

Snowmobile Advisory Committee

Final Draft Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual meeting
April 1st, 2021



Roll call

Present for the Snowmobile Advisory Committee
(committee):

- Chair – Don Britton
- Joe Bartlett
- Barry Bethke
- Keith Churill
- Joe Kuchnicki
- Scott LaCombe
- Karen Middendorp

Present for the Department of Natural Resources
(department) Staff:

- Annalisa Centofanti
- Paul Gaberdiel
- Dakota Hewlett
- Jessica Holley
- Richard Kennedy
- Steve Krzesicki
- Kyle Loup
- Patrick Olson
- Cpl. Ivan Perez
- Paige Perry
- Thomas Seablom
- Jill Sell
- Scott Slavin
- Roger Storm
- Monica Weis
- Paul Yauk
- Ron Yesney

Meeting minutes

Chairman Don Britton called the meeting to order at 10:02

Karen Middendorp made a motion to approve the December 3rd, 2020 meeting minutes. Barry Bethke seconded; motion carried.

Barry Bethke made a motion to allow the chair to take items out of order. Karen Middendorp seconded; motion carried.

Scott LaCombe made a motion to allow additional items. Keith Churill seconded; motion carried.

FRD – Logging Update/Trail Right of Way – Tom Seablom

- Joe Bartlett discussed the DNR website Logging Recreation Trails regarding 'hard template' and what does that mean? It states road maintenance to be completed by December 1st, no active use on the snowmobile trail from December 1st – March 31st, cross at right angles, remove stumps within five foot of trail, and stumps to ground level within 20 feet of trail. Tom Seablom said the wording of 'hard template' is not actually used in the sale specs, it actually is Standard Specs. The screen shot for the 2014 Forest Management Advisory Committee presentation didn't capture the entire word. Timber sale specs can be modified at the discretion of the forester and recreation specialists.
- With regards to stumps, it was mentioned that specs written into the timber sale take into consideration the preseason trail inspection. The timber sale proposal is reviewed by the local PRD recreation specialists and the trail coordinator and they also provide input at the compartment reviews. They are notified of all sale proposals when motorized and non-motorized trails are impacted. There is also a section on the timber sale proposal checklist to make sure trail protection specs are used if a trail is being impacted. If PRD made a recommendation to remove all stumps, FRD would re-visit the site to discuss, not all stumps need to be removed.
- Tom was a forester and has worked in the past with the WUP PRD recreation specialists. Ron Yesney said PRD and FRD work together to create the best specs for each site. He appreciates the working relationship with FRD.
- It was asked why there isn't any movement on this issue? Tom said that we have addressed this going into this season through our timber sale specs. Richard Kennedy will research to see if any amendments were submitted for drag or machine damage or repairs due to stump issues this past season. Tom said if this is still happening, give specifics rather than generalizations so we can address the issue.

- Joe also brought up the connection of forest roads and logging roads for trails, why hasn't this been accomplished spaces

Signed Intersections on Snow Trails, Missing Signs – Don Britton and Ron Yesney

- Trail numbers not at intersections causing confusion.
- Have the DNR unit contacts address, Jessica Holley will add an agenda item to the 2021 pre-season Agenda.

ORV Damage to Snowmobile Trails, Not on State Designated Trails – Don Britton and the DNR

- Snowmobile grant sponsors repair off-season damage and sometimes do not get reimbursed.
- ORV funding is restricted, can't be used on private land and the snowmobile money is used for signage and gates as a preventative.
- We have used ORV funding to repair snowmobile trails on public lands. What is the process and how do we get grant funding – add as a topic for the next SAW meeting.
- Most of our efforts are for prevention.
- What about wheeled traffic damage during the snowmobile season? Some unit contacts advise to include it on the weekly and they would approve. If there is an issue in reimbursement, bring it to the SAW Committee.
- Would need to have a LUOD or legislation preventing wheeled vehicle access from December 1st – April 1st.

Trail Proposal Database Status – Jessica Holley

A list of the current trail proposal status was shared with the group.



Trail Proposal
Status_SAW_03-31-21

If additional in-depth information on a specific proposal is needed, email the unit contact, recreation specialist, or Jessica Holley.

- It was asked why the process takes so long, it was stated that there is staff turnover across all divisions, training new people, data input into the system among other things that the recreation specialists are addressing.
- Paul Yauk said we are working hard and doing our best internally, we need help from our sponsors. We are focusing on keeping trails open, easements, and fix what we have first before new trail.

UPDATES

New Trail Plan, Critical Gaps Jessica Holley and Scott Slavin

- The action items are in for review and comment.
- Will be out for review early April by the groups, will be presented at the MTAC meeting.

Retirement and Recognition of Paul Yauk, State Trails Coordinator – Don Britton

- Don Britton thanked Paul and his staff for all the work through the years.
- Karen Middendorp thanked Paul for his help this past year.
- Joe Kuchnicki said he admired Paul as he is cool under pressure and offers a light at the end of the tunnel.

Equipment Subcommittee Updates – Joe Kuchnicki

- It was discussed that tracked machines should be used only on snow as the maintenance and maintenance costs are increasing.
- Michigan promotes trail use, but with restricted funds things aren't getting accomplished, need to free up monies.

Joe Kuchnicki made a motion to request releasing funds from both 2020 and 2021 for equipment purchases in 2021, Karen Middendorp seconded. Motion carried.

Matt Tracks End of Season Update – Karl Davenport

- The purchase of the new Matt Tacks in 2020 don't have many hours, but we are satisfied so far.

- Driftskippers' tracks have about 40 hours and JVTC's tracks have 140 hours, mainly used in orchards, fields, county seasonal roads, and rail-trail.
- A little concerned with wear, waiting to hear from the manufacture.
- Six hours to change tracks to tires with the Matt Tracks.
- Not as much traction as the Soucy's due to tread design
- Cost comparison – JVTC Matt Tracks were \$80K. Soucy's were \$108K which Matt Tracks met the \$108K price.
- There are issues with Zudiberg tracks with service and guarantee on what we have.
- Will have a comprehensive report on our track systems at the end of next season.

Keep on the agenda for next meeting.

Permanent Easement Updates – Matt Torreano and Roger Storm

- In the first of the two transactions closing December 2020, the DNR purchased 56 miles of 30-foot trail access in portions of Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron and Ontonagon counties. Using \$833K, through the Michigan Permanent Snowmobile Easement Fund.
- In the second transaction, the DNR acquired 11 miles of 30-foot trail easement in Ontonagon County, at a purchase price of \$153K, from Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands. The purchase was financed through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. Matt Torreano is creating a detailed map analysis of Lyme areas of ownership to see if we can secure more easements.
- We are also working with ROW contracted consultants and additional corporate landowners to acquire more easements.
- We are in preliminary discussions with Longyear on selling permanent easements on 35 miles of trail.
- TRG and Molpus in the Keweenaw both are interested in discussions.
- Another small easement is in the works, Miners River Bridge on Hancock land, moving the trail of H58 in Alger County and onto Hancock property.
- Roger Storm spoke of the purchase from CSX in Manistee where we have been working for a year on an offer to them. Manistee/Benzie Snowbirds has been involved facilitating and funding a land transfer with CSX. CSX is very litigious and demanding other work such as Phase I and

Phase II soil sampling and analysis, and a survey. They are also requesting a capping plan with money in an escrow fund if we do not complete capping the trail in their time frame. We have enough funding for the acquisition from the snowmobile permanent easement fund. We need another funding source for the additional work, which would be an additional \$80K-\$200K, depending on DNR staff or contracting. Joe Kuchnicki thanked Manistee/Benzie Snowbirds for the work they have done on this project and being a local partner to make this happen.

- It was asked what incentive corporate landowners have to sell easements. The money is pretty significant to their bottom line, KLA received about \$800K in revenue. In addition to the money, when the easement is permanent, the resources are protected and trespasses enforceable. It also fosters better relationships between the corporation, DNR, and local clubs.

Joe Bartlett made a motion that the SAW supports the use of funding from the snowmobile permanent easement fund for the CSX project in Manistee County, Joe Kuchnicki seconded. Motion carried.

Groomer Workshop – Karen Middendorp

- Great for the sponsors, very educational
- Last year, the paperwork class was a big help, thanks to Richard Kennedy.
- Would like a class on tracks, Don Britton would be willing to host the class.

Karen Middendorp made a motion SAW supports sending two club sponsors, paid by the DNR, to the groomer workshop held the Thursday prior to the SAW meeting in March 2022, Scott LaCombe seconded. Motioned carried.

Legislative Ride Participation and Response – Karen Middendorp

- The 2020 ride went well, about 25 participants, 15 of them new, split up in several smaller groups.
- The smaller groups provided better interactions.
- Many questions asked including wheeled vehicle legislation.
- Looking to add an ORV ride next year.

Free Snowmobile Weekend – Karen Middendorp

- No movement yet, look for something after spring break.
- Rep. Johnson has it on the next meeting's agenda.

Liability Insurance Sponsors/Landowners – Karen Middendorp

- The new company looks to be as good or better than current, a little less complicated.
- The \$250 deductible takes place when there is a claim, paid by the club – not the program.
- If sponsors have West Bend Insurance, let them know about the deductible, it will lower the rates.
- Scott LaCombe has been working with a different insurance company and will share with Karen Middendorp to discuss at the groomer workshop.

MAAG Update – Jessica Holley

- MAAG is on hold due to COVID-19, the proposal to restart working on the project is in place, but there is no time frame.
- It was discussed by Karl Davenport to re do the forms, some are very old, no capability to update, difficulty opening and accessing pdfs, among other issues. It would make it easier for the volunteers to submit the forms correctly and Richard Kennedy and his staff to complete them. Streamline the process.
- Not a uniform way of doing paperwork, difficult for the volunteers.
- It was asked that the trails administrative staff compile a comprehensive update to the program forms and hold another paperwork class at the groomer workshop.
- Richard appreciates the information from Karl and spoke about the issues with the forms, internet, and submitting them. Will investigate the forms in the future, not as easy as it is thought to change/update them – other people are involved.
- Some sponsors do not have issues, it depends on the club's capabilities, technology, and platforms.

Pinney Bridge Issue – Paige Perry

- Greg Kinser, Paul Yauk, and Nicole Toman met on January 13th and on the 29th they met with the Antrim County Road Commission (ACRC) and determined the road is a seasonal county

road. The ACRC allowed the DNR and JVTC to sign the road in the ROW and the landowner has the right to use the road.

- The private landowner believes they own the ROW, based on their lawyer's review.
- Right now, we are within the rule of law until something is proven in court.
- Will keep this issue on future agendas.

Carmeuse Update – Paige Perry

- We need to first define our ownership better in the quarry to make a trade to keep the trail on the DNR property along the fence line.
- For now, we are working on the trail proposal submitted by Dave Campo for next season, we have a grant for the Swan River Bridge and MDOT hopes to start work this summer and have it completed by 2022.
- We are seeking funding for a land contractor as this project is becoming more complex.

Allegan Update – Ron Yesney and Jill Sell

- This is a very complex issue.
- We are looking at the quality of title from CSX railroad and they claim they do not own the corridor. Most likely they had an easement and when the corridor was abandoned and went away, the underlying interest probably is with the prior owner.
- If the corridor reverted to the original owners, would they be interested in selling an easement?
- Matt Torreano is creating a detailed analysis map of what the DNR would like to acquire.
- We need to revisit this issue and keep it on future agendas.

Committee Updates

- Joe Bartlett would like to invite Ron Olson to the next meeting to help move our issues and ideas forward.
- Joe Kuchnicki reminded that there are many users on all the trails and thanked the loggers for helping to put trail in for us.
- Keith Churill mentioned that he knew of \$2K in damages to two machines this year due to stump issues.

- Karen Middendorp will ask sponsors about issues due to stump damages. The SAW Committee supports the legislation MISORVA is working on regarding wheeled vehicles on snowmobile trails.
- Scott LaCombe stated he has been grooming since 1994 and a sponsor for over 15 years and have noticed through the years the trail is being over-groomed. We need to have rules in the handbook, the program shouldn't have to pay for grooming a segment six times a day. It looks as if some sponsors are grooming 24 hours a day, the trail doesn't set up and it is hard on the equipment to maintain. This will be discussed with the SAW Equipment Subcommittee.

DNR/USFS/LED Staff Updates



2021_Q1_TRAILScom R_Kennedy_Update_S
bined regional DNR s1 AW_April_2021.pdf

Corporal Ivan Perez – DNR LED

- We are not changing the decibel levels, just changing old language in the sound laws.
- Fatality reports 2020-21 12 for the season. Alcohol and speed being the main factors, we are focusing our education with riders on those causes.

Teresa Maday – USFS

- The Ottawa NF is conducting a dozen road ratings on bridges, seven of which are on the snowmobile trail. Results coming later this year. If needed, will work with the DNR and clubs on seeking GOA funding for repairs. We want our bridges to be safe and functional.
- The Manistee NF discussing how to address the large amount of damage on snowmobile trail due to ORV use.)

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Anderson

- Asked about the status and updates from the Off-Trail/Backcountry Riding Workgroup. No updates for over a year.
- Ron Yesney discussed the accomplishments – the signs created that allow for enforcement regarding trespass issues and the Ride Here posters on finding information on where to ride, it is difficult to have a specific map.

- Ron said he will have Rob Katona will set up a meeting in the spring with the accomplishments so far and future next steps for the workgroup.
- Would like to have someone from the SAW Committee on the Workgroup.
- Paul Anderson and Karen Middendorp will discuss additional members on the Workgroup.
- Would like to have an update on the Workgroup at the next SAW meeting.

Gary Blaser

- Spoke of the safety issues with groomers and snowmobiles meeting side-by-sides on the trails. Had an issue this year on an 8-foot wide section of trail where there wasn't enough room to pass a side-by-side.

Karl Davenport

- Asked about the trail proposal document and it was confirmed that the information is from the DNR internal database and current. He also mentions that the 2019 handbook states that there is a recommendation to sign all intersections and it should be standard for all users.

John Newman

- Asked about a funding update. Richard Kennedy stated that it was early as final bills are due April 30th. It is anticipated there will be monies rolled back into the program because there was not a lot of grooming this season due. Equipment status reports are due April 14th. We are still waiting to hear from the UP Snow flyers, Big Bay de Noc, Four Flags, Normenco, and Grand Marais on their sign orders which were due March 14th, Richard sent a reminder to get them in by 4:30 April 1st.

Meeting Dates

The June 23rd meeting will be virtual as of now. No update yet if would be in-person.

September 30th and December 2nd

Adjournment

Barry Bethke made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Joe Kuchnicki seconded. Motion carried to adjourn the meeting at 2:11 pm.