

MICHIGAN TRAILS ADVISORY COUNCIL (MTAC)
Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2020
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Microsoft Teams Meeting/Teleconference

ATTENDEES:

MTAC

Bob Wilson
Jim Kelts
Joe Kuchnicki
Thomas Dunn
Jessi Adler
Jenny Cook
Ken Hopper
Don Kauppi
Steve Davis
Richard Williamson

DNR

Paul Yauk
Nikki Van Bloem
Jessica Holley
Annalisa Centofanti
Ron Yesney
Greg Kinser
Jeff Kakuk
Rob Katona
Paul Gaberdiel
Michael Morrison
Scott Slavin

Committee Chairperson, Bob Wilson, started the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Committee Chair, Bob Wilson, read an opening statement (enclosed) reviewing legislative charge to MTAC, role of MTAC, and the importance of citizen boards. Mr. Wilson then asked each committee member to introduce themselves and their role on the Council.

- **Jim Kelts** – representing snow trail users
- **Joe Kuchnicki** – representing snow trail users
- **Thomas Dunn** – representing ORV trail users, serves on ORVAW committee
- **Jessi Adler** – representing ORV trail users
- **Jenny Cook** – representing equine trail users, on ETS committee
- **Ken Hopper** – representing nonmotorized trail users
- **Don Kauppi** – representing ORV owners and the residents of the Upper Peninsula
- **Steve Davis** – representing nonmotorized
- **Richard Williamson** – trails support; maintenance and growth

Reports from Advisory Groups

Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup (SAW)

Jim Kelts, Committee Member

Jim Kelts remarked that at the February 2020 SAW meeting held at the RAM Center in Roscommon, three new members were introduced; 1.) (Joe Bartlett, *Region 2*; 2.) Karen Middendorp, *Region 3*; and 3.) Scott LaCombe, *representing the grant sponsors*. Trespassing was discussed in detail. Backcountry riding is increasing in popularity and needs to be enforced. Mr. Kelts talked about trail groomer price quotes for the upcoming year, stating a 20% increase in costs. Communication from DNR has already been given for grant dollars. The use of snow trails during off season months was discussed.

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Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup (NAW)

Steve Davis, Committee Member

Steve Davis talked about the impacts of COVID19 and how it affects trail users. Funding is going to be a struggle for 2020/2021. Mr. Davis reported discussions had taken place regarding DNR processes, and communication breakdowns, which will be addressed. Mr. Davis said the NAW members have done a great job engaging user groups and the public as to how good the opportunities are here in Michigan.

Bob Wilson commented on the upcoming, new revised Master Trail Plan, will promote trail users. The advisory groups should report into MTAC, this will assist with the trail master plan. Promoting is how Michigan builds trails, linking communities and people together.

Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup (ORVAW)

Thomas Dunn, Committee Member

Thomas Dunn said the ORVAW meeting took place on May 13, 2020 by phone conference. COVID19 ramifications were discussed and the impacts with the ORV programs. Trailheads are seeing heavy usage. There are concerns about trail conditions due to no maintenance. COVID19 has created budget concerns. Law Enforcement Division (LED) is out enforcing the Governor's Executive Orders for social distancing. Impacts have affected ORV park opening dates, ORV program MAGG has been halted, and marketing has been stalled. The group is working on finalizing an updated ORV handbook.

Equine Trail Subcommittee (ETS)

Jenny Cook, Committee Member

Jenny Cook started out by appreciating the public land management staff for keeping trail users safe. South West Michigan benefit rides have been delayed. Fort Custer area is keeping up with more users on the trail. Fund raising efforts are taking place through AMAZON Smile. The next ETS meeting is June 17, 2020. Ms. Cook mentioned she supplied a safety document (attached).

Jessi Adler, committee member, asked if the horse trails are only for equine users, can hikers access them? Ms. Cook replied saying typically, hikers are allowed on trails. Be sure to "STOP SPEAK STAND BACK".

BUSINESS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Bob Wilson, Committee Chairperson, motioned to approve the February 22, 2020 draft meeting minutes with committee members Thomas Dunn and Jessi Adler seconding to approve. Motion to accept minutes passed unanimously.

Committee Chairperson, Bob Wilson, asked the members for any amendments to the draft meeting minutes. With none to add, the draft meeting minutes are approved as presented, committee members Richard Williamson and Thomas Dunn seconding to approve. Motion to accept meeting minutes as presented passed unanimously.

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Committee Chairperson, Bob Wilson, asked the members for any May 20, 2020 agenda item requests and to take any agenda items out of order. A request to add COVID19 Update to the agenda item “e” under Business Items for Discussion. Committee members James Kelts and Richard Williamson seconded the motion, with all in favor. May 20, 2020 agenda approved.

COVID

Bob Wilson spoke about the impacts COVID19 has had on departmental loss of funding and staff furloughs. He stated we will endure this for quite some time, which is why we should rely on volunteers and nonprofits to the extent that we can. The State is facing billions of dollars in economic shortfall. It’s important that we all work together with various trail groups and organizations to get through this tough time.

Thomas Dunn remarked that the trails are seeing major use and there is concerns on how to keep trail users safe. Also, the uncertainty of providing economic help is worrisome.

Don Kauppi stated that organizing volunteers for sign replacements and brush crews should be considered.

Joe Kuchnicki said the ORV trail users are seeking alternate routes due to lack of maintenance.

Jenny Cook noted that etiquette and safety brochures are being placed in kiosks. She reported that high usage has spawned the need for safety awareness.

Steve Davis said this is an opportunity where the DNR can do more messaging as to how great the trails are, utilizing trails close to home. This is the time for people to support our trails.

Paul Yauk, DNR, said that with COVID19 everything is turned upside down. The DNR is doing their best with current restrictions in place. He said there is a serious budget situation and they are trying to work with it. Mr. Yauk stated that he realizes the trails are getting thrashed by all users. The DNR staff is communicating safety messages with the concerns surrounding social distancing.

Kristen Thrall, USFS, mentioned there is a ton of precautionary information out there. Forest USFS has been considered essential; therefore, they have not had any hiring freezes. The Huron Manistee area has cleared most trails. Some partner sponsored trails have been halted. In Baldwin all trails are open. She noted that ORV illegal use has slowed down. Park service has hired permanent staff and has dedicated trail management. Look at the USFS web site, they are updated constantly, to avoid confusion. Ms. Thrall noted that she appreciates everyone working together.

ACTION ITEMS

MTAC Rules and Procedures – Proposed Amendments

Chairperson, Bob Wilson, proposed amendments to the current Rules and Procedures (enclosed) and motioned for approval. Committee members Steve Davis and Richard Williamson seconded with all in favor. Motion approved to amend MTAC Rules and Procedures.

MTAC Vice Chair

Chairperson, Bob Wilson, moved to elect a Vice Chair to the MTAC Committee. Mr. Wilson proposed committee member Thomas Dunn. Committee member, James Kelts, was second to approve the motion, with all in favor. Motion to approve MTAC Vice Chair, Thomas Dunn, approved.

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MTAC Vacancy Equine Tourism Representative

MTAC currently has a vacancy for a statewide equine tourism representative. The position is secured by the recommendation from the Governor. Jenny Cook stated it is important that equestrians are represented through MTAC. Paul Yauk, DNR, commented that the position will be filled soon. The DNR had a candidate on board back in January, however the person declined at the last minute.

RESOLUTIONS

(Enclosed)

1. Resolution number 1 will give recognition of retiring members
2. Resolution number 2 will give recognition of DNR work
3. Resolution number 3 will create a nonmotorized funding workgroup

All three resolutions were voted on by the committee members and passed unanimously.

Meeting Dates

Bob Wilson acknowledged the MTAC meetings are held quarterly. The past meeting formats were scheduled in January, April, July, and October or November. Committee member, Jessi Adler made a request to hold two of the meetings on the weekend and two during the week. Bob Wilson said he will take the request into consideration. Paul Yauk said with a weekend meeting, there may be limited involvement from the DNR staff. Jessi Adler proposed if a meeting was held on a Saturday in February, committee members could possibly experience a variety of trails, given the right location. Mr. Wilson stated that a joint advisory workgroup meeting in January or February of 2021 will be a good plan to kick off the year. Nikki Van Bloem, DNR, stated that with the master trail plan process in progress, there will be a need for additional input from all committees, and a joint meeting will be appropriate.

UPDATES

Nikki Van Bloem, DNR

Nikki Van Bloem clarified the question earlier regarding horse trails, stating that hikers can use horse trails. She also addressed event permits, stating they will be allowed starting July 1, 2020. Ms. Van Bloem reported on the master trail plan timeline, saying there has been a slight delay, but feels it is still on track. Bob Wilson stated each committee member can assist in building the Trail Plan by keeping the department informed and up to date with their perspective trail representation.

Michael Morrison, DNR

Michael Morrison reported on the Pure Michigan campaign. Mr. Morrison reported that most items are on hold due to COVID19. He said the applications are still coming in, and the group is working on approvals.

Mid-American Trails and Greenways Conference (MTAG)

Bob Wilson reported the MTAG Conference for 2020 has been postponed to 2021. The location should remain the same, Amway in Grand Rapids, MI, and the slated dates are August 15 through the 18, 2021.

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Legislative

Bob Wilson passed on an update for the Opt-out, saying the movement has stalled. The proposed is to move from Opt-in to Opt-out, and the Secretary of State (SOS) is requesting more dollars to facilitate the program. The DNR is not in agreement with the request from SOS.

DNR STAFF UPDATES

Scott Slavin, DNR

Northwest Lower Peninsula

ORV

1. Grading of Lake County routes began Monday May 11th by DNR staff.
2. Motorized trails and trail heads in NW LP have had extremely high use reported by conservation officers and local law enforcement.
3. Engineering and design on two Bridges on North Missaukee route was started and is now frozen due to covid-19.
4. Missaukee junction 50" trail is closed and expected to open as soon as FRD staff can go back to work and finish building a 2-mile section of trail.
5. Northwest ORV Associations 42-mile Grand Traverse ORV route proposal is working through the trail proposal database.
6. Planning for the new Grand Traverse cycle trail head utilizing an abandoned gas well site is underway, funding has been allocated.
7. Reports are coming in on off trail riding on state forest lands causing damage to wetlands and dune areas.
8. Working on several ORV event applications.
9. Reviewing 2021 ORV grant applications and will be submitting to R. Kennedy.
10. Working with FRD on RDR site prioritization for 2020 and 2021.
11. High water continues to be a problem on cycle trail and routes in Lake and Grand Traverse counties, locations are being documented and planning is underway to correct the issues.

NAW

1. White Pine Trail construction projects are on hold for Rodgers Farm Pond culvert replacement, Hersey River culvert replacement, Cleveland Rd. triple culvert replacement engineering and design, Byers Creek culvert engineering and design, Cold Creek engineering and design CPRs have been submitted for shovel ready projects.
2. Cadillac Pathways approved single track mountain bike trail design is underway working on the project is NMMBA and the DNR 12 miles.
3. Creating a maintenance plan for the Pere Marquette Trail.
4. DNR is working with Manistee County on connecting non-motorized trails to Manistee, Thompsonville, Frankfort and Interlochen.

SAW

1. Working on several snowmobile trail proposals in the Benzie County, Grand Traverse County area.
2. Purchase of a section of Railroad grade from Kaleva to Chief is on hold due to, a CPR request will be submitted to move this forward.

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3. Several permanent easement requests are being worked on for connections into Fife Lake, Kaleva and Traverse City area.
4. Identifying projects for upcoming 2021 season.

ETS

1. Tin Cup Springs Campground has been surveyed; site clearing will take place after oak wilt restrictions are off.
2. Tin Cup Springs Equine trail mapping is underway.
3. Hopkins Creek Equine trail proposal is being worked on by a local group.
4. Mayham Swamp re-route for the shore to shore mtgs have been taking place and a possible land swap is being considered to help get the trail off private lands.

Greg Kinser, DNR

Northern Lower Peninsula

Greg Kinser reported heavy usage on the trails, he has been focusing on communicating safety. Through public announcements, the DNR has been delivering messages on current trail conditions and cautioning users to be aware of their surroundings. Mr. Kinser said staff has been discussing grants and projects. He noted that critical health and safety projects continue to move forward when a viable funding source is identified.

Ron Yesney, DNR

Upper Peninsula

Ron Yesney mentioned that he has been working in conjunction with LED on updating the ORV handbook. Critical project requests have been submitted for approval which involve, bridge and culvert repairs, and rebuilding trestles. The Dollar Bay and Lake Linden Houghton County projects are on hold due to COVID19 restrictions.

Rob Katona, DNR

Central Upper Peninsula

Rob Katona reported several projects in his area are currently on hold and he is hoping to move forward soon.

Paul Gaberdiel, DNR

Eastern Upper Peninsula

Paul Gaberdiel has been fielding calls due to storm damage. He reported trail conditions are not ideal. Projects in his area are being delayed due to COVID19 restrictions.

Jeff Kakuk, DNR

Western Upper Peninsula

Jeff Kakuk said he has critical project requests submitted for approval and is hopeful to get rolling soon. He mentioned in the UP, staff will be installing alpha signs this summer. This alpha system will help users identify where they are in addition to where they should be, avoiding confusion.

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Nikki Van Bloem, DNR

Nikki Van Bloem said, at the moment, projects that are State funded are not moving forward. Federal and fully funded trust fund projects can continue to move forward. She noted that the internal Critical Project Request process to acquire approval has expended a lot of time by the DNR to coordinate and organize submissions.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Joe Bartlett

Joe Bartlett, from the Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup, commented on the State's Trail Proposal process and the lack of communicating updates to all clubs. Nikki Van Bloem said the trail proposal data base platform is Microsoft Access, and there has been some talk from management of updating the data base. Ms. Van Bloem said at this time, the best way to track changes is to keep in contact with your trail specialist that you worked with on the proposal. The current system does not have the technology to share web information.

Mr. Bartlett brought up concerns about trucks and jeeps riding on snowmobile trails. Mr. Bartlett would like to see pledged support by drafting legislation to deal with this issue. Bob Wilson recommended contacting Craig Burnett, DNR Legislative Liaison. Mr. Wilson stated this is a legislative matter and not in the DNR bucket.

Committee Chairperson, Bob Wilson, adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m.

SAFETY IS FOR EVERYONE Trail Safety and Etiquette with Horses

Michigan has various types of non-motorized trails so every trail user group can recreate safely. Please follow the specific trail designations for the safety of everyone:

- **Shared horse and hike trails** - Horse riders and their horses have the most risks, so please keep horse trails for horses and hikers only. **No bikes**
- **Shared bike and hike trails - No horses**
- **Multi-Use trails** - Open to everyone, provided safety and etiquette are followed.

When encounters on the trails happen:

Stop Please stop.

Speak Say "hello" in your normal voice.

- Speaking helps identify you as a person and will calm the horses.
- Ask the horse riders how they would like to pass. The horse riders have been assessing the situation (horses' body language, other riders, terrain, etc.) and will have knowledge of how and when we should pass.
- Typically, the horse riders will want to move past at a walk (which helps the horses as they have "flight" instincts and naturally prefer to move their feet), while the other users remain stopped.

Stand Back 10 feet or more.

- Stand back with your whole group on the same side of the trail.
- Please contain children and dogs.
- If biking, please dismount and move to a safe distance away from the trail with your bike between you and the horses.

These actions will reassure the horses that you are not a threatening predator and help keep everyone safe.

