs

Ron Yesney gave an update on the flood damage in the Houghton area (see bullet points and map). Staff has been working diligently to assess and repair damage, with the number one priority being public safety. No concrete numbers available yet for damage costs, but department wise is in the millions. Paul Yauk said they are hoping to get some FEMA reimbursement dollars. Bob Wilson said he would be happy to be an advocate for any supplemental appropriation that they need, with the Governor's support. Chair Wheatlake agreed that it is prudent they use the Council to ask for support from the legislature. Bob Wilson will draft a letter of support. Chair Wheatlake thanked the department staff for their hard work.

Pure Michigan Trails and Pure Michigan Trail Towns

Bob Wilson gave a brief history of the Pure Michigan Trails and Pure Michigan Trail Towns. Rule-making authority was given to the DNR to put together the criteria. The department is now putting together applications for land trails, water trails, and trail towns to apply for this designation. Paul Yauk said they are creating an application process, and the goal is to have designations by this fall's Trails Week, which is the last week in September. Chair Wheatlake said they will hold a special meeting via telephone if they need to.

Water Trails Program – Paul Yauk introduced Michael Morrison who will be heading up the water trails program. Michael Morrison introduced himself to the council as the new water trails coordinator in PRD and gave a brief history of the water trails initiative and updated everyone on where they are at now. The goal is to have 2 – 5 state designated water trails in place by Trails Week of this year with a pilot application process. If you have any questions, please contact him. Chair Wheatlake welcomed Michael to the program.

National and International ORV Conference in Grand Rapids – Jessica Holley and Lewis Shuler informed the council on the activities planned for the 2018 NOHVCC Conference being held in Grand Rapids on August 14 - 18. A preconference ride sponsored by the DNR will be held at Silver Lake sand dunes on August 13. More information about the conference and how to register can be found at www.nohvcc.org.

P.A. 288 Update - Dave Lemmien, unit manager of the Traverse City Management Unit gave a status report on P.A. 288. Jessica Holley pointed out that, as of January 2018, 6,308 miles of the 7,552 available of the forest roads are now open to riding ORVs. More information can be found at www.michigan.gov/forestroads. Anna Sylvester added that everyone should watch the NRC agendas because P.A. 288 will be on them soon and there will be more public comment period.

Process to Extend Snow Grooming Season – Bill Manson spoke about the MSA's opinion on grooming after March 31st. They feel that it should be done on a sponsor area basis, not cart blanche. They recommend all sponsors revise their land leases to include a statement, and they recommended a policy (see attachment) be in place by next season. Paul Yauk said there are still some things they need to clarify. Chair Wheatlake would like the department and SAW to first agree on the language and then bring the language before MTAC.

Permanent Easements – Ron Yesney updated the group on the permanent easement program. Most of the success they have had has been in Big Bay, Drummond Island, and a project on private land in Lake Linden. Marketing the program does need to be improved. Their focus on corporate land has proven to be more difficult because of contacts being spread out and decisions being retracted. They are working on improving the process in this area.

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Subcommittee Reports

Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup (ORVAW) – *Tom Dunn*

Last meeting was held June 13, 2018 in Lansing. They are updating the Handbook on Michigan ORV Laws to make it current with new laws and signage as it pertains to the ORV community. The subject of winching and liability is being taken back to the department for legal opinion. Other thoughts were to change the handbook to follow in line with the Hunting and Fishing Guides as a cost savings. Jon Noyes from Oakland County Parks and Recreation gave an update on the Oakland County ORV Park project; the 235-acre park has a target opening of June 30, 2019. The National Off-Road Highway Vehicle Conservation Council's National Conference will be in Grand Rapids Michigan August 14 - 18, 2018. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is offering a tour of the Silver Lake State Park ORV area on August 13, 2018. Damage and cost assessment is being done on several trails in the Western U.P. that were recently damaged by storms. Other projects of concern are the Forest Island Trail Project in the Eastern U.P. that will have very high estimated cost to repair. Some ORVAW members have expressed concerns over liability. One ORVAW member has asked the workgroup to look in to seasonal closure of ORV trails due to the excessive damage from users after this year's wet spring; a subcommittee was formed to review.

Equine Trails Subcommittee (ETS) – *Mike Foote*

A suggestion for the Tourism Representative vacancy has been submitted to the Director. Since the last meeting, Jenny Cook as been spearheading the great lakes shoreline ride and progress is being made. Scott Slavin updated the group on the Tin Cup Springs rustic campground and trail system proposal. Ron Yesney updated the group on the Courtney Lake campground proposal in the West U.P. The Ottawa USFS is reconsidering opening equine campsites at the existing campground. Chair Wheatlake asked Mike to bring back accomplishments to the October meeting. On May 9th, they had Legislative Day of the Horse; put together by the Michigan Horse Council, and it was a successful day.

Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup (SAW) – *Bill Manson*

Last meeting was June 19, 2018; a conference call due to members traveling from the International Snowmobile Congress in Halifax. RFPs went out for GPS units; plan to get them in all grooming equipment for reporting. The Equipment Subcommittee looked at history of last year's maintenance on grooming equipment and it was recommended six new groomers be purchased. The LEAN process is on track. The department is looking at creative ways for new "no trespassing" signs, mainly for private landowners. The department gave them an update on the event use permit process. Luce County gave an insight of a program they are starting with a Stay Right Campaign on the trails. They are working with the department and MSA. They talked about a free snowmobile weekend and it was recommended for January 11 – 13th. More discussion will take place. They sold \$10K more permits than last season. Met with Scott Slavin, Jessica

Holley, and USFS on Trail 614 (Bear Swap around Irons) to move things forward; will be a great route, just need to work through swamp. Chair Bill Lucas (Representative at Large) has resigned his seat on the workgroup. Side note: the new advisory board consists of 17 members, and there is one motorized person who is the lobbyist for Polaris and lives in Washington D.C.

Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup (NAW)

Paul Yauk reported that this fall they will have Michigan Trails Week and they will be making announcements on water trails, Pure Michigan, and legislative updates. This past week was the Michigan Bike Ride that goes across the state. Bob Wilson is working with staff on the Great Lake to Lake Trail that goes from South Haven to Port Huron. They are making several advancements in the metro area with trails to link communities there.

STAFF REPORTS

Patty O'Donnell, MDOT

They continue to work with communities if they are planning trails within their trunk line right-of-way, and with the DNR if they are planning on their rail system. They are open to the legislation for the ORV connector trails; she has heard in her region (north region, Tip of the Mitten) they have got some communities who have gone in and applied but they haven't gone any further. The safety issue with bikes and pedestrians on the shoulders and right-of-way, making sure that when they do road projects that those shoulders are wider, if they can get the federal funds, as well as for the snowmobiles and ORVs.

Kristen Thrall, USFS

The three Michigan forest supervisors and upper leadership in the DNR met to talk about good neighbor authority and trails. Issues were talked through and awareness was brought. Out of this a mapping committee was formed and they are working on a one-stop-shop map everybody. A new toilet was installed at Luzerne equestrian campground.

Kenny Wawczyk, NCT

Last week they started building eight more miles of new trail in Baraga County and are doing negotiations with the property owner for easements. They are scouting for a route in the Porcupine Mountains to bring the trail into the heart of the Porkies. They received a Trust Fund grant to build a bridge over the Little Iron River and are moving forward with the trail proposal. A couple of other 1 ½ mile trails are being moved off the road.

Paul Yauk, State Trail Coordinator

They have \$350,000 in challenge grants allocated for planning, signing, projects along Iron Belle. Last year they received \$5M as a challenge grant; this year \$0. Two projects that did get funded were a trail from Traverse City to Charlevoix, \$2.4M, and an extension from the Hart to Montague Trail, Hart to Pentwater, \$1.9M. Iron Belle Trail -

three major projects going on. One is on Gaylord south for 11 miles and the other two are the White Pine paving project and the Lakelands Trails. The M52 corridor should be finished soon. They have a funding subcommittee for the Iron Belle and they are looking for \$150M. They are being told that by the end of the year they should have \$50 million committed from different funding sources. They are looking at updating the State Trail Plan; working with MDOT. He introduced Greg Kinser as the new Northern Lower Trail Coordinator.

Greg Kinser, Northern Lower Trail Coordinator

Greg introduced himself and said he is excited to start working in this new capacity. He is working hard to learn and get up to speed on all the projects. He went over some more projects that are happening in his district.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Mr. Tom Craig introduced himself as a rider of motorcycles, snowmobiles, ATVs, and Jeeps. He was a past member of CCC, AMA, and the past president of ATV Off-Road Club of Michigan. He has done trail maintenance and is a current member of Great Lakes 4-Wheel Drive Association. He owns property in the area and happens to have a multi-use trail that crosses it, Trail 6. In recent years, it has become the "West Higgins Lake ORV Route", maintained by Rosco-Higgins Trail Cruisers. He wanted to express the issue he is having with the trail, which is now a sand dune after the club disked it. At times he cannot get to his property without a 4-wheel drive. He spoke to Amy DeRuiter from FRD, who is not allowing them to do it anymore, however, the damage is done. He said the club has also taken a brush hog and turned it on end and have gone against trees, creating spikes on the side of the trail. Another issue he has is with the speed of machines going by which is very dangerous. Chair Wheatlake asked if he wants them to move the trail. Mr. Craig said that since it became an ORV route, one, the bed of the trail is on his property and there is no lease with him. Paul Yauk suggested he speak to Greg Kinser and Jessica Holley who are in attendance at the meeting.

Mr. William "Bill" Harris wanted to express his concerns that the bicyclists pay nothing when they use the trails and that he thinks they should pay their share. He is also questioning the railroad grades; why can't they be considered for ORVs? Chair Wheatlake said that bikers and equestrians do not pay, however, they are paying in kind by volunteering and working on the trails.

Mr. Harris also asked about the rail trails in the U.P. and if they are open to ORVs. Ron Yesney replied that most of the rail trails in the U.P. are multi-use. The U.P. benefits from less population density, thus, they do not have as many use conflicts. The biggest issue they have with rail trails and ORVs is dust. Mr. Harris thinks it should be considered in the L.P. and that it would be nice to be able to get on a rail trail and ride in the winter time.

Chair Wheatlake stated that his last meeting will be October 9, 2018. He wanted to commend staff. He sees a lot of work going on and a lot of pride going on within the whole department. From his perspective, he thinks they owe the Governor gratitude. He would like department staff to discuss with Keith Creagh and Ron Olson to get a proclamation put together from the department, MTAC, and the subcommittees for the Governor. Paul Yauk agreed and will organize it.

Tom Dunn informed the group that the Jack Pine Enduro, which is the oldest running off-road event in the country, will be coming in August, the same time as the NOHVCC. August 18th is the kids' race and the 19th is for adults.

Bill Manson said next June, MSA is hosting the International Snowmobile Congress in Grand Rapids, Michigan. More information can be found at Internationalsnowmobilecongress.com/isc. They expect to have between 400 – 500 people attend.

Paul Yauk said they have put a bid and application out to host the International Trails Symposium in Michigan in 2021. They will know this fall if it was accepted.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:20 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for October 9, 2018 at the RAM.



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

July 20, 2018

TO: Ron Olson, Chief, PRD
FROM: Jacklin Blodgett, Asst. Chief, PRD
RE: Western UP Update

Below is an update of the storm damage in Western UP as of Friday, July 20, 2018. Staff are working hard to assess needs, provide updates and organize restoration efforts to secure trails, get them operational and to restore community connectivity.

Below are a few highlights:

- A priority focus is to eliminate additional community damage, eliminate possible damage to DNR infrastructures (i.e. bridges) and restoration of key trail corridors for both ATV/snowmobile and non-motorized tourism
- Staff continue to assess restoration needs, equipment, supplies and material needs as well as assess funding needs to continue restoration.
- Multi-agency coordination is occurring, and staff are attending local planning meetings.
- DNR has retained OHM advisors to complete an assessment on the Lake Linden grades from Dollar Bay to Normand Road. This will begin next week and will provide a broader perspective on the situation for planning purposes.
- Another storm on 7/12/18 showed just how fragile the floodplain and drainage are. This one storm set everyone back and exposed new concerns. The entire drainage pattern has been affected and this is requiring coordination between multiple agencies.
- Staff are fielding many questions from users and communities as to why we are not filling the washouts back in and getting the trails open. Unfortunately, with all the coordination that needs to occur, DEQ permits and engineering assessments needed, it is not that simple.
- The DNR trails are just one piece of the puzzle. There are privately owned grades, municipal, county, MDOT and DNR property and infrastructure involved. We are each a part of the drainage pattern. All agencies are trying to work collectively, and the number one priority will remain the health and safety of the communities.
- The DNR is combining efforts with DEQ to look at the stabilization and prevention of future failures first. The trail rebuilding is part of the planning and will come after the existing unstable situations can be addressed.

- An area of concern is the increased dumping of garbage. The DNR crews pulled coolers, cushions, mattresses, chairs etc. out of culverts over the past few weeks, which has contributed to culvert failures.
- An exemption is being filed for the overtime efforts staff have contributed over the last five weeks to secure and assess the trail system.
- Scott Slavin and Dakota Hewlett will be assisting UP staff in early August. Michelle Crook is assisting on the Chassell to Houghton Trail as well as than DEQ liaison starting in late August.
- Finance staff are recording all efforts in the event FEMA approves the application.

Specific trail issues:

Bill Nicholls

- We are planning to have this trail open by snowmobile season. The bank slump is the largest unknown at this time and we should have a good understanding of the repairs needed in a couple weeks.

Hancock to Calumet (Jack Stevens #17)

- This trail is open, with reroutes. There are still some culverts to replace and fill work required. This will be addressed as other locations are completed.

Freda Grade

- The inspection and documentation are complete. The repair work required is substantial and this trail will remain closed for this season. We are just focusing efforts on Bill Nicholls and Lake Linden main route connections currently.

Chassell to Houghton

- This multiuse non-motorized trail will remain closed. Efforts are being directed to ensure protection to the highway and residential infrastructure at this time.

Lake Linden Trail

- Portage Lift Bridge to Dollar Bay is being worked on this week. This trail section should be open soon. Currently working with MDOT to address the main concern in this section, which is the main culvert washout north of H&Y Marina. This culvert may not be replaced this year and therefore require set up to loop around the damaged area.
- Calumet to Normand Road is open and we have a couple culverts to replace.
- Dollar Bay (1st Street) to Normand Road is heavily damaged. The priority is stabilization currently. Due to these complications, this section of trail will not be repaired by this snowmobile season. The focus is stabilization and prevention of future failures before the snow arrives and spring runoff occurs.

Additional concerns to address:

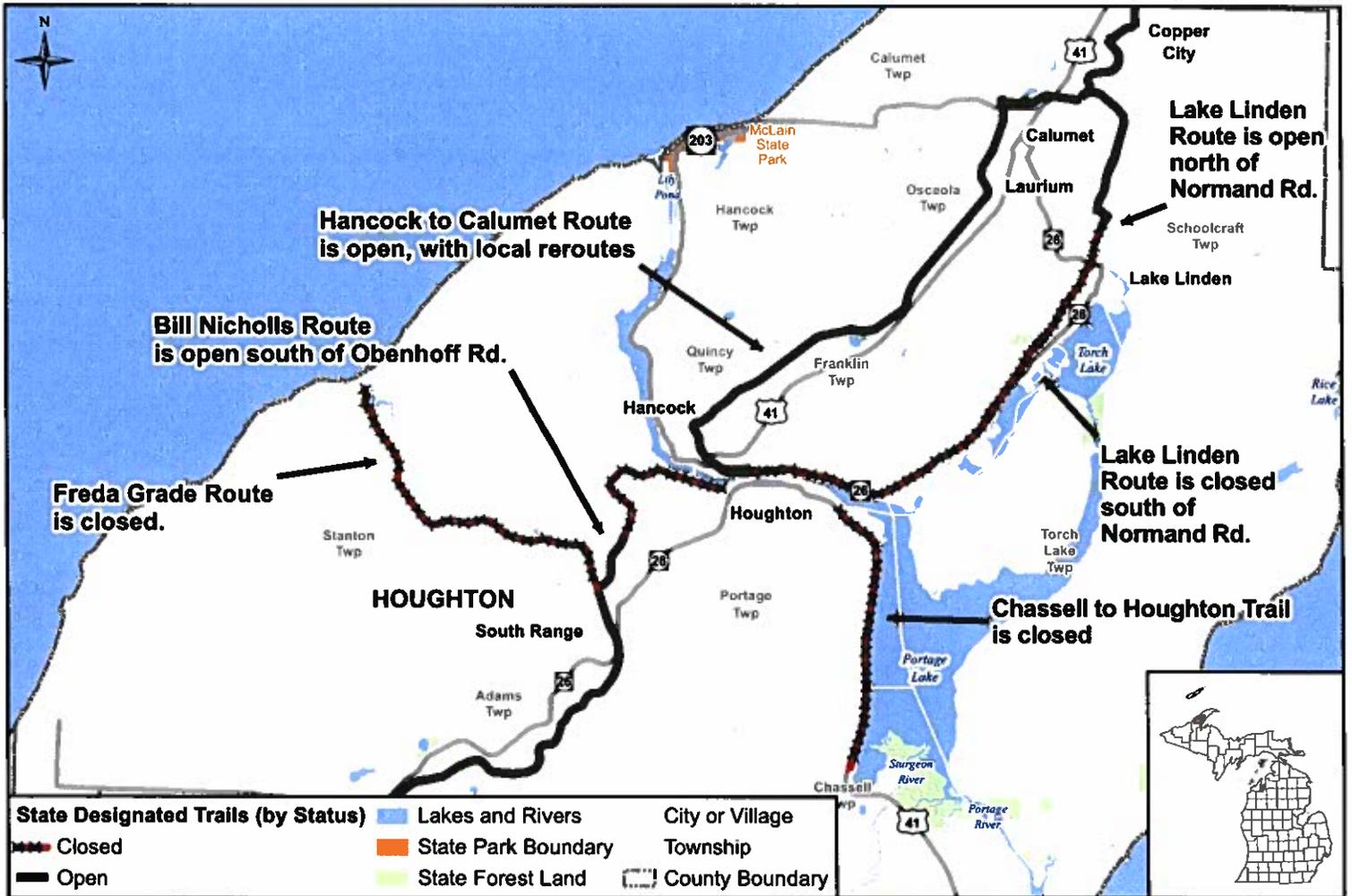
- Other trail work that is on hold due to staff and other resources directed to Western UP damage.
- Additional projects that are critical – Lily Pond BAS, McLain Shoreline (project scheduled for 9/1 but can be held no later than 9/15).
- Cooperative drainage structure plan needs to occur between DNR and MDOT on the Houghton/Chassell trail
- Purchasing and securing outside contractors needs to happen quickly.

- Facilitation and coordination with DEQ to ensure both departments are not working on the same projects, avoid personnel overlap and coordinate work being done is suitable for both agencies.

cc: Mr. Keith Creagh, Director, DNR
Mr. William O'Neill, Natural Resource Deputy, DNR
Mr. Ed Golder, DNR
Mr. Paul Yauk, DNR

Houghton Area State Designated Trail Status Map

Houghton County, Michigan



Issue: Adequate snow for trail riding and grooming after March 31st

Presently there is not a policy or procedure in place for additional grooming maintenance.

It is our feeling that it must be done on a Grant Sponsor (area) basis and cannot be cart blanc to open all trails even though they may have snow on them. Even though we may get an April snow storm in the south there are too many leases to contact them all in a 24 hour period.

History: When the season extended beyond the 17 weeks (March 31st) the grant sponsor contacted their field contact and would ask to continue grooming based on snow and usage. The field contact would confer with Lansing to see if there were grooming dollars available and give Lansing his opinion on the conditions. If Lansing concurred permission was granted and an amendment would be written to cover the additional grooming dollars. Although many of the Grant Sponsor leases end on March 31, Grant Sponsors in the higher snow areas would contact them for a verbal extension. Most all of the areas that request the extension have only state or federal lands for their trail system.

We would recommend that all Grant Sponsors start now and revise their land leases to include the following statement.

"If on March 31st the existing trail system is open and rideable and the DNR concurs to extend the riding season, this lease will extend automatically to match the departments program extension"

In those areas where only the DNR and or Forest service need to verbally extend their permission, the Grant Sponsor be granted permission.

As a policy we would recommend that we would use the process in the history;

When the Grant Sponsor would like the season extended beyond the 17 weeks (March 31st) the grant sponsor must contact their field contact and ask to continue grooming based on snow and usage. The field contact will confer with Lansing to see if there are grooming dollars available and give Lansing his opinion on the conditions. If Lansing concurred permission would be granted and an amendment would be written to cover the additional grooming dollars.

Once that decision is made the Grant Sponsor and the DNR can issue a statement about what areas may be open to continued snowmobiling with groomed trails.