

DNCR & TOWN OF GORHAM
PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION
APRIL 12, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
WebEx video conference

Call to Order. Director Bryce called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in accordance with the *Checklist to ensure meetings are compliant with the Right-to-Know law during the State of Emergency*. Attendance was taken by roll call with the following PRESENT: Denise Vallee/Town Manager, Mike Waddell/Chair BOS, Adam White/BOS, Judy LeBlanc/BOS, Chief Adam Marsh/Gorham PD, Commr Sarah Stewart/DNCR, Parks Dir Phil Bryce/DNCR, Interim Chief Clint Savage/DNCR and Torene Tango-Lowy/DNCR.

Opening Comments. Dir Bryce said the Town of Gorham has requested a closure of the Rte.2 parking lot for loading or unloading and parking of OHRVs during the summer. The purpose of this public information session is to solicit public comment on the use of the Rte.2 parking lot for OHRVs.

Commissioner Stewart thanked the town, its residents, DNCR staff and elected officials for attending this meeting. The Department of Natural and Cultural Resources is comprised of five divisions tasked with protecting, preserving and managing the state's cultural and natural resources: parks and recreation, forests and lands, the state library, historical resources and the council on the arts. She looks forward to listening in on the public comments.

Ms Vallee thanked the Commissioner and Phil for holding this public session on the town's request to close the Rte.2 parking lot for the loading or unloading and parking of OHRVs during the summer from May 23rd through November 30th of each year. This request to close the parking lot would not apply to abutters or snowmobiles. The closure would help to reduce the noise and dust from OHRVs. Signage, wayfinding and map revisions would be needed, and the town would work with the state, ATV clubs and the Chamber to inform users of the change.

Mr Savage said the new OHRV parking lot is located at 443 Main Street, off Rte. 16. The Bureau of Trails constructed the lot and the new access trail at the old B&M rail line onto the Presidential Rail Trail. The bureau will coordinate with the town, clubs and Chamber of Commerce to get the word out to OHRV riders of the new access point.

Selectboard chairman Waddell said that closing the Rte.2 parking lot to loading and unloading of OHRVs will take care of the lion share of the noise and dust complaints, and help lower the temperature. He appreciates that the state and DOT worked to open the new OHRV access area to keep most of the OHRV traffic off Route 2. Police Chief Marsh, who is tasked with fielding the complaints, is in full support of the town's request and of the use of the Rte.16 lot by OHRV riders to lower the temperature of user conflicts.

Public Comments. Dir Bryce opened the floor to public comment. Those who wish to speak will be called upon by Ms Jacques, who is managing the WebEx system. To allow for as much public participation as possible, questions will not necessarily be addressed tonight, but can be submitted in writing to the department for consideration. Ms Jacques said that those wanting to speak can use the hand icon in the WebEx internet system, and those on the phone can dial *3. She will call upon each person and open their line.

Senator Erin Hennessey (Dist. 01) thanked the Town and DNCR for hosting this public meeting and looks forward to listening in on the public comments.

Jerry Marcou, Deputy Chief, Coos County Sheriff asked how the use of the parking lot will be enforced. Dir Bryce said it was a good question and we'll answer try to answer questions at the end of the meeting if time allows, or otherwise post our responses on the project webpage.

Edith Tucker asked if snowmobiles, equestrians, bicyclists and sled dog recreationist will still be able to use the Rte.2 parking lot. Dir Bryce asked Mr Savage to will keep track of the questions.

Henry Sanschagrín is providing comment as an individual, not on behalf of an ATV Club. We should not be talking about this proposal, as there is an ongoing lawsuit. This proposal discriminates against one user group. If the parking lot is closed, it should be closed to all user groups. The Rte.16 access is dangerous for OHRV riders. Fish

and Game has an interest in the OHRV sport and laws were passed to allow ATV access. The use of the Rte.2 lot should be fair to everyone.

Aaron, Coos Cycling Club supports the town's request. The Coos Cycling Club has built mountain bike trails, organized events and developed the cycling community in Gorham for over 10 years. The use of the 22 mile trail network by human powered recreationists has grown, especially during the months of May through November. The Rte.2 lot is used by the Gorham school bike clubs. Closing the lot will reduce conflicts and he hopes that the state will honor the town's request.

Howie Wemyss provided his comments using the chat feature. He asked the state to take the next step by closing the Rte.2 trailhead section to OHRV use.

Reuben Rajala is a member of the planning board and budget committee. He's been involved with trails and recreation planning and construction for 40 years. During the public hearing about the alternative trailhead for ATVs, he recalls there being only 1 or 2 people that expressed interest in keeping the Rte.2 lot open to OHRVs once the new ATV lot was built. It will be a management and enforcement headache to allow ATV access only to locals. It makes sense to close the Rte.2 trail to ATVs now that they have adequate access and parking at the underpass location. The town struggled with the ATV issue, not knowing how big this could be or the conflicts that would arise. The non-motorized community deserve the Rte.2 access during the summer and fall. And, ATV access at the underpass would make for a cleaner educational outreach and management.

Diane Holmes supports closing the Rte.2 lot to OHRVs and also supports Reuben's comment to close the lot to all OHRV users, otherwise, enforcement would be difficult. It would go a long way to solving the problems of access around residential areas.

Abby Evankow said that if this goes as the town wants, why not also close the Presidential Rail Trail to OHRV use in the summer, as stated in the trail's management plan? She said OHRV registrations declined in 2020. And, the claim that the Rte.16 lot would reduce OHRV traffic through the Rte.2 neighborhood has not happened. [Due to the amount of feedback noise, Ms. Evankow will also send her comments in writing.]

Dir Bryce and Clint Savage circled back to answer some of the questions raised during the public comment session. Bicyclists, sled dog users and equestrians can continue to use the Rte.2 parking lot. DNCR will work with local law enforcement to coordinate enforcement efforts, including a review of DNCR administrative rules, having agreements with the Town of Gorham Police Department and the Coos County Sheriff Department to enable them to enforce rules on DNCR property, and targeting vehicles located in the Rte.2 lot that have OHRV trailers. DNCR will install signage at the Rte.2 lot and work with the OHRV community to educate OHRV riders of the lot closure.

Selectboard chairman Waddell said the town will work with law enforcement on the enforcement side of this and the education effort, along with the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses. Commissioner Stewart appreciated everyone's thoughtfulness. She will have the department's response posted on its website:

<https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/trails-bureau/parking-in-gorham>

Reuben Rajala posted a comment on the chat feature. Why can't locals use Rte.2 to access the trail from the Rte.16 lot, rather than going through the Rte.2 trailhead? That should not be a major challenge, otherwise, enforcement at the Rte.2 trailhead will be a nightmare.

Written comments can be sent to Commissioner Stewart at NHTrails@dnrc.nh.gov by 5 p.m., April 26, 2021.

Dir Bryce thanked everyone for attending. The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy.