

Meeting Minutes

Governor's Snowmobile Advisory Council
February 17, 2017 ~ First Gold Hotel, Deadwood, SD

Call to Order

Chairman Russ Johnson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Roll Call

Members Present: Scott Erstad, Bruce Hintz, Dave Kennedy, Al Nagel, Russ Johnson and Gary Ulmer.

Members Absent: Todd Wilkinson

Game, Fish and Parks Staff Present: Katie Ceroll, Shannon Percy and Ryan Raynor

Adoption of the Agenda

Erstad made a motion to add "New Council Shirts" and "Social Media" to the bottom of the agenda. Nagel seconded to adopt the agenda as amended. **Motion Carried.**

Approval of the Minutes

A motion was made by Nagel and was seconded by Erstad to approve the minutes of the November 11, 2016 meeting. **Motion Carried.**

Legislative Update

Ceroll updated the council on Senate Bill 130 brought forth by Maher and Bartling. This bill's original intention was to increase the amount of money a selling agent or business/vendor could charge for a Park Entrance License, Fishing and Hunting license from \$2 to \$4, or in some instances, \$4 to \$8. Typically a small fee is added by the selling agent to cover the operating costs of the credit card scanner and other overhead costs. On February 7th this bill passed the Senate Ag and Natural Resources committee with the amendment that the 5-Day Temporary Snowmobile Permit be added to this bill at the \$4 charge. On February 9th, the bill passed through the Senate at 28-3 and has not been scheduled to be introduced in front of the House Ag and Natural Resource Committee, but is not expected to receive much opposition.

Black Hills Update

Percy gave a brief update on the snowmobile season to date. Through January of last year, traffic counts showed just over 26,000, while this year that number is just over 62,000. Better snow conditions made a huge impact on the amount of traffic as last year the hills didn't have consistent snow on the trails up to January. Percy also stated vendors have been happy throughout the year, even though this week has been above average temperatures.

Percy told the board that four front differentials had gone out in groomers over the last few weeks. While GFP staff is still talking to Track about this issue, GFP is currently being told they could have been wound to tight, causing the metal shavings and malfunction of the differentials. Percy did state that three out of the four have been under warranty. Percy told the council that nothing has changed the way they service or operate the machines that would cause these uncommon malfunctions. Synthetic oil is used which is recommended by Tucker and they are serviced every 500 hours based on Tucker's recommendations. Johnson asked if there is anything preventative that could be done to the other two. Track told Percy that they could rebuild but that would be at the expense of the snowmobile program and Shannon is not convinced it's worth it. Percy stated Wyoming had the same problem about 4 years ago as well.

Governor's Ride

Percy gave the council a description of the trails selected for the Governor's Ride. Percy offered up two different routes of varying distance due to the deteriorating snow and trail conditions. The ride will start out the backdoor heading south to trail #5, over to #2C, then down to Black Fox where a toilet and fire will be located, over to trail #8, then down to #1, over and up on trail #12 then back to Hardy Camp. Percy said another map is provided to help shorten the route if the group leaders decide to choose so. Percy then stated while good snow does exist, the first few miles out of Hardy Camp will show some of the worst trail conditions, along with a section on trail #8. Raynor stated a list of the dignitaries and their assigned groups was also located in their booklets.

Spearfish Canyon Project

Ceroll stated that Senate bill 114, which was a special appropriations bill out of the Governor's Office, was tabled. This bill was designed to give funding to pay School and Public lands which would allow a land trade to take place between GFP and School and Public Lands. Declining revenue's coming into the state and a lower 4th quarter stopped this bill from going out of committee. Ceroll stated the master planning process is still ongoing due to the core pieces already owned by the department, such as Roughlock Falls, Savoy fishing areas and the Spearfish Falls acquisition which took place the previous year. Stakeholder meetings have been on going and will continue with the idea that a final plan will be in place by September.

Percy wanted the council to know that the snowmobile community is involved with the master planning process. Dave Kennedy is on the Volunteer Advisory Council (VAC), SDSA and the Advisory Council attended stakeholder meetings and Bruce Hintz recently attended a focus group meeting, which geared towards other recreational groups.

Ulmer asked if the council needed to take a position on the project. Ceroll stated that the most important thing is to keep tabs on the master planning process and since a council member is a part of the VAC, the snowmobile community has a direct line to provide input and stay close to the progress of the master plan.

Ceroll stated the VAC will meet again in March for the second time, again in May along with two public meetings, then again in June and July. In August, the draft master plan will go through a 30 day review period and hopefully finalized in September. Ceroll stated progress updates can be found on the GFP website for those wanting to follow the planning process.

A member of the audience wanted to remind snowmobilers in the room that being a part of the planning process is important and if the call comes, be ready to voice your opinion.

Fat Tire Bikes

Raynor stated before discussions begin, we should introduce the new Forest Service Supervisor, Mark Van Every who was in the audience. After Mark's introduction, members of the advisory council introduced themselves along with where they were from and how long they had been on the council. Raynor stated missing from the council was Todd Wilkinson from DeSmet, who has been on the council for four 3 year terms.

Percy stated that representatives of the Fat Tire Bike (FTB) community showed up to the January NFAB board meeting, an advisory group for the Black Hills National Forest. They would like to use the groomed snowmobile trails, which are currently not allowed due to a Forest Service order. A few years ago, then Black Hills Forest Supervisor Craig Bobzien, created an advisory group to help him make a decision on whether or not to allow Fat Tire Bikes on the snowmobile trails. This group set out to interview various recreational groups including, cross country skiers, snowmobilers and fat tire bike riders. This group was never able to interview all parties involved and has since been disbanded since Bobzien's retirement. After various members of the council shared their concern about the safety of a motorized vehicle and non-motorized vehicle on the same trail, Percy gave Mark Van Every an opportunity to discuss the current status of Fat Tire Bikes under his leadership.

Mark stated that a sub-committee has been formed to review all non-motorized recreation, not just FTB. Through some research on his own, Mark has found a couple examples where FTB's were allowed on the snowmobile trails such as the state of Wyoming and Island Park just west of Yellowstone, along with how those areas have managed the two groups on the same trails. Mark stated the biggest challenge he faces is how cross country skiers and snowshoers are currently allowed on the snowmobile trails but FTB's are not. He also shares the groups concern about safety and how the FTB could impact the trails which are funded by the snowmobile dollars.

Other places which allow FTB's on the snowmobile trails may limit them to certain areas such as trails that are straight and have a long line of sight or less heavily used trails. Some guidelines for the FTB rider included not wearing ear buds so they can hear traffic coming, wear brightly covered clothing and possibly purchase a trail permit. Mark also mentioned the idea of using current FS roads which are not part of the trail system and are not plowed. This would require the FTB community to acquire their own grooming equipment, most likely through the Recreational Trails Program. Parking under this scenario then becomes the challenge. Mark stated his goal is to continue to share ideas and take comments from the various groups to hopefully make a decision by next snowmobile season.

Erstad stated that other national forests and states like Wyoming where FTB's are allowed still differ from the Black Hills snowmobile trail system. The Black Hills has more snowmobiles staying on the trails because we do not have the elite off trail riding like other states have in the West.

A member in the audience asked if the cross country ski areas were being considered as a possible destination for FTB riders? Percy stated members of the Forest Service have discussed with the ski groups in the past and Percy wondered if they would be more open to them using their trails compared to past conversations, even though cross country ski areas bring their own set of challenges and obstacles. Van Every stated through his experiences, Cross Country Skiers typically wouldn't want this type of user on the same trails because they would ruin the track created in the trail.

Percy also stated that various communities such as Lead and Deadwood have created their own recreational advisory groups to look into various recreational opportunities. Percy continues to discuss with groups such as this on working with FTB's and other non-motorized recreational groups, which would also increase the economic impact of those communities.

A member of the audience wondered what type of liability would fall down on the snowmobiler who would have the snowmobile insured compared to a bike which most likely didn't have insurance. Snowmobilers were concerned that if an accident took place, it would only leave a bad mark on the snowmobiling community as a motorized vehicle hit a non-motorized user. Kim Raap stated while FTB's have been on the forest service trails in Wyoming for a decade, he is not aware of a reported accident. He also stated commercial use areas have not been allowing FTB use. Kim Raap then shared with the group that he created a document through the ACSA which highlights the growth of FTB's and things to consider for local trail managers from all perspectives such as safety, shared trails, and trail grooming costs to funding to name a few. Kim stated he would send the report to Raynor who could share with the council and SDSA board.

After further discussion, Percy encouraged the snowmobile community to stay in touch with Mark Van Every with the Black Hills National Forest and work together to make sure both recreation groups have a safe place to recreate. Johnson agreed with Percy and encourages the rest of the board to make sure their voices are shared with Van Every.

East River Update

Raynor gave an update on the current grooming season to date. 12 out of the 15 clubs were able to groom during the weekend opener. While many of those clubs were able to consistently groom throughout December and most of January, temperatures in late January and into February, along with a couple rain events erased all trails. No grooming has taken place anywhere on the eastern side of the state for the past few weeks. Even if additional snow storms roll through, the odds of being able to groom would still be minimal due to the time of year, amount of water currently in the ditches, icy conditions and increasing temperatures.

Raynor also told the council that the Beresford drag had been delivered recently. This drag was purchased to meet the needs of the current groomer owned by Beresford as the typical mogul master drag was just too heavy for their Piston Bully. An Arrowhead Ultra Lite was purchased from Arrowhead drags in Wisconsin, the first drag of its brand in SD. Johnson stated they were able to groom half of a rotation but the lighter drag worked much better and will serve their purpose well.

FY '17 Budget Review:

Raynor shared a budget summary with the council which showed 40.3% of the fiscal year remaining through February 4, 2017. Raynor told the council that expenditures to date were higher than this time last year mainly due to better snow conditions and increased grooming shifts in the Black Hills. Both diesel expenses and seasonal salaries were up significantly from the previous year. Another big expense not budgeted was the purchase of three tracks for groomers located in eastern SD. Two tracks went to Sisseton while one went to Sioux Falls. Just under \$55,000 has been spent out of the Grant in Aid program, but Raynor reminded the council this amount does not include the majority of grooming expense that has occurred to date. The reimbursement requests will take place after the grooming season. **Total expenditures to date** for the snowmobile program total **\$692,935** out of \$1,306,703 budget authority.

FY '17 Revenue Report:

Raynor gave a brief review of revenue received through January 31st, 2017:

- Gas Tax - \$406,805 (11,623 Registered Sleds for FY'17 which runs July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017)
- License Fees - \$56,484
- 3% Excise Tax - \$69,178
- Interest - \$16,937
- Other - \$76,704
- **Total - \$626,108**

Raynor reminded the council about the 1% loss in the excise tax which reflected the big difference from last year's number of \$86,917. He also reminded the council about auctioning off the two groomers which typically are used for a trade-in when purchasing new groomers. One groomer auctioned for \$35,500 while the other groomer went for \$34,000. That revenue is reflected in the "Other" category which is typically where all surplus related revenue is found.

Safety Report

Raynor mentioned 13 accidents to date have been reported with no fatalities in the state. Raynor stated out of the 13 reports he had received, 9 were rental sleds.

No snowmobile accidents reported on the eastern side of the state.

30 men, women, and children had taken the safety course to date. Overall 18 snowmobilers have received certificates for taking the safety course. Raynor stated more safety courses are scheduled and still need to report attendance back.

Snowmobile Advisory Council Shirts

Erstad asked GFP members to order new T-Shirts for the council preferably with material which looked more like the GFP uniform that had pockets. Raynor stated he will email the council later this month to get shirt sizes and make sure these are available for the May meeting.

Social Media

Erstad shared his concern of making sure we are getting the best and most information possible to the public as just because it was 70 degrees in Rapid City, doesn't mean it's that warm farther up in the hills or that trail conditions are as bad as what one would assume with those type of temperatures. Possibly using Facebook and posting pictures were other ideas brought up. Percy stated the problem with posting pictures is conditions change so quickly he's afraid of giving some people who travel long distances the wrong impression if they didn't clearly see the date and time of when the picture was taken. An audience member talked about posting the number of hours groomed in a given week.

We did remind the council that we have our GFP trails condition page and Twitter where we post our trail conditions. After further discussion, GFP was tasked with seeing what the state can do when linking to other website such as weather reports or SnoWest magazine as a few examples. Raynor stated he would have an update for the May meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 13th, 2017 at the Capitol in Pierre.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Nagel and was seconded by Hintz to adjourn at 7:31 p.m. **Motion Carried.**