

Statewide Trails Advisory Committee (RSA 216-F:5)

February 8, 2017

DRED Conference Room

In Attendance

Members:

- Chris Gamache NH Trails Bureau (BOT)
- Tom Levesque NH Off Highway Vehicle Assoc (NHOHVA)
- Debbie Briscoe New Hampshire Horse Council (NHHC)
- Tim Blagden Bike-Walk Alliance of New Hampshire (BWANH)
- Andy Welch White Mountain National Forest (WMNF)
- Raynold Jackson Society for the Protection of NH Forests (SPNHF)
- Scott Monroe Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC)

Staff/Guest:

- Alexis Rudko Bureau of Trails, RTP Specialist (staff)
- Phil Bryce Director, Division of Parks & Recreation (staff)
- Avis Rosenfeld guest

Open Meeting

6:30 PM, meeting called to order and introductions made.

Review Minutes

Minutes from the October 19, 2016 meeting reviewed. Motion to approve by Tim B, second Debbie B. Minutes approved.

OHRV/Snowmobile Update

Chris G noted that snowmobile season is underway and the season started very well with early snow in December and riding most available most of NH for the Christmas/New Years holiday week. As of New Years about 31,000 registrations had been sold; which is 8,000 more than were sold all of last winter. February is typically highest registration month and current storm pattern will help trails heading into holiday week and Mass school vacation week.

Chris G noted that not much to report on for OHRVs at this time, but Ray J inquired about status of Nash Stream and CORD discussions. Chris gave a brief history of the OHRV trails in Nash Stream Forest and the current reviews and management responsibilities of CORD (council on resource development) on state lands. CORD has legal oversight of properties bought with LCIP funds in the 1980's-90's, but other agencies actually manage the lands. CORD still uncertain about their final role but has voted that original OHRV trail, West Side, is compliant with their statutory oversight. They had asked for more information before voting on the Kelsey Notch Pilot Trail. That vote will be in March at their next regular meeting. Phil B commented that the management oversight is of concern to DRED as we are the agency the property was assigned to for overall management and that having a another group second guess management or interject themselves in whichever topic they decide is not a good way to manage state lands. Tom L asked if either the SPNHF or AMC rep on STAC could explain why their organizations wrote a letter with TNC to challenge the legality of the OHRV trails? Ray J noted that he believes SPNHF did it to get the compliance paperwork filled out and prove it was done and that they did not want to close the trails.

Recreational Trail Program Update

Chris G told the group that the STiP has still not been approved by NHDOT and that the RTP funds have not been obligated in the federal fiscal management system yet. No projects can start until the funds are obligated in the system (no expenses or match would count toward the project if done before the federal obligation date). Trails is reviewing when to make applications available for the next round. The reality is that the applications submitted this year would be for work to be performed in 2018. Trails Bureau is also discussing changing the scoring format and panel used to rate applications. Thought is to use state staff from different divisions and bureau's

to give objective scores and not volunteers. This is similar to how NHDOT is handling the scoring of Transportation Alternative applications. It has been good to have volunteer knowledge of projects during the scoring, but have seen some instances when scores were given higher or lower because of familiarity with the organization applying, or not. Feel it may be a fairer way to score applications. MOA with NHDOT on how the program is run is almost done. FHWA has decided it will no longer be involved with RTP for billing reviews and oversight and is putting the responsibility onto DOT. DOT has concerns with it as it is a very different program that transportation programs. "soft match" is a concern to DOT as no other FHWA programs allow; but it is allowed in RTP guidance and it is the most popular part of RTP for organizations (volunteer labor match). DOT says it will not change that part of the program, but it is the major part of it that makes them nervous.

Heritage Trail Update

At last meeting the STAC recommended to remove this from the agenda in the future, due to little activity. Chris noted that the STAC legislation listed the Heritage Trail as a topic that will be discussed at all meetings and as such it will remain as an agenda item. Scott M inquired about reviewing the heritage trail files and will follow up with the office to schedule a time. Parks & Recreation is still working with North Country Council on a Coos County Trail Planning document. Goal is to get a stakeholders group put together to develop a guidance document that can be used in the future for trail planning, conflicts resolution, etc. Goal is to have a guidance document by the end of the year.

Old Business

Trail Group Insurance/Parks – Chris read a short report from Patrick H: As of today, we are waiting on directions from our insurance broker as to what information is needed from us to start the purchase process with the insurance company. Everything has been set and approved from the State's end, including approval of the policy from the Attorney General's Office, and we're ready to go; just awaiting directive from the insurance side. We expect to have this insurance in place and in effect for the Spring season at the latest, though it should be finished much sooner. This is a general liability policy that will cover approved activities by volunteer groups named on the policy while working on DRED land (only). These groups were identified through a response the sharing of information and financials that showed they were incapable of self-insuring at this time. The policy is limited to the number of groups that can be covered. We have a full list right now, but some eligible groups are considering and researching self-insuring, as they carry on activities off of DRED land. This policy will not cover those activities. This policy has no bearing on individuals; statutes in place already offer levels of protection for individual volunteers. This policy is intended to cover the volunteering organization's exposure, as its own entity. Some general discussion ensued about the Division policy and what would qualify organizations for it or not and how it is only good when working on DRED lands.

Legislative updates: Ray J gave an update on the SB 383 hiking trail study committee that has met twice so far and reports out in late 2017. Ray J, Phil B and Andy W are all on the committee. Goal is to work on recommendations at the next meeting in March. Chris gave a short summary of other legislation, but commented that there was not a lot of trail specific legislation this session.

New Business

Electronic Mountain Bikes (eMTB) use on trails was discussed and a NEMBA magazine with New England state summaries of rules about them was shown to the group. DRED considers them motorized vehicles and as such they can only be used on motorized trail. WMNF and other federal land agencies consider them motorized vehicles also. Question about them having to register as OHRVs was asked. Unclear of how they would fit it. Federal Highway Administration breaks them down by engine size and some are classified as motorized and some are not. Fed and State land management agencies list them all as motorized vehicles. A fair amount of discussion ensued and it was noted by several that this would continue to be a topic to look at in the future.

Chris mentioned that the new Trail BMP's were on the Parks website in the Trails Bureau section. DES is not using these for trail permits and the document has been changed to include more trail recommendations, bridge guidelines and has doubled in size. Question about Prime Wetlands and how they relate to trails was asked. Prime Wetlands automatically elevate any project out of minimum impact projects to major impact projects with Army Corp reviews and much higher fees. Recommendation is to avoid if at all possible. Debbie B noted that in some southern areas the only places left without housing developments are areas around these wetlands and some impacts would likely have to be done. Bill in legislature to increase protection to include upland areas 50-100' around prime wetlands to make this non-jurisdictional area subject to the same rules. Timberland owners opposing this expansion.

Ray J reminded the group about the UNH Stewardship Network trail training that was noted in the Oct meeting and is there a better way to share training opportunity information around? Reminding groups to use it. Ray will ask them to come to a future STAC meeting to talk to the group.

Scott M asked if Parks is involved in managing drones? No. that is a general legislative topic for management and agency defaults to federal guidelines for their use at this time, but agency does plan to use them for marketing and filming in the future.

Tom L commented that he liked how the Trails Bureau had improved is snowmobile trail report to include winter ATV riding areas. He would like to see the wheeled pages change all references to ATVs and UTVs to OHRVs; which is the broader legal term. Chris noted they would look at it but many areas have width and other restrictions that would be specific to the subcategories of vehicles.

Guest Comments/Questions

Tom L asked Chris to tell the group about the NOHVCC meeting in August. Chris gave a quick update of the NOHVCC annual meeting be held in Manchester in August and that it is the first time this national association has met in New England. The OHV agencies in each state are all on the planning board for the conference.

Next meeting scheduled for Wednesday May 10, 2017. Meeting will start at 6:30

Meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM.