

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

**MINUTES**

**March 3, 2016  
10:00 a.m.**

**Kewadin Casino and Hotel  
2186 Shunk Road  
Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**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  
Tom Paquin, PRD, Newberry  
Paul Gaberdiel, Forest Resources Division (FRD), Newberry  
Rob Katona, PRD  
Jeff Kakuk, PRD  
Darrell, Welch, PRD, Marquette  
Matt Torreano, PRD  
Travis Kross, PRD  
Corey Butcher, PRD  
Darrrell Welch, PRD  
Emily Meyerson, PRD  
Cpl. John Morey, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Gaylord  
Loretta Cwalinski, Finance and Operations Division (FOD), Gaylord**

**PUBLIC ATTENDEES**

**Dale DeClark, Jordan Valley Trails Council (JVTC)  
Karl Davenport, JVTC  
Doug Blenc, JVTC  
Jim Kelts, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club  
Karyn Hautamaki, MSA Board Member  
Susan Churill, Alger SORVA, MVB  
Terry Martin, Grand Traverse Area Snowmobile Club (GTASC)  
Rick Brown, MSA  
Cindy Hammers, Drummond Island  
Paul Hammers, Drummond Island  
Stu Volkers, EUP Council President  
Thomas St. Aubin, MUPSA  
Rodney M. Altman, Presque Isle Sno Trails (PIST)**

**Dave Campo, PIST**  
**Don Simon, GTASC**  
**Ted Stanke, GTASC**  
**Grant DeWitt, Chippewa Snow Chasers**  
**Mark Evans, Allegan County Snowmobile Club**  
**Mike Beard, Bader & Sons**  
**Bob Leidlein, Track, Inc.**  
**Dave Walker, Arrowhead Groomers**  
**Terry Stoudt, CAMSO**  
**Don Reed, Seney Snowmobile Association**

## **WELCOME**

**Mr. Manson** called the SAW meeting to order at 10:05 a.m., March 3, 2016 at the Kewadin Casino-Hotel in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. He welcomed everyone, introduced himself, as did the workgroup and attendees. Chairman Lee Murray and Rich Filley were unable to attend.

## **AGENDA**

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

- Old Business - Yuma to Copemish
- New Business - Green Trail Signs
- Also - Groomer Repair Support

**Mr. Yauk** introduced Emily Meyerson, Northern Lower Trails Coordinator and Jeff Kakuk, Western Upper Peninsula Trails Specialist. Also introduced was Matt Torreano, Northern Michigan Outreach Specialist from Executive Office, Lansing, who will be assisting PRD with the trails program.

**Motion was made by Mr. Lucas, seconded by Mr. Kuchnicki to approve today's agenda. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

## **MINUTES**

**Motion was made by Mr. Duke, seconded by Mr. Britton to approve the minutes from December 3, 2015 SAW meeting. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

## **OLD BUSINESS**

**Snowmobile Easement Grant Program – Mr. Yesney** said they've received quite a few applications and would like someone from SAW to assist evaluating which ones to fund. Mr. Manson was appointed at the October SAW meeting to assist. Grant eligibility is limited to local governments and 501C3 only. **Mr. Manson** added that there were more details limiting eligibility to assure snowmobile funding assistance.

**Mr. Yesney** said there just isn't enough staff to track the applications for easements and funding etc., so hopefully, a consultant would be involved. There is no process as of yet.

**Mr. Torreano** explained some of the processes are already in place regarding purchasing. He is working to figure out how these easements can be acquired and tracked within legal parameters. Their thoughts were to advertise for bids through MI Bid (<http://mibid.bidcorp.com/AuctionDefault.aspx>) and acquire vendors/contractors that could work with staff on this project. They are hoping to get more than a few companies interested.

**Mr. Yesney** pointed out that equestrian use and 'side by side' usage has increased over the years, so these are also additional users to consider. He wants to ensure that the snowmobile grant money will only be one third of the easement money due to multi-use trails involved. Discussion continued on how to make sure that this process is fair and equitable to the program.

**Mr. Yesney** in addition wanted to recognize Mr. Welch who worked on finding a clear interpretation of the 5013C eligibility, along with other research.

**Mr. Manson** said he's been working closely with Jacklin Blodgett, State Administrative Manager for PRD, and would like to thank her for her assistance as well as working on the discrepancy of funds from registrations; she is still working on how to get some of that back.

**Oil Sample Updates – Mr. Kuchnicki** said that the kits were purchased through Bader & Sons, \$11 each; they're still waiting on approximately 340 kits that have not been returned. Those unused kits are still good, and he'd like to continue with this process as well as going through Bader & Sons. He'd like to see someone on the DNR side help manage the information from the kits and results. There will be someone appointed to work with the field contacts. **Mr. Yauk** said they are looking for a new employee to work on the motorized program, and that position will be posted soon.

**Mr. Duke made a motion, seconded by Mr. Lucas to have Mr. Kuchnicki continue working on the oil sample process and working with the Department. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

**Research Request for Trail 8 – Mr. Welch** said this is regarding the Chatham to Gwinn section; he's working with one landowner in Chatham – they are interested in selling their whole parcel, so they're still pursuing funding. This section is only ¼ mile, but there's one person not cooperating. **Mr. Yesney** added that they also had a discussion with a local township official, which usually improves situations like these. This reroute has become a top priority.

**GPS Update for Groomers – Mr. Yesney** said that in Marquette County (pilot project) there's funding for three GPS units that have been installed in the past week. They will use that data on a chosen site which in turn will be used for the rest of the state. **Mr. Britton** said he talked to Tom Weston, Chief Technology Officer in Lansing yesterday, and a delay will be set in the units of 8 to 24 hours before that information is made public. The units will be both cellular and satellite, and will be compared as to which ultimately works better. Sponsors will eventually spend less time submitting reports due to automatic data transfer.

**Ms. Churill** said they are using a GPS tracker on their unit already that updates every five minutes, and it seems to be working well.

Question was asked if any savings will come back to the program that can be quantified.

**Mr. Yauk** said that all of this is a process of trying to save money, and definitely to save money, and put money back in the program.

Another question was asked about the GPS units now being tested and if there's an emergency button available? If a groomer comes upon an accident/emergency, it could be reported immediately.

**Two-Year Tractor Turnaround – Mr. Lucas** shared a handout with details of their final recommendation. He said they would like to see this part of the program move forward with a motion. After three or four years, tractors start having breakdowns, and to keep the equipment under warranty would be beneficial, by trading equipment back in. They would like to see approximately \$20,000 per trade-in from the program. Six could be traded in under this fiscal year. Also suggested was a review of the pilot program each year to gauge the success.

**Mr. Manson** asked if there's \$120,000 available and **Mr. Yauk** thinks there may be. **Mr. Reed** asked which tractors were chosen – this will be discussed by equipment sub-committee meeting in June. He also said that moving tractors to more appropriate locations that maybe don't use quite the hours would be smart, and added he would be willing to take a used/refurbished groomer. Discussion continued regarding challenges on trades.

**Mr. Leidlein** said they don't have the ability to transform traded in equipment into other uses – i.e. farm equipment; once a groomer always a groomer.

**Mr. Lucas** added that they're aware it's a trial period and lots to consider; however, if it does work there could be considerable funds saved to the program, and the dollars that they looked at saving should be more than worthwhile. Extended warranties were a waste of money.

**Motion was made by Mr. Lucas, seconded by Mr. Britton that the Department set aside \$120,000 for two-year turnaround tractor trade-ins to be reviewed by SAW equipment sub-committee and the Department in June. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

**Millersburg Bridge Update – Mr. Yauk** reported that it cost \$375,000 for engineering oversight, design and construction of a new bridge. Mark Mandenburg, Trails Program Technical Designer, PRD is working with the State Historic Preservation Office as well as a Federal review process. Several steps need to be taken, including Michigan Native American tribal review. He's expecting it to be bid out this year. There are only two bridges in the country that are this historic.

**Mr. Campo** commented about the historical committee discussion and what the point is of making the bridge historical if it is crumbling, unsafe and worth nothing but to be torn down. There are no choices other than to have its usefulness and safety and historic value reviewed. The reroute is causing lots of problems such as trespass and economic impacts as well.

**Carmeuse/Rogers City Trail Update – Mr. Yauk** explained that this spur is through the limestone quarry, but one of the concerns is that the railroad has to stay in place. The delays are not only changes in ownership, but numerous obstacles. Now they are waiting for the two parties to meet, but weather has been at issue recently. **Mr. Yauk** said that the new group does sound like they are ready to move it along.

**Signing – Mr. Katona** referenced his colorful handout with recommended signs to be added. The first sign suggested is a yellow ‘advisory’ sign giving Notice for Snowmobile Trail, and the dates of operation as such (Dec. 1 – March 31) to hopefully keep wheeled vehicles off the trails during official season. Adding ‘Groomed’ may be more specific, but needs to not be regulatory. Second sign is the sharp turn arrow.

**Motion was made by Mr. Kuchnicki, seconded by Mr. Britton to recommend to the Department that the Notice Groomed Snowmobile Trail sign be added to the sign manual and the intersection identification signs have the trail numbers added to them as a standard. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

These signs would be placed in problem areas generally, not every entrance to snowmobile trails. Discussion continued regarding confidence markers and the attentiveness (or lack of) for snowmobilers, along with placement of signs.

**Mr. Manson** updated that they are still trying to introduce legislation to legally ban wheeled-vehicles on snowmobile trails.

**Mr. Katona** continued with his presentation and explained the introduction of a One-Direction Large Arrow.

**Mr. Lucas made a motion, seconded by Mr. Duke to accept both recommended signs (on the right hand side of submitted examples) which are Sharp Turn Arrow (left and right), and One Direction Large Arrow (left and right). Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

**Yuma to Copemish Upgrade – Mr. Yauk** said there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) finally, and the trail request has been signed. Copemish to Mesick is hopefully going to be open next year with just a little bit of work to be done, and the bridge will take a little longer to finish.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Groomer Trade-Ins – Mr. Britton** said that this discussion is ongoing and explained the system of trade-ins and the challenges. Once it’s 100 percent, they’d like to see even-brand name trades happen – for example, a Tucker for a Tucker. They would like to come up with a position statement regarding trades. Also, the groomers that have not been traded in need to be dealt with.

**Mr. Leidlein** asked Mr. Britton if it’s internal movement of equipment within the DNR – **Mr. Britton** said yes, that would be internal.

**Mr. Beard** commented that he wasn’t aware that they had a choice to take a trade-in. They have to figure out how to move it after that. The trade-ins need to get a little more attention, in particular when another brand is turned in to another company’s brand. **Mr. Beard** said that MI Bid is another option to get rid of equipment, but **Mr. Manson** clarified that actually the tractor is owned by the club, not the Department. (MI Bid still might be an option). **Mr. Yesney** suggested finding out what equipment is still sitting out there and move forward to get rid of them.

**Snowmobile Trails and Logging on Corporate Land – Mr. Yesney** started by saying this may be more specific to the western UP, but after calls from loggers, corporate landowners in March and April are getting together to discuss snowmobiling. The issue is mountain sled/snowmobile trailer parking on logging roads which end up blocking the roadways. There was a particular reroute that a snowmobiler did not follow, and confronted a logger who was ‘on the trail’. They are suggesting having some sort of education/communication to snowmobilers that the loggers have priority. There is an upcoming meeting that Mr. Yesney will advise Mr. Manson about and hopefully resolve the issue.

**Mr. Manson** added that it’s difficult to reach those other various snow users to share safety messages; he only has total communication with MSA members. Perhaps Maia Turek, Recreational Programmer with PRD can help get the word out to some of those other user groups as well.

**Gogebic Range Trail Authority – Mr. Yesney** explained the history of the club which has had a lot of turnover and the grooming has been terrible. Two of the club’s members will be here tomorrow; Mr. Kakuk has been asked to meet with the group and make it a top priority to fix the situation. He is hoping that MSA could help support that club next season, to assist with signage and grooming. **Mr. Kakuk** added that the club consists of only five remaining members, and they do need help. They are over their heads trying to get the grooming done, and too much friction from inside the group and businesses in the area as well. **Mr. Yesney** did not think a ‘failure to perform’ is appropriate as the small group is really trying to make it work – they just need guidance.

**Green Trail Signs – Mr. Lucas** said that in Mesick they had old DNR signs that the club had removed the “Department” portion; however, Bruce Tower, Baldwin Fire Supervisor, recognized the signs and told the club that those were DNR signs and needed to be removed. Mr. Yauk will follow-up and get more details.

**Mr. Manson** said that he’d like to make sure that there’s an e-mail contact list to include both DNR staff and clubs to help support any clubs or areas that need assistance or help from adjacent clubs, or equipment assistance from other clubs. **Mr. Lucas** asked if the equipment committee could come up with a plan. Some form of widespread communication would be helpful for many reasons. Updated information on websites and Facebook can be also be used.

**Mr. DeClark** wanted it known that their field contact was making it difficult to move forward with their repairs. **Mr. Yesney** said that if anyone has issues with their field contact, the next person to go to is the local Recreation Specialist, then the Trail Coordinator.

**Bill Bradfield Request, Special Event Permit – Mr. Yesney** said he was approached about an exemption for trail permits for a ride that is for a fundraiser. The ride is from the Sault Ste. Marie across the UP. Many of the participants are from out-of-state. He is asking for SAW’s recommendation. **Mr. Manson** said that this is a great event, but he feels that they should buy their trail permits; they will be using groomed trails.

**Mr. Kuchnicki made a motion, seconded by Mr. Britton that the DNR not grant a special event permit for this request to exempt trail permits. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

**Possible SAW Vacancy – Mr. Manson** advised that as of the December meeting, Rich Filley has resigned from SAW. Mr. Yauk has not received an official letter yet so he will contact Mr. Filley so a replacement can be made. Anyone interested, Mr. Yauk will accept resumes for a replacement, which will hopefully be filled by June.

## **STAFF REPORTS**

**Parks and Recreation Division - Mr. Yauk** asked his staff for any reports. **Mr. Katona** said that he's been asked to do some audits/inspections on trails, looking at signage and appearance. Overall, he said the regulatory signs looked good but the improvements needed were on informational signs and cosmetics of the signs (needing replaced). He said he found several old program signs, and on winding trails the turn signs were overused. They sent a notice to the club and gave them a deadline to get those things fixed. Just looking for consistency where they've had complaints.

**Mr. Yesney** added that they are going to have a 'train the trainer' exercise to make sure there is consistency between all the areas.

**Mr. Manson** said he would like to see the hierarchy of staff for PRD and contacts.

**Ms. Churill** mentioned their trail inspection done by two different staff, and inconsistencies – hopefully that will be fixed when there's a consistent message.

**Law Enforcement Division – Cpl. Morey** said that at the December SAW meeting there was a request for a comparison of online classes versus in-class snowmobile safety: Online in 2014, there were 546, and 1,064 taking classroom courses. In 2015, there were 934 online, and 749 in a classroom. No one showed up at Gaylord DNR's decibel testing but the weather was warm.

Last, so far this season there have been 22 snowmobile fatalities.

**Mr. Yesney** asked if perhaps those fatalities should be addressed by the DNR. Should there be safety messages? **Mr. Manson** attributes that partially to anxious riders and a later season to the speed and/or alcohol use with inexperience or newer and faster sleds? The unknowns are how experienced the riders are. Trail conditions were also a possible factor. A group effort with DNR, MSA and SAW was suggested to address these fatalities - it's unacceptable. **Mr. Yauk** agreed that it would be a good idea.

**Mr. Volkens** added that some of the ones he's noticed were not on groomed trails.

**Mr. Brown** asked if there was a standard accident report, or are there several from different agencies? **Cpl. Morey** said that Conservation Officers and PRD have to do an internal form if it's on state land or a groomed trail, but they also need to do supplements.

**Cpl. Morey** said that there will be a press release coming out next week regarding the deteriorating trail conditions and safety precautions needed due to changing weather.

**Mr. Manson** said he noticed that Ms. Blodgett's estimation of lower trail permit sales this year was correct - there have been less sold so far. This could be of concern when asking for grant money.

**USDA Forest Service** - No representative in attendance from the Forest Service (FS), however; **Mr. Duke** said he was just in communication with them regarding the Doty Trestle Bridge. He advised the history of the bridge and that the FS had deemed it no longer safe for even snowmobiles. The FS did not move forward with a reroute and currently there is a seven-year temporary bridge there. Mr. Duke would like to know the status of the bridge because the FS is still short \$400,000 and realistically it will probably not come from that agency. He would also like to know where the Recreation Trail Proposal (RTP) is. In addition, there was a request for ORV funds as well. **Mr. Pacquin** will be involved in this issue.

**Mr. Gaberdiel** said he has not seen where the application is, but he will take a look and advise SAW. Discussion continued. **Mr. Yesney** asked Mr. Duke to find out what the FS is willing to contribute and also suggested they move the rating of the bridge back up to 50 ton for maintenance equipment.

## **PUBLIC APPEARANCE**

**Mr. Reed** wanted to address aging equipment - he pointed out how much money is put into older equipment and repairs and agrees that something needs to be done in getting the older equipment traded.

**Final comments by SAW:** **Mr. Kuchnicki** said that on the plus side the equipment is getting better.

**Mr. Lucas** said that they'll have two more meetings coming up and would like to encourage folks to come into the discussion; 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. Friday, and Saturday at 10:30 a.m.

**Mr. Manson** added that DNR and SAW will be having a round table at 12:30 tomorrow as well.

**Mr. Duke made a motion, seconded by Mr. Lucas at 2:50 p.m., that the SAW meeting be adjourned. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.**

## **NEXT MEETING**

Next meeting of the SAW will be June 21, 2016, Gaylord, Michigan.