

70-Mile Trail Oversight Committee Meeting

Tuesday, April 29th 2008

6 PM

Woodland Bank, Hill City, MN

MINUTES

In Attendance: Robert Marcum*, Steve Aysta*, Frank Turnock*, Mark Jacobs*, Brian Napstad*, Len Hardy*, Galen Tveit*, Robin Baker*, Jon Korpi*, T.J. Gustin*, Harlan Kingsley*, Maynard Ahonen*, Warren Spawn*, Kim Risen*, Jeff Koehn, Larry Moses, Russell Heittola, Larry Hammill, Doug Hougt, Terry Mejdrich, David Lange, Mary Broten, Mark Fossum, Jerry McKnight, Ron Smith, Gilbert Eigsbey, Steve Saari, Glenn Kingsley, Florian Blaszak, Katie Fernholz**, Kim Chapman**

* = Committee Member ** - project coordinator

6:07 PM – Call to Order

Approval of 2/20/2008 Meeting Minutes

(Addition of Kim Risen to list of committee members in attendance. Motion by L. Hardy, Second R. Baker, Approved)

Approval of Meeting Agenda

(Addition of New Business regarding Aitkin County Rec Forester Position and addition of EAW preparation contract. Motion by L. Hardy, Second W. Spawn, Approved)

Review of Old Business

Review of Actions & Decisions from previous meeting

- Development of Phase I EAW
- Development of work teams for Phase II alignments

Outcome of Discussion: Project Coordinator reviewed the results of previous meetings, including the decision to take a phased approach to the project and to proceed with development of the Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for the four Phase I trail segments. To advance the Phase II trail segments, local work teams have been meeting. The three Phase II trails include the Big Sandy-Palisade segment, Swatara to Hill City, and a trail segment from Warba to the Rabey Line Trail. The Big Sandy-Palisade trail faces challenges at both ends, including a new landowner in the Palisade area who needs to be engaged in the project and a need to retarget how the trail is linked near the lake and identify parking areas. The local group working on the Sandy-Palisade trail includes Brian Napstad, Ron Smith, T.J. Gustin, Kim Risen, and local residents, business owners and landowners. The group will contact the new landowner and aim to address the Palisade connection first. The Swatara-Hill City trail also faces challenges. Harlan Kingsley and other folks from Hill City are working on it and know there are

wetlands that will need to be avoided. The group is waiting for better weather and a chance to walk around and look at options. The Aitkin County Land Department and the DNR met with folks from the Chippewa National Forest to look at trail routes in northwestern Aitkin County that could link the Soo Line trail and the proposed UPM trail. The Chippewa National Forest identified some alternative routes that would utilize existing roads in the Remer area. The next step is to meet with the City of Remer. The Cass County Land Department will be included in the discussions. Robin Baker noted that people in the Deer River area are interested in trails that link to Remer and the north Chippewa State Forest area.

Discussion and New Business

- Red Top Trail Survey Report (Dovetail)

Outcome of Discussion: A final report was provided regarding the results of the survey developed to gather noise disturbance data associated with an existing trail (Red Top). The survey was developed to inform the impact analysis of the 70-Mile trail project. In mid-January, 161 surveys were mailed to property owners within 3 miles of the Red Top Loop Trail. The deadline for returning surveys was February 4th. The overall survey response rate was 58%. Responses were coded with regard to distance from the trail. Zone A responses were for properties located within 1 mile, Zone B for 1-2 mile distances, and Zone C for 2 to 3 miles. The response rate was greater than 57% for all three zones. The surveys recorded some household information and general property data. The survey questions focused on gathering information about experiences with noise associated with owning property located within 3 miles of the Red Top Trail. Nearly all respondents (94%) indicated they were familiar with the Red Top Trail and more than 70% use the trail for ATV riding or other activities. Overall, 53% indicated “no noise impacts” from living near the Red Top trail – including 27% of the responses from Zone A, 41% from Zone B, and 73% from Zone C. Of the 47% that reported some impacts from noise, 80% of these responses reported the noise as either “tolerable” or “very tolerable”, including 88% of the people reporting some noise impact from Zone A, 77% from Zone B, and 82% from Zone C. Survey results also indicated that noise impacts are most likely to occur during the summer, on the weekends, in the afternoon, and for a perceived time period of 30 minutes or less. (Motion to post the survey report at the project website. F. Turnock, Second L. Hardy, Approved)

- Quarterly Progress Report (Dovetail)

Outcome of Discussion: Copies of the next Quarterly Progress Report for the project were provided. The report summarizes events from January – March 2008, including the development of the summary of stakeholder comments and the release of the Phase I maps. On April 28th the report was mailed to approximately 184 business owners, elected officials, and other stakeholders in Aitkin and Itasca Counties. The report will also be posted at the project website and emailed to the full project contact list.

- New Aitkin County Recreation Forester Position Update

Outcome of Discussion: On May 6th, Joe Majerus will be starting as the new Aitkin County Recreation Forester. The position will include responsibilities related to the 70-Mile Trail Project, countywide recreation trail plan, and will address motorized and non-

motorized recreation in the county.

Update on EAW process and timing

- report from County Land Depts and AES

Outcome of Discussion: A preliminary Natural Heritage review of the Phase I trail segments was completed to help identify potential ecological concerns. The response indicated the greatest concern with the Solana Loop due to wetland concentrations and populations of the four-toed salamander, a special concern species. The trail alignment could be moved to address this concern. The Solana Loop could be included in Phase II depending on what the DNR decides to do. The Lawler Loop and Moose River Connection did not raise any Natural Heritage concerns. The Lawler Loop is within a large forest block and could be moved to reduce impacts. There were concerns raised about earthworm movement associated with construction of the trail segment in Itasca County. Recommendations to address this concern include using granular fill and avoiding the movement of infested dirt. The committee members from Itasca County are looking at moving the trail further east of Hay Creek to use an old roadbed and reduce impacts. There is also interest from Ball Bluff Township in identifying a trail route from Warba to Jacobson.

- EAW Preparation Contract

Outcome of Discussion: The contract with the DNR identifies funding to assist with the preparation of the EAW. Motion for the committee to authorize the Aitkin County Land Commissioner to execute a contract or contract addendum within the grant cost parameters for preparation of the EAW to address Phase I and Phase II of the project. (Motion made by W. Spawn, Second R. Baker, Carried)

Discussion of Monitoring and Enforcement Planning process

Outcome of Discussion: Copies of the drafted monitoring and enforcement plan were provided to the committee. The plan addresses trail conditions, trail management, environmental monitoring and enforcement. Trail ambassador training has been completed. The full name for trail ambassadors is “OHV Safety and Conservation Volunteer” and they have no enforcement authority. The volunteers are trained in GPS to record waypoints, invasive species, and other topics outlined in the statute. The committee may want to put signs at trailheads or other locations with information about invasive species and how to prevent their spread. The USDA Forest Service is currently working on trail signage guidelines. The DNR also has signage guidance and Mary Broten could present on this information at a future committee meeting. Comments or questions about the plan can be directed to Beth Jacqmain with the Aitkin County Land Department. Motion to post draft plan at website without pictures, except for signage examples. (Motion made by R. Baker, Second L. Hardy, Carried).

Discussion of Phase II Work teams

Outcome of Discussion: See previous discussions under Old Business.

Public Comments

Mark Jacobs: Made presentation about the 70-Mile Trail Project at ATVAM annual meeting and there was support for the project, project goals, and the approach that is being used. Mark will be presenting about the project at a forestry meeting in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in June.

Scooter: Ball Bluff Township and the Jacobson sub-committee want to help. There are ten of us and we've been working with Len. Need more education about what we can and can't do. The Rabey Line deadends at Jacobson and would like to go through to Warba. Trail has to go through or people will use roads to make the trip anyway.

Kim Risen: The trail needs to stay west of Hwy 65 to avoid rare wetland plants and sensitive species.

Frank Turnock: At 4 pm on May 16th there will be a ride on the Turnock Loop to officially open it. Everyone is welcome. It is about a 13 mile ride and illustrates public access being provided on private land.

Kim Risen: Judy Cain from the Mille Lacs Tourism Council should be informed about the project. Tourism partners should be identified and we should discuss naming the trail system.

Larry Moses: Crow Wing County is interested in connecting with the project and thinks the committee has done a good job with the trails. The Welcome Center along Hwy 371 gets 20-31 inquiries per day during the summer from people looking for ATV trails.

Brian Napstad: The Joint Inter-Governmental Meeting with cities, school districts and others will include information about the trails and discuss issues impacting tourism.

Len Hardy: The safety training for youth emphasizes the need to look at the website and get information about trail guidelines and rules. 11,000 kids have been certified since 2003.

Jeff Koehn: Len Hardy was recently named Minnesota Youth ATV Safety Instructor of the year.

Next Committee Meeting: Monday, June 16th at 6pm at the Long Lake Conservation Center (*For directions to the LLCC, call 218-768-4653 or visit: <http://www.llcc.org/roadmap.html>*)

8:05 PM Adjourn