

**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY WORKGROUP (SAW)**

**MINUTES**

**June 21, 2016  
10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

**BJ's Restaurant  
990 North Center Avenue  
Gaylord, Michigan**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Lee Murray, Chairman, At-Large Representative  
Bill Manson, MSA, Region III Representative, Grand Rapids  
Jim Duke, MSA, Region I Representative, Munising  
Don Britton, At-Large Representative  
Joe Kuchnicki, MSA, Region II Representative  
Bill Lucas, At-Large Representative**

**DNR STAFF PRESENT**

**Paul Yauk, Parks and Recreation Division (PRD), Lansing  
Nicole Colberg, PRD, Lansing  
Nikki VanBloem, PRD, Lansing  
Emily Meyerson, PRD, Northern Lower Peninsula  
Paul Gaberdiel, PRD, Newberry  
Todd Neiss, PRD, Cadillac  
Paige Perry, PRD, Gaylord  
Matt Lincoln, PRD, Lansing  
Loretta Cwalinski, Finance and Operations Division (FOD), Gaylord**

**USDA Forest Service**

**Jon Thompson, Huron-Manistee National Forest, Manistee**

**PUBLIC ATTENDEES**

**John Karl, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club (OHSC)  
Norman Rockwell, OHSC  
Jim Kelts, MSA, Region II  
Bill Stegenga, Bader & Sons  
Mike Beard, Bader & Sons  
David Low, West Michigan Snowmobile Council  
Karyn Hautamaki, MSA Member  
Jon Thompson, Huron Manistee National Forest, Manistee  
Kenneth Meyers, MSA Member  
Mark Panker, Elk Country Sno Travelers  
Mark Coe, Benzie Manistee Snowbirds**

## WELCOME

**Chairman Murray** called the SAW meeting to order at 10:01 a.m., June 21, 2016 at BJ's Restaurant in Gaylord, Michigan. He welcomed everyone, introduced himself, as did the workgroup and attendees.

## AGENDA

**Motion was made by Mr. Kuchnicki, seconded by Mr. Britton to allow Chair Murray to take agenda items out of order if necessary. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

### **Agenda items to be added:**

- Carmeuse/Rogers City under Old Business
- Legally ban wheeled vehicles
- Green Trail Signs
- Fatalities last year
- Contact list
- New Business – Program purchased equipment/bridges etc.
- Snow bikes

**Mr. Manson made a motion, seconded by Mr. Lucas to approve today's agenda. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

## MINUTES

**Motion was made by Mr. Lucas, seconded by Mr. Duke to approve the minutes from the March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 SAW meeting. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

**Chair Murray** would like to address on Page 2 the **Snowmobile Easement Grant Program** section. There have been a few meetings and the appointee to the meetings has not received updates yet. Mr. Yauk will update Chair Murray and the appointee.

Also, on Page 3 the paragraph regarding equestrian use; no decisions have been made – how does Mr. Yauk move forward on this? **Mr. Yauk** explained that they are working on hiring appraisers, and would like to focus on ideal trails connected to public lands as priorities. Also look for alternative funding if necessary for longer leases – Graymont property is in discussion; good topic for next meeting agenda.

**Mr. Lincoln, Planning Section** for PRD made a presentation, asking for input to update the Division's strategic plan for 2017-2021. He summarized their discussions and changes and introduced the planning committee. He shared their vision on the focus of goals and the importance of measuring progress. This Plan will be shared externally online and with various user groups and committees.

**Ms. Colberg** facilitated a discussion for input regarding Strengths, Opportunities, Threats, and Weaknesses that the group sees regarding the division, department or anything else that comes to mind regarding the snowmobile program and overall relationship:

### **STRENGTHS**

- Volunteerism
- Available Public Lands
- Organizations – Variety of clubs (i.e. SAW and MSA)
- Large Staff
- Sponsors
- Recreation under one roof
- Partnerships
- Money – Fees/Permits
- Private land partnerships
- Cooperation between groups
- Grooming equipment
- 6500 miles groomed trails and 50% private lands
- Good safety education program and availability

### **WEAKNESSES**

- Large Staff (not my job)
- Turnover of staff
- Transition issue from FRD to PRD
- Education of field contacts (PRD)
- Lack of Coordination
- Grooming equipment
- Aging grooming equipment/equipment costs
- Fiscal constraints
- Lack of volunteers
- Bridges and infrastructure
- Lack of permanent routes and connectivity
- Communication to user groups
- Lack of Law enforcement on trails
- Snowmobiler image - noise, alcohol, pollution

### **THREATS**

- Extremist environmental groups
- Legislative issue
- Lack of permanent easements/private ownership
- Government regulations
- Lack of snow!
- Speed and alcohol
- New technologies
- Trespass/backcountry riders
- New recreational users
- Noise
- ORV/ATV users on snow trails
- Reduced number of riders, new generation
- Changing user interests
- Endangered species

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Trail expansion
- Communications/Marketing (i.e. 'PURE' snowmobile ads)
- Expand economic impact – Study
- Legislators
- Local governments
- New technology, GPS
- Permanent snowmobile trails
- Public Relations
- Use efforts of Pure Michigan
- Cooperation between user groups
- Dual use of equipment between trail clubs
- Expanding business partnerships, support
- Examine other state's successes
- Act on user group recommendations/ timely

**Chair Murray** asked about the GPS units and emergency buttons – **Mr. Britton** said there is no emergency button on the ones that they tested. **Mr. Yauk** added there will be a full year to test any GPS units they are looking at and said it's an important feature to consider.

On Page 5 of the March 3<sup>rd</sup> minutes regarding the trail request for Yuma to Copemish upgrade – **Mr. Neiss** said the plan is to use PRD staff and to cut slopes (they have a permit); FRD and PRD staff will do that work. This bridge will be considerably less expensive. Viaduct Road should be done for the winter season. Mesick Bridge should be engineered this year.

Also on Page 5 the comment from Mr. Yesney regarding equipment – **Mr. Yauk** will ask Mr. Yesney if it's being worked on and update. **Mr. Manson** added that this would be a good task for the Equipment sub-committee to look into.

On Page 6 in the fifth paragraph, **Mr. Manson** noted a typo in the last sentence regarding e-mail contact list - should read "Updated information...can also be used."

**Mr. Manson** asked for a hierarchy contact list for PRD. **Mr. Yauk** will make sure the SAW receives that information.

**Motion was made by Mr. Lucas, seconded by Mr. Duke to approve the corrected minutes from the March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 SAW meeting. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

## **OLD BUSINESS**

**SAW Member Vacancy – Mr. Yauk** would like to send their standard ad to the public, for 30 days and see if they can get a volunteer for the vacant SAW position. This will also be added for the next meeting agenda.

It was brought to the attention of the group that the updates will happen quickly regarding SAW members and expiration dates. MTAC will officially approve the extensions at their next meeting. **Mr. Yauk** advised they are working on new staff in place and updates – he has asked SAW members with letters for extension be sent to Barbara Graves or Mr. Yauk. Also, e-mail

addresses of members will be posted on the DNR website as well to increase communication with SAW.

**Permanent Trail Easements – Mr. Manson** said they've had two conference calls since last meeting, discussing liability issues, administrative rules, updated proposals, matching funds (Land Exchange Facilitation Funds and Graymont funds), Plum Creek easement. They are making progress. In the Chatham area, Trail 8 – **Mr. Gaberdiel** advised they are working with landowners and townships and it looks to be progressing fine.

**Equipment Subcommittee Report – Mr. Kuchnicki** said he and other members Mr. Britton, Mr. Lucas, Don Reed and Richard Kennedy have realized they have a lot of need with not a lot of money. They discussed how much to keep in budget but will only buy two pieces of equipment, and use the balance of funds to fix what equipment they can. **Mr. Yauk** said it was a tough revenue year so they did the best they could. Keweenaw and Gogebic clubs will get the new equipment.

**Motion was made by Mr. Kuchnicki, seconded by Mr. Lucas to authorize Mr. Yauk and the DNR to send a “recommendation” letter requesting two grooms a day.** Discussion continued regarding the Handbook verbiage and grooming as necessary for trail conditions.

**Motion was withdrawn.**

Mr. Kuchnicki offered another motion that SAW authorizes Mr. Yauk to send a letter requesting the grant sponsors limit their grooming to two or less per day. After discussion, this motion was also withdrawn.

**Mr. Kuchnicki** is requesting that Mr. Yauk talk to the field contact and remind the club to make an effort to reduce grooming as necessary.

**Mr. Manson** asked to discuss reducing brushing and grooming; **Mr. Britton** said to request special maintenance dollars if necessary.

**Motion was made by Mr. Manson, seconded by Mr. Duke to reduce signing and brushing from \$90 dollars per mile to \$70 per mile temporarily until snowmobile program improves fiscally. Motion for adoption unanimously approved.**

**Two year tractor turnaround – Mr. Lucas** said they've looked at six tractors for this turnaround; from \$25,000 for a turnaround to \$50,000. (Tier three to tier four equipment.) They think the program will work but with a down-turn in used equipment; trading like for like equipment should benefit trade-in value. One third of the groomers would be involved in that two year old program. It's not viable this year due to low funding availability. This is good information to keep in review and further discussion.

**Chair Murray** would like to appoint a Chairman to work directly with Mr. Yauk and be the liaison between the Equipment subcommittee and the Chair – he appointed Mr. Britton.

**Ms. Meyerson** gave a quick update on the Ocqueoc River Bridge in Millersburg - the Historic Review was approved and should be able to proceed to bid.

**Snowmobile Law Update Needs - Mr. Manson** updated new regulations working with legislators; they will hopefully introduce the bills in September. There will be a fee increase bill

as well as increase in fines for no trail permit. Discussion extended to wheeled vehicles on snowmobile trails – there's no way to keep them off unless there is a law.

**501c3 for Non-profits – Mr. Gaberdiel** said that the designation is mainly for religious, charitable, and educational organizations. **Mr. Manson** agreed they are limiting the designation requirements.

**Green Trail Signs – Mr. Yauk** would like to hold this discussion until next meeting.

**Fatalities Last Year - Mr. Yauk** said he'd like to have something together that addresses fatalities before the next season. **Chair Murray** asked **Mr. Manson** about the International Snowmobile Congress meeting. Michigan is the only state that had an increase in fatalities. Several reasons contributed to this; newer sleds, less snow, berms, higher speeds for conditions. **Chair Murray** said there is no easy solution for safety on sleds but to continue the discussion and add to solutions.

**Chair Murray** said Cpl. Morey, Law Enforcement Division advised him that he was unable to attend today's meeting.

**Program Purchased Equipment, Bridges etc. – Mr. Manson** would like to know who keeps track of inventoried bridges that would need removals and future installs. **Mr. Yauk** said that PRD will be in charge of that information. **Mr. Britton** said that he'd like to see an inventory on snowmobile funded bridges. **Ms. Perry** advised that Jen Burnham, Site Condition Forester, FRD has tracking in place for those types of equipment. Ms. Perry or Mr. Yauk will send that information to the SAW as to who has it and how to access it.

Snow-bike meeting will be July 19<sup>th</sup> 10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. in Lansing. Polaris and Arctic Cat have manufactured these, and trying to get them designated under a definition of snowmobile. **Mr. Manson** would like the discussion to include that the terrain here in Michigan is not necessarily the same as western wide open states. This topic will also be added to the next agenda. **Ms. Perry** asked if ORV Advisory Workgroup should be invited as well as someone from Law Enforcement Division.

**10-Year Budget - Mr. Manson** said that their meeting with Jaclyn Blodgett, PRD has been rescheduled to after July 4<sup>th</sup>. The snowmobile trail permit should cost around \$60 to be where it should be for the program. He will update at the next meeting; add to next agenda.

**Yuma to Copemish Trail, Manistee River Crossing – Mr. Lucas** said the local snowmobilers are looking forward to having a meeting and make this river crossing happen. Mr. Neiss and Mr. Lucas had a meeting recently with interested parties to get involved and make this work.

**Mr. Coe** shared their snowmobile trail map to discuss connectors – in particular a connection near Interlochen. He referenced several connectors including Cadillac down to Grand Rapids. They would like to see support for the bridge over the Manistee River to connect several communities. **Mr. Lucas** said that there isn't a grant for that particular area north of the river, but there is a proposed trail. He added they would like approval to move forward with funding; the trail has been approved. **Mr. Yauk** will ask **Mr. Kennedy** about Yuma to Copemish trail, and advise the group.

**Mr. Coe** added that they have a great relationship with their local DNR and sheriff for patrolling problem areas on trails. He'd like to encourage the clubs to work with their local officers as well.

**International Snowmobile Congress** – This event occurs every June and includes snowmobile organizations from United States, Canada, Sweden and Russia to discuss and share policies, tourism, challenges, etc. The next gathering will be in Grand Rapids in 2019!

**Rider Education – Snowmobile Trails and Logging on Corporate Land – Mr. Manson** said it's important that somehow we educate riders (boondockers) where to ride and where not to, avoid trespass, where not to park, etc. National magazines or online are two options to reach those folks. **Chair Murray** agreed that communication is very important and that perhaps to give a discount for a trail permit if the snowmobiler is a member of a snowmobiling association; that would aid in reaching snowmobilers. **Mr. Manson** asked if PRD could include Marketing Division to share those important messages. **Mr. Yauk** said that safety, noise, etiquette etc. could be good topics for marketing to share on a wider scale; he will make that contact.

**Mr. Coe** added that in their area they have additional information given to kids in the classes, and have local law enforcement present as well as other informational pieces not included in the online course.

**Loud Pipes – Mr. Duke** said that the noise ordinance needs to be enforceable and enforced. News releases are effective, but trails are lost due to excessive noise from snowmobilers.

**Off Trail Riding** – This topic should be very clear – it is not OK to ride on private land unless permitted. State Land Use rules do not prohibit off trail riding; however, the Pigeon River Country State Forest is one exception.

**Joint SAW and ORV Meeting – Mr. Yauk** said he feels those meetings are beneficial to both groups. **Chair Murray** suggested the October meeting, or perhaps an August or September meeting would work with both groups. **Mr. Yauk** said he will work that out.

## STAFF REPORTS

**Mr. Gaberdiel** discussed introducing youth into snowmobiling. **Mr. Manson** is familiar with a group from Wisconsin and will share that information with Mr. Gaberdiel. He added though that there really needs to be a dedicated adult with the teenagers, for obvious reasons. Discussion continued.

**Mr. Thompson, Cadillac-Manistee Ranger District Office** shared a short presentation and update on a rather contentious snowmobile re-route in their district that they wanted SAW to be aware of. This re-route is in Elk Township, Lake County, and in order for this to happen they are hoping to involve many sources – local groups and organizations, private landowners and the DNR as well. A map of the trail is provided along with a photo of the Bear Swamp Bridge that has failed (one of two) and is unsafe. The county road proposed has proven troublesome, but the USFS process is lengthy and costly. After much discussion the reroute will not be complete for this season but are currently thinking USFS land is preferred for the reroute.

**Mr. Manson** mentioned the change in trail programs and the National Forest trails - there is a five year NEPA process involved.

**Mr. Rockwell** asked about a seasonal roads letter their club received from Huron-Manistee regarding the use of their forest roads for trails. **Mr. Thompson** said that on Huron-Manistee National Forest roads they are not designated open to snowmobiles even if they are to motor vehicles in the summer. **Mr. Manson** will look closer into that letter, and advise.

**Priority Trail – Ms. Perry** updated about Alpena to Barton City connector. No trail and no local energy; what role should MTAC play in making these a priority on the list of 20 priorities. Perhaps SAW should look at that list. How much emphasis should she put on the Alpena trail?

**Mr. Manson** asked about the revised Snowmobile Grant Handbook and the updates. When will it be ready? **Mr. Yauk** will look into that.

**Motion was made by Mr. Lucas, seconded by Mr. Kuchnicki for the DNR to update Snowmobile Grant Handbook. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

**Chair Murray** asked to see the SAW minutes first for review, and then sent to Lansing staff; also keeping in mind that SAW would like to receive the Draft minutes at least two weeks before the next SAW meeting, to be held at the Ralph A. MacMullan Center in Roscommon, October 18<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m.

Meeting adjourned at 2:26 p.m.

**New Trail Proposal**  
**Elk Twp., Sections 7-8, 17, 20, 29-30**  
**Lake County, Michigan**

**Legend**

-  Existing Snowmobile Trail
-  Proposed New Trail on County Road
-  Proposed New Trail on National Forest Road
-  Remove from Snowmobile Trail System and Decommission Road
-  Remove from Snowmobile Trail System, Route Remains Open
-  USFS Ownership
-  Private Land



