

**JOINT SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY WORKGROUP (SAW)
AND OFF-ROAD ADVISORY GROUP (ORVAW)**

Meeting Minutes

December 14, 2016

Ralph A. McMullen Conference Center, Roscommon

SAW MEMBERS PRESENT

Lee Murray, Chairman

Jim Duke

Cindy Hammers

Joe Kuchnicki

Bill Manson

ORVAW MEMBERS PRESENT

Thomas Dunn, Chairman

Don Helsel

James Hunt

Tim Kobasic

Lewis Shuler

The following DNR staff was present: Jacklin Blodgett, Paul Gaberdiel, Jessica Holley, Rob Katona, Richard Kennedy, Dean Molnar, Todd Neiss, Ron Olson, Sue Sobieski, Amy Swainston, Scott Whitcomb and Paul Yauk.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The start of the meeting was delayed due to inclement weather. Meeting called to order by Chair Lee Murray at 10:35 a.m. Introductions of everyone present. Mr. Murray welcomed everyone and stated the purpose of the meeting.

Motion was made by Jim Duke, seconded by Thomas Dunn, to allow chairman to take items out of order on the agenda. Motion carried.

Mr. Murray made an addition to the agenda under Old Business by adding "Snowmobile/ ORV Conflict – Drummond Island", as described in the Dec 3, 2015, meeting minutes.

Jessica Holley would like to include the addition of a verbal report from Jackie Blodgett, DNR, and Paul Yauk, DNR.

Revised agenda accepted unanimously.

Motion made by Tim Kobasic, seconded by Jim Duke, to amend the minutes of the December 3, 2015 joint meeting to mention that Pat Brower of the ORVAW was not present at the meeting. Motion carried.

Ron Olson, Chief, Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) addressed the group and thanked everyone for coming. Goal is to strive to provide a world-class system of trail experiences for multiple users and figure out how we can be efficient and do better at what we are doing through working together. Opening of forest roads next year will bring challenges. Snowmobile leveled off – creating challenges with finances. ORV riding season has increased. There are new technologies and equipment coming out constantly, and we need to address them. ORV riding longer season. Change is about. Everybody wants more. Find ways to be sustainable. Sustain the system. Michigan touted as a trail state. We need to deliver a good product.

Assistant Chief Dean Molnar, LED, addressed the meeting. He gave an overview of how LED is structured and how they will interact with PRD and trail users. Trail enforcement is concentrated on motorized trail systems. He shared statistics of arrests, warnings, and contacts made by LED staff. Never will be enough money to do all the enforcement everyone wants. Enforcement involves Safety first, preserving the natural resources second, and the rest falls after that. There are 9 LED Districts throughout the State. Call the Report All Poaching (RAP) hotline if you encounter violations while out on the trails. RAP # 800-292-7800.

Questions were asked and answered: Assistant Chief Molnar stated that the goal is two officers per county average. He will provide details on dates and a schedule for this winter's sound testing to Bill Manson. When asked why snowmobilers get a lot more contact with law enforcement than ORV'ers, he responded that it is a combination of things, one being there are more organized patrols in the snow areas, and two, ORV patrols are not as frequent because they are not as concentrated as snowmobile use. There are currently no breakdown by violation available. A lot of warnings are given instead of tickets to educate people.

NEW BUSINESS:

Act 288 of 2016 – Scott Whitcomb gave presentation about Public Act 288 of 2016. He explained the Pigeon River State Forest vehicle access plan. Some of those principles will help apply to Public Act 288. There will be more consistency between UP and LP. This Act requires that a state forest road inventory be taken. Need to clean up inventory information and make it accurate. Building a road classification system is necessary to complete the inventory. This law only affects state land and not federal land. Timeline for compliance is Northern Lower Peninsula due by 12/31/2017, Upper Peninsula and Southern Lower Peninsula due by 12/31/2018. Maps and mileages will be posted by region as project is completed. Exception to rules need to be developed. Legally what is required, who has jurisdiction, etc.

It will be necessary to meet with recreation groups, consult with tribes required involving treaties, public input meetings, land use orders to give LED authority to enforce, maps, etc. Social media, press releases, etc.

Discussion held on format for the new maps displaying open state forest roads. Pros and cons discussed about modeling them after the USFS maps. Please contact Jessica Holley with your ideas and suggestions.

Questions were asked and answered: Mr. Whitcomb said the dividing line for the regions will follow the Forest Resource Division (FRD) Eastern and Western District Lower Peninsula dividing lines. More interactive engagement will come; this is new so it will take time.

Paul Yauk introduced the DNR-PRD Recreation Specialists Todd Neiss, Paul Gaberdiel, Amy Swainston, and Rob Katona. He also introduced Richard Kennedy the DNR-PRD motorized grant specialist and Jacklin Blodgett, PRD Chief of Administrative Services.

Jacklin Blodgett gave a summary of ORV and SNOW revenue and expenditures.

Jessica Holley, the motorized trails specialist addressed the group. She displayed a map showing the close proximity of SNOW and ORV clubs and encouraged them to see if they can join forces. Some have already joined forces where distance makes it appropriate. A statement was read from Mr. Chavis whose snowmobile club joined an ORV club in the UP and said it is going very well. She also showed S.O.R.V.A. Alger County Facebook page which shows clubs working together.

Lee Murray mentioned multiuse ORVAW and SAW brushing and signing on the shared trails. Lake County is an example of heavily used trails. Lake County has a group that is both SNOW and ORV sponsor.

Bill Manson: Discussed need for creating consistency with signage. ORV signs are going to carsonite. Don't need to change stop and stop ahead signs. Collaborate with the other clubs in your area if not the same club.

Trail inspections and how to do that in the future will be determined. Limited department staff to inspect trails. Sharing equipment might be a cost saving option when clubs combine. Equipment prototyping is being constructed to be used for attachments to use as a drag in the summertime. Looking at more versatile equipment.

Easements: Dollars are available for easements. Working towards permanent right in land instead of an annual agreement so that trails that go through private property can be used year-round. Need these so that we don't lose trails. Want to connect large tracks of public land through private land.

Bill Manson asked if easements through private lands are eligible to be paid for by trust fund money. Ron Olson said applications to the trust fund score points. The more multiple pursuits, more points. Department would have to apply. Application deadline is April 1st. Follow up on that. Should look into that for permanent easement rights for program.

Work through Jessica and work on a proposal for April 1st. Paul Yauk will get back with Bill Manson on it.

Discussion was held regarding incoming new legislators and how it is important to show them the importance of motorized trails in the recreation community. A survey is being formulated to motorized trail users. It is going through marketing to get it out to existing users and new users. Jessica would like feedback on marketing effort.

Paul Hammers discussed shared trails on Drummond Island. Routes can operate all year. Jeeps and snowmobiles using the trails at the same time creates a safety factor. It should be a courtesy for Jeeps to avoid groomed trails. Feels that ORV funds should be available to repair the trails before snowmobile season.

Tim Kobasic suggested adding signage that "Dec. 1 – March 31 this is a groomed trail" in order to raise awareness. Some of these have been implemented for the clubs to use at their discretion. Restricted Route signs have been changed to show side-by-side icon, not Jeep, and will specify less than 65".

Cindy Hammers questioned if there will be restoration dollars to fix the trails when Jeeps damage them. Drummond Island ORV club can apply for restoration funds on public lands. Keep advised on ORV/Jeep use on dual use trails.

Lee Murray wanted to know if designation of roads are as open to ORVs, will ORV funds be available for repair and maintenance. If it is just a forest road open to ORVs and not a designated trail, no ORV funds currently available for repairs.

Donald Helsel is concerned that the discussions and comments today might fall off the table. Lee Murray said that he always cross-checks the last meeting minutes to make sure that anything that was discussed is on the next meeting agenda.

Lewis Shuler: There is a week-long ORV conference coming to Michigan in February 2017.

Other Upcoming Events:

- March 2, 2017 SAW Meeting in conjunction with Groomer Workshop in Sault Ste. Marie
- January 2017 MPARKS Trail Summit in Grand Rapids

Next Joint SAW/ORVAW meeting – it was suggested for April

Bill Manson suggested forming a subcommittee to work on how to share equipment and brushing.

Joint SAW and ORVAW Equipment Subcommittee was appointed by each committee chair.

ORVAW Appointees: Donald Helsel and Lewis Shuler

SAW Appointees: Bill Manson and Joe Kuchnicki

Chairman for the committee: Bill Manson

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Stu Volkert of the Les Cheneaux SnowClub and EUP Council. Discussed multipurpose trails in their area. There is rutting on multi-use trails. How do they fix them in a timely manner prior to snowmobile grooming? Suggested shutting down trails late November but with deer season that isn't an appropriate option. Lee Murray asked how long it would take to repair the trails. Stu said worst case scenario, in a week. Can there be a Director's Order to get the trails fixed before snow grooming? Paul Yauk suggested grooming could be done before deer season. Lee Murray suggested letting newly formed committee discuss this.

Tim Kobasic said that fall trail maintenance would be best time to bring berm down to level ground and drag. Do it before it is frozen. Can snowmobile equipment be inventoried and value established then the ORV community buy into it so they have use of the equipment that is compatible during other times of year.

Bill Manson asked Richard Kennedy if ORV maintenance equipment dollars are available for weekly grooming. Richard responded that the program standard is \$25,000 for grading for the season. He doesn't know how many times they are actually graded. DNR staff rent motor grader for one month in some areas of the state to go in and pull back berms.

Greg DeWitt said that the Sault Club donated a drag system. Smithers brothers donated a tractor and they drag trails after April, again in July, and once in the fall. This has worked well. Different trails are maintained by various staff. DNR, volunteer, clubs, USFS, etc.

When and how often are the trails REQUIRED to be groomed? Snowmobile trails #4 and #9 aren't graded at all. Greg Yager said that is a connector and no grant was applied for or received.

Trail maintenance grant money is different than grooming. Just because you have money to brush and sign, doesn't mean the trail will be graded.

Gary Blazek: Asked about leasing groomers. Can the manufacturers lease tractors instead of purchasing them? Snowmobile program has looked extensively into leasing, however, the 4 month window of the snowmobile season doesn't make it feasible. If ORV and SNOW end up coordinating, then leasing might become a viable option.

Ron Corbett, MSA Past President: Discussed statistics between the registrations of SNOW and ORV. Are permits being sold for all ORV's and SNOW. The people who have these registered and where are they riding? He has seen 5 sledders pull into a gas station with only 2 having permits. People who don't ride trails don't always buy trail permits. Some would rather pay fine if caught without a permit instead of buying it ahead. Rentals are becoming more and more popular. Rentals put 5 times the amount of miles on than average rider, for the same price sticker. Suggested a step formula where people who rent snowmobile, there should be more money coming in from that.

Paul Mulder: Quite disappointed that we didn't have everything in order on shared routes before this meeting. Cost of signs that will be put in this spring. Discussed sign manual requirements for signs.

Emil Rousseau: Said they have lots of questions but no answers. Discussed the width of ORV's is measured at the widest point. In this agenda, where are the answers going to be found? Jessica said that the meeting minutes will be posted. Any progress made on these questions will be put on the website with updates. As progress is made, Jessica will be contacting the clubs more often.

Ron Olson: Don't wait; be proactive and allow the process to work instead of waiting for conflicts. Spend lots of time working with finance to work out how it will happen. Let us know what you want to know so that we can provide information that you need.

Richard Kennedy: Good news is that 6 machines will be purchased. He doesn't have the rate for this year yet.

Joe Kuchnicki. Asked how much equipment does ORV side own. Lewis Shuler said that CCC owns all of equipment – different for clubs and chapters all across the state.

Meeting adjourned.