SnowTRAC Meeting Minutes 8/26/2015 - Approved

SnowTRAC Members Present:
Dan Mayfield – Chair – Mat-Su/Copper River Basin Rep.
John Scudder – Vice-Chair – Anchorage Rep.
Cynthia Hite – Mat-Su/Copper River Basin Rep.

SnowTRAC Members Not Present:

DNR Staff Present:
Ben Ellis – Director of Alaska State Parks
Jamie Walker – Administrative Operations Manager
Darcy Harris – Alaska State Trails Program Coordinator
Steve Neel – Alaska State Parks Grants Administrator
Justin Wholey – Resource Specialist - Alaska State Trails Program

Others Present:
Darrell Breese – Staff representative for State Representative Mark Neuman
Debra McGhan – Alaska Avalanche Information Center Executive Director
Rick Northey – Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers President
Jay Northey – Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers Administrator
Harry Holt – Lake Louise Snowmachine Club President
Randy Arndt – Lake Louise Snowmachine Club Treasurer

*New SnowTRAC member Justin Derr is in attendance via teleconference.

Board Elections
Motion: Gary Anderson nominated Dan Mayfield to continue serving as SnowTRAC Chair. Erin McLarnon seconded the motion.
Vote: Yes-5   No-0
The motion passed. Dan Mayfield is Chair once again.

Dan Mayfield nominated John Scudder to serve as Vice-Chair for SnowTRAC. Gary Anderson seconded the motion.
Vote: Yes-5   No-0
The motion passed. John Scudder is the new Vice-Chair.
**Public Comment**

Harry Holt commented that SnowTRAC, State Parks, and Alaska Snowmobile Association did a great job informing people about the budget issue last year (SnowTRAC was not included in the Governor’s budget last year, but was later added to the state budget legislatively). He also thought that the board should inform more people about what it is that SnowTRAC accomplishes, so it’s not seen as just a collection agency. He also wanted to make sure that people knew how important SnowTRAC trails were, and how much they are used by snowmachiners, as well as other user groups.

Rick Northey thanked the State Parks staff that he had been working with over the last 4 or 5 years. He also thanked the board members for taking the time to be at the meeting. He reported that after going through the grant process with ORTAB, the Cabin Hoppers were awaiting delivery of a new PistenBully trail-groomer. He said that it is a $230,000 piece of equipment, with $130,000 coming from the all volunteer club, and $100,000 from an ORTAB grant last year; the grant helped get over the mark to be able to pay for it. He closed in thanking the parks staff for getting everything processed, and to SnowTRAC for their efforts as volunteers.

Debra McGhan thanked SnowTRAC for performing a tough job that spread funds throughout the statewide snowmobile community. She asked the committee to consider education as a key element in their decision making process, and mentioned that during the last two years there were no education grants funded by SnowTRAC. She said that she heard SnowTRAC’s request that education projects should be delivered on a statewide basis, and not a one-shot deal, and that hopefully this grant project will meet the committees expectations.

Justin Derr explained that his goal joining the board was working on the Southeast region. He mentioned that there was only one established Juneau (snowmobile) club, and a few private clubs, but he would like to get more established clubs together and bring everyone in Southeast together to improve and grow the riding community.

Cindy Hite commented that she would like to get the program running smoothly, have a statewide trail system, and employ a full time trail coordinator to travel around the state and promote SnowTRAC. She said that the safety part of the program should be the signs on the trails, and that the safety curriculum should go a different route if we don’t have all the SnowTRAC funding that we would like.

Gary Anderson thought that the program is doing pretty well with the amount of money available to work with, but there have been cuts over the last several years. He mentioned that SnowTRAC has tried to find more money by trying to increase registration rates over the years. He noted that the program needs more money.

John Scudder commented that when SnowTRAC first started there were 500 miles of trails with a $5 registration fee, and that this year there are 2000 miles of trail with the same registration fee of $5;
Groomers have many expenses, and unless fees increase, money for the program will be tight for the next few years.

**Past Year SnowTRAC Funding Issue**

Dan Mayfield outlined a budget issue that SnowTRAC encountered over the last year, and its eventual resolution. The SnowTRAC line item wasn’t included in the Governor’s last budget. Only the legislature could put the line-item back in by the time SnowTRAC was aware of the issue. Mayfield said that several folks mounted a campaign with the legislature to get that funding put back in. Kevin Hite, Dan Mayfield, and others wrote letters supporting the SnowTRAC line item, and it was added back into the budget by legislators. Mayfield thanked Rep. Neuman, Rep. Kathy Tilton, Jim Culver, Sen. Huggins, and Sen. Dunleavy. He also said that the entire Mat-Su delegation were extremely supportive, and possibly other legislators. He also mentioned that the Governor was in support, but it was too late to change anything in the budget when it was called to his office’s attention.

**Draft House Bill & SnowTRAC Draft Resolution**

Dan Mayfield described a draft house bill that Rep. Mark Neuman and his office created to respond to SnowTRAC’s funding issues. The bill as written would increase the snowmobile and OHV registration fee from $10 for 2 years to $20 for 2 years, with an optional 6 year registration for $50; if passed the bill could take effect on January 1st, 2017. Mayfield then presented a SnowTRAC draft resolution supporting the bill; he also expressed interest in an automatic registration cost increase a few years after the initial increase.

Darrell Breese (staff representing Rep. Neuman) described the draft bill as addressing the concern that there is not enough money available for SnowTRAC. Breese noted SnowTRAC’s interest in an automatic registration increase a few years after the initial increase, and language in statute that automatically triggers the money being included in the budget. Breese suggested that SnowTRAC include those desires in their resolution language. Breese also said that Rep. Neuman’s office is receptive to any suggestions SnowTRAC has; he noted that if the registration is increased too much there is the risk of fewer people not choosing to register their vehicle at all.

John Scudder asked if there could be a mechanism in place to increase registration in a few years automatically. Breese said the language would have to be included in this draft bill, and the exact increase amount and date would have to be stated, as well; he also said that legislators may resist recurring rate increases, but that he would see if Neuman was receptive to a one-time increase, maybe $12 in 2020.

Dan Mayfield read the Draft Resolution in its entirety; it suggested revising snowmachine and off-highway vehicle registration fees, and to give SnowTRAC increased authority for (recommendation of) disbursement. It also referenced economic opportunity spurred from winter trails, that SnowTRAC is underfunded, and that SnowTRAC supports Rep. Neuman’s draft bill. The draft resolution also requests
that the DMV authorization to release funds should become codified so disbursement is automatic, thus
not requiring a line item in the state’s budget every year. The resolution also supports an increase in
funding authority authorized from the DMV, from $250,000 to $500,000, to meet demands of riders.
Dan Mayfield also discussed language to incorporate a fee increase in 2020 for $12 for one year ($24 for
two years). Breese also added that the resolution will be attached to the legislation, and if the board
wants them to review it yearly, then they should include that language.

Appearance by Director Ellis
Director Ellis had some suggestions to improve the resolution language. The last paragraph said the
DMV will release funds to SnowTRAC, but the DMV cannot do that, DMV would have to release funds to
the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) for SnowTRAC. Director Ellis also said that the
authorization limit at one time was higher, than it currently is, but it was reduced because the
registration dollars were not reaching that limit; he explained that the authorization limit should be at or
slightly more than the money available for SnowTRAC, as well. The Director mentioned that the DMV
has a poor accounting system currently, and because of this, registration numbers for snowmobiles vs.
OHV’s and new registrations vs. renewals is unknown. He also said that in the future there will be an
improved system where this data can be queried.

The Director also stated that Alaska has the lowest snowmobile registration fee in US, and that some
states have a one-time lifetime registration fee; he also said that SnowTRAC’s interest in a $5 increase is
a good step forward until the new DMV accounting system comes online; then the committee could
analyze the data, and modify the registration fee structure differently, if needed. Director Ellis thought if
the point-of-sale registrations make up most of the funding, then it may be good to focus on those. Ellis
also mentioned that parks can roll over money to the following year, which could enable DPOR to
spread the funding beyond the year it is collected, for multi-year or one-time registrations.

Motion: John Scudder moved to modify the resolution to include mention of an automatic raise in
registration fees in 2022. Gary Anderson seconded.
Discussion: Cindy Hite thought that this was good language so the board doesn’t have to go through this
same process again down the road.
Vote: Yes-5  No-0
The motion passed.
Daryl Breese also noted that as the draft legislation is updated Sen. Neuman’s office will keep in contact
with Dan Mayfield and the committee.
Motion: Cindy Hite moved to approve the resolution (resolution hard copy passed out in room earlier) in principle, pending the work out of the final details with Director Ellis, and present to the resolution to the legislators. Justin Derr seconded.

Vote: Yes-5  No-0

The motion passed.

Director Ellis informed the board that DPOR or he didn’t drop the ball, as a magazine article recently stated, and that the governor’s administration for the last nine years added SnowTRAC to the budget automatically. Ellis said that when he found out he notified the Governor’s Office immediately. The Director pointed out that the new administration just didn’t have experience with this like the previous administration did, and SnowTRAC just fell through the cracks without intent.

Director Ellis said he supports putting in statute that the snowmachine registration money goes to the DPOR only for snowmobile activities. Until then the committee should send the Governor’s Office a letter requesting that the Governor’s budget include SnowTRAC funding, to make sure the funding issue doesn’t happen again.

Ellis also thought that the bill would likely have broad support and a good chance of passing. He also said that he is committed to SnowTRAC and for the program to grow with more funding; he thanked the SnowTRAC committee.

DPOR Financial Discussion

Steve Neel stated that the registration dollars for the past year were the lowest he’d seen, but there is significant money left over from last season that evens this out somewhat. Neel also noted that there is $15,000 that was previously set aside for a rural Alaska safety grant, and that SnowTRAC should make a recommendation for those funds.

Motion: Dan Mayfield moved to recommend the return of the $15,000 that was set aside for a rural Alaska safety grant back into the SnowTRAC pool of available funds. Tinker seconded.

Vote: Yes-5  No-0

The motion passed. SnowTRAC recommended returning the money to the SnowTRAC pool.

Dan Mayfield asked if the board could get an update to see when the DMV’s new registration/accounting system will be online. Jamie Walker says that DPOR can do that for the board.

Safety & Education Grant Discussion

Dan Mayfield noted that as his duties as assemblyman he sponsored a resolution (that passed unanimously) to support the Alaska Avalanche Information Center Mobile App grant. He said he didn’t see it as a conflict, but would stay out of the vote if there were objections; there were none.
Cindy Hite thought that among the grants either the budgets were not complete or they were all administrative costs.

**Live to Ride Another Day Mobile Game App – Alaska Avalanche Information Center, Inc.**

Darcy Harris noted that $15,000 was a placeholder amount since there was no total listed in the budget. She also noted that project materials from safety projects become property of that State of Alaska, which she had been talking to the DNR IT department about. Dan Mayfield noted that the budget was not complete. John Scudder thought that this app would be available to anyone on the internet, and that SnowTRAC money should benefit only Alaskans. Gary Anderson said that ORTAB (Outdoor Recreation Trails Advisory Board) would be a better funding avenue for this project. Cindy Hite stated that the budget was poor, and that it was all administrative costs. Erin McLarnon commented that the budget was not complete, as well.

**Aniak Snowmobile Safety Trails – Aniak Traditional Council**

Darcy Harris noted that this grant applied for signing and marking only; no grooming. Dan Mayfield was concerned that the applicant is an extension of the local government, and would use this grant to fund jobs, as well as fringe. John Scudder said that he supported trail marking, but not a project with a budget this poor. Gary Anderson said that he likes the safety aspect, but would like the work to be by volunteers.

**Alaska DPOR Interpretation & Education – Statewide Snowmaching Safety Brochure**

Dan Mayfield and Erin McLarnon thought the wages for the grant were excessive. John Scudder questioned if more brochures would be printed when they ran out, and Steve Neel clarified that a much smaller amount of money would be needed to distribute the same amount of brochures (once they were designed).

SnowTRAC discussed the scores and decided to vote for each project individually.

**Motion:** John Scudder moved to recommend funding for the Alaska DPOR (Dept. of Parks and Outdoor Recreation) grant. Erin McLarnon seconded.

**Discussion:** John Scudder thought that even though the budget was questionable, it would help folks throughout the state. Cindy Hite thought that the State has too many fingers in the SnowTRAC money.

**Vote:** Yes-2  No-3

The motion failed.

**Motion**

John Scudder moved to recommend funding for the Aniak grant. Gary Anderson seconded.

**Vote:** Yes-0  No-5

The motion failed.
Motion
Cindy Hite moved to recommend funding for Alaska Avalanche Information Center’s project. John Scudder seconded.

Vote: Yes-0 No-5
The motion failed.

Dan Mayfield suggested a tutorial to help applicants complete better applications, because quality applications aren’t coming in. John Scudder stated that it may look like the board doesn’t support safety, but a groomed and marked trail is a safe trail, and will save more lives than a piece of paper or an app.

Grooming Grant Discussion
Darcy Harris announced that Lake Louise Snowmachine Club applied to add a new trail (Crosswind North) to the grooming pool, as well as funding in their grooming grant. Dan Mayfield questioned whether the board should add new trails to the grooming pool, and mentioned that SnowTRAC decided not to fund new trails at prior meetings. Cindy Hite thought it was important for folks to apply even if a trail is not funded, so there is an assessment of need, but until there is more funding we shouldn’t fund new trails. Harry Holt said that his club spent a lot of time getting the Crosswind North Trail legal, and that having it in the pool would allow flexibility if other trails weren’t suitable to groom.

Motion
Dan Mayfield moved to accept this new trail (Lake Louise Snowmachine Club’s Crosswind North) into the grooming pool and recommend funding its grooming for this season. John Scudder seconded.

Discussion: Cindy Hite said she didn’t support new trails because it doesn’t further a statewide trail system.

Vote: Yes-2 No-2
The motion failed.

Cindy suggested putting together a list of trails that would be in the grooming pool, but recommended for funding if more money became available. This list would include Lacey Lane and Crosswind North.

Motion
Cindy Hite moved to put the Lake Louise Trail in a file for legal trail status, and when funding becomes available, we will revisit and take a vote on the funding recommendation for this trail. Gary Anderson seconded.

Vote: Yes-4 No-0
The motion passed.

Dan Mayfield noted that $278,326.27 is available for funding, and State Parks staff has put together a spreadsheet with several funding options, and grooming can be funded at the 77% funding level.
Motion
John Scudder moved to go with column one, at the 77% (funding level) and zero grants. Gary Anderson seconded.

Discussion: Cindy Hite asked why Lake Louise asked for $10,000 less than last year. Randy Arndt explained that the person that submitted the grant made a mistake.

Vote: Yes-5 No-0
The motion passed. SnowTRAC recommended funding grooming at the 77% funding level.

John Scudder noted that in theory, there may be some money available for Lake Louise if other areas aren’t able to groom as much as they want due to weather. Harry Holt asked what the chances of getting reimbursed for grooming over their grant amount if they checked in with parks first, and Steve Neel said to check in and parks can work with him to try and work something out if possible.

Dan Mayfield noted that the Mat-Su Borough has a recreational grant program for (501(c)(3) non-profit organizations for gasoline and maintenance reimbursements. The deadline is August 28, and Community Development Director Eric Phillips is the contact. Mayfield also said the Mat-Su Borough is funding brushing; trail brushers can be rented. Also, he said that the Mat-Su Borough is putting together a recreational trails bond package to fund bridges, trail hardening, and interpretive signs. It will likely be finished in December, and be voted on next election.

Darcy Harris explained that there were three year board terms and one year elected terms.

Motion
Gary Anderson moved to have the elected positions (chair and vice chair) in SnowTRAC last for two years. John Scudder seconded.

Vote: Yes-5 No-0
The motion passed.

Cindy Hite requested that the trails approved for SnowTRAC, but not being funded should be added to the DPOR spreadsheet for the meetings. Darcy Harris took note of this.

Dan Mayfield expressed interest in looking into why some groomers are increasing the amount of funds requested.

Cindy asked Justin Derr about the grant scoring process for a new member. Justin Derr said it was quite difficult. Darcy Harris told the board that the score sheet would be improved for next year.

Public Comment
Rick Northey expressed interest in having signs available for groomers to indicate SnowTRAC funding for trail grooming, also if there is a template available he would be able to make his own signs.
Motion

John Scudder moved to adjourn. Tinker seconded.

Vote: Yes-5  No-0

The motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 2:45pm.

*Note: All SnowTRAC members were not present to vote on all motions.