

SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY WORKGROUP (SAW)

MEETING MINUTES

December 9, 2010

Approved February 15, 2011

**Sydney's Restaurant
400 Cedar Street, Munising, Michigan 49862**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Lee Murray, Chairman, At-Large Representative
Al Green, Michigan Snowmobile Association (MSA), Region II Rep., Cadillac
Bruce Wood, Trail Sponsors Representative
Rich Filley, Trail Sponsors Representative
Jim Duke, MSA, Region I Representative, Munising
Bill Manson, MSA, Region III Representative, Grand Rapids
Don Britton, At-Large Representative

DNRE STAFF PRESENT

Steve DeBrabander, State Trails Operations and Construction Unit Supervisor, FMD, Lansing
Cpl. John Morey, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Gaylord
Sharon Schafer, Assistant Chief, Finance, Administration Division, Lansing
Ron Yesney, Recreation Specialist, FMD, Marquette
Loretta Cwalinski, Secretary, Administration, Gaylord

PUBLIC ATTENDEES

Kaye Houk, Presque Isle Sno-Trails (PIST)
John Houk, PIST
Rodney Altman, PIST
Keith Litchfield, Bader & Sons Co.
Bob Bowers, Munising
Rick Brown, MSA
Bill Lucas, MSA & Cadillac Winter Warriors
Don Wing, MSA & Cadillac Winter Warriors
Judy Wing, Cadillac Winter Warriors
Ken Stigers, Keweenaw Trail Service
Ray Ranta, Moose Country
Bill Stegenga, Bader & Sons Co.
Don Reed, Seney Snowmobile Association, MSA
Jim Dickie, MSA

WELCOME

Chairman Murray called the Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup (SAW) meeting to order at 8:59 a.m., Wednesday, December 9, 2010, in Munising, Michigan.

MINUTES

The minutes of the October 19, 2010 meeting were acknowledged.

Motion was made by Mr. Manson, seconded by Mr. Britton, to adopt the minutes of the October 19, 2010 meeting. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Special Maintenance Project Funding

Mr. DeBrabander stated that there have been concerns expressed regarding the ability of trail sponsors to provide 25% of a high cost Special maintenance project up front prior to reimbursement. A motion was made at the last SAW meeting that the program pick up all costs involved in the financing. Mr. DeBrabander sent an e-mail to all SAW members prior to the meeting to address this concern. Proposed additional language for immediate effect and to amend next years' handbook:

On high cost special maintenance projects, additional advance payments may be available, on a case by case basis, when the trail sponsor does not have the funds available to pay the final 25% of the project costs.

Trail sponsors should work with their local DNRE contact to pursue additional advance payments.

Mr. Wood asked when this could take affect and if it's for any reimbursements to clubs this year – even if the project is over.

Mr. DeBrabander said he was not sure about covering costs for past projects and he will look at it. This does take immediate affect.

Update on Developing Contracts with Groomer Manufacturers / Dealers for Groomer Purchases

Mr. DeBrabander summarized past discussions on specifications for grooming equipment. He indicated a workgroup sent out bid specs for potential contracts looking for lower pricing and to develop a cap on equipment grants for four groomer types. The workgroup has decided to cancel the process; they were not convinced the prices were good, the prices were not locked in and could be increased, and flexibility to purchase groomers from various dealers would be limited.

Mr. Green added that many of the decisions were made by the DTMB. He also wondered if there could be a thank-you sent out to those businesses that did make bids. Evidently on the website, there was an acknowledgment of bids but no thank-you. **Mr. Green** said he will do that. **Mr. DeBrabander** said he will let Mr. Green know if that's acceptable with the DTMB.

Major Repair Warranty Deductible

Mr. DeBrabander reviewed the discussion from past meetings regarding concerns over the \$1,000 deductible. It was originally intended as an incentive to take care of equipment properly. The DNRE has agreed to waive that deductible on major repairs for 100% funded equipment.

Mr. Green asked about the second part of the motion requiring oil analysis (OA) and records of maintenance.

Mr. DeBrabander indicated the DNRE does not need to receive OA reports. If the repair qualifies under the manufacturers' warranty, it passes the test of adequate maintenance being completed and that is good enough for the program.

Mr. Wood said he would like to see it suggested to the clubs to keep up with oil samples.

Chairman Murray said that at the last meeting, they discussed coming up with a list of suggested preventive maintenance items to keep equipment in good shape. Not a requirement, but highly recommended items.

DNRE Collecting Trail Sponsor Administrative Time Reports

Mr. DeBrabander said the DNRE does not need that information and will not collect it, but perhaps it can be collected through the MSA if needed.

Military Hill Bridge Proposal

Mr. DeBrabander introduced Ron Yesney, Recreation Specialist, FMD, and updated that Mr. Yesney will be moving to northeast Lower Peninsula, taking Robin Pearson's old position in Gaylord.

Mr. DeBrabander continued and mentioned that at a previous SAW meeting there was concern that the USFS completed environmental assessment (EA) would expire and have to be redone. In conversation with the USFS, the DNRE found that the EA does not have an expiration date and will be valid unless something changes to the project or project area. This is a very expensive bridge, nearing \$2 million. The DNRE is suggesting a trail counter be placed on the trail to determine volume of use on this trail to help determine a state wide priority for this expensive bridge.

Mr. Yesney said that he feels that it is a good project and worthy. It's not been without delays, but he did look at other funding and it really needs to be funded through the snowmobile program, as it is primarily used by only snowmobilers. The DNRE will get a trail counter placed on the trail to get a better idea of actual usage.

Chairman Murray asked Rick Brown to speak since he submitted a Comment Card noting this topic. Mr. Brown stated this is a very dangerous place to cross. He would like to see it a priority but wondered if it is really necessary to do a whole new bridge. He feels it's worthwhile either way.

Mr. Manson wondered if U.P. Fabricating could go out and make another estimate.

Mr. Yesney said he can follow up with some of the recommendations and will investigate costs further.

Mr. DeBrabander said the DNRE can add this item to the agenda for the February 15, 2011 SAW meeting. Mr. Yesney will bring back some concrete numbers on costs. Discussion continued with suggestions on how the estimates could be combined and perhaps funding broken down over a few years.

Motorized Trail Sign Handbook Update

Mr. DeBrabander reviewed the history of concerns on over-signing trails. The big concern is that speed on the trails is up due to riders riding “sign-to-sign” and being warned of every possible hazard they may encounter. Many individuals have indicated they feel the trails would actually be safer if users had to be responsible for determining trail alignment, etc. without being warned, and that as a result of less signs, speeds would actually be reduced. The workgroup assigned to discuss the signs had a varied group of individuals, discussing both ORV and snowmobile trail signs. Should some be eliminated, some added. Draft documents were e-mailed to the SAW and also handed out to discuss. Several snowmobile signs were recommended to be removed. Most were agreed upon, but there are still a few that need to be discussed. The Single Side Intersection sign was recommended by the group to be eliminated. However, a few noted concerns and that those signs are necessary. He asked for advice from the SAW. All agreed with keeping the Single Side Intersection sign.

Mr. Filley said he feels that loitering at those intersections could be a problem – what can be added for safety?

Mr. Lucas said he has a concern with those signs and mentioned particular trails for discussion. Discussion continued.

Chairman Murray wanted to review the decisions; **Mr. DeBrabander** said that the workgroup’s discussion and recommendation was that something needs to be done for safety. The consensus is for the sign to continue in the program. A single side intersecting trail does require a stop and stop ahead sign. The workgroup did decide to keep Congested Area sign, so perhaps that could help?

Mr. Manson added that there needs to be common sense on all parties with using these signs.

Chairman Murray would like to make a motion to keep the Single Side Intersection sign to be up to the discretion of grant sponsor. **Mr. DeBrabander** has concerns over giving the trail sponsor that discretion due to possible inconsistent signing.

Motion was made by Mr. Britton, seconded by Mr. Manson that the SAW recommends the Single Side Intersection sign be included in the handbook, and the use coordinated between the grant sponsor and field contact with the decision to make a three way stop or one way stop. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Discussion continued – the Original Motion dies due to lack of support of the second portion of that Motion.

Motion was made by Mr. Britton, seconded by Mr. Manson that SAW recommends the Single Side Intersection sign be included in the handbook. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Cpl. Morey read the handbook's description of stop signs, which clarifies the use.

Mr. DeBrabander is suggesting that a bit more definition be added to the handbook. He will e-mail the SAW with a recommendation.

Private Drives Ahead were discussed being added to the program, with the explanation to cover i.e. Next Three Miles.

Mr. Green mentioned the green diamond and that the wording "within a community" could be fixed so that these signs could be used in other areas.

Mr. DeBrabander said that the particular wording was intentional. There seems to have been some misuse of the green diamonds. Discussion continued on the needs of the signs, and the usage of the green versus the orange signs.

Mr. Manson explained the historical use of the diamonds to get into towns, and back out. They weren't considered designated portions of the trails, but there is a need for the green diamonds. Snowmobilers need to have a designated way into towns and businesses, and back out.

Chairman Murray said he would like one of the three members speaking with concerns come up with a solid recommendation to the DNRE. Discussion then continued with concerns over landowners and easements.

Motion was made by Mr. Manson, seconded by Mr. Wood that the SAW recommends to the DNRE to remove the two sections referencing "within a community" under the Guidance section of Snowmobile Community Route Markers. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Mr. DeBrabander reviewed the last concern over signs at curves of 90 degrees or greater, using a curve ahead sign and direction signs at the curve. Again, trying to limit signs but giving safe warning, and treating a 'curve' and 'turn' separately.

The question is how does the SAW recommend to mark curves/turns on trails.

Bill Stegenge said that whichever way the trail goes, it needs to be marked at any turn where there's more than one way to go.

Don Reed also agreed that if you can go straight (if there is a clearing), but the trail goes right, the trail turn needs to be marked.

John Houk said he feels the curve or turn needs to be clearly defined.

Mr. Lucas added that there are some dangerous curves that need marked, especially at the curve, and the curve ahead – should be marked with both.

Motion was made by Mr. Britton, seconded by Mr. Duke that when a trail turns 90 degrees or greater, to use a turn arrow sign; when there's an option of two directions, the trail gets a directional arrow sign. Motion for adoption carried with one objection noted by Mr. Filley.

Further discussion continued on how and when to mark curves on trails. Safety should be a priority. The question remains on how to mark a curve after a curve.

Chairman Murray said that if another workgroup needs to be created, do it, or if another meeting needs planned, to do it.

Mr. Wood asked about Trail Closed sign – it is no longer in the catalog to order. It will be put back in the draft sign listing.

NEW BUSINESS

Appointment of Vice-Chair

Chairman Murray said he and MSTAC Chair Frank Wheatlake had a discussion and decided that Mr. Manson would be the Vice-Chair of the SAW.

Ogemaw Hill Snowmobile Club Trail Repair Project

Mr. DeBrabander advised that Dayle Garlock, NLP District Supervisor met with the club, and decided to have the club apply for a \$10,000 grant for repairs. Since the last SAW meeting a grant amendment was requested, approved and processed, and the work is near completion on the ground. A written report by Mike Janisse stated that the majority of the work has been done. He believes the issue has been resolved.

Snowmobile Budget Review

Ms. Schafer referred to her handout and reviewed in much detail all financial aspects of the snowmobile program from Distribution of Revenue to Estimated Ending Fund Balance.

2011 Workgroup Meeting Schedule

Mr. DeBrabander referenced a handout with proposed meeting dates and locations. The four SAW meetings proposed are for February 15, June 21, October 1, and December 8, 2011.

A motion was made by Mr. Wood, seconded by Mr. Green that the meeting schedule be accepted. B.J.'s is preferred over the RAM Center for cost savings. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

One Way Grooming on Highway 41

Mr. Britton, with Ron Yesney's assistance, referred to a map detailing their dilemma. In the trails program there are currently no one-way trails. However, on M-28 along the railroad, their proposal is a designated trail to go with the flow of traffic and north only along US 41. Comments added that several one-way signs should be posted along the north bound trail section. Mr. Yesney has the trail proposal and is working with MDOT. They are recommending the M-28 section as a business community connector.

A motion was made by Mr. Manson, seconded by Mr. Green that the SAW endorses this plan for a two way trail from the grade along M-28 and the junction to 41, also a one way trail going north on the bike path to access the remaining businesses. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Mr. DeBrabander wants to make sure the trail proposal review process is used and expressed concerns that a designated one way trail could be approved.

FY 2011 Fuel Reimbursement Rate

Mr. DeBrabander advised the rate for the 2010-2011 snowmobile season will be \$4.57 per mile, which is a twenty-four cent increase from last season. Labor and routine maintenance remains the same.

Snow Processing Equipment - Added agenda item with Keith Litchfield, Bader & Sons –

Mr. Litchfield reported that he has recently done a fair amount of research to find the best equipment for grooming and wanted to know why the DNRE denied three club requests to purchase snow processors. He would like to have this particular equipment taken to various clubs to try, and then report back to DNRE staff and himself. He also added that Michigan has the best trail system around but they could be better.

Mr. Manson asked the cost of the drag - \$14,000-18,000. He added he'd like to see more facts of the longevity of the equipment, and good data of actual long-term usage and maintenance costs.

Mr. Green said that they have a John Deere groomer, and added that Cadillac Winter Promotions would like to test out the drag and document in detail the comparisons, etc. for that equipment.

Mr. DeBrabander wanted to address the denial – he verified that this new piece of equipment does not replace a drag but is in addition to a drag. He stated the program does not have adequate funding to add a new piece of equipment to the program and stated he did not think it was needed. Michigan does have the best groomed trails in the country already, and the focus should be on timely replacement of groomers and drags. The program can not currently replace groomers and drags at a rate requested by trail sponsors, and adding a new piece of equipment will have a negative impact on the equipment replacement schedule. These snow processors also have many more moving parts than a drag, have been prone to breakdowns, and purchasing them is not the best use of program funds.

Mr. Litchfield said he would still like to offer it out in the field for a year, in various areas, as trails and conditions vary throughout the state.

Chairman Murray said Mr. Litchfield will be on the agenda for February, and at that time be told if the DNRE is accepting of that offer. He would like to know if the additional equipment will save the program money – he'd like to see more data.

Mr. Green added he would let another club use their equipment and they would be glad to document the results with this new drag. If the DNRE goes along with it, they can get with Mr. Green.

Mr. Duke wanted to clarify that this equipment is strictly experimental.

Mr. DeBrabander restated that the DNRE does not support funding for snow processing equipment.

STAFF REPORTS

Ron Yesney updated the group on the trail not being groomed north of Big Bay. The trail proposal came in late, but it is being expedited and will hopefully be approved very soon.

Also, he is working on a CN railroad crossing issue south of Munising. The railroad removed an existing crossing and field staff and specialists are working to determine why it happened and working to get it reinstalled.

Also, the trail between Champion and L'Anse has a land control issue, no trail there either but looking for a reroute. Unit contact was going to meet with MDOT yesterday.

There's been a major reroute between Big Bay and L'Anse, an additional ten miles. Get gas in Big Bay! Trail proposal is in place.

Law Enforcement Division

Cpl. Morey brought up the issue of sound testing. Technology has changed, and SAE acknowledged a problem which causes belts to blow due to the test. In essence the SAE standard needs to be changed and therefore the law as well.

STAFF

M-65 Bridge Connector

Mr. DeBrabander said it's been a rather complex issue and there has been progress. The DNRE has approved the proposal, but more work needs to be done; many limiting and expensive conditions were listed by various agencies. Funding has not been identified.

Mr. Murray reminded everyone that if members of the public would like to speak, to please fill out a card ahead of time.

Mr. Wood showed a stub of a trail marker pole being used in Ontario, costing approximately \$5 each, made from recycled material. Their club is buying about 60 of them. Theirs are about 5'6".

Mr. Manson said that historic snowmobile legislation passed allows one time plate for sleds 25 years or older – will be October 2011 before ready.

Mr. Duke mentioned that McVeigh was going to attend the SAW meetings replacing Randy Charles, Ottawa National Forest, but McVeigh is retiring November 31. McVeigh commented that the MSA has been by far the best group to work with and the most passionate.

Mr. Filley wanted to thank Mr. DeBrabander for his work with the program over the last few years and said he was the right man at the right time for the committee/workgroup.

Mr. DeBrabander gave a farewell speech, and received many positive compliments and a thank you from the SAW.

Mr. Britton also thanked Mr. Yesney for all his hard work.

Next meeting will be February 15, 2011; check website for location.

Meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m.