

Outdoor Recreational Trails Advisory Board (ORTAB)

Teleconference Meeting Minutes 10/7/2015 3-4pm

ORTAB Members Present:

Jeff Budd - Chair - Represents Southeast Alaska / Non-Motorized

Mike Sirofchuk - Represents Kodiak / Southwest Alaska

Mike Rearden - Represents Western / Southwest Alaska

Ron Lurk - Represents Anchorage / Motorized / Diversified

Seth Adams - Represents Fairbanks Area /Northern Area

DNR Staff Present:

Darcy Harris - Alaska State Trails Program Coordinator

Steve Neel - Recreational Trails Grants Administrator

Justin Wholey - Alaska State Trails Program, Resource Specialist

After group introductions, Darcy Harris announced updated RecTrails/ORTAB documents, including a revised score sheet, revised application instructions, a revised grant application, and a new stand-alone excel budget form. She explained that about 90 percent of the applicants' budgets had to be revised before being accepted by Federal Highways. Hopefully, she said, providing a budget sheet more similar to what Federal Highways uses, fewer revisions will be needed. She also suggested ORTAB members review these new documents before they begin scoring grant applications.

Darcy Harris noted that the grant process has become more competitive, and four years ago there were half as many applications submitted as now; applications should be thorough and presentable for this process. She also said that a quality application suggests the possibility of a successful project, and that there is now a general application quality section (25pts); this new section may help better differentiate scores from each other. Also, the score sheet has been shortened and the application budget is weighted higher, and there is a new match ratio as noted on the grant application and in the instructions. In addition, the latest CFR released by Federal Highways has become more strict, she said.

Jeff Budd asked what criteria staff in the Alaska State Trails Program (ASTP) used to determine project eligibility, and would ASTP staff weed out the ineligible projects? Darcy Harris explained that ASTP staff use the same eligibility criteria as the ORTAB does. These criteria are from the score sheet and application instructions, and that the obviously ineligible projects would not be passed on for ORTAB for review. Jeff Budd asked if ASTP staff intended to share their grant scores with ORTAB before the meeting. Mike Sirofchuck noted he wanted to score applications in a vacuum. Steve and Darcy said that that as in the past, ASTP staff will not send its scores to the advisory board.

Darcy Harris and Steve Neel then discussed the possibility of ORTAB members submitting their scores at the meeting, instead of submitting them ahead of time. Mike Sirofchuk didn't see anything wrong with putting scores up to look at before the scoring discussion. Ron Lurk thought it was an okay idea to put

scores up before the discussion, and noted that the score changes are usually only a few points up or down. Ron Lurk also thought it might be helpful for ORTAB members to send scores in early in case a member cannot make it. Steve Neel explained that submitting scores at the meeting was an idea from another state. Darcy Harris said it was up to the board if they wanted to do this or not.

Darcy Harris explained that Federal Highways now asks for project schedules and milestones, and that the schedule and the budget need to correlate with each other. Another goal for this new budget format is to help applicants come up with good project plans. Also, she said, a final end-date cannot be changed unless there is an emergency.

Steve Neel discussed how in the past applicants could add an optional allowance of 7% for administrative costs. He noted that now a federally-approved administrative costs rate can be more than 7%; if an organization (local government entities and non-profits) doesn't have an approved rate from the federal government, they can apply for one. The application period can take several months.

Steve Neel updated the ORTAB on funding news; he explained that Federal Highways Map 21 Act expires October 28, and a continuing resolution is expected. A continuing resolution likely means the same level of funding as in past years; about 1.5 million for the year for projects and administrative costs. He also said that if a new highway bill were to pass it is possible that RecTrails could be funded at a different level.

Once again the score submittal was discussed. Darcy Harris asked how and when ORTAB members wanted to submit their scores. Mike Sirofchuk, Jeff Budd, and Ron Lurk were in favor of sending the scores in advance. There was general agreement that this would continue. Darcy said that the deadline for turning in scores to the trails office would be January 4th, and that the applications sent out to board members by December 11th.

Steve Neel noted that travel arrangements will be coordinated before the meeting; also there are no LWCF apps this year.

Mike Rearden Joined in and noted that he and Ron Lurk are nearing the end of their term. Darcy Harris said that there were no other applicants for their positions, and that she had sent renewal recommendations to the commissioner. Mike Rearden and Ron Lurk were both in favor of serving another term. Ron Lurk asked if there were any SnowTRAC grants awarded. Darcy said no.

Meeting Adjourned.