

Homework Assignment

ATV/UTV Trail Project

ORV Council Representative Input

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**The enclosures are relevant to the answers of questions 2-4, so
if the paper is sorted into separate isolated components
(like by question), it is important to include the
enclosures as part of the answer for each question.**

Homework 1: Describe what your organization sees as a desired rider experience.

The desired rider experience can vary with the individual rider. It seems that very few have a single preference and many enjoy some varied experiences. There seems to be a strong majority that do not favor extensive segments of overdeveloped or gravel trails.

Doctrine requires that local trail systems be designed to offer varied experiences for riders. A classic model is a system with an easy loop, a moderate loop, and a difficult loop which allows riders to select the experience they prefer to enjoy at the moment.

The experience of the ORV council is that some entities come in with requests intended to uniformly develop their trails to a single standard or experience. This more closely aligns with seeking a well-developed system of forest roads than it does with providing the varied experiences that riders prefer. Requests like these often lean toward over-development.

Another challenge we face is that with the extensive development of road routes we have created a transportation network for ATVs and UTVs. People take their ORV on trips to the store, tavern, or a restaurant from their home or cottage. The desire for a transportation network does not closely align with the intent for a recreational experience on an off-road vehicle trail network, although some riders only have road routes to use for recreation in their region.

People that want to ride smooth paths already have well over 10,000 miles of smooth gravel, paved, or dirt routes they can ride. The last thing we want to do is convert our land constrained 2,000 mile trail network to more of the same. We need to make the most of our trails by preserving the off-road experience to the extent we can.

Many riders seem to understand and accept what some may see as “overdevelopment” in places where there is an actual need to address some serious spot or small area deficiency with the trail. General “overdevelopment” of a trail, sometimes creating a road-like experience, is not a desirable condition for trail riders. This is substantiated, in part, by the majority of survey responses.

Although no well-developed and scientific surveys about rider preferences have been made, we are able to gain some insight by anecdotal remarks from trail users. Referring to anecdotal remarks has been a practice on all sides of trail issues to date, so sharing these is not an unusual practice.

Recently we offered an informal poll, on a social media site associated with Wisconsin ATV/UTV trail users, to capture some thoughts from riders concerning their preferences. The remark we posted:

“Hi All, I'm part of a workgroup discussing guidelines for ATV trail development. There have been a lot of comments over the years about smooth trails, rugged trails, and what some see as over-developed trails. I think a lot of people would like to hear from trail users what they think makes a great trail. Examples of existing trails might be useful if applicable. Smooth? Rough? Wide? Narrow? Mud? Gravel? Water? Sand? Please offer some remarks that share what you find to be desirable trail features and experiences. Nothing scientific, just interested to hear people's thoughts.”

The initial poll offering involved three options:

Moderate Mixture of varying trail experiences. 191 votes

Rugged trails that challenge an ATV and rider. 96 votes

Smooth road-like trails. 1 vote

The other options were added by respondents.

Keep in mind that someone could vote for more than one option, but only vote for any option one time.

The screenshot shows a poll interface with the following options and vote counts:

Option	Vote Count
<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate mixture of varying trail experiences.	191
<input type="checkbox"/> Rugged trails that challenge an all-terrain vehicle and rider.	96
<input type="checkbox"/> Smooth hilly twisty wooded trails	85
<input type="checkbox"/> Single tracks in heavily wooded forest with some greasy mud here and there and some scenery along the way = perfection	60
<input type="checkbox"/> Everything but washboarding	42
<input type="checkbox"/> Muddy trails. ungroomed challenging trails. if i wanted smooth id take a gravel road	29
<input type="checkbox"/> Main trails for all users plus side-loop challenge trails	20
<input type="checkbox"/> where is the question on safety. there should be a state law minimum 12' wide for utv/SxS trail use.	6
<input type="checkbox"/> Smooth, road-like trails.	1
<input type="checkbox"/> 40' wide trails.	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Add an option...	0

The interface also shows a list of user avatars on the right side, with a callout box indicating '187 other' users. The poll is titled 'RZ' and has a '1' next to it. The interface is partially obscured by a sidebar on the right with labels like 'Per', 'Frie', and 'Priv'.

There were a number of comments submitted with the survey:

“-So, how obvious is it....STOP MAKING OUR TRAILS GRAVEL ROADS!!!! One person wants that in this poll

-Not trying to stir the pot but.. What's the point? Correct me if im wrong.. I often am.. But doesn't a large source of club revenue come from how often they groom? So if rough trails wins out will clubs get paid to have a groomer sit idle? Kinda like how the government pays farmers to not farm?

-Rocks, hills, holes, winding trails are all cool...

-A good mix of trail conditions keep it entertaining and exciting. Smooth groomed trails get boring after awhile.

- An even mix would be great! Something like other states use such as green, red, black trails. Many people gravel interstate highways (groomed trails) and many people like untouched true off road and mud. There is nonreason to groom every trail into gravel roads. Wisconsin will soon lose any destination status as people come to 4 wheel with their 4 wheelers, and then you can say goodbye to all the tourism revenue. Me personally, I like to have skill based off road wheeling. Don't touch it with any kind of groomer. Perfect example, Baraga Plains in MI

-Would love to see some one way trails. That way you don't have to worry about others coming at you.

-Logging is necessary, but making trails into roads and keeping them that way just isn't fun to ride

-Ride from Dunbar to Florence and back making a loop. While some straightaways are present and even a few miles of roads, I find it an extremely fun ride.

-Don't groom, these are 4-wheelers, not snowmobiles. Want smooth trails ? go find gravel roads or black top.

-Smooth Hilly twisted wooded trails

-Everyone likes something different. There's no way to please everyone.

- Seems to be a pretty common thread that people want real trails and not 30' wide gravel roads

- I want more challenging trails. There no reason we couldn't have a trail difficulty grade system like other. Not every trail has to be groomed for the families, and people who want dirt highways. I've been in North Carolina riding and trail grading system like use down there be great. We could have some great technical trails with grading system. I honestly don't like groomed trails. I want to go offroading.

*- I love hill climbs and big jumps. Harrison Hills is where I like to gob
When I get enough of the jumps I'll go to parish and do some high speed drifting on the smooth and groomed [Author comment about this remark: highlights reduced safety where speeds are encouraged by smooth trails.]*

-Dirts better than gravel.”

Homework 2. What ideas does your organization have to balance desired rider experience with the resources (funding, labor, equipment, etc.) that exist to create those experiences?

The oversight and review of grant applications allows the ORV Council to do a great job managing resources, actual needs, and proposed enhancements for trails.

The authority and responsibilities of the council are defined by Wisconsin Statutes, sections 15.09, 15.347(9) and 23.178, supplemented by these procedural bylaws.

The off-road vehicle council shall provide advice and make recommendations to the department of natural resources, the department of transportation, the governor, and the legislature on all matters relating to all-terrain vehicle trails and all-terrain vehicle routes, including matters relating to activities conducted on all-terrain vehicle trails and all-terrain vehicle routes by all-terrain vehicle users and utility terrain vehicle users, and shall make recommendations to the department of natural resources with regard to incentive payment requests under s. 23.33(5r) and requests for funding under s. 23.33(9)(b), (bb), and (bg).

This system does an excellent job serving all with an interest in trails very well. Careful consideration to supporting environmentally sound trails has allowed foresters in Wisconsin to exceed certification standards for ten years.

Major revisions to a trail or requests to improve, rehabilitate, or construct a trail go through a system that requires the ORV Council to evaluate the request.

The ORV Council is made up of ATV/UTV trail riders that are in touch with user groups and trail management issues. Many have formal trail development training and have extensive experience on Wisconsin trails as well as those from other states and provinces. The combination of these traits provides them with important insight that allows them to evaluate grant requests. The council also has the benefit of a state-wide perspective when comparing the relative value of individual grant requests. It is important to note that some grant personnel and some land managers are not recreational trail riders and do not have broad experience on a variety of trails. This is not intended as criticism. It does relate to why we have a council of users involved in the process.

Clubs and dedicated volunteers are a principal strength in tending and developing trail systems. We can't say enough praise about the wonderful people that give so much to support this recreational interest. The fact is that a relatively small group of enthusiasts and volunteers carry much of the burden to provide riding opportunities for others. We are all very proud of the accomplishments of these outstanding contributors.

Our current system relies on *local* decisions about how and when to routinely *maintain* trails for which routine per mile funding is provided. The system draws from current references and best practices. This system can have faults. Land managers that contract with clubs to perform maintenance may generally

rely on the clubs to supervise themselves for much of the season. With few exceptions, this works well. Since some clubs are paid for grooming, there is the possibility for grooming to be done in some cases at times when it is not actually required. This can be an effort to accumulate hours to collect the maximum amount of per mile maintenance money available. Instead of having some instances of unnecessary grooming, it would be better to use that portion of the money to do more with other maintenance issues. There appears to be some interest in requesting an additional rehabilitation grant to address some trail maintenance issues instead of doing more with mileage money to support maintenance. The council previously took steps to raise the per mile maintenance rates to cut down on some rehabilitation requests. It is not clear that this step achieved the desired result. In the answer to question 1 there is a remark posted from someone that was worried that if more rugged trails that required less routine grooming became more prevalent, clubs would lose income. He wondered if we would still pay maintenance money to the clubs for NOT grooming to preserve the club income. He likened it to paying farmers not to raise crops. This isn't how we want to spend resources.

Some may want to look into changes that were made in the snowmobile grant program to overcome the potential for paying for, as an example, grooming that wasn't done or was done on private trails where funding isn't authorized. Sadly, these things have to be taken into account.

Some local club leaders may have an interest in developing trails to a single experience that does not account for the broader spectrum of preferences that trail users have. This goes against the sound doctrine of providing a variety of experiences and levels of trail development within a single system. A local club leader's opinion can represent local club interests and not those of all users. This can lead to trail systems that do not offer the variety of experiences that riders prefer. If this is done on multiple systems, we can end up with trails in an even wider region that do not offer the preferred experiences. Some riders claim that the tendency to over-develop trails is eliminating their preferred experience.

A land manager may see an opportunity to improve forest roads using ATV program money. This is understandable: some people would be happy to make local improvements that are paid for by some other program. Not an uncommon approach anytime money is available. We've seen grant requests to put gravel on forest trails (where ATV money can be spent) that have the same surface as forest roads that were not given the same treatment. If the proposed surface development was necessary, why wouldn't it be necessary on the roads as well?

Another issue that presents a resource management challenge is surfaces on multi-use trails. A trail that has a surface that is fine for ATV/UTV use may not be preferable for bicyclists or some other users. ATV grants usually pay 100% so sometimes people ask for a 100% ATV grant to pay for another user group's or land manager's preferences that have nothing to do with ATVs. This can also be true for a snowmobiling related interest to smooth an otherwise satisfactory ATV trail. Since the snow program doesn't have sufficient funds to do this type of work some can submit a grant claiming it is an ATV issue. These kinds of practices need greater awareness and attention at the request level so that appropriate sources of funds are being addressed instead of going to 100% ATV. The ORV Council is able to take steps to try to appropriately balance resources and needs regarding some of these requests.

There is a significant problem trying to account for winter ATV/UTV riding on snowmobile trails. First, no one has any reliable idea of how many ATV riders actually engage in this. Second, there are no uniform laws pertaining to winter ATV/UTV use between jurisdictions across the state. There is no reliable system to address funding issues under the current system without a trail pass to record actual users and collect the appropriate fees to be distributed in support of snow trails. This must be fixed to balance funding against rider preferences and actual use.

One proposal refers to rehabilitation being done on a calendar basis (WCFA – rehab no less than 8 year intervals). The calendar doesn't indicate actual need. Conditions on the ground do. Actual need may be 6 years or 15 years (or some other figure) depending on what evolves on a particular trail. Rehab is done when required, not based on a calendar. Rehab also involves the segments that actually require rehab. We don't rehab a long trail segment unless it uniformly requires rehab. Do townships pave an entire road when they have to repave the site of a single heaved culvert?

An example of a defective calendar based plan that does not account for actual needs or conditions on the ground that also assumes that 1/10th of the system will be uniformly in need of rehab each year (quote taken from written remarks posted on-line):

“As someone who works on state funded trails, my and the County Forester's plan is to rehab 1/10th of a system a year. By the end of the decade, my predecessor (sic) can start over.”

Based on some of the situations outlined above, one can see how the most important element in managing resources and the desired rider experience is the process of using the ORV Council to review grant requests. The council can take in the myriad of factors that don't relate to a broad cook book guideline because they can closely examine the elements involved that are particular to the specific situation at hand. The council can also make judgements as to the validity of some of the assertions contained in a grant request. It is well known that money can sometimes drive people to unethical behavior. There is no checklist stock reference that can replace the necessary judgement. The ability to apply the wisdom and perspective from state-wide experiences and to balance requests against available resources is important. It would be unfair to all grant requestors to spend money on a request that is not an accurate representation of need.

Homework 3: Should trail standards influence grant decisions? Why or why not? If so, how should they influence grant decisions?

First of all, there is nothing broken in the existing system that requires additional trail guidance.

We have an excellent grant process in place that already takes into account existing trail standards and guidance. The existing system does a great job recognizing that no one size fits all with regard to some firm standard for trails. There is no universal standard that could be applied without wasting available resources and detracting from the rider's experience.

Trail work involves art that goes beyond basic knowledge and requires the wisdom of experience which precludes a one size fits all reference.

The current system relies on addressing actual needs concerning a trail versus other enhancements that are not required but may be desirable if the proposal has merit and sufficient prioritized resources are available. We must target actual needs first, and the council has done a great job managing this. There isn't a single instance of a grant request involving an actual need being denied. There have been many grant requests approved for enhancements that the council saw as appropriate based on the situation and the resources available. If there is an actual need for something, the council meets it without fail.

We've done a great job managing resources, actual needs, and proposed enhancements for trails for quite some time using existing available guidance and references. This is in keeping with the statutory authority and responsibilities of the council which have been cited elsewhere in this document.

We applaud our partners in the forestry community who have enjoyed success with forest certification by exceeding requirements for ten years. Clearly we have been doing things right to take care of any certification concerns. This year, one of the counties (Iron) had an isolated defect. It should be noted that this was after some significant weather events. Keep in mind that even sections of paved state and county highways were stressed or destroyed during major weather events in that area in the past.

A problem with trying to use a trail standard as a lever to try to gain funding for a proposal is that the "standard" may not have merit in the actual case where it is to be applied. We have plenty of trails in various states that are fine, but someone could misapply a proposed standard to try to spend program money just to meet a "standard". There may not be a problem on the ground, only that a dimension isn't the same as the "standard" or there isn't gravel applied to an otherwise satisfactory surface.

A group could actually set out to develop a set of standards to use as a lever to try to get improvements that may not actually be needed. This is one reason why it is critically important to rely on a thorough examination of a proposal and the conditions on the ground instead of responding to a "standard" without the required applied evaluation and judgement.

The council carefully evaluates safety, environmental issues, rider experience, trail opportunities, and a myriad of other factors that may be a unique combination that can't be covered in a simple cook-book

“standard”. We even see grant requests where one requestor says sand is good and another says it is not.

When considering an enhancement that is not required, the council also considers the future expense that is incurred. For example, applying gravel requires that gravel be replenished over and over in the future. Gravel should only be used when there is a sound technical reason to use it in a particular spot. A particular spot does not involve trying to gravel mile after mile of trails that do not otherwise require that treatment.

A treatment may be the right course of action in one set of circumstances but if it was a standard it could be a needless and wasteful use of resources that is also contrary to the preferred rider experience.

One important component to the current system of reviewing requests against existing practices and trail guidance is that the council employs personal visits to examine the situation on the ground at a grant request location. The ability to see first-hand what the situation is enables the council to have the insight to make decisions about needs, enhancements, and guidance about trails as they apply in that particular situation. Visiting a variety of grant request sites over time gives council members a unique state-wide perspective of the situation, conditions, practices, and needs on a broad scale. It helps them determine the relative value of requests when they have to sort them with regard to priorities and limited resources.

Trail standards can be selectively developed to be self-serving to a particular interest. As an example, a group could be interested in getting money from another program to overdevelop trails to improve a network of forest roads beyond ATV/UTV trail requirements and user preferences. It is important to note that the ORV council, which has been dealing with trails, grants, and user preferences for years, was excluded from the WCFA effort to write a standard of their own. Some may interpret some provisions in their proposal to be self-serving. Applying something like this in the grant process could be considered as a giant step backward in several ways.

Any trail standard that is calendar based is faulty. This is why it is important that standards like this do not come into being. One document calls for rehab at no later than 8 year intervals. This is absurd. The council focuses on actual needs and not some calendar requirement. Depending on the totality of circumstances involved, one trail may require rehab at four years and another not for twenty. Keep in mind that the system is designed to involve routine maintenance for which maintainers are paid each year. We also don't rehab an entire trail. Wise use of resources is to rehab those sections of trail that REQUIRE it.

Before the council clarified this point, people submitted for rehab based on a minimum interval. One remark was along the line of “since we can only put in for a rehab once every ten years, we might as well do the entire trail”. That defective provision has since been eliminated since the council acts based on actual need and not a calendar schedule.

We examined a section of railroad grade trail that had not had gravel added to it in over 20 years. The trail was fine and not in need of the proposed rehab. While in the area an inspection of another section of the same trail that recently had gravel added to it revealed that the trail reverted to the original mature and sound tread way and the gravel added piled up off to the side which makes it pretty much a waste. This is why it is most important to go visit a site to interpret all the circumstances involved when evaluating a request instead of dealing with some “standard” like rehab every so many years or some claim for rehab largely because something otherwise hasn’t had gravel added for 20 years.

Sadly, money can drive some people to unethical behavior. That is why it is important that we apply sound judgement in examining grant requests instead of relying on some cook book standard that may not be significant in a particular situation. Part of the role of the council is to examine requests for potential waste, fraud, and abuse in dealing with requests. The council has a fiduciary responsibility in the program. This can also involve requests relating more to other groups or elements that may have little to do with the ATV/UTV system but have an interest in using our resources.

Sharing high quality references that offer a catalog of trail and spot solutions goes a long way to taking the right steps to make a trail reasonably sustainable without overbuilding or overspending with little return on investment or without taking on needless long term recurring expenses.

One misapplication of a trail standard can be to argue about what MIGHT happen if we don’t do something. Typically this can relate to overbuilding. Sometimes it is better to take an action and then deal with any hot spots that evolve instead of overbuilding a trail segment using a “what might happen” argument. Again, it is important to carefully manage resources and not overbuild trail segments because of a claim that tries to rely on a general trail “standard”.

The council also has to make judgements about the long term use of funds instead of just the immediate project. Applying gravel then burdens the program with the expense of replenishing the gravel over and over again in the future. If it was never really needed in the first place, or the trail was otherwise overbuilt, this is a huge waste of program resources.

Trying to apply trail standards to grant requests can lead to situations where the users’ preferred recreational experience is ignored. There is already too much tendency to overbuild trails into a road like experience. A significant number of users do not want this type of trail. Trail doctrine requires that a trail system should offer a variety of rider experiences instead of becoming a uniform set of paths system wide. When this happens with several systems in an area, soon riders are being denied their preferred experience over a broad regional area. This is another important area where the ORV council serves a role in evaluating the totality of circumstances in a location and a region to try to account for user preferences. That kind of applied judgement cannot come from a cook book trail “standard”.

The best course of action in dealing with grants is to examine an individual request and the situation on the ground to evaluate all of the factors involved. This does not rely on a rigid trail “standard” but

instead relies on wisdom and judgement to apply trail construction and maintenance references, experience, and the circumstances involved in each situation to arrive at the best course of action with regard to a request. Making something like a trail “standard” more rigid than the flexibility required in this process will detract from the program, open it to abuse, and lead to a potential waste of resources that does not properly account for rider preferences.

Based on some of the situations outlined above, one can see how the most important element in managing resources and the desired rider experience is the process of using the ORV Council to review grant requests. The council can take in the myriad of factors that don’t relate to a broad cook book guideline because they can closely examine the elements involved that are particular to the specific situation at hand. The council can also make judgements as to the validity of some of the assertions contained in a grant request. It is well known that money can sometimes drive people to unethical behavior. There is no checklist stock reference that can replace the necessary judgement. The ability apply the wisdom and perspective from state-wide experiences and to balance requests against available resources is important. It would be unfair to all grant requestors to spend money on a request that is not an accurate representation of need.

Homework 4: Propose Solutions!

We have a working system in place now that has served us well for many years. We also have the opportunity to tweak a few things to make it better, but there is no requirement for a major overhaul.

We've done a great job managing resources, actual needs, and proposed enhancements for trails for quite some time using existing available guidance and references.

We applaud our partners in the forestry community who have enjoyed success with forest certification by exceeding requirements for ten years. Clearly we have been doing things right to take care of any certification concerns. This year, one of the counties (Iron) had an isolated defect. It should be noted that this was after some significant weather events. Keep in mind that even sections of paved state and county highways were stressed or destroyed during major weather events in that area in the past.

Our current system relies on *local* decisions about how and when to routinely *maintain* trails for which routine per mile funding is provided.

Major revisions to a trail or requests to improve, rehabilitate, or construct a trail go through a system that requires the ORV Council to evaluate the request.

Those requesting a grant have the opportunity to detail the justification for their grant request. Requests can involve an actual need (work that must be done) or an enhancement (something that isn't required but might offer some desirable feature if resources allow). See Enclosure 1, Discussion and Recommendation Regarding Improving Grant Applications, for more details and definitions on these concepts.

Department personnel work with requestors to assist them with their grant applications. No one in the administrative chain is able to authoritatively state whether a grant request that otherwise meets requirements will be approved or not. This is largely because the amount of money available to support all grants is not usually visible until late in the process.

A key component to this system functioning well is that applicants present an accurate and complete grant application that legitimately supports what they desire to do. There have been shortfalls on this in the past. To assist grant applicants with having a better chance of their request being understood and approved is a review of applications by the ORV council conducted approximately one month prior to the funding meeting. No decisions are made at this time, but the council often requests additional information that might make the application more complete and potentially more successful.

Someone suggested that it might be easier for grant managers to have a simple guide of what grants will likely be approved or not. With the exception of knowing what money is available until late in the process, there is already guidance and information available to all in the process as to priorities applied to projects. There is detailed complimentary guidance to assist grant requestors with sorting out actual needs versus enhancements. (See Enclosure 1.) Further, no one in the process is a stranger to what has

historically been approved or denied and the reasons why. In view of all of the conditions involved in reviewing a grant, we do not see how some type of trail guidance, by itself, is going to make it easier for anyone including the body tasked to make recommendations about a grant. Those recommendations include relative merit based on state-wide priorities as balanced against available resources. Needs are the priority, not broad and general specifications that may or may not be relevant in view of the myriad of varying circumstances that can be involved in a particular situation.

The ORV Council is made up of ATV/UTV trail riders that are in touch with user groups and trail management issues. Many have formal trail development training and have extensive experience on Wisconsin trails as well as those from other states and provinces. The combination of these traits provides them with important insight that allows them to evaluate grant requests. The council also has the benefit of a state-wide perspective when comparing the relative value of individual grant requests. It is important to note that some grant personnel and some land managers are not recreational trail riders and do not have broad experience on a variety of trails. This is not intended as criticism. It does relate to why we have a council of users involved in the process.

The authority and responsibilities of the council are defined by Wisconsin Statutes, sections 15.09, 15.347(9) and 23.178, supplemented by these procedural bylaws.

The off-road vehicle council shall provide advice and make recommendations to the department of natural resources, the department of transportation, the governor, and the legislature on all matters relating to all-terrain vehicle trails and all-terrain vehicle routes, including matters relating to activities conducted on all-terrain vehicle trails and all-terrain vehicle routes by all-terrain vehicle users and utility terrain vehicle users, and shall make recommendations to the department of natural resources with regard to incentive payment requests under s. 23.33(5r) and requests for funding under s. 23.33(9)(b), (bb), and (bg).

Grant applicants have the opportunity to submit grants for needs that must be addressed and for other actions that aren't necessarily required but might be of value as resources and the relative merit of the request allow. All interested parties have a chance to present the merits of their proposals so no one is being left out.

I can't think of a single grant request that was intended to meet an actual need that was denied. I can think of many grant requests for enhancements that were approved. If there is an actual need, we meet it without fail.

In addition to reviewing the written grant requests, some council members visit grant request sites to see what the situation on the ground is. This is an important step. Sometimes grant requests are not prepared completely enough to give a clear picture of the need and sometimes the description in the request differs from what is seen during an in-person visit. Often, the visit by the council members results in additional photos and information that support a request that might otherwise have been denied. Visiting a variety of grant request sites over time gives council members a unique state-wide

perspective of the situation, conditions, practices, and needs on a broad scale. It helps them determine the relative value of requests when they have to sort them with regard to priorities and limited resources. This is such a high-payoff initiative that it needs to be even more formalized in the procedures for the council.

A shortfall with trying to describe any fixed standard with regard to surfaces and dimensions is that it can lead to a waste of resources. Those that spend a lot of time on trails know that a uniform 12' width is not required for the entire length of a trail. There are a variety of factors that must be considered. More often than not, the totality of circumstances allows less than 12' to be satisfactory and safe in many situations. If a standard requiring the uniform application of gravel came into being, we'd be wasting money (while detracting from the trail experience) to put gravel where it is not needed. Keep in mind that once you add gravel, you are taking on the long term expense of replenishing that gravel. Gravel lacks sustainability without continued replenishment.

Rehab/storm damage requests make it clear that you cannot completely storm proof trails. Nor can you stormproof highways and they have an enormous stack of specifications for their design and construction.

We also can't have "near perfect" trails. Even if they were affordable (they're not), we doubt we could ever achieve "near perfection". We need to concentrate on actions that address environmental concerns. We need to ensure that maintenance dollars are being properly spent to sustain trails and minimize any detrimental defects of weather and trail use. We need to avoid overbuilding or overspending for actions that are not reasonably required. In the past, trails were often based on existing forest paths even if they weren't optimally suitable. In the future we need to do a better job of trail placement and design to begin with something more sustainable.

We need to consciously consider the spectrum of user preferences instead of overbuilding trails into a broad and unvarying collection of road like paths. In principle, no single trail system should have only one trail experience being offered there.

We need to separate the ATV /UTV route issues from the trail experience issues. Routes were initially intended as connectors between trail segments where a trail would not otherwise be available. Routes have since evolved into a major transportation network with a purpose that is not closely related to trail recreation - except for those that only have roads to ride (no trails) proximate to where they live.

Since we already have a system that has handled trail issues quite well for many years, it is a good idea to explore other products that might be helpful to those involved with trails.

One useful step is to have a central list of useful trail references. This has already been started by means of this workgroup. Another useful tool would be a repository involving a knowledge-base or shared success stories. For example, on a recent trail tour one manager was demonstrating how he

managed the tendency for some riders to try to go around an otherwise harmless puddle on the trail. A simple and inexpensive deterrent barrier of fallen trees solved the problem – a solution already offered as an option in trail references.

Sharing high quality references that offer a catalog of trail and spot solutions goes a long way to taking the right steps to make a trail reasonably sustainable without overbuilding or overspending with little return on investment or without taking on long term recurring expenses.

Trail work involves art that goes beyond basic knowledge and requires the wisdom of experience which precludes a one size fits all reference.

Another issue that could use more attention is surfaces on multi-use trails. A trail that has a surface that is fine for ATV/UTV use may not be preferable for bicyclists or some other users. ATV grants usually pay 100% so sometimes people ask for a 100% ATV grant to pay for another user group's preferences that have nothing to do with ATVs. This can also be true for a snowmobiling related interest to smooth an otherwise satisfactory ATV trail. Since the snow program doesn't have sufficient funds to do this type of work some can submit a grant claiming it is an ATV issue. This kinds of practices need greater awareness and attention at the request level so that appropriate sources of funds are been addressed instead of going to 100% ATV.

One change that might be useful to consider is the funding for ATV/UTV trails on state properties. It might be better to have projects on state lands go through the same process as other projects. This would relate to more uniform trail practices as department projects would have the same consideration and oversight and may have more adequate funding.

There is a significant problem trying to account for winter ATV/UTV riding on snowmobile trails. First, no one has any reliable idea of how many ATV riders actually engage in this. Second, there are no uniform laws pertaining to winter ATV/UTV use between jurisdictions across the state. There is no reliable system to address funding issues under the current system without a trail pass to record actual users and collect the appropriate fees to be distributed in support of snow trails. This must be fixed.

One looming problem is that we have bridges of unknown capacity that were constructed without engineering. We refer to these locally produced bridges as "frankenbridges". Some have sturdy components but poor design. Some use discarded utility poles, trailer home frames, and who knows what else. With the ever increasing size of trail maintenance equipment using these bridges, there is a high risk of failure with catastrophic results. We already had a piece of equipment break through an otherwise seemingly sturdy locally constructed bridge. The safety and liability concerns related to these structures have been ignored far too long. The recent trend toward larger and heavier equipment has forced this issue to be dealt with. It will require considerable funds from trail programs to replace these bridges with proper engineered structures. This expense has the potential to detract from other trail enhancements for quite some time. An immediate priority is to tackle this safety and mobility issue.

One proposal refers to rehabilitation being done on a calendar basis. The calendar doesn't indicate actual need. Conditions on the ground do. Actual need may be 6 years or 15 years (or some other figure) depending on what evolves on a particular trail. Rehab is done when required, not based on a calendar. Rehab also involves the segments that actually require rehab. We don't rehab a long trail segment unless it uniformly requires rehab. Do townships pave an entire road when they have to repave the site of a single heaved culvert?

General Remarks About Trail Standards

Since there are a broad array of specific circumstances and remedies that contribute to a properly constructed trail in widely varying situations, it is difficult to describe a construction standard that will address every situation. Circumstances vary based on use, soils, terrain, water, slope, level of maintenance, and many more aspects that affect trails.

There are many references that discuss techniques for addressing trail construction and maintenance under a variety of circumstances. Again, no "one size fits all" solution is available there.

However, there are sound principles that contribute to establishing sustainable trails. By applying the techniques associated with these principles as they relate to the specific situation at hand, we are able to determine what design, work, and materials are appropriate once we consider the variables of a specific situation. This is one reason why it is important to rely on references that offer a catalog of appropriate tailored solutions instead of a broad brush approach from some guidance document that may or may not fit a situation.

The council focuses on doing what is necessary to keep trails sustainable and to prevent significant wear, erosion, hazard, and adverse environmental issues while keeping user preferences in mind.

Since we don't have unlimited resources, this means the council has to determine the best use of our funds to address what is necessary. If sufficient resources are available beyond that, the council may approve enhancements beyond what is actually required to sustain the trail system.

This avoids faulty standards that do not consider all of the circumstances involved – such as saying a certain depth of gravel is routinely required.

The current system is working well. Available guidelines and references are getting the job done now as evidenced by a proven record of success. As always, we strive for continuous improvement in ways that positively influence the program and do not detract from it.

Enclosures

1. Discussion and Recommendation Regarding Improving Grant Applications
http://dnr.wi.gov/Aid/documents/ATV/ORV_AdHocGrantAppRequirements.pdf
2. Discussion Regarding Site Visits by Individuals
http://dnr.wi.gov/Aid/documents/ATV/ORV_CouncilMemberSiteVisits.pdf
3. Discussion Regarding Self-Assessments and Grant Applications
<http://dnr.wi.gov/Aid/documents/ATV/ORVSponsorSelfAssessment.pdf>

Discussion and Recommendation Regarding Improving Grant Applications (ORV Council 1 Mar 2016)

Purpose

The primary purpose of this ad hoc committee is to develop recommendations as to how to improve grant applications. The intent is to assist applicants in submitting a well-developed submission on which the council can act, and to assist the council in ensuring that available funds are properly allocated to meet the needs of the program.

Background

Mission of the council:

The authority and responsibilities of the council are defined by Wisconsin Statutes, sections 15.09, 15.347(9) and 23.178, supplemented by these procedural bylaws.

The off-road vehicle council shall provide advice and make recommendations to the department of natural resources, the department of transportation, the governor, and the legislature on all matters relating to all-terrain vehicle trails and all-terrain vehicle routes, including matters relating to activities conducted on all-terrain vehicle trails and all-terrain vehicle routes by all-terrain vehicle users and utility terrain vehicle users, and shall make recommendations to the department of natural resources with regard to incentive payment requests under s. 23.33(5r) and requests for funding under s. 23.33(9)(b), (bb), and (bg).

The council found that some applications were not sufficiently developed to give members a clear understanding of the request allowing them to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities. In some cases, key information was absent or not meaningfully addressed.

Instead of having to put aside an inadequately prepared grant request, the council undertook an initiative to help requestors become more successful with their applications. Instead of waiting until the funding meeting to review applications, with the risk of an application being denied due to insufficient information, the council took on the task of a preliminary review of applications a month prior. This allowed council members to ask questions to clarify, amplify, or otherwise improve the information and justification in an application without having to make a decision based on what they reviewed at that moment. By means of this process, requestors had an opportunity to address information shortfalls in time to still be considered at the funding meeting. This was a very positive and helpful initiative by the council to assist grant applicants.

The month out step was still not sufficient to ensure that all applications were complete enough to document actual need, distinguish between actual need and enhancements, or for council members to understand any vaguely presented justification for an action. The step to improve grant request submissions is an action to further develop the application process to do even more to assist applicants in being successful while enabling the council to have the information they need to make decisions that best support the program.

Improved Approach

Improving applications involves justifying and documenting actual needs. Focusing on needs first, and other lower priority enhancements later (as value and funds allow), helps the council to do more to ensure that funds are best allocated in support of the program.

Actual needs: Conditions that require action to be taken. A broken bridge, blown out culvert, significant erosion, and other common hot spots associated with trail maintenance.

Enhancements: Enhancements are not required to have a sustainable trail, but they may offer a desirable improvement that makes the trail more attractive for some. For example, adding gravel to an otherwise sound section of trail that is based on native soils is not required, but it may be something that someone may prefer.

There have been many quality grant requests submitted as part of this program. This effort is to improve those that need further development, and to contribute to more common understanding and standardization that will ensure that everyone's requests will be given appropriate consideration.

We contribute to establishing a common standard by ensuring that we distinguish between actual needs and enhancements (preferences) so that that we address needs before we begin to address enhancements.

No element can take unfair advantage of the program if all applicants have to clearly demonstrate actual need and distinguish it from a lower priority enhancement. In any grant program anywhere there is the potential for an applicant to try to take advantage beyond what is appropriate. In any situation involving grants, it is important for the people tasked to review the requests to have the information they require to ensure that requests are appropriate, allowed by law, and in support of the best interests of the program.

Application quality is key. We need to understand the situation on the ground (adequate information) so that we can compare varying degrees of need to make sure things are properly addressed.

Toward that end, we offer some specific additional guidance in the appendix to this document that is based on our previous experience evaluating requests. This is done with the intent to help make grant requestors and the council as a whole more successful.

As before, if a request wasn't properly substantiated, the council could be reluctant to approve it and may reject it outright. One of the highest priorities of the council is to meet as many actual needs as they can. The goal of the council is not to deny more requests. The goal is to have well documented requests that allow us to make best use of the funds available to ensure that as many needs are taken care of as can be and that we are best supporting the program.

Highlighting Actual Needs

Most important is that we take care of actual needs first. Then, as resources allow, we can evaluate and prioritize proposed enhancements. This concept is similar to what people do with their personal budgets.

Some have suggested that we have some specific list to describe a standard surface for all trails. This could involve something like adding gravel of a certain depth to every trail just to have a standard gravel surface. There are so many potential circumstances that could be involved in a particular section of trail that it would be nearly impossible to formulate a catalog that would describe the actual needs of every situation. There are many references that discuss techniques for addressing trail construction and maintenance under a variety of circumstances. Due to the number of variables that could be involved, no one size fits all is available.

There are sound principles that contribute to establishing sustainable trails. By applying the techniques associated with these we can easily identify actual need and the remedy required. A review of some trail construction and sustainability references did not produce any across the board requirements for all trails. References start with a base of native soil and then offer technical practices to deal with problems that present themselves as conditions and use vary.

Trail references do not describe any standard surface like gravel or gravel depth. They do describe practices that can be implemented to make a trail sustainable.

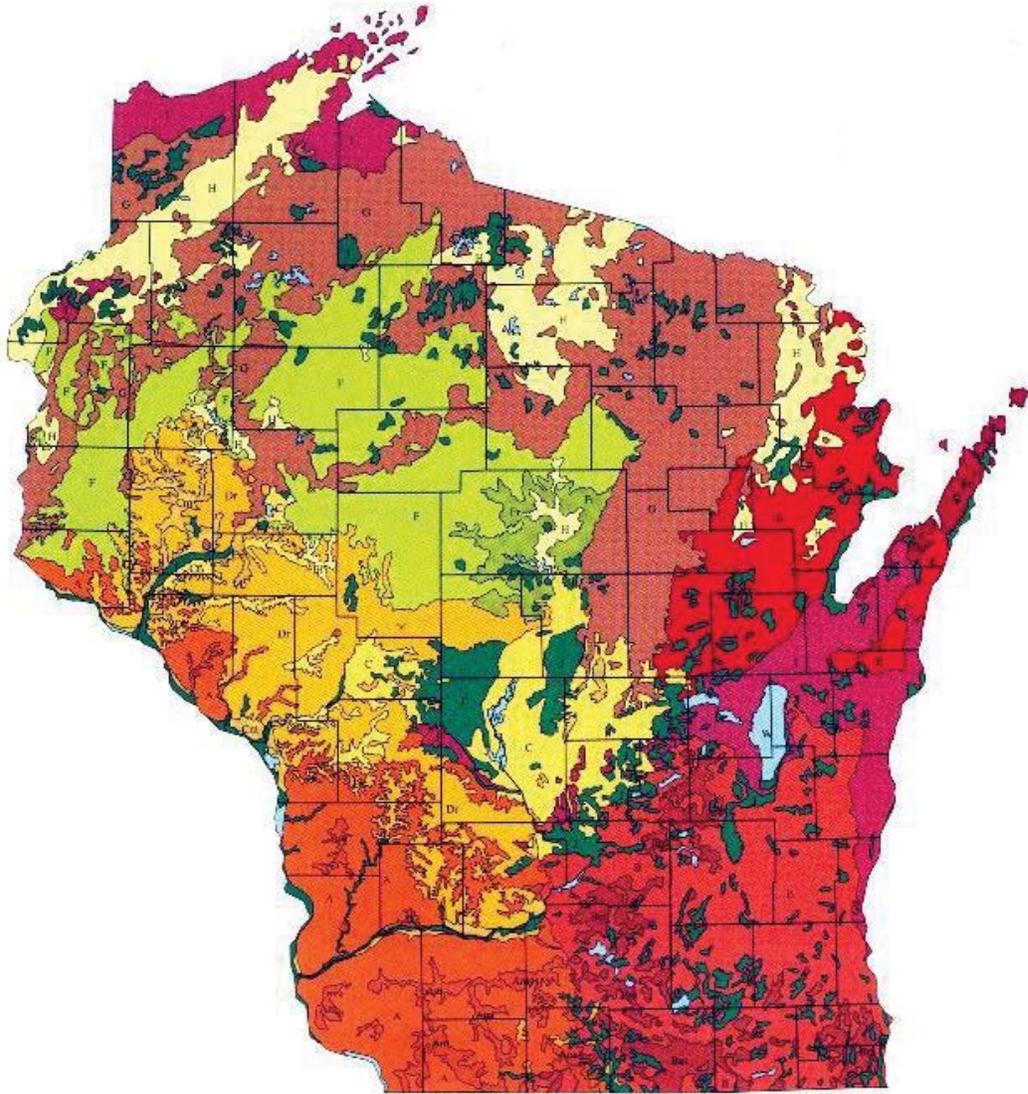
Some suggested dealing with gravel by describing a standard based on inches of material. Again, there is no set standard. If a section of trail actually required gravel the amount would be based on what was actually needed there. For example, a stable trail of native soils would not need gravel but a soft bridge approach might need a substantial amount of rock and gravel.

Keep in mind that we are not dealing with a highway network with specific DOT standards. We are dealing with a recreational trail system for all-terrain vehicles. Highway-like trails may not be affordable or desirable.

Experience has proven that trails can be based on native soils providing that needs to appropriately deal with hot spots are addressed. This is probably the most prevalent surface in trail systems anywhere. Amounts of enhancement beyond actual need vary. It is always the highest priority to deal with actual needs first, and consider enhancements at a lower priority as funds and the value to the program allow.

Some agencies may have more requests for actual needs or enhancements than others because of the nature of their trail system: soils, topography, intensity of use, existing sustainability, and the like. Within a single trail system there can be a wide variety of soil types, elevation profiles, and other relevant conditions. We are more focused on actual needs than jurisdictional boundaries. Some jurisdictions may require more than others. Not all trails get equal amounts of use.

Many of us ride trails all over the country. We get to make first-hand observations about sustainability issues across a broad array of circumstances particular to trails. We get to observe and experience what is good and bad and what the relative value of improvements and enhancements are.



With regard to rehabilitation, no one ever intended for trails to be rebuilt on a ten year cycle. It is not “automatic”. Rehabilitation is based on actual needs to rehabilitate that go beyond what can be done with maintenance funds.

Rehabilitation must be based on actual need. If sections of a trail require a rehab at 7 years due to some catastrophic damage that can’t be addressed with maintenance funds, they should get it. On the other hand, they should not be rehabilitated until they require it. For some sections of trail this could be 12, 15, 20 or more years. Rehabilitation means to “restore to good condition”. It does not include enhancements that are not required by the otherwise satisfactory condition of the trail.

A common misstep is to include enhancements within a rehabilitation request. Some may believe that since ten years have passed they should do a “whole road” instead of addressing the sections that truly need rehab. A quote from an app: “We only get one rehab request every ten years so doing the entire trail only makes sense.” A path does not uniformly require the same amount of maintenance or rehabilitation. For a seven mile stretch, there could be short segments that truly need rehab. Some may desire to improve the entire path under the terms of a rehab grant. Since applying rehab (high priority) dollars to the non-rehab (enhancement) part of the path is inappropriate based on actual need and definition, the request would have to be split by actual need and enhancements. This is not to say that the enhancement wouldn't be funded after other priority projects are addressed. It is to say that enhancements would be properly and fairly sorted out from higher priority rehab requests based on actual need. In the end, money would have to be available and the proposal would have to make sense with regard to the overall value to the program.

A parallel is what townships do with road repair with their budgets. They often replace only short segments of deteriorated road versus repaving miles of otherwise usable roads.

Expectations and preferences that go beyond actual needs relate to funds available. Actual needs come first and must be well documented.

Sand, by itself, does not require additional surfacing across a trail system with other materials. Some entire trail systems are built on sand. While sand may not be good for cars and trucks, it is certainly not a significant obstacle for all terrain vehicles. Like everything else, justified actual needs would be part of a grant request addressing sand related issues. Quote from a grant request: “The sandy soils and flat topography help to keep this trail sustainable.”

Discussion - Enhancements

Each time we add gravel to an otherwise sound section of trail, we are creating a future obligation to sustain that gravel. As gravel is graded wider and wider on a forest road/trail over time, more gravel will be required to sustain the surface. So, one must consider the value of continuing to add gravel to sustain the initial gravel application in future years. Adding gravel where it is not required can incur a long term expense to the program.

Ease of grading is not a factor if gravel was applied to an otherwise satisfactory surface that already offered minimum maintenance. The ability to satisfactorily maintain trails without extraordinary effort is an important concern to everyone. However, requests to improve the ease of maintenance must be appropriately categorized with regard to actual need and enhancements.

Making a trail smooth may not make it more sustainable or make it easier to maintain. It can actually increase the need to apply more resources and effort to keep it that way. This is another reason to consider what requirements we generate in the future for an action now.

Making a smooth gravel trail does not by itself improve safety. It can actually decrease safety by encouraging higher speeds and poorer traction for low pressure ATV tires. Keep in mind that many ATV fatalities are on roads.

Gravel can introduce significant dust issues – although dust issues can exist with other surfaces.

Sometimes requests are made with regard to making it easier for snow groomers. Some specifically ask us to fund the application of gravel to accommodate snow groomers. We appreciate our snowmobile partners, but it is difficult to deal with a request that is presented with principally snowmobile concerns. Other factors relating to snow depth and when grooming is being performed may offer a remedy.

Subjective Self-Assessment

(See related discussion document regarding self-assessment and grant applications.)

At one point, someone suggested a system where applicants would self-assess and prioritize their own projects and submit that assessment as criteria for the council to use to rank and order grant requests. The first problem is that there is no standardized way to ensure that each application bears the correct assessment with regard to the entire program. Being principally subjective, it would be of little use overall. Someone's top priority locally may not even be close to the highest priorities for the overall program. Doing a subjective self-assessment can add another layer that has to be sorted through to get down to the one standard criteria that is most important: actual need.

We already have a system of priorities to address actual needs. What must be done is to sort out enhancements to an appropriate priority.

Varying User Preferences

User preferences vary. Some want smooth trails and some want rugged. Add in that a single trail or trail system is usually not uniform in the rider experience being offered. Conflicting ideas about rider experience can be a problem when it comes to determining what enhancements might be appropriate for a trail system. This can be a troubling issue for all involved. Perhaps a solution might be to follow the doctrine that allows for varying experiences being offered in a trail system.

“So, if I can't justify an actual need, will I get my grant request or not?”

Properly classifying something as an enhancement does not eliminate it from being approved via a grant request. It simply gets the action into the proper category with regard to other priorities and helps ensure fairness by ensuring that everyone's actual needs are addressed first.

The common standard of distinguishing between actual needs and enhancements is important. The council is committed to fixing actual problems beyond what can be done using maintenance dollars. This is especially true for actions that pose a bona fide and well substantiated threat to other programs such as forest certification.

Increased workload for applicants?

Taking the time to prepare a well-documented grant application that justifies the need for what is requested has always been a requirement. Some applicants put more effort into creating well developed applications than others. What we need now is for all applicants to recognize the difference between actual needs and enhancements and then properly substantiate their requests under the existing program. For example, it is not enough to claim “safety” as a factor without explaining exactly what the unsafe condition is and how the requested action will make conditions more safe while recognizing that trail riding is inherently unsafe in the first place.

Grant applicants are not being given a significant additional burden regarding their requests. Some will have to do more to support their grant request than they have in the past which was probably already required in the first place.

An examination of grant requests from the last cycle reveals the following:

- There were 78 grant requests for a total of around \$4.9M dollars.
- There were 28 entities making requests for an average of 2.8 requests per entity.
- The average amount per request was around \$63K.
- Number of grant requests per entities.

# Entities had this	# Requests
1	6
4	5
5	4
4	3
8	2
6	1

Trail Standards

Since there are a broad number of specific circumstances and remedies that contribute to a properly constructed trail in widely varying situations, it is difficult to describe a construction standard that will address every situation. Circumstances vary based on use, soils, terrain, water, slope, level of maintenance, and many more aspects that affect trails.

There are many references that discuss techniques for addressing trail construction and maintenance under a variety of circumstances. Again, no “one size fits all” solution is available there.

However, there are sound principles that contribute to establishing sustainable trails. By applying the techniques associated with these principles as they apply to the specific situation at hand, we are able to determine what design, work, and materials are appropriate.

The council focuses on doing what is necessary to keep trails sustainable and to prevent significant wear, erosion, hazard, and adverse environmental issues.

Since we don’t have unlimited resources, this means the council has to determine the best use of our funds to address what is necessary. If sufficient resources are available beyond that, the council may approve enhancements beyond what is actually required to sustain the trail system.

This avoids faulty standards that do not consider all of the circumstances involved – such as saying we will pay for gravel up to a certain depth.

An Unresolved Issue

On September 25th, 2014, several ORV council members were invited guests at a Wisconsin County Forest Association meeting in Rothschild, WI. During the meeting the council was criticized by some WCFA members for approving grant applications that they (WCFA members) didn't even want in the first place. This was an astonishing revelation to the ORVC members that were present – especially after being asked previously to “just trust” that if foresters say they want something they truly need it. The principal speaker on this issue, and those that added remarks, indicated that sometimes foresters were required to submit grant requests that they didn't support, want, or need due to local political pressures or direction to do so. These remarks not only expressed frustration with their own local problems, but also seemed critical of the council for approving the requests. One ORVC member answered that if foresters submit a signed request for a grant, the council can only believe that if they request it they want it. There did not seem to be an obvious solution for this issue with regard to specifically addressing it under the topic of improving grant requests. We are not able to detect if someone is submitting a grant request for something they don't actually want. The best course of action is to require well developed grant requests that substantiate the need for what is being requested and follow the system from there. If a grant request is inadequate, the council may not be able to approve it. If the action requested is not a high enough priority with regard to the overall program, the council may not be able to approve it. This situation highlights why it is important for the council to carefully consider each request in accordance with their fiduciary duties.

Summary

The grant application process needs to be improved to ensure that grant applications clearly substantiate actual need. A neutral depiction of the situation on the ground that encompasses the factors that are relevant to the request is what is best for the council to use for an evaluation. All are required to simply present facts and supporting images in the appropriate manner without relying on subjective claims. Arguments about the level of development of a trail, safety issues, and the like would need to be clearly explained and justified with facts – as is reasonable for a grant application in the first place. A distinction between actual need and desired enhancements is required so that enhancements are appropriately categorized for consideration. This is by far the most rational and standard method to approach managing grant requests. Some clarifying points of guidance are included in the appendix to this document.

Appendix 1 Notes to Discussion and Recommendation Regarding Improving Grant Applications

This appendix provides some notes and relevant guidance regarding a sampling of topics that may be included in a grant request.

It is not enough to simply mention safety when offering the issue as a relevant factor in a grant request. It is important to describe the unsafe condition and specifically how the requested action will improve safety keeping in mind that ATV riding is inherently unsafe in the first place. If someone offers safety as an issue but does not articulate the issue and remedy we can only ignore the remark as a significant factor since it was not explained. Safety is an important concern to the council. It should be important enough to explain if the issue is introduced in a grant request. We can't guess what point an applicant is trying to make. Keep in mind that a safety issue on a trail may have a variety of remedies. These could include signage, speed restrictions, visibility, trail surface conditions, topography, intensity of use, and the like. Accident reports that relate to unsafe conditions may be relevant. Keep in mind that adding gravel to a trail surface may actually detract from safe conditions rather than improving them. One unsafe condition could easily be replaced by another without a significant improvement in safety overall.

If gravel is being proposed as part of a remedy the need must be clearly justified. There needs to be specific information about why the existing trail surface needs to be improved and what the value of adding gravel will be. It will be important to justify the need for adding gravel. Keep in mind that introducing gravel also introduces future expenses for sustaining the gravel surface. The need must justify taking on future expenses for maintaining a gravel surface. Photos/videos that clearly demonstrate need along the length of the proposed project will be required. The proposed dimensions of the gravel application will need to be clearly described including how deep and wide the gravel will be and what compaction factor is being applied. There are restrictions regarding the width of a trail surface being addressed under this program.

It will be important to describe previous maintenance efforts when asking for additional funds to rehabilitate a section of trail. This is because additional funds are being requested beyond the previous payments for trail maintenance. Some cases of catastrophic damage due to a storm will be quite obvious. Long term deterioration generates an interest in previous maintenance efforts. It is important that we know what work is effective in sustaining a trail, including previous rehabilitations, as we consider a rehabilitation proposal.

Erosion problems may require trail design improvement beyond resurfacing. We need to address root issues rather than repeating the same effort due to a trail design that could be improved.

Statements like "it can no longer be graded" need to be substantiated with appropriate references (photos) and descriptions. The council needs to be able to understand the need the applicant is trying to describe.

In the past there have been remarks about getting ATVs off a "busy township road". Busy is a relative term. In some counties and situations that could mean a very high traffic count. In others, "busy" is much less substantial. A better description is required to support a contention like this.

An argument might be made for gravel that would improve the surface for hikers, bicyclists, and snowmobilers. Keep in mind that there are funding sources that relate to their interests that might be more appropriate than ATV funds.

One picture of one location does not substantiate the need for an entire project. The number of pictures used to substantiate needs should be sufficient to describe the entire project. This does not mean that images must be contiguous. It does mean that they should adequately demonstrate the need for an action.

Taking an action to prevent something in the future does not by itself demonstrate that there is an actual need at the present time. Prevention is important, but it must be addressed with the appropriate priority. Describe the scale of the problem, the current need, and the potential future need.

Stating that something makes the trail “much easier to maintain” does not clearly establish the need for an action. One would have to address the scale of the current maintenance problem and if the action is a current need or an enhancement.

Intensity of use can be a relevant factor. Quantifying that use can make it easier to give a higher priority to a project where this is a factor.

Claiming that a path is “nearly inoperable” for an ATV would require substantiation. ATVs can handle rugged terrain.

Boardwalks can be expensive to build and maintain. It is important to demonstrate the need for a boardwalk in lieu of an alternate route.

Any issues that are based on snowmobile concerns need to clearly substantiate why this is an issue for the ATV program and not the snowmobile program.

Treating hotspots is a preferred technique rather than applying a uniform treatment to a trail that does not have uniform needs. As an example, when referring to concerns like protruding rock, describe the actual problem area. Likewise, an entire trail will not likely require rehab along the entire length of the trail. Grant applications must separate the areas of actual need for rehabilitation from other areas that do not require rehab but for which someone might propose an enhancement like adding gravel.

When referring to rider enjoyment or rider experience in an application, keep in mind that rider preferences are not uniform. One group may prefer a smooth trail while another may prefer a rugged trail. Doctrine for trail design refers to offering a variety of rider experiences within a trail system. Instead of having a goal to make an entire trail system smooth, managers might find that user preferences are better met by having loops that offer varying experiences.

It is not proper to attribute a list of problems to an entire length of trail. For example, if within a 5 mile trail segment there are issues that relate to roughness, protecting a wetland, and erosion (as examples), break out the need for each of the problems instead of claiming uniform issues for the entire distance.

Sand, by itself, is not a problem for ATVs. In fact some entire trail systems are built on sand. Requests to replace the surface would need to distinguish between actual needs and enhancements and the substantiation would need to demonstrate why it was appropriate.

When claiming that a trail surface causes problems for trail groomers, be specific. What problem for what type of groomer, why, and what remedies have been considered.

Discussion Regarding Site Visits by Individuals (ORV Council 1 March 2016)

Background

Recently there was some discussion regarding a member of the council visiting a grant application site and taking photographs that he later shared with the council as information relating to a grant request. Mike Peterson (WCFA) objected to members visiting a grant request site without the land manager being present. It appeared as if site visits like this did not sit well with Mike and perhaps a few others. As a side note, grant applications are submitted for the council to consider without the land manager being present. It seems appropriate to revisit this issue to ensure a common understanding regarding this kind of activity.

Mike Peterson (WCFA) introduced the idea of visiting a project site by scheduling a council visit in Rusk County for an in-person look at a site involved in a grant application. The intent was to show us, by our in-person visit, what was described in the application. This visit demonstrated the value of seeing firsthand what the situation was on the ground instead of solely relying on what was described in an application or in remarks at a meeting. Those that attended are grateful for this valuable experience that was based on Mike's suggestion.

Likewise, council members also appreciated the photographs shared by a council member after his visit to a grant request site. As is usually the case, a neutral array of photographs can give a very clear picture of the situation on the ground. Grant requests sometimes lack some information that could describe the project more clearly. In this case the council member's photographs taken during his visit to the site proved to be very relevant and useful information.

Council Members and Trail Knowledge

Members of the council are motorized trail users. They have experience riding trails not only in Wisconsin, but in other states across the country. This first-hand experience is part of what qualifies them to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the council. Most have been able to compile a great deal of knowledge by their observations and experiences with trail conditions, problems, and how well remedies work under a variety of circumstances. Some members have been formally trained in trail design, construction, and maintenance techniques. Members are expected to apply their observations, knowledge, and experience as they fulfill the mission of the council.

Council Initiatives to Improve the Process

It continues to be a priority for the council to improve grant applications to try to ensure that customers are best served. The first step by the council was to provide for a preliminary review to allow submitters the opportunity to make their applications more complete to avoid being otherwise denied at the formal funding meeting. The idea was to improve conditions to make applicants more successful. There is a second phase being developed to help applicants present more complete (and therefore likely more

successful) applications. Considering the council's initiatives to improve things, how will they ever know if the grant applications are doing a good job of reflecting the actual needs on the ground if they don't visit some sites described in applications? How can the council develop better methods to assist grant applicants if they lack this vital feedback?

Individual vs. Council Actions

Members are not acting in the name of the council as they see and do things in pursuit of their recreational interests. However, they are entitled to the knowledge they develop during their pursuits – including visiting a particular site that they might be interested in as a result of their service to the council.

The council by-laws already make it clear that visits of this type, whether intentional or inadvertent, are unofficial and are not tasks directed by the council unless specifically authorized. The council as a body is not directing these visits. These are individual actions apart from council actions.

Council members may not generally present themselves as a representative of the council as a body without specific authorization. With that in mind, it may be unacceptable for the council member to meet with a land manager on the subject of a grant request during a visit to a site.

There is nothing wrong with seeing something first-hand. Council members are entitled to share whatever relevant knowledge they develop on these and other visits or experiences.

Since council members are trail riders, they are going to be out riding in pursuit of their recreational interest apart from anything to do with their role on the council. It would be absurd to think that council members should avoid trail segments that might be involved in grant requests. It would be contrary to the mission of the council to expect members to close their eyes and not include anything they have seen when they are called upon to exercise their judgement about grant requests. Keep in mind that members would have little or no idea about what areas might be involved in a grant request until well into the riding season anyway.

Value to the Program

There is no problem with a council member visiting a grant application site and later sharing information with the rest of the council about what he saw. We historically have had members reporting about their observations about trail segments based on their visits. Photographing some or all of the site provides visual images that can often be more clearly interpreted than a less developed written or verbal description.

Grant applications are initiated based on need as observed by someone that surveys the trail. Why would it ever be unreasonable for a council member to visit a trail and see exactly what the conditions are? How is more information ever bad? The observations of a member could further support the need described in a grant request.

Why would anyone object to a visit to a trail grant application site by a council member? What would be the reason for this objection? Facts are facts. It is a basic tenet that things must be properly described in a grant application whether there are visits or not.

The State Trails Council sometimes schedules their meetings at a location with the intent of visiting a trail or trail related facility to see first-hand what is being done.

Some points that illustrate the value of visits of this type:

- a. Additional information is never bad. It often compliments what is described in a grant request providing a clearer picture of the situation to be dealt with.
- b. Visits allow members to compare what is requested relative to their observations and experiences from across the country, state, and the specific trail location.
- c. Visits allow council members to develop knowledge about how well applications are accurately describing the actual needs involved in a request. This can allow members to suggest remedies or improvements to the application process that will best serve all involved.
- d. Although the council is not directing members to make site visits as a council action at this time, the council does not discourage members from making visits on their own.
- e. The council will evaluate information derived from these visits just as they evaluate other information involved in the process.
- f. Council members are required to know about trails. They need to be out there looking at things.
- g. Visiting sites related to grant applications can also be valuable after the grant has been executed. This serves as important feedback for the council to see that the work was completed as described in the application and assessing if the action was effective in addressing the need. It is important for the council to get information that allows them to determine that what we are funding actually works as projected.

Resolved

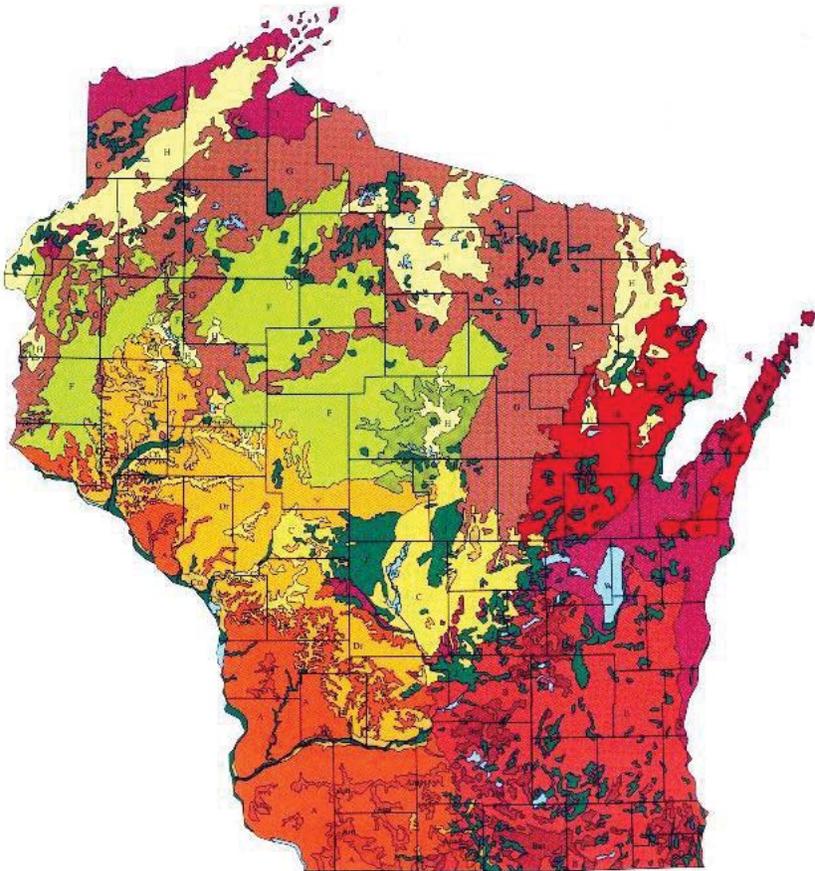
In view of the foregoing, it is clear that council members sharing information about trails and sites they visit can be valuable to both grant applicants and the council. Not only is it unmistakably permissible, but it should be encouraged by the community we serve.

Discussion Regarding Self-Assessments and Grant Applications (ORV Council 1 March 2016)

Self-appraisals are deceptively attractive. They look like a good idea, but they're not.

An effective self-assessment would require a broad range of knowledge about all of the other situations and related grant requests being submitted in that cycle. To have an accurate assessment with rankings that are truly relevant to the overall system, all submitters would need to have the same level of knowledge and commitment to enable them to get it right. Outside influences would also have to be eliminated.

Topographic features, man-made trail structures, and soil types differ widely between counties – sometimes even within a county. Intensity of trail use also varies as do acts of nature that have an impact on some trail systems but not others.



With that in mind, it would not be unusual for a single or small number of counties to have a number of very high priority grant requests in a cycle. Other counties, with less of a relative need, could also present their projects as their highest priority. Trying to resolve the true relative system-wide values of all of the projects while relying on locally scored self-assessments introduces a superficial layer of information to sort through. Trying to sort through subjective self-assessments unnecessarily detracts from managing grant requests.

As has often been pointed out, there are too many combinations of variables to the circumstances of projects to develop a reliable numeric system of ranking them. Even when exhaustive efforts are made to try to capture factors related to a project, ranking efforts are still ineffective due to the inherent flaw of subjective ratings.

Studies have consistently shown that self-assessments are notoriously inaccurate.

- Assessments are made by people that do not have equal knowledge, understanding, or ability – especially regarding program-wide issues.

- Often those with the worst level of knowledge and understanding mistakenly produce ratings far above a more realistic assessment. People usually mean well, but they often don't know what they don't know.

- Often those that do have well developed knowledge and understanding make a more realistic rating, often lower than what is merited, and certainly lower than many of the rankings of the less informed. Those with broad knowledge that lends itself to making a better assessment often mistakenly assume that others are operating on the same level. They can mistakenly believe that others are making as accurate of an assessment as theirs with an outcome that the relative rankings for their own projects are less than they deserve.

- Without a broad level of knowledge of the grant applications being submitted program-wide in a cycle, the self-assessor lacks the ability to make an accurate appraisal of how his or her individual projects rank overall in the cycle.

- There can also be a more self-serving motive as there can be competition for available dollars which can motivate some to inflate their rankings. This may also involve pressure from various sources to take steps to out-compete others for grant money.

A model that demonstrates some of the factors that influence subjective ratings is as follows. Priority A is afraid of being considered as Priority B, while Priority B is afraid as being regarded as Priority C, while Priority C can mistakenly believe they are Priority A.

So what is the probable outcome based on trying to implement a system of subjective local self-assessments for grant applications? We would create an artificial layer of inherently defective assessments that would have to be sorted through to achieve a reasonably accurate assessment with regard to how important a project is with regard to what is being considered throughout the program during a grant cycle.

In addition to adding a distracting layer that does not enhance the process, subjective self-assessments introduce misunderstanding and potential conflicts. People end up arguing about self-developed evaluations instead of dealing with the neutral facts on the ground.

Trying to make decisions about the relative value of grant requests is a very difficult job. The council is not all-knowing or all-seeing as they approach this task, but they do have visibility of all of the grant applications being submitted program-wide during a cycle. This lends itself to the council being able to

reasonably assess the relative value of projects. The last thing we need to do is to add confusion to the system with a layer of subjective self-assessments.

The better system is to refine grant applications to ensure that they clearly demonstrate actual need. A neutral depiction of the situation on the ground that encompasses the factors that are relevant to the request is what is best for the council to use for an evaluation. All are required to simply present facts and supporting images in the appropriate manner without relying on subjective claims. Arguments about the level of development of a trail, safety issues, and the like would need to be clearly explained and justified with facts – as is reasonable for a grant application in the first place. There will also need to be a distinction between actual need and desired enhancements within the categories that are already defined. This is by far the most rational and standard method to approach managing grant requests.

(The above paragraph is a brief description of part of a program addressing improving the grant application process that will be covered elsewhere.)