

**Minutes of the  
Michigan Trails Advisory Council  
October 11, 2017**

The regular meeting of the Michigan Trails Advisory Council (MTAC) was called to order by Chairman Frank Wheatlake at 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday, October 11, 2017 at the Staybridge Suites in Marquette. Members present: *Chairman Frank Wheatlake, Jim Dickie, Jim Duke, Tom Dunn, Tim Kobasic, Bill Manson and Jason Rolling.* Via telephone: *Mike Foote.* Absent: *Sarah Nicholls.*

The following Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff was present: Paul Yauk, Paul Gaberdiel, Jessica Holley, Stacy Welling Haughey, Jeff Kakuk, Rob Katona, Cpl. John Morey, Dennis Nezich, Amy Swainston, Matt Torreano, Monica Weiss, Tom Weston, and Ron Yesney.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

Mr. Duke moved to approve the October 11, 2017 amended meeting agenda. Mr. Dunn seconded and the motion carried.

Mr. Dunn moved to approve the July 6, 2017 meeting minutes. Mr. Manson seconded and the motion carried.

### **UPDATES**

#### *Governor/Director Discussion – Frank Wheatlake*

Between the Governor's office, the Executive office, and MUCC, they are working well together. They are enacting legislation that is being funded and are getting support from all.

#### *Trust Fund - Paul Yauk*

In this current cycle of the available \$25M they are asking for funding for PRD acquisitions and development projects with matching funds from Federal, ORV, and snowmobile funds. Field staff requests include: railroad grades, culverts, and bridge repair. They rolled as many into acquisitions as possible to get a jump start on these projects rather than ask for project funding alone.

**Mr. Yesney** talked about securing key links of trail that cross private land. There are several 2 to 3 mile stretches from public land that cross over private that are crucial to keeping the integrity of the trail. Grant sponsors send in proposals for acquisitions to make the trail permanent because they have the connections with the community and who is willing to sell. Their intention is to obtain permanent easements rather than yearly easements. **Mr. Yesney** went on to illustrate the point with the Longyear parcels in Marquette County. They are working with Longyear to obtain snowmobile and bicycle easements from the Menard's along Highway US 41 north to Big Bay. **Mr. Yauk** said they would be happy if they would get 2 to 4 or more projects funded. MTAC will

forward a letter of support regarding the proposals sent in for PRD acquisitions and funds on the trails.

#### Mapping and Timeline Recommendations – *Paul Yauk and Tom Weston*

Maps are available on-line and can be updated quickly. The joint ORV/snowmobile overlay map is great for the public and partners. They are continuously collecting data from staff. Please let them know if they see something needs to be updated. They are using GPS coordinates for both accuracy and safety; they are 20% complete and are continually improving and updating.

The Marquette trail mapping project is complete. During the process they found data was housed at several locations. They want to have a clean data repository from one source that is available to any user to download. They need to scrub the old data, overlay the new, and install an automatic upload of revisions. They need to make sure their partners have a bridge to obtain the trail information they need. **Mr. Rolling** asked about users pushing data to the open portal and what if the data is inaccurate?

**Mr. Weston** said the technology is there to have the public push data but they want to first get their house in order with FRD and PRD trail information. In the long-term it would be possible for IOHT to update our data if they know an area of their trail is closed. **Mr. Wheatlake** said this project has further progressed in two years than was anticipated and he thanked everyone for their efforts.

#### P.A. 288 Update – *Dennis Nezich*

This Act requires an inventory of the forest road system. The NLP will be completed by the end of the year as to which roads will be open and which closed to ORV use. Field staff inventoried 7,600 miles in the NLP and initially determined 87% of the roads could be open to ORV use with the remaining 13% closed. There were public meetings, emails, letters and the use of an on-line map where a person could click on a specific road and leave a comment on that particular location. Public input, special management areas, and lack of continuity were taken into consideration and the roads were tweaked a bit to reflect the concerns. Through public outreach, 76% of people were opposed to roads proposed to be open and 24% opposed to the roads being closed due to loss of ORV access and trail connectivity. The basis of our criteria included user conflict issues, special management areas – Jordan River Valley and the Pigeon River area, and special conservation. **Mr. Dickie** asked how much weight do those 76% of people who opposed opening the trails carry. **Mr. Nezich** said the DNR reviewed and appraised the comments and came up with mitigations and recommended that 87% of the forest roads would be open to ORV use. This Act will ensure continuity between the UP and NLP where roads will be open to ORV use or posted closed. They inventoried primary and secondary roads and forest access roads that are part of the traditional forest transportation system, so some roads may be ruled out. If use is not allowed the road will be posted closed. This will clarify issues for users, LED, forestry, and other entities. **Mr. Rolling** said in the Camp Grayling area, ORV use poses a problem for the military. There are many unexploded ordinances, especially in the northern area. ORV users need to be aware of the military activities that continuously occur in the Camp. **Mr. Nezich** said a Land Use Order of the Director would be

annually updated and tied to the map. **Mr. Yauk** said there are no forest roads in the SLP, however PRD staff is converting their inventory of the parks and boat launches to meet the forest inventory standards. **Mr. Dickie** asked if they could overlay a snowmobile map over the ORV open/closed area maps, the capability is there to do that. There is concern about ORV year-round use on snowmobile trails. Users pay to have the trails groomed. Some snowmobile trails are part of the forest road system; would any of these roads be closed? In most cases, where trail is considered multi-use, they were kept open. **Mr. Nezich** said they did the best they could and they can make changes if needed as the Act requires annual updates. **Chairman Wheatlake** said he appreciates the efforts of this undertaking as it was much needed. **Mr. Dunn** asked about funding as the ORV program cannot afford to pay for a road system. **Mr. Kobasic** said it is a good project but is an unfunded mandate. Initial costs were \$500K, and then it went to \$1M, and is now up to \$3M. At the ORVAW meeting a resolution was made to recommend appropriations to fund the entire project present and in the future. MTAC should consider the same proposal. **Chairman Wheatlake** said they support the option to opt out of the Recreation Passport program. Out of the \$15M in funding, about half would be available, how the funds are divvied up is another matter. They are gaining traction for funding. They will discuss with the Department and make a decision with more information at the next MTAC meeting.

#### Permanent Easements – *Matt Torreano*

In 2002 the snowmobile clubs realized there were issues with trail easements and wanted to move from yearly to permanent easements. They started using permit dollars to provide monies for an acquisition fund. **Mr. Rollings** asked about the time frame for getting an easement in place. **Mr. Manson** said the process for snowmobile-only easements is rather quick as the funding is in place, 30-45 days would not be unrealistic if everything is aligned. The lag is in the red tape portion and **Mr. Torreano** said they have streamlined the easement process. Once they have a few completed, the process should move more quickly as they will be using the same documentation. Multi-use trail easements are a bit more complex as there are several funding sources to consider. **Mr. Yauk** said that there is no need for Division review because the trails are already in place; they are seeking permanency through a formal land transaction. As an example, they had an agreement with Mr. Smith to cross his 280 acres. He sold the property and the new owners are unwilling to grant access. They now have a trail with a key section that is blocked off to access. This is not an uncommon occurrence which would be mitigated by having a permanent easement in place. **Mr. Torreano** said they will revamp the process to incorporate multi-use trails.

## BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

### Subcommittee Reports

**Mr. Manson, SAW** - The end of last season was dismal and he was surprised they actually sold 130K permits; only 133 less than last year. Since there wasn't much grooming, money is leftover. They spent \$2M on 9 pieces of equipment and have about 300 pieces in the system. The equipment subcommittee is working on the logistics of moving equipment around to get the best trade-in deal. They lose money if they trade-in a Tucker to JD. They are moving JD equipment to a club that will trade it in to JD to save costs to the program. They are showing the legislature that they bring in \$½ billion in tourism dollars and are asking for \$2M from the budget. They only received \$290K that was line item vetoed. It is a positive start; they will continue to push that. They are moving forward on acquisitions and easements on key connectors in the State. They are still working on the process of equipment reimbursements for using snowmobile equipment for ORV use. The Joint ORVAW/SAW meeting on October 10<sup>th</sup> is in discussions about how this should be reimbursed. What will the impact be from P.A. 288 with ORV use on snowmobile trails in the summer? The snowmobile program went through the LEAN process and is working on implementing the key objectives. This will take time and effort to make better use of their monies and efficiencies.

**Mr. Dunn, ORVAW** - There is a 6% growth in ORV use. They have \$8M in funding and project an increase in next year. They sold 233K licenses (\$26.25) and 183K permits (\$10). **Mr. Yauk** will share the ORV year-end reports. S.B. 552 – sunset bill they will let this pass and revisit in 2024. They are working on culvert and bridge completions. He also discussed P.A. 288 and the lack of funding for the legislation.

**Mr. Yauk** discussed the ORV Park in Oakland County. The Township invited the Department to purchase the property on marginal land. Now the Township is seeing stimulation in the economy because of the ORV Park. They should have something to show the public by the end of 2018. Sales of adjoining lands and new restaurants are proposed due to the new Park.

**Mr. Kobasic, ORVAW** – They are working with LED regarding the ORV Handbook as some of the information is outdated and they need to focus more on adult users and information pertinent only to Michigan. Also, the manuals and testing materials could be revised and they could implement a two-tiered test, one for youth and one for adult users.

**Ms. Holley** will be putting out a map where multi-use trails overlap with the contact information of each club. This would enable neighboring clubs to collaborate and allow them to work together on the trail.

## Call to Action – Invasive Species and Water Trails

**Ms. Haughey** read the Department letter addressed to Ms. Tammy Newcomb with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding keeping out invasive carp. **Ms. Haughey** suggested that individuals and the group as a whole submit their comments. She will share the letter with everyone and include the deadline. A RESOLUTION was made for the group to review, vet, and send the invasive carp letter to Ms. Newcomb by the deadline. **Mr. Dunn** supported. **Mr. Duke** seconded and the resolution carried.

**Ms. Haughey** also wanted to bring the Director's message to the group. Thank you, he appreciates all the work accomplished. Things are now getting done. The subcommittees are functional. Funding conversations are occurring; nothing in stone but there are conversations. J.R. Richardson planned a meeting with Representatives and other people for funding ideas going forward.

Tentative 2018 Meeting Dates: 4/10/18, 7/24/18, and 10/09/18. It was discussed to have all three at the RAM Center with the possibility of having one in the UP and one in the SLP.

## STAFF REPORTS (by exception)

**Paul Yauk**, Statewide Trail Coordinator, Parks and Recreation

### Year-End Review

Todd Neiss, Cadillac trails specialist left PRD for MDOT and they will be filling his position. Megan LeMarbe filled the vacant non-motorized grant position. Anna Mooney is our new legislative liaison and **Mr. Yauk** will send contact information. E-bike legislation would allow use on the linear trails but not on the mountain bike trails unless invited by the clubs. ORV sunset Bill is moving through the process and would extend the bill as is. H.B. 4846 would allow all roads open to ORV traffic, including M roads unless closed by the County. At the first meeting, the Michigan Association of Counties is not on board with the bill. The bill will be going to the Subcommittee. Michigan is truly a trails state as shown by the Governor's tour of the UP this summer. He rode the trail from Hermansville-Escanaba, paddled a kayak, and biked some of the trails on his visit. Trails are important to Michigan and they have good support from his office. They are making headway on MDOT issues. They have meetings between the two Executive divisions. The Iron-Belle Trail is a Governor's priority. They are making progress as they have \$5M from the General Fund that they are turning into a challenge grant 50/50. They have a huge partnership with the NCT; they leverage every dollar into \$15 of volunteer time. They are also inviting other partners to their meetings and USFS, Consumers Energy to work collaboratively. The LEAN Process is helping them use motorized funds to the best of their abilities. They will be using GPS units in the equipment to go paperless. They are making progress in our permanent easement processes.

### Non-Motorized Surveys

The survey for hiking, biking, and equestrian use will be coming out shortly. For the motorized program they received 11K responses from ORV users and 6-7K responses from the snowmobilers.

### 2018 NOHVCC Conference

Is being held August 14<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> in Grand Rapids. There will be workshops, rides, and field days.

### Consumers Energy – *Robert Bourgeois*

They are one of the largest private landowners in the NLP. Most of their land has transmission towers, pipelines, and high pressure gas mains. They want to work with the DNR to get a perspective of use. They also want to work with the groups who have a footprint on their land and get some of these trails formalized through their license/easement process. They want to identify these trails for both a liability and safety perspective. Some of the trespass use exposes their pipelines. There are users riding under the girders. They have third party users on their lands who use equipment and workers which pose a potential hazard to everyone. They need to capture the types of use, which trails are utilized, formalize trail use through easements. This would allow them to inform the groups when parts of the trail would need to close for maintenance or other issues. **Mr. Manson** said there are contracts in place with the snowmobile clubs and Consumer is now charging for the easements. Are other groups/clubs being charged as well? **Mr. Bourgeois** replied that, yes, other groups, mainly municipalities are paying for the agreements. The cost structure has also been reduced to be fair and consistent. **Mr. Dickie** asked if volunteerism, brushing, and other maintenance are taken into consideration. Yes, the fee schedule will reflect that.

### Hiawatha National Forest Service Comprehensive Trails Plan – *Paul Holeva*

The Hiawatha is conducting a comprehensive assessment of forest trails. Workgroups are soliciting feedback; the goal is to promote communication between the Forest Service and trail users, as well as between the user groups themselves. The Forest Service is struggling with funding as a result of forest fires and budget cuts, so the Forest Service would like to develop better partnerships to accomplish the goals set forth in the coming plan. This plan will be a strategic guide for the next 5-10 years. Additional information can be found on the Hiawatha Forest website, under 'Working Together' there is a tab for the Comprehensive Trail Plan. This is a pilot program for a long-term plan paralleling MTAC's collaboration with the DNR. **Mr. Yesney** said the Department and the Forest had a working relationship in the past and with retirements and personnel issues, the communications broke down. They recognized there were issues and are now starting over. They can work together on projects and work with user groups more effectively if they are all on the same page.

### Northern Lower Peninsula Staff Report - *Emily Meyerson (Presented by Paul Yauk)*

All staff should be proud of their efforts; much work was accomplished this year. They are in the process of filling vacancies and welcoming the new people they have brought on board. Much work has been done on P.A. 288. The Lakelands Trail will

soon be renamed to the Mike Levine Trail in large part due to his generosity to the trails program.

#### Upper Peninsula Staff Report – *Ron Yesney*

Jeff Kakuk completed many projects this summer; Rob Katona is working on the Gwinn-Arnold trail and the snowmobile-bike trail Marquette-Big Bay; Matt Torreano is working on the Keweenaw trails area; Carol Fulsher has been instrumental in bringing the IOHT together. Without her hard work this 47 mile interpretive trail might never have gotten off the ground; Lauri Hausworth is a keystone for the Keweenaw trails. The Copper Harbor bike trails are rated internationally. With dedication like hers they can and do get things accomplished.

### **PUBLIC APPEARANCE**

Robert Raymond discussed his property adjacent to Aloha State Park. He is seeking easements to establish the feasibility of both a restaurant and lodging along the trail system. One of his concerns is the size of a drain field and acquiring easements to secure more land for developing a larger drain field. The size will determine the number of bathrooms his businesses can support. He gave his proposal to Paige Perry. Apparently there are issues with the community. **Mr. Yauk** said while this is an advisory committee meeting, he does appreciate his comments and concerns. **Mr. Yauk** will look into this matter and direct Mr. Raymond to the correct people he needs to approach.

#### Round Table Discussion – *Committee*

**Mr. Kobasic** wanted to applaud Ms. Holley on all her efforts, travelling to all the meetings, her willingness to meet all the people and learn the trail system. Ms. Holley is bringing people and partners to the program to work together.

**Mr. Dunn** said things are looking good for ORVAW. Their subcommittees are working well together with the legislature. He wanted to give Ms. Hausworth and Ms. Fulsher huge thanks for their amazing work on their respective trails.

**Mr. Dickie** said it was a good worthwhile trip to the UP.

**Mr. Manson** said this was a great meeting.

**Mr. Foote** said the equestrian community will cover issues at the next MTAC meeting. The equine survey put out by the American Horse Council will have information specifically targeted to Michigan. This survey is an equine economic survey and will be put out spring of 2018.

**Chairman Wheatlake** said they are making progress and getting stuff done.

**Mr. Dickie** made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:11 a.m. **Mr. Dunn** seconded. Meeting adjourned.