

CWC Comp Rec Plan Advisory Group Meeting

Tuesday, September 28th at 6pm in Meeting Room 2 of the Land Services Building
(322 Laurel Street, Brainerd, MN 56401)

In attendance: Bill Keefe*, Russell Heittola*, Shawn Roberts*, Rosemary Franzen*, Alan Steiff*, Larry Moses*, Gail Brecht*, Bryan Pike***, Kirk Titus***, Katie Fernholz**, Laura Ukura-Leir, Marvin Eisel, Peter Nelson, John Terwilliger, Cindy Terwilliger, Michael Manlick, Jerome Weiss, William Durham, Jacqueline Becker, Kathi Nagorski, Tad Erickson, Jack Huebsch, Dave Clute, Roger Williams, Roger D. Bentley, Richard Sergot, Jerry Wolters

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

Agenda

Welcome/Overview

Presentation of Motorized winter trails

Brainstorming ground rules

Brainstorming of present and missing for motorized winter trails

Summary of outcomes

Public Comment

Next meeting – October 26th: Water trails and other trail types

Review of 8/25/10 meeting notes – incorporation of updated data on page 2 regarding ATV registrations as of June 30, 2010

Presentation made by Bryan Pike, Crow Wing County Land Services Department regarding motorized summer trails. Presentation posted at:

<http://dovetailinc.org/files/CWCPresentation92810.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 motorized Trails

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

(includes comments from the Advisory Group and public input)

- One of the best trail systems in Minnesota
 - Well marked
 - Connects towns
 - Well maintained/groomed
 - Funded/funding
- Clubs, user groups
- Maps (online and printed)
- Website info showing trails
 - <http://www.centralminnesotasnowmobiling.com/>
 - <http://www.cwcsta.com/>
- 626 miles of trail
- All trails have been GPS located with mile markers and coordinates are with the Sheriff's department to support emergency responders
- There are 12 clubs in the county with 9 doing trail grooming; other clubs contribute funds and provide some labor
- Total club membership in the county is at least 1,000 people
- Clubs do mowing in the fall and clear deadfalls to prepare for winter season
- Clubs acquire easements with private landowners and make the contacts to get permissions (not done by the county)
- Collaborate with county on trail re-routing needs due to changes or conditions
- Clubs prefer trails on public lands due to stability of ownership
- Riders use the Mississippi River
- Vigorous patrolling of trails by DNR
- DNR likes to ride snowmobiles
- Conservation Officers provide enforcement
- DNR Trails & Waterways monitor signs/maintenance
- Plans for Camp Ripley Veterans Memorial Trail
- Businesses pay for trail markers across Gull Lake
- DNR provides trail signage (paid for by license fees and trail permits)
- Snowmobile trail inventory in 70's-80's found 875 miles of trail in CWC
- Decreasing trails due to land sales
- Loss of trails due to land development
- Now at 661 miles (according to the DNR)
- List of trails that no longer exist (a dozen?)
- Lost trails across lakes due to lack of funds for grooming (not allowed in GIA)
- Used to have Nisswa to Roy Lake trail, Fifty Lakes to Fox Lake (on road around lake), Mission Lake to Mississippi River Landing, etc.
- Not really adding trail miles
- Holding steady
- DNR pays for grooming out of user fees, have a regional system for distributing funds
- Traditional Grant-in-Aid program tracked hours/labor and was intensive for the DNR to administer
- Performance-Based Grant-in-Aid (GIA) involves DNR inspections of trail conditions, grooming, signage, etc to determine adequate maintenance by clubs
- Gas tax revenues for trails based on snowmobile use of gas
- \$80.00 for 3 yr license and trail permit for machine (can be purchased annually for slightly higher cost)
- GIA reimbursement was 90% for grooming; 65% for clearing, etc.
- Different approach with performance-based GIA, uses a "cost-per-mile" basis
- Safety training for youth (age restrictions for 12-14); starts at age 11 for permit at age 12
- Today we have better machines, they work better, warmer clothes, and can do longer rides in a day
- Poker Runs – not legal anymore

- Clubs buying property/land to maintain trail routes and connections.
- Can buy property, establish an easement for the trail and then resell the land with the easement intact
- Clubs use pull-tabs, charitable gambling to support trails
- Expensive grooming machines (\$175,000)
- 9 grooming machines in CWC
- Each club has 3 or 4 trained groomer operators
- Some operators are paid; some are volunteers
- Better trail with paid operator
- Range of local businesses supporting snowmobilers, sponsors shown on the map and indicates there is economic benefit
- Snow = business picks up
- Negligible use of alcohol on trails due to enforcement/laws (DUI, open bottle, etc)
- Can lose drivers license for DUI/DWI on snowmobile or boat
- CWC has the best trails in the state and they are improving
- Clubs are good at monitoring
- Good signage, better than ever before
- GPS system in 2003 with support from County Parks Funds
- 2-way trails
- Usage of trails depends upon snow/weather conditions
- Few accidents (e.g., collisions with a fixed object)
- Riders stop with families at restaurants along trails
- Ditch riding safety issues – mark culverts and hazards with signs/posts (use caution signs)
- Stay on Trail – indicates a safe route
- Chamber of Commerce provides visitor info (at website)
- Clubs provide weekly trail condition reports and contact info
- State liability law to protect property owners
- Running dog teams on trails occurs and can create hazards for dogs
- Trail shelter at Fort Ripley, new shelter at Cole Lake
- Merrifield Shelter to be moved
- Statewide trail association with monthly meetings to ensure everyone is hearing the same information and well informed
- Potential trail use conflict with ATVs
- Some ATV trails run on snowmobile routes
- Some segments have compatible different seasonal uses
- Clubs required to have \$1.5 million in liability insurance (therefore pay groomers so they are covered)
- Clubs work well together
- Have 47 different trail names, mile markers with club names
- A lot of trails

What is Missing to support Winter Motorized Trails

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

(includes comments from the Advisory Group and public input)

- Some towns don't allow off-trail riding to get to businesses, limits economic benefits
- Trails within towns and municipalities to get to businesses
- Winter picnic and bonfire areas for families
- Shelters, stopping points, or lean-tos along the trail
- Need stops between municipalities
- Stops close to amenities
- Northshore trail has rest areas every 10 miles
- Missing river crossings?
- Lack winter ATV routes or other motorized winter recreation
- GIA snowmobile trails are restricted to snowmobiles
- Designated separate winter routes for ATVs
- Permanent easements on private lands (incentives at the time of sale)
- County can/should mention opportunities for easements with land owners
- Updated contact information for clubs (included on annual trail maps)
- Railroad right-of-way trails
- Don't know how many miles of snowmobile trails are in the public right-of-way?
- Large parking areas along routes
- DNR studies/projections of snowmobile use
- Used to have seven maps, went to three, now have one that covers area larger than CWC
- Use of a single map reduced advertising space
- Guide for interesting scenic points on map isn't included
- Could identify scenic areas (forest stands, etc)
- How are access points to lakes decided and monitored? (Some are public accesses, some are on private property)
- Lighted posts (or reflective posts) help with crossing lakes (e.g., on Gull Lake)
- Don't groom on lakes, no GIA funds
- Minimum trail width of 8 feet, new trails 10'. Wisconsin requires 10' and have some 16'.
- Asking for 20' trail permit (machines are bigger)
- Try to groom double widths (12-16') and hit center of trail twice where use is heaviest
- 2-way trails with snow piled in between lanes
- Need continued support from DNR and County
- Continued auditor office help with permitting, etc.
- More support needed to address trespass
- Updated maps needed and more accurate information about trail miles
- Information about how many miles of trail are on county managed lands
- Need to know who to contact at the county for help with trail maintenance, permitting, etc.
- County isn't too involved with maintenance
- Land Dept and Auditors Office do permitting and do an excellent job
- Coordination between agencies responsible for different lands/trail segments

Priorities

- Safety
- Connectivity
- Continued Support
- Permanent Easements
- Maintaining quality of very nice trail system (vs. expansion)
- Maintenance – maintain what is here (this is working)
- Continued good management and oversight
- Maintain active clubs/volunteers
- Tax incentives for land owners for permanent easements (recognize economic benefit to state, could be a 10 yr program commitment like other programs)
- Recognition of Polaris & Arctic Cat that manufacture in Minnesota; Yamaha has their primary research & development facility in Minnesota

Public Comment

L. Ukura-Leir: Are trail shelters on public lands? Could the clubs build the shelters?

R. Heitolla: It depends on the trail and where the shelter should go.

L. Moses: Shelters have been permitted on public land. Some have been moved to private land to avoid damage and vandalism.

L. Ukura-Leir: Private interests are doing markers on the lakes and so others could do the same? The markers indicate suggested routes, but not groomed trails.

J. Terwilliger: Need rest stops and restrooms along trails. There are risks of vandalism. Luckily many trails in Crow Wing County are within riding distance of communities and services.

L. Ukura-Leir: What studies do we have with data about snowmobiles and projections for future use?

C. Terwilliger: Snowmobiling is a tradition in the region. It is a family tradition and way of life that has continued for my family and me since 1967.

J. Terwilliger: We see more kids on snowmobiles now and families on trails.

L. Ukura-Leir: Crosby/Ironton Scorpion snowmobile reunion could be supported and it attracts collectors and recognizes the heritage.

C. Terwilliger: Pequot Lakes Brush Pilots hold annual antique snowmobile event that draws a national crowd.

P. Nelson: Two of the major snowmobile manufacturers are in Minnesota

Adjourn 8:00 pm