

MINUTES FINAL - as of 10/27/06
Governor's State Trails Council Meeting
Friday, July 14, 2006
Auditorium, Richard Bong State Recreation Area
26313 Burlington Rd., Kansasville, WI 53139
10:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.

State Trails Council Members Present: Ken Carpenter, Alison Dwyer, Randy Harden, Tom Huber, Mike McFadzen, Dave Phillips, Martha Schouweiler, Jon Schweitzer (delegate for Tom Thornton)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff Present: Bill Morrissey, Peter Biermeier, John Bronikowski, Brigit Brown, Gary Eddy, John Meyer, Laura Van Slyke, Joseph Warren

Others Present: Mike Conley, Mike Edwards, Ann Harden, Karen Kroll, Anna Kwidzinska, Ken Linzmeyer, Rob McConnell, Bill Menke, Dave Nadowski, John Schnorr, Dave Peterson, Judy Peterson, Tony Phillippe, Brook Waalen

Legislators Present: Senator Robert Wirth

Agenda review/repair and approval of May meeting minutes

- McFadzen called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda.

- Phillips asked for a clarification to the May 2, 2006 State Trails Council minutes. There is not a “Master Hunter” program in Wisconsin. Phillips asked if the DNR had considered a program similar to a “Master Hunter” program. Approval of the May 2, 2006 meeting minutes by Phillips. Harden seconded. Minutes passed as amended.

Chair Report

- McFadzen introduced Laura Van Slyke, property superintendent for Richard Bong State Recreation Area. Van Slyke summarized the history of the recreation area and some of the issues related to motorized vehicles that she sees on a regular basis. The ATV trails happen to be located on one of the wettest spots on the property, which is not an ideal situation for maintainable trails. The trails oftentimes need to be closed, and when they are open, they tend to be very crowded. Many calls come in to the office complaining of trail closures and the lack of ATV trails in the area. Van Slyke would like to have safe, maintainable trails for both family-oriented riders and riders that are looking for more challenging trails. Brown added that a trail building crew could help make sustainable trails and help make trails better for ATV use at Richard Bong. Brown will be introducing a proposed state trail building crew later in the meeting.

- McFadzen reviewed the Natural Resources Board (NRB) and the DNR acquisition of an extension to the Hank Aaron State Trail. Following the May 2 meeting, the STC passed a resolution in support of having the DNR purchase the extension. The NRB voted in favor of having the DNR purchase the extension that would connect the western suburbs of Milwaukee to the existing Hank Aaron Trail.

- McFadzen reviewed the legislative committee on state trails. The committee was approved and membership is expected to be announced soon. McFadzen noted that the Legislative Committee could be a good opportunity to raise the profile of trails in Wisconsin and would also be a good opportunity to work with legislators on raising awareness about Transportation Enhancement funding.

DNR Report

Motorized Recreational Use Area

- Morrissey thanked Van Slyke for explaining to the council the issues that the Richard Bong recreation area must deal with concerning motorized vehicles. The concept of a state motorized recreation area is not entirely new to the Wisconsin State Park System as Richard Bong and seven state trails allow for motorized use. The DNR Department Leadership Team has asked Morrissey to address the growing number of motorized recreation vehicles in Wisconsin. Other states have created Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) parks to manage the use of motorized vehicles on public lands. Given the issues concerning motorized recreation, other states have found success providing a space where OHV use can be managed and enforced.
- The NRB voted 7-0 in favor of having the Wisconsin DNR study the concept of a state motorized recreation area further. The DNR will be looking at and studying one or two areas in Wisconsin that could be set aside to have motorized vehicles as the primary use. Morrissey mentioned that abandoned mines in Minnesota have become magnets for OHV riders. Taking an already established property and displacing existing uses would not be practical. The DNR would welcome help and would work to establish partnerships with both motorized and non-motorized groups on these projects. Morrissey will report back to the NRB a proposal for one or more areas where the property has been identified, and will identify funding sources.
- Harden noted that the media seems to be reporting that the process of the proposed motorized recreation area is further along than it really is. The NRB only approved studying the concept further.

WSPS Strategic Plan

- Morrissey reviewed the Wisconsin State Park System (WSPS) Strategic Plan. Public meetings will be held to narrow the focus and goals for the different areas managed by the WSPS. The Strategic Plan will look at new ideas for financing. The WSPS faces many issues. Nationally, Wisconsin is tied for last place in the amount of money dedicated to the State Park budget compared to overall state expenditures. Morrissey talked to the NRB about being in last place. Wisconsin is a national leader in state trails, but last in the nation for the amount of money the State Legislature designates for state trails. Morrissey stated that the WSPS does a very good job with the resources it has, but could do much more for Wisconsin's citizens with additional funding.
- Huber asked how Wisconsin compares to other states. Minnesota has 70 rustic cabins and is adding more. Wisconsin has rustic cabins but they are only available for people with disabilities. Wisconsin has about 4000 campsites compared to 13,000 in Michigan. Wisconsin's state park attendance has been stagnant for a number of years due in part to the limited number and type of campsites. More campers want electric campsites. The state of Virginia has water and electric hookups in 96% of state park campsites.

Wisconsin has electric hookups in 25% of campsites. The average state park system generates 30% of their own revenue by fees. The WSPS generates 68% of its revenue by fees. Other states such as Michigan and New Hampshire are on an enterprise system. McFadzen would like the STC to help play a role in supporting the trails portion of the Strategic Plan.

- Biermeier reported that the Environmental Assessment for the Amery to Dresser State Trail is close to being done. The DNR is currently going through numerous public comments received at the public hearing on March 9, 2006. Biermeier will give an update at the October meeting.
- Biermeier reviewed the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The Plan will be released in August. When the document is available, a link will be sent out to council members. There will be a public comment period. SCORP will go before the NRB in September or October. The DNR is expecting that the Governor will sign it in October or November. After the Plan is signed by the Governor, it will then be submitted to the National Park Service (NPS). The NPS will use the document to administer Land and Water Conservation (LAWCON) funds for Wisconsin. The biggest changes in Wisconsin are the demographic shift from rural to urban, and the different recreational interests of this generation and their parents.
- Biermeier updated the Council on small game hunting on parks and trails. The Bureau of Parks has asked that small game hunting not be expanded to more properties. The DNR has yet to make a decision. The small game hunting seasons at state parks this year are permanent as the pilots have already been done. The shift from rural to urban is pressuring state park land to open for hunting because state parks provide a source of green space. McFadzen mentioned that the STC is on record as being opposed to small game hunting on parks and trails.

State Trails Report

ATC and Power Lines

- Brown reviewed the American Transmission Company (ATC) and the placement of power lines issue. The ATC has proposed three potential corridors to locate the large 345 Kilowatt lines for the Middleton Substation. One of the potential power line routes travels through Ice Age National Scientific Reserve and Ice Age Trail property. Brown passed out a document the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation (IAPTF) submitted to the ATC. The IAPTF is using the report to make their case for why the property should not be used as a power line corridor. The ATC holds that they do not have to place these power lines below ground.
- One potential route for the power lines uses the beltline in Madison as the corridor. The Mayor of Madison has said that he does not want the beltline route to happen. The Public Service Commission (PSC) has to look at what route will have the most minimal impacts and ultimately is the final decision maker.
- Phillips stated that he has received numerous calls about this issue. The community is very interested and does not want to see the power lines go through. The belief is that these power lines are not intended for Wisconsin residents but are to supply Chicago and

Illinois. This is the first step for a process that will continue for many years into the future. This is a big issue for trails and the Council can not cave in.

- McFadzen stated that he is not opposed to have power lines crossing trails, but does not want to have trails or potential trail corridors such as the Ice Age Trail, used as power line corridors. McFadzen would like to see the council dedicate more time to this issue on future meetings.
- The ATC has been holding many public meetings. McFadzen asked the Council if they or someone they knew would be willing to sit in on all of the ATC meetings and report back to the Council. It was suggested that perhaps someone who is willing to sit in on the ATC meetings could sort through correspondence, media, etc. and keep the STC informed. The State Trails Council may even consider compensating this person.
- Brown gave an update of the Statewide Environmental Assessment (EA). There are some EA issues that are holding up the development of trail projects. The Bureau of Parks will be hiring someone outside of the DNR to work on a programmatic EA. Brown will give an update at the October meeting.

State Trails Plan

- Brown will be requesting bids in September or October from consultants on a new trail plan. The goal is to update and combine the existing State Trails Network Plan and the Strategic Plan to give state trails one direction. There will be multiple public meetings for comment. Within one year Brown hopes to have a comprehensive plan for the future of state trails to take before the NRB for approval. The State Trails Council will be involved in the process. Brown will send a copy of the State Trails Plan to council members when it is done.
- The legislative committee on state trails will also be holding meetings. The committee expects to wrap-up in early 2007. There is a desire to make sure the State Trails Plan and legislative committee do not dovetail together. The STC is welcome to make some suggestions. Brown will give an update at the October meeting.
- Phillips asked if there is a political agenda behind the legislative committee on state trails that Senator Breske will oversee. Biermeier stated that the members of the committee will bring many issues to the table. Senator Breske is concerned about the economic benefits of trails in northern Wisconsin and about opening up trails to motorized use.

Proposed Private Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area in Forest County

- Tony Phillippe, Tribal Program Coordinator for the Sokaogon Chippewa Community, gave a presentation on the proposed OHV recreation area in Forest County. The proposed recreation area would provide facilities for all types of motorized ground vehicle types. Phillippe passed out an outline of the proposal to council members.
- Phillippe requests that the State Trails Council recommend that the Forest County site be included in any DNR feasibility study conducted for an OHV recreation area in Wisconsin. Phillippe explained that the proposed project will be conducting a feasibility study of its own, and requests that the STC support the funding by state agencies of the project's feasibility study.

- McFadzen asked about liability issues related to the recreation area. Schweitzer stated that users to the park can sign a liability waiver form but it will not stop them from suing. Park managers for a private park could be held responsible for any liability issues, but the amount of money someone can sue is limited for a public entity. Phillips mentioned that management can get sued if they do not take care of certain trail issues, and the state can get sued if they help develop a park, because the perception may be that the state tends to have the deepest pocket for insurance.

Noon presentation

- McFadzen gave a presentation that highlighted the economic, community, health, and transportation benefits of trails to the state of Wisconsin. McFadzen discussed the Transportation Enhancement (TE) program and the amount of money the Wisconsin Legislature obligates for TE projects. Wisconsin ranks third to last in the nation and last in the Midwest for amount of allocated money obligated for transportation enhancements. McFadzen wants to see Wisconsin increase this number and would like the STC to help play a role in securing more TE funding for Wisconsin's citizens.
- Senator Robert Wirth explained to the council that the best way to lobby for transportation enhancements is to target the Joint Finance Committee. If the Joint Finance Committee is aware of under allocation, they will start asking questions. Senator Wirth recommended that the council contact the members of the Joint Finance Committee before the next election.

OHV Recreation Area Issues

- Brook Waalen, representing the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters, gave a presentation concerning issues related to Off-Highway Vehicle use and the proposal for a motorized state recreation area. Waalen presented some information regarding OHV use in Wisconsin and showed photos demonstrating ATV damage to pedestrian trails. Waalen questioned the council if a state motorized recreation area would take pressure off of other state trails to open for ATV use, and questioned if a state motorized area would reduce ATV damage and illegal activity in the state.
- Schouweiler asked if riders that visit OHV parks learn different moves and habits and might want to practice them illegally in other places, causing further damage to trails and other areas. Harden explained that at an unmanaged park, riders may learn bad habits, but a well-managed park would be a good opportunity to teach riders the proper and responsible way to use OHVs. Some parks ban bad riders if they do not obey the rules.
- Schweitzer explained that some of the snowmobile trails that applied for rehabilitation funding were denied money because of the impact of ATVs to the trails. Not all of the damage is caused by ATVs, but because the funding has an ATV clause, the money can be denied. The result is the snowmobile club has been forced to put up several thousand dollars to fix the trails.
- Morrissey commented on the trail damage pictures Waalen presented and noted that in certain conditions, especially wet conditions, all trail uses can cause damage. Schouweiler agreed with Morrissey that all uses, including foot traffic can cause damage to trails, but stated that mud holes and obstacles is what some ATV users are looking for. Harden stated that the user needs and goals are different for OHV users and other trail users. A sustainable ATV trail may be different from a sustainable hiking trail.

- McFadzen asked Phillips and Harden to work on the language of a State Trails Council resolution concerning OHV parks, and to also work on a resolution regarding the responsible use of motorized recreational vehicles. The Resolutions will be in support of OHV parks as long as these parks help to meet the needs of motorized and non-motorized users, discourage illegal OHV activity, and encourage safe and responsible OHV use. The Council will vote on the Resolutions electronically when the language is complete.

Federal Funding for Trails

- Dar Ward, Executive Director for the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin (BFW), gave a presentation describing the Federal Transportation Enhancement program and some of the methods the BFW suggests to secure TE funds for projects. Ward passed out a sheet explaining how the TE program works and the loopholes that allow states to under-fund federal programs. Ward explained that the majority of obligated TE monies are granted out to local units of government. To have a better chance of securing TE funding for a project, Ward suggested that groups applying for TE money should make sure the projects are important and needed in the community.
- McFadzen stated that the STC represents larger users groups. Each council member represents a user group. Carpenter suggested that the STC could contact lobbyists and user groups to take a grassroots approach in getting Wisconsin lawmakers to raise the amount allocated to TE at the state level. Council members can relay information back to user groups and clubs to have them contact legislators as well.
- Ward described the lobby day used by citizens in California requesting alternative safe transportation routes to schools. Following this lobby day, the Safe Routes To School (SRTS) program expanded nationally. The Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin held its first lobby day at the capitol in Madison. The turnout was good and the BFW was able to raise the profile of bicycle user groups in Wisconsin.
- Brown suggested that the State Trails Council could look at a similar model for a lobby day for trails. If user groups are contacting legislators about trail funding issues, the legislators would be hit again with a lobby day. McFadzen would like to refine a written message to make it easy for user groups to communicate with lawmakers. Carpenter stated that more information about the budget process will be coming out later in the summer, and having a written message available in early fall would allow the council and user groups enough time to talk to members of the Joint Finance Committee before elections in November.

Recreational Trails Program

- Brown reviewed the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The RTP is one of the fundamental reasons why the State Trails Council exists. The STC helps decide how RTP funds are used. Concerning the state of trails in Wisconsin, Brown is looking at making trails more sustainable. It is hard to make good trails. Sustainable trails, built by skilled, knowledgeable workers, need less maintenance, hold up better, help protect natural resources, and provide a better user experience. Brown is proposing a roving trail building crew for the State Park System. The proposal calls for a crew of five that will fix old trails and make new ones. If there is funding, there may be more members or crews added in the future. Volunteers would be able to join or apprentice with the crew. The

proposed state trail building crew would work on all of the WSPS properties for all trail uses. The crew will begin by mostly fixing and rerouting old trails.

- In most cases this crew will be doing mechanized trail building. This will help get trails built sustainable in a faster time frame. Brown is proposing to fund this crew with RTP money. This proposal will have to go before the Parks Management Team (PMT). The PMT will have to match funds from the RTP. The money will be spent on tools and labor. Brown is asking the STC for permission to use RTP funds.
- Phillips commended Bill Menke on the North Country Trail (NCT) as a good example of a sustainable trail. The NCT meets user needs and wants, decreases the amount of maintenance and labor put into upkeep, and provides a good trail experience for users. Brown will draft and send out to council members, a resolution for the STC in support of using RTP funds to create a state trail building crew. The Council will vote on the resolution electronically when the language is complete.

Public comment

- Mike Conley and Dave Nadowski informed the council of some of their concerns with the recently posted speed limit signs and the frequent closure of trails at Richard Bong State Recreation Area. Conley and Nadowski want to be safe and not break any rules, but machines without speedometers make it difficult for them to know their speed. There are not many places to ride ATVs close to Richard Bong and they feel that the trails could be open more often. Harden stated that the best way to keep the trails at Richard Bong open would be to redesign and reroute all of the trails to make them sustainable. Brown will talk with Conley and Nadowski following the meeting.
- Karen Kroll stated that having members of the STC on the legislative committee on trails would be a good opportunity for council members to inform the committee of trail money issues. Kroll also commented on Waalen's presentation. Kroll stated that she has seen similar pictures of trail damage concerning horse trails and feels that pictures and statistics can be used to skew information. Kroll feels that sustainable trails, horse, ATV, pedestrian or other, would not have extensive trail damage.
- Anne Harden explained the Wisconsin All-Terrain Vehicle Association's (WATVA) Trail Ambassador program to the council. The program puts certified Ride Smart Trail Ambassadors out on ATV trails to promote and enforce safe and responsible motorized recreation. WATVA has over 1,100 ambassadors and is adding to that number all the time. WATVA has seen the program make a significant difference on reducing the amount of rogue riders. Harden stated that the program teaches safe and responsible riding and asked that the council not group all ATV riders into a 'bad apple' category.
- Luana Schneider, with the Wisconsin Four Wheel Drive Association (W4WDA), submitted her comments to the council in writing before the meeting. Schneider announced that the W4WDA has been awarded the contract to cut trails and be Trail Guides for Camp Jeep at Road America in Elkhart Lake from August 10-12, 2006. Schneider also thanked Morrissey and Laurie Osterdorf for their proposal to the NRB of the concept of a state motorized recreation area.
- Motion to adjourn by Huber. Seconded by Carpenter. Meeting adjourned.

Addendum

- The State Trails Council passed a Resolution for support of a Wisconsin State Park System Trail Crew.

- The State Trails Council passed a Resolution for support of the concept of a State Motorized Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Park.

- The State Trails Council passed a Resolution for support for the responsible use of motorized recreation vehicles.