

Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System Oversight Committee Meeting
(formerly the 70-Mile Trail Project)

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

6 PM

Quadna Mountain Resort, Hill City, MN

In Attendance: Frank Turnock*, Brian Napstad*, Bob Marcum*, Robin Baker*, Katie Fernholz**, Len Hardy*, Warren Spawn*, Mark Jacobs*, Maynard Ahonen*, Harlan Kingsley*, Tom Gustin*, Jon Korpi*, Andrew Brown*, Ross Wagner*, Rusty Eichorn*, Larry Moses, Joe Majerus, Elaine LeVoir, Ken LeVoir, Jack Halverson, John Welle, Roger Olson, Rita Butterfield, Gilbert Eigsberg, Rick Barta, Terry Snyder, Sam Johnson, Jerry Pawlak, Michael Bergmann, Lori Bergmann, Darrel Palmer, Andy Palmer, Dave Christy, John Drahota, Roger Bently

* = *Committee Member* **=*project coordinator*

AGENDA

6:05 PM – Call to Order

Approval of Meeting Agenda (Motion by R. Wagner, Second by L. Hardy, Approved)

Approval of 2/9/09 Meeting Minutes (Motion by F. Turnock, Second by W. Spawn, Approved)

Review of Old Business

- The trail system logo was modified as discussed at the last meeting and circulated via email to the oversight committee for review and approval. A majority of committee members responded and approved the logo. The logo will be used in the development of signs and maps. Motion to post the logo at the project website (Motion by W. Spawn, Second by A. Brown, Approved).

Discussion of Potential Use of County Road Right-of-Ways (John Welle, Aitkin County Engineer; Terry Snyder, Itasca County Sheriff's Office; John Drahota, Aitkin County Sheriff's Office; and Dave Christy, Itasca County Engineer in attendance)

The oversight committee invited the participation of the sheriff's offices and county engineers at this meeting to help improve the committee's understanding of the concerns and alternative approaches that should be considered regarding the potential use of county road right-of-ways to create trailhead connections or "trail corridor connections." The committee wanted to have a general discussion before going any further with developing trail routes or making a proposal to the counties. Current statute already allows for riders to use the road surface or right-of-way when operation in the ditch is deemed impossible and unsafe and to avoid obstacles. The committee also recognizes that use of the right-of-way is not a first choice. It was noted during the discussion that other counties have passed resolutions to allow ATV use on road surfaces and in the right-of-way of roads. One downside of using an ordinance or resolution is that the enforcement falls to the local sheriff's office. Local game wardens do not have jurisdiction to enforce an ordinance. Also, when an ordinance is used

standard driving regulations apply, meaning that anyone operating an ATV in the right-of-way would need to have a drivers license. Alternatively, there are provisions within the state statute to allow local road authorities (e.g., counties) to utilize a permitting process to identify and designated trail corridor connections. The benefits of this approach include the ability for game wardens to enforce the permits, and children accompanied by adults can legally ride on designated and permitted grant-in-aid trail corridors. A challenge associated with the permit approach is developing a credible and fair application and approval process. Considerations within this process include maximum length of corridor connections, guidelines for where they are allowed or most appropriate, permit start-and-end dates, speed limits, and other factors. Itasca County has initiated a permit process to allow for the use of roads to connect trails as a “corridor ATV trail” with signage and posted speed limits. The proposed criteria and permit process has been developed with input from a committee that includes the Land Department, County Engineer, Sheriff, and ATV clubs. The proposed permit process requires an application to be submitted by a recognized club, an initial review by the Land Department, and a second review by the Engineer. The corridors should be less than 5 miles in length, with a 20 mph speed limit, and corridors must connect recognized grant-in-aid trails. The focus on connecting grant-in-aid trails provides potential access to maintenance funds for the corridors and grant-in-aid trails are covered through the state’s liability insurance. Approved permits are issued to the Land Department, which manages the grant-in-aid trails. Itasca County has adopted an ATV Ordinance allowing licensed operators to travel a portion of several county roads. The experience in Itasca County has been positive with very few complaints or issues reported. The Ordinance has been extended for an additional year. Benefits of the permit process include allowing case-by-case decision making and flexibility for the county to develop appropriate criteria, review and revoking processes. A two-year permit length is being considered to correspond with the review cycle of grant-in-aid trails. It was noted in the discussion that although the permitting approach appears to offer a good approach for exploring trail connections, there are still areas where allowing operation in right-of-ways should not be allowed due to safety issues and other concerns. It is also important that any permitted routes be clearly identify and well marked with signs to inform riders as well as to allow for effective enforcement. Additionally, it will be important to not allow for too widespread of use of the permitting process to the extent that it is difficult to enforce or resulting trail connections provide only limited public benefit.

The final decision about whether or not to utilize an ordinance or permit process will be informed by the proposed trail alignments and any identified needs to explore potential corridor connections where the environmental and safety impacts could be minimized or avoided by using the right-of-way. The Phase II routes in Aitkin County include areas along County Road 29 where the ditches are wet, and there may be about four miles along Itasca County Roads needed to connect routes in Itasca County. The Land Departments and DNR will look at the potential needs and alternatives and then work with the county engineers, sheriff departments and others to identify the best approach. To move forward, it was suggested that Aitkin County consider developing a committee similar to the permit development group in Itasca County and that the experiences in Itasca County be used to inform any potential permitting process development in Aitkin County.

Construction Planning/Legislative Sub-Committee Update/Phase II Update

- The committee is sticking with a June 1st deadline for proposed alignments for Phase II routes. Phase II includes 5 potential segments (3 in Aitkin County and 2 in Itasca County)
- Phase I routes have received grant-in-aid recognition and associated funding for maintenance, including Solana Forest Trail, Moose River Connector and Lawler North and South Loops.
- Funding for the Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System was included within the bonding bill and was not one of the items vetoed. The committee is very appreciative of the support of local legislators, including Sen Saxhuag and Rep. Solberg and others. Mitch Berggren with Saxhaug's office has been very helpful with supporting the goals of the project. Bonding dollars need to be matched by local dollars and funds can be used for construction as well as acquisition, which could help identify new alignment opportunities.
- The project has also submitted an application for a federal trail grant that would help support continued work and Phase II development. If received, these funds will also provide matching dollars for the Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program award that has been made to the Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System. These grant requests include the UPM Blandin Trail.
- The committee discussed MPCA's new requirements, effective as of Feb. 1, 2010, for the development of pollution prevention plans and training for contractors regarding stormwater management. The training events to meet these requirements are mostly done or closed to additional registration. Minimum fines for violations are \$3,500. It is important to increase awareness of these new regulations with contractors and to request that additional trainings be held. The DNR indicated there are plans to offer the training in early-April in Grand Rapids specifically for DNR staff and the counties to participate in.

Signs Subcommittee Update

The signs subcommittee had a meeting and developed criteria for selecting materials for the signs and discussed opportunities to work with local sign makers and local businesses. The committee favors the use of a pressed-board sign that has a ten-year guarantee and a quoted price of \$291 for a 2'x3' trailhead kiosk style sign. The kiosks will be constructed with locally harvested responsible wood products from local companies. The next tasks for the sign committee include developing an inventory of the total number of trailhead and intersection map signs that will be needed and design of the trailhead signs and kiosks. The directional and trail route signs will follow DNR grant-in-aid rules. Samples of trail route signs can be brought to a future meeting. The Polaris and Yamaha grants can be used for sign and map development and can be matched by bonding dollars. Motion to authorize up to \$2,000 for the sign subcommittee to move forward with trailhead sign for trail opening (Motion W. Spawn, Second L. Hardy, Approved).

Phase I Status

- Planning for Grand Opening Events for Phase I Routes: Several options were discussed for potential grand opening events for the Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System, including having a single event, multiple events in multiple locations, planning an event in conjunction with a club event, and holding the event on a weekend or weekday. The pros and cons of the various approaches include the ability to attract media, involving the legislators who have been supportive of the project, and being able to keep the event manageable. The committee will work to coordinate schedules with legislative staff and will explore the possibility of a weekday event in late-June or early-July and potentially at a trailhead location in Lawler. The committee will plan to select a date for the event and develop more details at the next meeting.

Schedule Next Committee Meeting:

The next meeting will be Tuesday, May 4th at 6pm at Long Lake Conservation Center.

Agenda for the Next Meeting to Include:

- Selection of date for Grand Opening Events for Phase I Routes
- Development of Signs
- Printing of Phase I Maps

Public Comments

F. Turnock: We should get maps printed soon and the clubs are getting requests for maps.

B. Napstad: We could do a printing run in May in time for the opening event this summer and this should be an agenda item at the next meeting.

K. LeVoir: The maps should include extending trails across county borders so that the connections are clear to riders, like for Moose River.

R. Butterfield: Our club is getting email messages from people outside of Minnesota that are interested in the trails and services in the area. We could use additional maps to send to these people.

K. Fernholz: There are planning maps for each route available at the project website (<http://www.northwoodstrail.net>)

8:53 PM Adjourn (Motion by L. Hardy, Second by H. Kingsley, Approved)

For directions to the meeting location, call: (218) 768-4653 or visit <http://www.llcc.org>