

1 **Approved - SnowTRAC Meeting Minutes 8/28/2013**

2 **SnowTRAC Members Present:**

- 3 Andy Morrison - Chair - ORTAB/SnowTRAC Liaison
- 4 Dan Mayfield – Co-Chair - Mat-Su/ Copper River Basin
- 5 Stephen Enochs – Fairbanks Rep.
- 6 John Scudder – Anchorage Rep.
- 7 Jim Stanford – Southeast Rep.
- 8 Cynthia Hite – Anchorage Rep.
- 9 Gary Anderson - Kenai Peninsula/ Valdez/Prince William Sound
- 10 Erin McLarnon - Mat-Su/ Copper River Basin
- 11 Doug Boulden - Kenai Peninsula / Valdez / PWS

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13 **DNR Staff Present:**

- 14 Ed Fogels – DNR Deputy Commissioner
- 15 Ben Ellis – Director of Alaska State Parks
- 16 Darcy Harris – Alaska State Trails Program Coordinator
- 17 Jamie Walker - Administrative Operations Manager
- 18 Steve Neel – Alaska State Parks Grants Administrator
- 19 Justin Wholey – Resource Specialist - Alaska State Trails Program
- 20 Wayne Biessel – Mat-Su/Copper Region Parks Superintendent
- 21 Teri Zell – SnowTRAC grant Administrator
- 22 Kyle Kidder - Div. Mining, Land, and Water

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24 **Public:**

- 25 Scott Connely – Snomads Snowmachines Club President
- 26 Deborah McGhan – North America Outdoor Institute (NAOI)
- 27 Randy Crosby – Alaska Snowcat – Petersville Groomer
- 28 Rick Northy – Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers President
- 29 Jay Northy
- 30 Kevin Kastner – Iron Dog Inc.
- 31 Harry Holt - Lake Louise Snowmachine Club President
- 32 Corky Matthews – Lake Louise Snowmachine Club Treasurer
- 33 Jack Kreinheder –Trail Mix Inc. President
- 34 Dave Luce – Groomer Susitna River/Yentna

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40 **Wednesday, August 28, 2013**

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42 **Introductions**

43 SnowTRAC members, DNR staff, and the public introduced themselves. Some joined the meeting via  
44 teleconference. New board member Doug Boulden was in attendance.

45

46 **Board Elections**

47 **Motion**

48 Jim Stanford nominated Cindy (Hite) for the Chair position again. Stephen Enochs seconded. Cindy Hite  
49 declined. There was no vote.

50

51 **Motion**

52 Dan Mayfield nominated John Scudder to be the new chair. John Scudder declined. There was no vote.

53

54 **Motion**

55 Stephen Enochs nominated Andy Morrison for Chair. Cindy Hite seconded. Andy Morrison accepted the  
56 nomination for Chair.

57 **Vote**

58 (9 yea, 0 nay) Motion Passes

59

60 **Motion**

61 Gary Anderson Nominated Dan Mayfield for Co-Chair. Steve Enochs seconded. Dan Mayfield accepted  
62 nomination for C-Chair.

63 **Vote**

64 (9 yea, 0 nay) Motion Passes

65

66 Andy Morrison is the new Chair and Dan Mayfield is the new Co-Chair.

67

68 **Public Comment & Funding Discussion**

69 Rick Northy (Cabin Hoppers President) explained that last year his club groomed a 100 mile of trail  
70 system, with a total of 1500 miles of grooming, and logged 500 volunteer hours. He told the board that  
71 his club groomed \$8000 billable hours that were not groomed with SnowTRAC funds (to make a point  
72 that state funds only cover some of the costs). His club also spent \$3000 in non SnowTRAC funds for  
73 summer trail work. He said that his club supports safety, meaning wide-groomed trails and signs for  
74 snowmachining and dog-mushing. He was concerned that 6 hours was spent on grooming standards  
75 during the last meeting, but nothing came of it. He supports a one on one meeting so members have  
76 direct contact. He also mentioned that he had been working with legislators to try to get a line-item for  
77 more SnowTRAC funding.

78 Scott Connely (Snomads President) explained that his club (400+ members) has also put a lot of their  
79 own money into their trail system, with significant volunteer effort. He also mentioned working with the  
80 legislature to find more money for SnowTRAC. The Cabin Hoppers sponsored a fat-tire bike and jogging  
81 race last spring, as well as a ski race. Lacey Lane was added to the trail system this year.

82

83 A round-table discussion began about grooming costs in the SnowTRAC program. A question was raised:  
84 Is there a formula for calculating how much it costs to groom trails? Parks staff answered that there is  
85 not a standard formula used by groomers. A meeting with Wayne Biessel (Mat-Su/Copper Basin  
86 Superintendent) and several groomers took place last year to determine standard grooming costs;  
87 Biessel said they made progress but have a ways to go to have standards finished. Board members and  
88 the public discussed problems with assigning standard costs, including differing amounts of traffic on  
89 trails, and primary vs. secondary trail grooming costs.

90

91 Randy Crosby (Alaska Snowcat groomer) said that the SnowTRAC program is on life support and  
92 groomers are fighting over a shrinking pot of money. He also said he asked for the actual cost to groom  
93 the trails, and if everyone did the same there would be a more accurate depiction of total funds needed  
94 for the program.

95

96 A discussion began about SnowTRAC funding, and how more money is needed to run the program. Ideas  
97 such as increased registration fees, and snowmachine registration enforcement were among the topics.  
98 A recurring theme was that Anchorage cross-country skiers received a grant for just under a million  
99 dollars without asking for it; how could SnowTRAC replicate this? Another idea was to collect money  
100 from other user groups (other than snowmachiners) that used the groomed snowmachine trails. A  
101 longer registration period (4-6 years) at point of sale was also mentioned.

102

103 Jack Kreinheder (Trail Mix President) talked about the Juneau area with its 400 registered riders. He  
104 explained that there are only a few trails in Juneau, but these trails are important to groom; they travel  
105 through the woods to allow snowmachiners to access alpine areas where most riding happens. He said  
106 that raising fees is controversial in Juneau since rural areas don't benefit from SnowTRAC. He  
107 mentioned that some states have both a snowmachine registration fee AND a trailhead fee to more  
108 appropriately charge users; other states are between \$45-\$50 rather than \$5.

109

110 Dave Luce (Mat-Su groomer) agrees with an increased registration fee for snowmobiles, but not a trail-  
111 usage fee; he feels that people will use the trails regardless. He said the trails on the Yentna River are  
112 getting marked and kiosks are erected, but the trails aren't maintained often enough.

113

114 Kevin Kastner (Iron Dog Inc.) thanked SnowTRAC for their work over the years, and mentioned that he  
115 can send out public announcements at the Iron Dog expos about how snowmobile registration fees pay  
116 for grooming. He supports NAOI's efforts for safety projects. He also mentioned the option of removing  
117 line items from his budget if SnowTRAC doesn't agree with an expense.

118

119 **Discussion with State Parks Director**

120 Ben Ellis introduced the new Administrative Operations Manager at Alaska State Parks, Jamie Walker.  
121 He spoke about the budget shortfalls within State Parks; several positions have been left vacant. The  
122 RecTrails program has a serious budget shortage, and may run out of funds in early 2014; it is unknown  
123 what will happen. He also explains how SnowTRAC and ORTAB rely on each other; the managers of both  
124 programs are the same staff, so the viability of each program depends on both existing.

125  
126 Ben Ellis answered questions with the rest of his time. He explained that Representative Fairclough  
127 supports SnowTRAC, but doesn't think the legislature will appropriate any money. Several other topics  
128 were discussed, including requesting State Parks and DOT work together for funding, winter trail system  
129 development, increased registration fees, tapping into the state gas tax for funds, and South Denali  
130 ground-breaking. Another possible funding source could be charging a fee (like a boat launch fee) at  
131 trailheads; this would be through regulation rather than legislation. A change of management of  
132 SnowTRAC from state government to a non-profit was also discussed; the director said he didn't oppose  
133 this.

134  
135 One idea to increase funds collected was to rotate State Park Rangers around the state to enforce  
136 snowmachine registrations; one hurdle is that most park rangers are off during winter. Another idea was  
137 to start a survey to gather data about how important snowmachining is to Alaskans.

138  
139 Board members discussed how the current teleconference meetings for SnowTRAC are inefficient;  
140 Director Ellis explained that it was his decision to not pay for per diem and airfare due to limited funds in  
141 the Parks budget, and the fact that SnowTRAC is not a Governor's Board.

142

143 **DPOR Reports and Huslia Discussion**

144 Grants Administrator Steve Neel reminded the group that 5 non-grooming grants were awarded for the  
145 2011-2012 SnowTRAC season. Excess funds not used from last year will be moved to this year. He  
146 brought up the fact that nothing has been billed from the Huslia Tripods project; he mentioned that the  
147 folks he has been in contact with are different than those who applied for the grant, and it has been  
148 difficult to make contact. Technically the grant has expired, but there is some leeway to wait for a bill a  
149 bit longer.

150

151 **Motion**

152 Dan Mayfield moved to move the \$15,407.98 (from the un-billed Huslia project) to this year's fund (this  
153 year's pool of SnowTRAC money). Cindy Hite seconded.

154 **Discussion**

155 Some board members were hesitant to cut off funds to the Huslia project with haste; they thought that  
156 they needed more information, and communication with folks in rural Alaska is different.

157 **Vote**

158 (5 yea, 4 nay) Motion Passes

159 Before the board discussed individual grants Steve Neel mentioned that money from ORTAB is no longer  
160 available for SnowTRAC. He explained that in the past, there were fewer of motorized applications for  
161 ORTAB, so it made sense for ORTAB to fund part of SnowTRAC (to satisfy percentage requirements for  
162 motorized usage); this is no longer the case.

163

### 164 **Safety & Education Grant Discussion and Voting**

165 Before the discussion, conflicts of interest were discussed, and Dan Mayfield was the one board  
166 member that receives grooming funds (through Big Lake Trails Inc.) through SnowTRAC.

167

168 Some members were concerned that if the safety projects are funded, that it spreads the grooming  
169 money very thin, and that Lake Louise is applying for a grooming grant for a new trail, even though the  
170 board has mentioned in the past that no more trails will be added to the grooming pool. The possibility  
171 of having these grants accepted by ORTAB was also discussed, but this would delay the project until the  
172 following year; there is also a very small chance that any of these safety grants would be awarded by  
173 ORTAB because it is very competitive, and has a 5% cap. It was noted that the program has shifted from  
174 a grant-oriented program to a grooming-oriented program.

175

176 Grants were then discussed and scores were looked at. One thought was that the grooming grant  
177 application (not the returning groomer application) from Lake Louise should be given the same  
178 reduction in funding as the other returning groomers (because there is not enough money to fund the  
179 groomers fully). Another concern about Lake Louise was that the trail will become part of the grooming  
180 pool (see above paragraph). A concern about the Snomads grant is that is it a grant for plowing a parking  
181 lot just off a maintained borough or state road; some members think that State DOT or the Kenai  
182 Peninsula Borough should take care of it. It was noted that the Snomads haven't asked either entity  
183 about this possibility.

184

### 185 **Motion**

186 Dan Mayfield moved to partially fund the Lake Louise Snowmachine Club initiative (John Lake Trail  
187 Grooming) for \$3,875. He would like to fund that at the same level (percentage) as any of the (returning  
188 groomer) grooming requests, and disregard the other grant applications at this time due to austerity  
189 reasons. Gary Anderson seconded.

### 190 **Discussion**

191 One member thought there should be more discussion about this before an official motion. Another  
192 member didn't agree with the second part of the motion.

### 193 **Vote**

194 (5 yea, 4 nay) Motion Passes

195

196 Some board members were concerned with this vote because safety will not being addressed, and folks  
197 may avoid applying for safety grants in the future.

198

199 **Grooming Pool Discussion**

200 Dave Luce mentioned that he may have seriously underbid for grooming the Yentna area and asked  
201 about additional funds. Wayne Biessel informed him that money can be moved around in the grooming  
202 pool, but only the amount up the request can be used initially. More funds can be requested but there is  
203 no guarantee they will be granted.

204  
205 It was pointed out that some groomers have asked for more money this year than last year, with less  
206 money available. Ways of scoring groomers was also discussed, including trailhead/kiosk comment  
207 sheets and having trail-users contact Parks directly. Other ways of dispersing SnowTRAC funds to  
208 groomers was also discussed, such as a standard grooming cost per mile, not contracting groomers that  
209 only groom for part of the year, and not funding grooming in State Parks.

210  
211 **Motion**

212 Andy Morrison moved to fund the trail grooming requests for 2013/2014, including the John Lake-  
213 Eureka Trail at 60% of the request. Jim Stanford seconded. Andy withdrew his motion until after Ed  
214 Fogels' discussion.

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216 **Ed Fogels Discussion**

217 Deputy commissioner Ed Fogels thanked the SnowTRAC board for their commitment. After a brief  
218 introduction he welcomed questions from the board and the public. Board members brought up ideas  
219 to increase funding for SnowTRAC with Ed Fogels, including raising registration fees, extending point of  
220 sale snowmachine registrations to 4-6 years, a fundraiser, tapping into the state gas tax, an economic  
221 impact study about the value of snowmachining to give to the legislature, and corporate sponsorship.  
222 The board also described all the volunteer hours many clubs put into grooming and signing. The idea of  
223 SnowTRAC being run by a non-profit was also discussed; staff turnover was also mentioned by board  
224 members as a reason a statewide trail system hasn't come together. Ed Fogels told the board that he  
225 would make a commitment to get information from DOT and the Department of Revenue to see if there  
226 are other ways to find funds for SnowTRAC; he told the board that he really wants to get stuff done.

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236 **Continuation of the Grooming Pool Discussion**

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238 **Motion**

239 Cindy Hite moved to remove DPOR funding requests, as well as Yukon Quest’s funding requests, and  
240 fund grooming as a cost per mile. John Scudder seconded.

241 **Discussion**

242 Some members didn’t like the idea of a cost per mile rate. One member brought up how much work was  
243 done to add Fairbanks into the grooming pool. Another member thought that picking and choosing  
244 grooming areas like this could challenge the validity of the board, and set the precedent for only  
245 grooming in Southcentral Alaska. The issue of the Snomads applying significantly more in their grooming  
246 request was addressed by Scott Connelly; a trail that was formerly groomed by the Caribou Hills Cabin  
247 Hoppers is getting taken over by the Snomads now.

248 **Vote**

249 (1yea, 8 nay) Motion Fails

250

251 The discussion continued about whom to fund and how to allocate SnowTRAC money. The board talked  
252 about how the Denali Highway grooming is problematic; it is only groomed starting in February, high  
253 winds often drift over grooming, and the grooming is essentially to make a trail to private lodges  
254 (businesses).

255

256 The board talked about finding a fair way to allocate the funds. Based on some groomers asking for  
257 more money than last year, the board looked at basing the upcoming season’s groomer funding on last  
258 year’s actual expenses, and reducing each groomer’s funding by the same percentage to fully use this  
259 year’s funds.

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261 \*The actual amounts charged by returning groomers last year were added to the new groomers’ funding  
262 requests to determine an uninflated funding request total, which was \$293,285.45. The board  
263 determined that there is \$219,702.02 for SnowTRAC to spend for the 2013/2014 season. \$219,702.02 is  
264 74.9% of \$293,285.45, so it was proposed that groomers get awarded 74.9% of their actual expenses  
265 billed to SnowTRAC last year (2012/2013 season), or if they’re new groomers this year (or grooming a  
266 new trail) they get 74.9% of their funding request. There was a concern by some members that funding  
267 requests may have been inflated to try to receive more money this year, that’s why last year’s actual  
268 billed expenses were used.

269

270 **Motion**

271 John Scudder moved to fund last year’s actual maintenance costs to include Alpine, Hatcher pass, and  
272 John Lake at 75%, and the Lower Susitna Yentna - Dave Luce. Dan Mayfield seconded. (For clarification  
273 on this motion see paragraph above preceded with the asterisk.)

274 **Vote**

275 (9yea, 0 nay)

276 **Closing Discussion**

277 Increasing registration duration for snowmobiles was brought up again; a lifetime registration was  
278 mentioned as well (both would be at a higher cost than the current registration, but be valid longer). An  
279 idea that money for a longer registration would need to spread out (funds from 4 year registration  
280 would need to be spread out for grooming and grants over 4 years, for example). A recap of ways to  
281 bring in more money for SnowTRAC was listed: longer snowmobile registration period, snowmobile  
282 registration enforcement-State Parks law enforcement, obtain funds through the Alaska gas tax, and  
283 solicit a new economic impact study (to highlight how important snowmachining is to Alaskans).

284  
285 Travel costs were briefly discussed. Since Alaska State Parks isn't paying for travel, one member wonders  
286 if someone could write a grant for these expenses through SnowTRAC funds.

287

288 **Motion**

289 Andy Morrison moved to adjourn. John Scudder seconded.

290 **Vote**

291 (9yea, 0 nay)

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293 Meeting was adjourned at 4:50pm.

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