

7/27/10

CWC Comp Rec Plan Advisory Group Meeting

Tuesday, July 27th at 6pm in Meeting Room 2 of the Land Services Building
(322 Laurel Street, Brainerd, MN 56401)

In attendance: Katie Fernholz**, Mary Claire Ryan*, Paul Thiede*, Russell Heittola*, Rosemary Franzen*, Alan Steiff*, Larry Moses*, Shawn Roberts*, Bob Manning*, Gail Brecht*, Brett Hardy*, Peter Nelson, Monte Miller, Roger Landers, Tom Whitehead*, Patrick Lann, Jack Olson, William Durham, John Reynolds, Clement Roden, Mark Stadem, Dave Clute, Jake Huebsch, Jon Henke, Duane Smedsrud, Jack McAllister

* - advisory group member, ** - project coordinator, *** - Land Services Department staff

Agenda

Welcome/Overview

Presentation of Non-motorized winter trails

Brainstorming ground rules

Brainstorming of present and missing for non-motorized winter trails

Summary of outcomes/next steps, public comment

Next meeting – August 25th: Motorized summer trails

Review of 6/29/10 meeting notes – correction on top of page 4 regarding dirt bike trails (incorrectly referred to as mtn bike trails)

Update on HCVF Assessment: Results of assessment available for public review. Comment period closes October 1, 2010. HCVF Assessment can be downloaded at:

<http://dovetailinc.org/files/CWCHCVFAssessmentDraft7210sm.pdf>

News release about HCVF comment period:

<http://dovetailinc.org/content/crow-wing-county-invites-public-input-forest-assessment>

Presentation made by Kirk Titus, Crow Wing County Land Services Department regarding non-motorized winter trails. Presentation posted at:

<http://dovetailinc.org/files/CWC72710Presentationsm.pdf>

Brainstorming:

Ground Rules for the Advisory Group

- 1 person speaks at a time
- All share ideas, everyone participates
- Questions welcome for clarification
- No one may criticize another
- Ideas may be reviewed for themes
- Feelings may be expressed
- Discussions are about positions not personalities
- Listen respectfully and sincerely – try to understand others

Ground Rules for Facilitator

- Make participants comfortable
- Share/enforce ground rules
- Communicate with each participant
- Act neutral
- Stay positive
- Allow thinking time
- Avoid lengthy comments, verbal rewards, leading or loaded questions, or know-it-all tone

What is Present that supports Winter Non-motorized Trails

(e.g., what are you glad the county already has?)

(includes comments from the Advisory Group and public input)

- 1,680 acres non-motorized winter trails (at least 22 miles of trails)
- Dog sled race at Crosslake
- Possible expansion of cross country ski trails by Crosslake
- 1 ski club in Crow Wing County (Nordic Ski Club) with 200 members
- Well-designed cross-country ski trails – best in the state
- 4 trail systems (designated trails) for cross country skiing
- 2 ski trail systems on public lands (Larson Lake, Wolf Lake)
- Not looking for more trails
- Cass County grooms 6-8 cross country ski trails
- County does maintenance for Wolf Lake trails
- Brainerd Nordic Ski Club does maintenance and grooming for Northland Arboretum and French Rapids
- Funding from Ski pass funds (grant-in-aid money) to support maintenance and grooming
- French Rapids, Arboretum and Larson Lake trails are grant-in-aid funded
- 65% reimbursement for trail maintenance
- Grant-in-Aid (GIA) and ski license (ski pass) program started in 1984
- Making ends meet with whatever funds are available
- Club does brush-hog work, erosion repair, grooming, etc.
- Wolf Lake application for Grant-in-Aid funding includes plans for necessary crossing to link trail to Hwy 210 parking lot.
- Large land base for other non-motorized winter opportunities
- Public land available to provide cross-country ski trails
- Distributed trails on 103,000 acres – how many miles total?
- Ski-trail maps
- 50+ miles hunter/hiking trails
- Deep snow is okay for snowshoeing
- Wolf and Larson are used for hiking and biking in the summer
- New approach to snowshoeing requires packed trail
- State of the art grooming equipment
- Ski pass is \$20/year (\$100 fine when caught on grant-in-aid trail without a ski pass)
- Legislative process to raise ski pass fee (was recently raised \$5)
- Independent mindset of skiers
- Lighted trails at Arboretum
- Access to lakes/rivers (e.g. portage trail, dogsled in winter, and connect lakes)
- Shelters, maps, good publicity (Wolf, Larson – heavily used by non-year round residents)
- Trails out there that are not designated
- Skiing and dog sledding on groomed snowmobile trails can create user conflicts
- Other ski trails – Forestview (5 km), Grandview (groomed on golf course), Craguns, Kavanaughs (Cass County), Wildlife Mgmt Area
- Crosslake used to have county groomed/maintained trails (3 miles) (links to 600-800 acres county land)
- County has 4X4 trucks, trailers, plow for parking lots, equipment
- Sufficient dollars for winter trails?
- Budget for grooming twice per week? 90% reimbursement for grooming

- Good trail maps and signage at Larson and Wolf
- Snowmobile clubs utilize funds from pull tabs
- 3 groomed trails offer good variety of terrain and diversity of landscape
- Bryan Pike does a good job of grooming trails, but this isn't his job
- Ski pass money (state pot/application process)
- Flat funding level/pass sales
- Fees on GIA trails, could have fees on county trails
- First year of sign-ins on Wolf/Larson '09 (est. 1/3 sign in – 70/week on each trail signed in)
- Would like to see changes in dispersing grant-in-aid funds
- Differences between snowmobile gas tax funding source
- Could have tax on sales of ski equipment
- How many ski-passes sold per year?
- Ample law enforcement to cover trails? No need for enforcement?
- People aren't buying passes and no one is checking them
- Conservation Officer (CO) at Larson, but not at Wolf because not GIA
- CO has no jurisdiction on non-GIA trails
- Metro counties backed out of GIA therefore program lost revenues
- Metro counties formed 3 River System with their own fee
- Elm Creek Park – make snow and have own fee system
- Annual metro pass now; therefore, don't buy state ski pass
- Larson Lake: “Died and gone to heaven” – top notch place to ski, groomed, hills, flats, terrain – natural ski area, well-designed
- County could charge at Wolf Lake (creates barriers to use, admin costs)
- Good economic potential for winter non-motorized
- Metro ski club visits county each year
- Could drop GIA status and adopt fee system
- Visitors from metro area use trails
- GIA trail permit and license fees for snowmobiles
- 3 trails on national Skinny Ski website (with maps – marketing efforts – includes info. about grooming) <http://skinnyski.com/>
- County website has trail reports – skiers use this http://www.co.crow-wing.mn.us/land/ski_trails_and_conditions.html
- Chamber of Commerce links to county website – info to plan trips <http://www.explorebrainerdlakes.com/visit/winter.html>
- How many non-avid skiers use trails – do they know about CWC system?
- Potential users don't know about what is available (marketing to avid skiers not casual skiers)
- Diverse trail users
- Brainerd is a winter rec. destination
- Ask trail users where they are from – N.D., Moorhead, etc.
- Frequent visitors to area investigate trail opportunities
- Existing interest in pursuing Recreation Trails for some land that is for sale by Potlatch directly east of the City Owned Waste Treatment Ponds in Pequot Lakes (possible equestrian trails/horse park ideas)
- Good trail system; good equipment

What is Missing to support Winter Non-motorized Trails

(e.g., what do you wish the county had?)

(includes comments from the Advisory Group and public input)

- Consistent grooming during ski season
- Do we have enough skiers to fund CWC trails?
- Need study of usage
- Don't know how many people are using trails (don't track usage)
- Monitor ski-pass use at trailheads (enforcement)
- Accurate/consistent information about trail length and distances?
- Volunteer or contractor to provide grooming services on county maintained trails
- Money/budget for grooming and maintenance
- Lacking funds for maintenance
- CWC needs to budget and provide man power to groom county grant-in-aid ski trails
- Need county employees trained in the art of ski trail grooming
- Plowed out trailhead parking lots
- Check with Cass County about their trails
- Better way of tracking trail users and who is coming (number from CWC area, influx, economic impact, number from outside, lodging/restaurant impacts)
- Marketing at county website – set up forum for comments to be posted
- Sufficient enforcement of ski-pass permits
- More info at website (interactive maps, narrative descriptions and rules)
- Accurate trail lengths (consistent measure)
- Damage control from inappropriate use (dogs, etc.)
- Budget info. For grooming, etc.
- Plan for grooming by county (need way to keep grooming on continuous basis)
- More ski clubs, more members = more grooming
- Crosslake ski area
- Dogsled trails – any feedback from users? Need info? (specify which trails are not groomed)
- Snowshoe trails
- Winter walking trails
- Winter bird watching
- Cross country skiing on lakes – need to tap into these users
- Primitive ski areas – could coordinate with snowshoe trails and summer hiking (e.g. northern areas without groomed trails)
- Add statement at county website for allowed uses on various types of “undesigned trails”
- Corporate sponsorship
- Matching grant for equipment (county could serve as fiscal agent)
- Equipment rental services in county?
 - Nisswa, Crosby, Craguns
- Trail maps (printed copies) at resorts and visitor centers (currently at Land Services Dept and website)
- Dogsled race route (challenges to selecting a route – distance, conditions)
- Goal for healthy recreation to drive tourism
- A parks and trails advisory committee (CWC had one 2002-2008)
- Crow Wing County management – including funding, monitoring, enforcement of 22 recreational facilities (summer/water) (see page 21-24 of CWC Parks, Trails & Open Space Plan)

- Budget needs to be flexible due to variable winter weather
- Marketing
- County website to advertise trails AND areas
- Designate hunter/hiking trails as snowshoe trails (although most are trespassed on by snowmobilers)
- Small flowages make perfect travel ways for off-trail skiing or snowshoeing or hiking
- Lack an area large enough to be considered as a solitude area for snowshoeing, cross country skiing and hiking off-trail or primitive
- Plowed parking lots would be nice
- Must have fiscal plan with specific cost centers and revenue sources
- Improved trailheads
- Snowshoe areas
- Skijouring areas
- Dogsled areas
- Staff to maintain, improve, develop trails
- Multi-use trails
- Primitive ski areas - ungroomed

Information about opportunity to expand trails near Crosslake:

- Had 3 mile county maintained trails
- Discontinued
- Lack facilities attached to trails
 - Warming house/shelter
 - Parking/restrooms
 - Lighted trails, etc.
- 150 acre park connected to county land
- Facilities are key to supporting use
- Businesses depend on snowmobilers and winter visitors (ice fishing, etc.)
- Goal of developing destination trail (rental services, trailhead, facilities, marketing)
- Plan to use existing logging roads following recent harvest (beginning to explore opportunities with the county)
- Current trails are “expert” level
- Want county as partner (not looking for money from the county)
- Central Lakes College learning experience opportunities for students
- Want use of county land (similar to French Rapids work with club)
- Looking at grants
- Map development (planning stages)
- Wet areas: not good for summer use and some trail segments would need to be closed
- Summer marketing to mountain bikers
- Potential for 10-12 miles of ski trail
- 5+ miles of summer access
- Close wet areas to motorized use/damage in summer
- Area of snowmobile trail included
- Hilly county

Priorities

- County plan for maintenance, grooming, marketing trails
- Inventory usage information
- Don't stay blind to one trail type – multi-use trails
- Need inventory and need marketing
 - Micropolitan planning – work with Cass County
 - Don't stop at border – work together
 - Check budget for grooming
- Expand Crosslake primitive skiing on hunter/hiking trails
- Designate Multi-use snowshoe trails
- Up-to-date trail condition information (Good example: <http://johndee.com/>)
- Create a positive image of non-motorized winter trails for future generations. Commit to a goal of healthy, sustainable, environmentally friendly and publicly supported recreation. Gather specific information and data regarding customers and users, and impact on the people in the area.
- Inventory and user information for better planning
- Funding: need marketing or funding situation won't change
- County commissioners' support of funding a county parks and trails department
- Staff to maintain trail system
- Budget dedicated to the program
- Improved trailheads

Public Comment

Roger Landers, Nisswa – Appreciate county initiative, Need permanent parks and trails adv. Committee for county to be serious

Rosemary Franzen – We have a committee for this planning project. We also have a parks and trails committee, consisting of 2 commissioners, a delegate from each district and county staff. Funding is limited for additional meetings and groups.

Kirk Titus – Committee may be resurrected after the planning project is completed

Jack McAllister, Cuyuna heritage network – Need to provide fair amount of time on agenda for public to speak. When will portage trail be addressed? Interested in restoring Native American trail by Riverton/Rabbit Lake (Mississippi River Loop) and recreation area where there is public land (Hole-in-the-Day History). Book about the history for sale in Crosby.

Katie Fernholz – The October 26th meeting is planned to address “Water Trails and other Trail Types”

John Reynolds, Merrifield – Is there an area large enough to be a solitude area for skiing? Need parking area and access (e.g. 50 lakes area N. of Highway 1, 10-20,000 acres)

Peter Nelson – Discussed trail idea with Kirk and the Land Services Dept. Cross Country skiing opportunities at Edgewild Resort and partnership opportunities.

Adjourn 8:12 pm