

2/9/12 Parks/SnowTRAC RFP Meeting Teleconference

Anchorage Parks Staff (In Person):

Darcy Harris (DH) State Trails Program Coordinator
Karlyn Herrera (KH) Administrative Operations Manager
Steve Neel (SN) Grant Administrator
Claire LeClair (CL) Deputy Director - State Parks
Justin Wholey (JW) Natural Resource Specialist

Mat-Su Parks Staff (On Phone):

Wayne Biessel (WB) Superintendent - Mat-Su/Copper Parks
Teresa Zell (TZ) Administrative Officer

SnowTRAC Board Members:

John Scudder; Anchorage Rep. (In Person)
Bill Luth; Mat-Su/Copper River Basin Rep. (On Phone)
Cynthia Hite; Mat-Su/Copper River Basin Rep. (On Phone)
Stephen Enochs; Fairbanks Rep. (On Phone)
Andy Morrison; inter board liaison with ORTAB

Public Listening In:

Ron Lurk (Curry Ridge Riders Snowmobile Club)

Teleconference Agenda:

Participants: Alaska State Parks representatives, SnowTRAC representatives, Public

Planned Agenda

9:55 (Public only) Sign up for public comment period.
10:00 Introductions
10:15 Ground Rules (DH)
10:20 Public Comment Period
10:45 Intro. of discussion topic: Request for Proposal (RFP) process options and State law. (KH, DH)
11:15 SnowTRAC and Alaska State Parks Q & A/discussion.
12:00 Adjourn

Meeting Begins at 10am.

DH: Announces meeting format and agenda. Reminds drivers to be safe on slick/icy roads with very high snow berms obscuring visibility at intersections (Safety Moment)

BL: Urges caution for snowmachiners due to high snow berms leading to visibility problems.

DH: Introduces topic of the meeting including: the RFP process, competitive bidding with SnowTRAC funds, and how to be in compliance with state regulations in this process.

KH: Introduces options for the grooming process in the future:

- 1) Continue grant program as is and if there are competing bids for an area the RFP process begins.
 - 2) Use RFP process for all grooming applicants.
- KH views this as the simplest process overall.

DH: It takes 60-90 days to process an RFP; this has the potential to push into the grooming season. The state also has more authority with RFPs for compliance. Contracts can be pulled, or not awarded again the following year.

BL: Can this (compliance authority) be added to the grant process?

DH: The big question is should we use the RFP process for all groomers, or just the areas with competitive bids? If we use the RFP process we still need SnowTRAC input for developing the standards for the RFP contract.

KH: We can have an RFP that is broken into regions, or have one contract and include all of the groomers in it. If a groomer is on the SnowTRAC board then they would have to recuse themselves from putting together the contract.

CH: I assume that there would be more rules involved using the RFP process. What would these rules be?

KH: You would have to have a business license.

BL: Some insurance is required. If we go to RFP Hatcher Pass and Big Lake are the only competitive areas.

DH: There is a limitation of funds using the RFP process. The money available has a cap.

KH: Did everyone read the statutes in Darcy's Email? There are restrictions, but many of these can be determined by parks, and can be quite flexible.

BL: About the Big Lake issue: There were rules put together by a SnowTRAC committee that were turned into Wayne Beissel. Operations on weekends were prohibited, but are still being done.

KH: Compliance authority is a benefit of the RFP process.

CH: Can we do this with the grant process too?

KH/WB: Yes.

KH: In the grant process we can choose not to renew a grant the following year, but not pull it mid-year.

JS: What happens if there is no groomer grooming an area because of non-compliance issues?

BL: There have been no problems except for Big Lake and Hatcher Pass.

SE: Money is getting tighter which puts pressure on SnowTRAC dollars. Grants aren't automatic either. Mark (Wilke) was looking at going a different direction because of safety and non-grooming grants. Can SnowTRAC allocate a certain amount of money?

BL: There is X amount allocated for each area.

TZ: SnowTRAC needs to work on getting the registration fees increased if the program is to go anywhere. Everyone realized that 89% of what was asked for was available for this season. The application can also be trimmed down to 4 pages. Even though Big Lake and Hatcher Pass are our only competitive/problem areas these situations can arise year to year. For the RFP process to run more smoothly we must get all paperwork turned in earlier. We should set firm allocations yearly, once we find out how much money is available. Bids cannot exceed the allocated amounts.

BL: The problem with the registration fee increase is that there is no enforcement.

CH: Some Park Rangers are checking snowmobile registrations.

JS: Fish & Game is checking at Big Lake.

WB: State Park Rangers have some authority to enforce this on state land, but it is kind of a grey area. Taking rangers outside of parks stresses staff time/resources.

BL: I've asked rangers to write tickets at the Willow Kiosk. Could we send a note to John and Drew?

SE: In December the Snow Travelers had State Troopers give a presentation. They said if they have time they'll issue registration citations, but they usually don't have the time.

CH: Enforcement is not the way to go. People need to know why their registration dollars are important and are needed. The statewide trail system is my dream and the RFP process can create this system, because we can assign what we want to be groomed.

TZ: We need to make sure the RFP process is simple enough.

KH: The current grant process requires some hair pulling.

CH: SnowTRAC has been dealing with streamlining the grant process for two years and needs some help from DNR. (To DH) How much time do you put into SnowTRAC? 5%? 10%?

DH: We try to manage as many things as we can, but we are split between different tasks. We have to make due with the resources we have.

CH: What are the cons of the RFP process? I haven't heard any yet.

TZ: Time.

KH: The time constraints.

CH: So it's 60-90 days from when the bid is placed to grooming authorization?

KH: Yes that is about how long the procurement process takes.

BL: In early November RFPs are available so when does the board meet? When will applications have to be due?

KH: Should we have the meeting in May then?

WB: The deadline should be Jun 15th or July 1st for the letter of interest. My idea is we could reshape the application so it acts as an RFP/Grant hybrid process. The application will be set up to get all the information needed for an RFP. If the area becomes competitive then we are safe-guarded and go to RFP. If there is only one applicant then we can follow the grant format.

TZ: It takes me one day to process one grant (if there are no outstanding issues). I like Wayne's hybrid idea.

CH: Why not send everything to RFP?

TZ: Pat Daniels asked me: Why do I have to answer all of these questions?

CH: I'm not getting the cons.

KH: There really aren't any cons. I think RFP is a cleaner process. The first year will be more difficult, but the second will be easier. There will be many questions that first year.

CH: How much bureaucracy will procurement have to deal with in the RFP process?

KH: RFP is already set in stone.

TZ: If everyone follows the RFP process then money cannot be shuffled around between grooming areas (example: one area receiving lots of snow, and another area not having any snow to groom)

BL: Can flexibility of shuffling funds around be written in to the contracts?

KH: We'll have to ask procurement about that (shuffling funds between areas).

TZ: Groomers will try to bill the maximum amount.

KH: They can only bill for what they do.

TZ: There are variable grooming conditions and costs attributed by groomers.

BL: We will push the season out if we have the ability, and will supplement with our own money.

CH: SnowTRAC money is not intended to be the sole source of funding for groomers.

TZ: We currently have more leeway with shuffling.

JS: One con for the RFP process is it's a moving target.

KH: In the RFP process we can have a maximum allowed cost. Example: What can you do for this amount of money?

WB: We will have to know how much money is available in advance.

CH: What amount must be known?

KH: The receipts from the prior fiscal year are used for the upcoming fiscal year.

SN: July is the earliest we can know that full amount.

SE: This doesn't mean that we'll get more money from registration fees. There is no automatic amount of money set aside for grooming. If more emphasis is placed on trail development and safety, then SnowTRAC will be paying for formerly ORTAB projects.

KH: You are correct in that assumption. We can look at this topic later and change it.

SE: I agree with making the grooming competitive, but there's not much grooming done in the Fairbanks area. Grooming up here is a crock.

-How could state parks compete against other bidders?

KH: Parks cannot compete. There can't be competition between public and private entities.

DH: Do you want more money for development and safety?

SE: The SnowTRAC Board made a list of things to develop including a statewide trail system. I think that the best interest of the public is the statewide trail system.

DH: I would like to see more motorized trail projects for RecTrails.

BL: Refers and explains the SVWT (Susitna Valley Winter Trail).

CH: I've heard rumors that it's hard to get motorized projects through ORTAB.

DH: The breakdown for projects is 30/30/40 requiring 30% motorized projects.

BL: How much money is available for RecTrails next year?

DH: It is uncertain. It being an election year the congress may keep the status quo.

JS: It's a nightmare writing grants for ORTAB.

DH: We want to show people that they can apply for grants easily. Let's get back to the original topic.

SE: I think we should keep the grant process intact, but if there is competition then it can be handled by the RFP process.

BL: I agree with SE except add the stipulations we gave to Wayne.

CH: For a statewide trail system, can we go through the RFP process?

KH: The RFP process would allow us to designate the trails ahead of time.

CH: Suggestion. We go in Wayne's direction and tackle this as an RFP process to prepare for the change-over in the future, and make it 3 or 4 pages.

JS: I lean towards the Hybrid (Wayne's suggestion).

DH: It looks like folks on the board are for the hybrid option. We should plan for a meeting in May.

-CH, BL, SE, and JS support the hybrid option.

CH: The evaluation process in the field hasn't been discussed.

DH: I've been brainstorming ways to have Kenai managers inspect trail grooming.

BL: Until standards are in place, trail inspections are a waste of time

DH: Explain what standardized inspection entails.

CH: Wayne mentioned that volunteers can't be use for inspections. What about ASSA members?

JS: The general public could report to the ranger district. I have no problem with the public reporting.

DH: What about a trail-watch type program for SnowTRAC grooming?

CH: The ASSA volunteers could be a good resource.

DH: I'll contact ASSA.

BL: We could offer volunteer time to do inspections.

-AM joins at 11:15, and DH updates him on past discussion.

AM: Sounds ambitious.

CH: We have to add a value to each of the trails.

DH: Informs AM on what the hybrid process would be.

AM: That sounds good.

JS: No new trails are to be added to the grooming pool; is that true?

SE: It's probably not practical to not add new trails.

CH: We should create a trail system to put out to bid, not ask what trails do you want to groom.

DH: We should set up a meeting in April?

BL: After the 10th of May.

CH: We can set it up via email and phone calls.

TZ: I have a question. Who will be making allocations for different areas? I have an issue with that. I suggest that DNR comes up with the initial allocation and SnowTRAC refines it.

BL: That's acceptable to me.

TZ: We can look at the historical billings to ballpark it. It may be difficult to figure out the cost per mile. Hatcher Pass has had more than one operator with charges between \$27 and \$50 per hour.

DH: We'll revamp the application for ORTAB.

CH: I can volunteer to help because I'm here in town (Anchorage).

DH to TZ: Do you have the grooming records available?

TZ: You have all of the binders.

AM: Funds cannot be moved around based on snow with the RFP process.

CH: Why didn't we go straight to RFP?

TZ: We can't shuffle funds easily with a contract.

AM: The RFP process sounds daunting. Do we need to?

WB: The RFP process will consume a lot of staff time and won't be cheap for parks.

AM: In the future funding sources will be questionable so we should look for more funding sources for the groomers – in-state gas tax being one.

DH: Here are the action items:

DNR will look at drafting basic language criteria to get out to the board so you can discuss it. We'll set up a meeting in mid to late May. We'll chat about the application streamlining process.

TZ: I'll get together a very streamlined application in a couple weeks.

DH: We'll look at historical allocations, billing per hour, and what machinery is being used. Maybe we can standardize a per hour rate based on those criteria. I'll also get the rules from Wayne to put into the draft language.

TZ: FYI: The week of the 14th Mat-Su parks will be busy training volunteers.

Meeting adjourned at 11:55am.