

SnowTRAC Committee Meeting
Foraker Room, Egan Center
Anchorage, Alaska
November 8, 2002

Meeting called to order at 9:38 a.m. by Chair Marianne Beckham. Quorum Present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Marianne Beckham - Anchorage

Matt Divens – Fairbanks

Lee Johnson - TRAAK Board Liaison – Fairbanks

Craig Seibert – Trapper Creek

Greg Barclay - Soldotna

Bruce Friend - Anchorage

Christine Noakes – Big Lake

Frank Woods – Dillingham

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Kenton Bloom – Homer (excused)

Mark Wilke – Juneau (excused)

Staff present: Jim Stratton-Director, Jim Renkert and Teri Gilpin (ASP)

Public: Peter Porco-Anchorage Daily News, Dwayne Adams-Land Design North, Tim Krug-City of Wasilla, Joanne Yerkes-Skwentna, Cliff Larson-DNR-ML&W, Dwaine Schuldt-Chair of the Girdwood Trails Committee, Jennifer Heck- Citizen, Jerry Gregory-Deshka Landing& Lower Susitna Drainage Assoc., Dwight Neal-citizen, Paul Prusak-DOT in Fairbanks, Pat Owens-Mat-Su Borough

Introduction of visitors and committee members.

There were no alternates or proxies.

Greg moved “to approve minutes from August 23, 2002 as submitted”. Craig Seibert 2nd. Motion approved.

AGENDA ADDITIONS/REVISIONS

Tim Krug, City of Wasilla, added under Public Appearances. Jim Stratton requested the Directors Report be moved up in the agenda before staff reports.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Jim Stratton gave his final Director's report. As of noon on December 2 he will step down as Alaska State Parks Director and start a new job. Stratton discussed his experiences as director. As the agency leader it was a privilege to work with new people and try a new outdoor recreation activity: one he otherwise may not have experienced. As director, it was his responsibility to represent the outdoor activities of all Alaskans. Early on in his tenure he asked, "What can parks do to support snowmobiling?" The response he got was to support the passing of the point of sale registration legislation and the establishment of a snowmobile trail grant program. Through the efforts of many people, point-of-sale legislation passed in 1998 and registration began in 1999. In 1999, the

SnowTRAC Committee created to oversee the grant program. State Parks established SnowTRAC with four representatives from the Alaska State Snowmobile Association (ASSA), two from the Alaska Snowmobile Representatives Alliance (ASRA), one from rural Alaska, and two representatives from the multi-use trail community. State Parks worked hard to build a level of trust to allow this program to move forward and succeed.

In 2000, the first grant was made. With SnowTRACs guidance, the Division of Parks has made 27 Acquisition, Development, and Maintenance grants, and 19 Safety and Education grants, totaling almost \$400,000.

SnowTRAC is now looking at other issues facing the snowmobile community such as trail dedication, state rules and regulations, and a comprehensive statewide safety and education program. Stratton would like SnowTRAC to review all of the state's current laws and regulations along with similar laws and regulations in other states. Upon review, recommendations can be made to the Legislature to clarify and consolidate Alaska's snowmobile laws. A good focus would be on young riders. Stratton wants Jim Renkert to get back to his primary job with the Alaska Heritage Trails Program and trail easements. To do this, State Parks needs to create a position to work only on snowmobile issues. This person would support SnowTRAC, manage the grant program, and develop a statewide safety and education program.

Stratton said he is very proud of the partnership developed between Alaska State Parks and the snowmobile community to make Alaska a better and safer place for riding. This is government making a difference. He has enjoyed starting this program, watching it grow and thanked everyone for their time and energy serving on the board. He concluded with the hope that each of the committee members would continue to serve, and are successful with the next director.

Marianne spoke on behalf of SnowTRAC thanking Jim Stratton for his involvement, bids farewell to him, and wished him Good Luck with his new job.

STAFF REPORTS

GRANT STATUS 2003 Ten grants were awarded for 2003. Several were awarded conditionally. One, a City of Wasilla acquisition grant, has subsequently been denied, as the city already owns the land. Grant agreements were sent out, we have received five back. Randy Crosby, Alaska Snow Cat, needs to obtain a DOT permit. Discussion regarding grooming Petersville Road. Paul Prusak from DOT Fairbanks should be arriving to speak on grooming in the DOT right-of-way.

GRANT STATUS 2002 These grants expired in October or will expire October next year. Southeast Alaska Avalanche Center-closed. Shaktoolik, they have called but have submitted no progress report. Maybe give them another month and then move to close. Fairnet, 75% advance but no progress report, they said they may apply for an extension. B.A.A.R.T., closed. Alaska Mountain Safety Center, snowmobile safety book, Jill Fredston requested a change in scope. Fairbanks Police Department requested and received a 75% advance last year. They have requested a 1-year extension. Submitted a

very nice progress report; have only used \$1,100.00 of their \$15,000 grant. Recommend a 7-month extension until end of May 2003.

Greg moved “to extend the grant to Fairbanks Police Department”. Matt 2nd, motion passed. North Slope Borough, missing photos of the snowmachine they purchased, another \$4,000 in reimbursement, just about done. St. Michael, no progress report. Ohogamiut Traditional Council, no progress report. Interior trail grooming, Chena Hot Springs, no snow to groom last year, no progress report. Have not heard anything from them, they have been contacted via e-mail. Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers, closed. Lake Louise Phase II, closed. Continuing to work on trail easements in Lake Louise area. Mat-Su Parks, Kroto Creek trailhead, used \$4400 last year, \$5400 left.

Discussion on Alaska Mountain Safety Center change of scope request. Craig moved “to reopen the scope of services on this grant”. Chris 2nd.

Discussion on contents of the information card and price, time frame, and copy right issues. Greg moved “to approve request pending submittal of a budget, more information on content of brochure, and clarification of copyright issue”. Bruce 2nd. Motion passed.

GRANT STATUS 2001 Copper Country, submitted a letter yesterday providing information on the firm they selected for survey work. Forwarded to DNR Procurement Section for approval. Big Lake Chamber Of Commerce, trail grooming, if we get Iron Dog wrapped up we can move forward with grooming. Brevig Mission, grant has expired. Spoke with them in September, they’re still deciding on whether to request extension or relinquish. We will contact them one more time. They did purchase some supplies for project. Anchorage Snowmobile Club, no snow to groom the first year, did \$1,400 of grooming last year. They’ve submitted one progress report but did not include receipts. They’ve requested an extension for another year; recommend extension until April 30, 2003. All agreed to extend.

GRANT STATUS 2000. This was the first year of SnowTRAC grants. Eligibility requirements and documentation material have tightened up since then. ASSA was sent certified letters closing their two grants. They owe us money for one grant from an advance that they didn’t completely use. We’ve had no response. Alaska State Parks, Hatcher’s Pass brochure, spoke with DNR graphics person; she has material just needs to put it together. Committee would like this completed by end of the year. Trail Mix, Lawson Creek bridge project was changed to the Lake Creek trail project. Report in packet. They’re making good progress, may be done by the end of this month. Mat-Su Borough, Pt. McKenzie trailhead, kiosk has been received, they need to set up and send us photos. City of Wasilla, Tim Krug will give us a report. Eklutna cabin, project completed, some final receipts to be submitted. Close at end of the December. EagleSong, there is some disagreement between EagleSong and state over allowable expenses. They already own the equipment that they are submitting receipts for rental on. Parks accountant is not allowing this as a legitimate expense. Committee agreed.

FINANCIAL REPORT \$200,000 appropriated for 2003 fiscal year. We have used \$112,000 for grants. Year to date, we have used \$10,500 in administrative costs. We used \$900 for reprinting flyers, booklets, and brochures.

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENTS Jim Renkert collected the signed Travel Authorizations and reimbursement forms.

New snowmobile position is working its way through Juneau to be placed on Workplace Alaska. We hope to have it posted by the end of the month. Public notice will be out next week on a section of the Iron Dog Trail. Continuing to work on Iron Dog; met with the Mental Health Trust Land Office to discuss obtaining a trail license for the part of the trail that crosses their land.

Tim Krug from the City of Wasilla reported on their two 2000 grants (\$15,000 and \$10,500 respectively) on developing winter trailhead amenities and trail grooming. After progress report on trailhead, Krug presented a request to change the scope of the trail-grooming grant. The City of Wasilla would like to turn the grant over to the Iditarod Trail Committee to groom in the City of Wasilla, along Knik-Goose Bay Road and along historic Iditarod Trail. Historic Iditarod has a 200-foot right-of-way. Discussion. Some questions regarding legal access, DOT right of way and RS2477.

Paul Prusak-DOT, one of the authors of Snowmobiles in State of Alaska Rights-of-Way, Winter Transportation Study. City of Wasilla's request goes back to the DNR conditions of the grant, applicant needs to go to DOT for proper authorization within the right-of-way.

Jim Renkert: One of the recommended revisions to state law in the Winter Transportation Study (WTS) is that local governments should work with DOT to obtain an encroachment permit within the right-of-way to designate a winter trail. The WTS Paul has put together is the baseline data on where Alaska is with respect to laws and issues regarding snowmobiles.

Further discussion on Wasilla request. According to Paul, for races and events within the DOT right-of-way, a permit is needed. DOT Northern Region Maintenance section has been issuing and they generally haven't been a problem.

With regard to grant, Marianne reiterated that SnowTRAC will not approve a grant that promotes trespass on anybody's land. We require documentation that shows approval of access. Paul, Tim, and Marianne discussed obtaining documentation for grooming this right-of-way. Discussion.

Scott Lapienne, commenting as a member of the public, mentioned that the Iditarod Sled Dog Race does not follow the historic Iditarod Trail Easement mentioned by Tim Krug. According to Lapienne, the Iditarod Trail Committee gets a permit every year to groom the section of the trail outside the historic trail. Outside of the historic Iditarod Trail route, there may be other landowners and agencies that need to be contacted.

Further discussion. This change of scope needs a better map that highlights routes. Committee would be in favor of changing the scope and allowing Iditarod Trail Committee to groom provided that City of Wasilla supplies better documentation of legal access and a map. Also, request that there can be no restrictions to snowmobilers for portions that Iditarod Trail Committee grooms for dog mushing.

Frank moved, “to approve the change in scope with the conditions of legal public access documentation and a map”. Greg 2nd. Discussion. According to Jim, Wasilla still has the original grant and can use that through March 31. Motion passed.

Break @ 11:24am. Reconvened @ 11:29am

PUBLIC APPEARANCES

Joanne Yerkes, Skwentna-Shell Lake area. Ms. Yerkes made several comments regarding snowmachine use in Skwentna area. Snowmachines are the primary mode of transportation in the Skwentna area and are used differently than recreational snowmachines. According to her, area residents are concerned about protecting their private property and way of life. They support trails, but would like a policy of ‘do no harm’ adopted by recreational users. They would also like the residents and property owners better involved in dialogue regarding trail location and development. They felt this has not been happening. For example, they didn’t get notice of grants [Recreational Trail Grants not SnowTRAC grants] until after awarded. Other concerns are recreational snowmachiners going too fast and trespassing on posted private property.

Bruce Friend: Point well taken. This brings your concerns to light; I am also a remote landowner with some of the same concerns. I would ask by way of notice, that people being affected would bring more notice to committee.

Pat Owens, Land Management Specialist-Mat-Su Borough: Some comments on the grant reviewing process. The burden of proving legal access usually falls on the applicant, they however usually contact Pat at the borough for assistance. Pat suggested it would be helpful if, in the review process, each of the organized municipalities involved could actually review the grant; they would know what is/isn’t legal.

Marianne: Can’t see all of the different municipalities reviewing these grants, sounds too involved. Suggested that a summary that states intent of grant, location and access issues, if any. Municipalities could then input if they had any information.

Pat: Municipalities could help coordinate, with maps and legal access.

Cliff Larsen, ML&W: As a new DNR employee he is working on obtaining legal access on trails, much like the issues being discussed today. When looking at the grant applications, it is very important to have maps, who gave permission and how specific it is. He is also part of the AK Heritage Trails Program and will be a good resource for SnowTRAC.

Jennifer Heck: Average snow machiner, she is a supporter of snow machining and rides everywhere she can. Feels that this organization is a great forum.

Dwigh Neal: There is a DOT bike trail runs from Copper Center to Glennallen that has signs posted that say no winter snowmachine use. [According to Paul Prusak this is no longer the case] Yet here in the municipality there is a bike trail along the Glenn Highway that is unused all winter. The law needs to be changed.

Marianne: Clarified for all present that nothing we have been reviewing is going to overturn a municipal ordinance. The municipality still has the authority over the roads and trails within the MOA.

Frank Woods: We have a similar situation in Dillingham. DOT basically said, this is the law and we have to abide by the law. Until this is changed, it is going to be our biggest problem.

Jerry Gregory-Lower Sustina Drainage Association: Here on a fact-finding mission.

Paul Prusak: Addressed issues of legally riding a snow machine in a DOT right-of-way. Per Paul, it is legal with certain exceptions, such as controlled access. Discussion on legality of riding in the Municipality of Anchorage. Signs on the Copper Center bike path have been removed.

Jim Renkert: The DOT and State Parks brochure Alaska Snowmobile, Safety Laws, Rules and Regulations 2002-2003 shows where it is legal to ride snowmachines within the DOT right-of-way.

COMMITTEE OPERATING POLICY AND PROCEDURES: postponed until after lunch.

Jim Renkert, City of Wasilla grant for two lots in the Buena Vista Subdivision. This grant was approved in August with the condition the city provide proof of a willing seller. According to Tim Krug, the City of Wasilla already owns the property; the city just needs to pass an ordinance dedicating the land to public use. The question from DNR and SnowTRAC is, if the city already owns the property, why does it need grant money? The project was denied for this reason.

Tim Krug: Tim asked about using it for trail grooming on this property. Grooming could be authorized but a change in scope would have to be submitted along with details of the project and a review by SnowTRAC. He stated it would have been nice to get a letter saying there were conditions. The situation is that the land owner has transferred the land, but can still come back and pay money on it, back taxes. What the city of Wasilla is asking is if it can get money to do this public dedication. Discussion on what exactly the money is being spent on and what receipts will be submitted. The outcome was the money would pay for an expense incurred prior to the grant being issued. Grant rules do

not allow for this. Discussion. Outcome was the land was already purchased. Tim would like a possible scope modification to gain access.

Lee Johnson: If we look back to the Lawson project in Juneau, they came back with an alternate project with a lot of information and we approved. A change in scope could be considered for this project if Wasilla comes back with the details.

Committee Discussion.

Adjourned for lunch 12:10pm.

Reconvened at 1:20pm

OLD BUSINESS

The SnowTRAC Committee Operating Policy and Procedures document has been updated. There are still some questions regarding proxies and alternates. Discussion. It was decided that there can be no more than 2 alternates per meeting, proxies can only vote on what the proxy vote is specifically for, the director of state parks needs to approve the alternates, and the alternates need to be from the same organization. The discussion was tabled until the next meeting. Research will be done on the definition of “alternate”.

ADOT& PFs WINTER TRANSPORTATION STUDY/SNOWMOBILE STATUTES AND REGULATIONS

Dwayne Adam, Land Design North, (consultants hired to work on the report): Although he has not seen the final product, Paul Prusak has done a very thorough job. Land Design North is the primary author of the research. The report is a good summary of how other states deal with these issues and should help provide SnowTRAC with some guidance and direction.

Paul Prusak, DOT: The study has two recommendations: 1) Revise Alaska snowmobile laws and regulations. A stand-alone set of laws is needed under Alaska State Statute to specifically address snowmobiling. 2) Develop an Alaska Statewide Snowmobile Program. The study recommends that DNR, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation take the lead role

Marianne: We do need to rewrite some of the laws. We also need a stand-alone chapter on snowmobiling that addresses all the various issues such as speed limits, liability, insurance, regulation, etc. This is part of what SnowTRAC wants to do. The Legislature made it very clear they want SnowTRAC to consider this and be proactive in ways to police ourselves.

Paul: Anecdotal story that he wanted included in the record. About 30 years ago in Ontario, the snowmobile situation was ugly; today it is completely different. It started with snowmobilers working with the public, agencies and working with their own people.

Ontario now has about 30,000 miles of trails, many of which are self-policed. Helps keep things under control and is much more accepted by the public.

Discussion on process SnowTRAC would follow. Objective is to bring forward a list of recommendations. Develop the ideas today and not an end product. Take it back to regions and groups and get feedback.

Paul: Suggested taking the laws and breaking them into categories. Take on a just a few at a time.

Matt moved “to present to the Alaska Legislature a stand-alone set of regulations specifically for snowmobiling by January 2004”. Frank 2nd. Motion passed.

Lee Johnson: Concerned that listing issues numerically gives the impression they are in number priority. List a different way. It was agreed that they were not in priority order. Is there anything else that should be included? Discussion, focused on helmet laws, liabilities, age limits, and operator licenses.

Discussion on Safety Education courses.

Topics were broken down into four groups: (no particular priority)

Group A: speed limits, operator licensing, youth insurance, operating a snow machine while intoxicated, equipment

Group B: winter use of trails, winter use of right-of-ways

Group C: liabilities, accident reports, inherent risk, insurance

Group D: state agencies, law enforcement, grooming, state right-of-ways

Discussion on possible teleconferencing, e-mailing, chat room forum, and web site posting. Jennifer Heck volunteered to set up the on-line forum; all she needs is email addresses for the set up. The chat room will be public. The committee liked the idea of teleconferencing and the chat room forum.

Tentative Time Line

January 03, April 03; July 03; November 03; the August meeting is strictly for grants.

Discussion on unused SnowTRAC grant funds to pay for teleconferences and administrative expenses. We could request these funds, but it would be up to the State Parks Director to approve.

Jim Renkert: Spoke with Randy Crosby at lunch. DOT will issue an encroachment permit to State Parks, who will then issue a permit to Crosby for the grooming of Petersville Road. DOT’s public notice on this should be going out next week. Discussion on the Petersville road project and right-of-way.

Adjourned until 3:00 pm. Reconvened.

Discussion of the A Category issues. (Speed limits, operator licensing, youth insurance, operating a snowmobile while intoxicated, equipment)

Christine: Snowmobile speed limits should coincide with the state laws, same as current state laws for other vehicles. Important we adopt some youth certification where they have to take a safety course. Fully agree with the 10 points for snowmobiling while intoxicated.

Committee discussion on underage and drunk driving. Driving while intoxicated (ages 14-21) can lose all future driving privileges.

Matt: No speed limits in rural areas, urban area speed limits according to traffic, pedestrians, and weather conditions, etc. Case by case not a blanket speed. Snowmobile safety education required for users 16 and under, or have a guardian with you. No license required. Intoxication- current laws. Opposed to helmet laws. General philosophy: what is the minimum amount of restriction possible? Regarding snowmachine equipment, machines should have reflector, lights, exhaust that meets the manufactures specs. Opposed to loud pipes.

Frank: Speed limit maximum in urban areas is 25mph, enforce on state highway, bike paths are off limits. Sixteen and under should require a mandatory safety class. Even experienced drivers should have a safety class. Communicate to parents that if you are letting your child under 18 drives, you are liable. Fourteen and under needs to have parental or guardian supervision. If over 14, need to have proof of rules of the road education. Same as state standards. Dillingham has already put some of these in effect. (The board asked to see a copy of the Dillingham rules.) Mandatory helmets for 18 and under. Operator competency, be liable for their own equipment, riding style, ability, and responsibility.

Greg: Driving with regards to conditions, should be the same with any motor vehicle, reasonable speed for conditions. We need safety courses. For operating snowmobile while intoxicated, no difference than existing laws for any motor vehicle. I would say for helmet laws, we should look at the laws for motorcycles. There is a noise ordinance that I think should be followed.

Craig: I think the state already has got good guidelines for speed limits. In residential areas and areas where there are lots of people, speed should be reduced. There are people who will break the rules. We already have a good defined set of rules here. Everyone should start by taking a safety class, if nothing else as a refresher.

Lee: I agree that speed limits have been flushed out; we need to look at how they are applied (residential and urban). We could look at the authority for those who already manage recreational areas. I think that some sort of certification is needed, we need to look at the minimum age that one can get certification. Certainly in residential and more populated areas need to have some sort of regulation. Not necessary everywhere. Has no problem with this requirement for the younger riders.

Committee discussion. Outcome is that whatever rules are adopted do not burden the villages. Education in rural areas is also important.

Public comments:

Joanne: Speed affects the rural areas too, define the rural areas.

Scott: Any maintained trail (trail systems) needs to have speed limits, need to have some sort of law enforcement on machines on the trails. There should be a graduated certification process, corresponding to engine size and age. Helmets should go with the graduated situation too. Should have basic signaling, signal mirror, first aid bandages, lighting should have minimums and maximums. Should have a noise standards.

Jennifer: Speed limits should be what is posted otherwise they will not be followed. Under 16 you should be certified. Intoxication-I think the laws we have now are efficient. There is a decibel level, and it is higher than some people think it should be.

Dwayne: My only suggestion is that you are the policy making body, I think it is going to be easier than you thought.

Paul: I think any speed limit statute needs to start out as a reasonable and prudent law. I think it would be better to refer to residential areas rather than urban and rural. Highway speed is not necessarily a good guide. There needs to be a night guide. Youth training is going to be difficult because of money and manpower. Look at a youth education package as a standard. I think the states laws are good for intoxication. Equipment I feel is good, maybe a little research with manufacturers. Machine must be in good operating condition. Kids under a certain age need to wear helmets. Parents are liable for their kids. When parents make the decision to allow their children to ride, they take on that liability.

Marianne: I haven't heard anything that I disagree with, but I want to be on the watch for new bureaucracies. Certainly a safety course would be good but let's not built a whole new level of bureaucracy. Let's be realistic. I am a helmet person but I think as an adult you can make that decision, but definitely should be required for your children. I don't like speed limit, but I am willing to comply.

Cliff: Night limits reduce death rates. Equipment issue, I have research on the issue and manufacturers rate is 76 decibels at full throttle. There are ways to make them quieter and faster, that people don't necessary like because something about noise makes it better.

DATE & AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

Chair Marianne and committee members set January 24, 2003 and April 18, 2003 quarterly meetings. We will continue working on these regulations. This will be the topic of our next two meetings, in depth. City of Wasilla will be coming back with new information on the Buena Vista project. In January, we may need to consider some

emergency grant repair funding, to repair some trails that were damaged due to recent flooding and earthquake.

Marianne: Thanked the committee members and public for their cooperation. She also thanked and congratulated Paul and his staff for the excellent document produced.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Chris: BAART is having a booth at ASSA convention with flyers. First class is November 23, for \$25.00. BAART will be giving seminars every hour on the hour (for 15 minutes) on Sunday at the convention. We will also have a schedule for all the classes all winter.

Craig: Consider a speed sign to show max speed and night speed.

Lee: TRAAK board meets on November 22 and 23. On the sound issue, working on a field protocol for sound. If we came up with a standard, they don't have a procedure yet.

Marianne: If we get a permit, November 30, 10am to 4pm, ASRA will hold an event in Javier del la Vega park. Safety education on how to operate a snowmachine and what gear to wear. Demo rides if there is snow, no alcohol, and helmets required. Kiddy area for kids to ride too.

MEETING ADJOURNED 4:00PM