COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SNOWMOBILE AND ATV ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

NOVEMBER 10, 2016

MEETING MINUTES

Location: Bald Eagle State Forest District Office, 18865 Old Turn Pike Road, Millmont, PA 17845

Meeting Start Time: 10:00AM

Committee Meeting Attendees:
Jack Clark, PA Off-Highway Vehicle Association, SAAC Chair
Elizabeth Krug, PA State Snowmobile Association, SAAC Vice Chair
Eric Bruggeman, PA Off-Highway Vehicle Association, SAAC Secretary
Jennie Shade, DCNR Legislative Liaison, SAAC Liaison
Matt Beaver, DCNR Bureau of Forestry
Fred Brown, PA Off-Highway Vehicle Association
Jason Hall, DCNR Bureau of Forestry
Mark Hansford, DCNR Bureau of Recreation and Conservation
Jonathan Lutz, for State Representative John Maher (via conference call)
John Norbeck, DCNR Deputy Secretary
Mike Walsh, DCNR Deputy Secretary
Al Sain, PA Off-Highway Vehicle Association
Jim Saylor, Allegheny National Forest

Introductions:
Mr. Clark initiated the Snowmobile/ATV Advisory Committee (SAAC) Meeting. Committee members, attendees and guests of the meeting provided introductions. Ms. Shade announced Carrie Lapore is the new member representing the Department of Community and Economic Development. Mr. Beaver welcomed the attendees and noted he is now the District Forester for the Bald Eagle State Forest. There are currently 17 miles of ATV trails in the Bald Eagle State Forest, with a goal of expanding to 20 miles by August 2018. A total of 250 miles of combined snowmobile trail and road exists, plus 40 miles of off highway motorcycle trail, and 90 miles of dual-sport motorcycle trail exists within the Bald Eagle State Forest.

ATV Trail/Area Inventory and Analysis:
Mr. Buerkle from Pashek Associates provided a summary of the ATV Gap Study. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) staff are coordinating with Mr. Buerkle to determine the methodology for the most suitable areas of additional ATV trail expansion. Currently, DCNR’s inventory of active ATV registrations totals 169,000 ATVs. The active registrants were defined by the individuals who travel to recreate off their property. Allegheny County has the highest active ATV registrants with a total of 8,000 ATVs which coincides to the southwest region of Pennsylvania with the highest number of registrants at 45,000 ATVs or 27 percent. The southcentral region has the second highest registrants at 35,000. An overall summary concluded registration is broken down geographically in the state by 43 percent in the western region, 31 percent in the central region and 26 percent in the eastern region. In comparison, 45 percent of registrants exist in the northern half of the state and 55 percent in the southern half of Pennsylvania. Ms. Krug noted it is interesting the study is focused on registered users
location of ownership. Potter County has a high number of users, but a low number of registered users. Mr. Buerkle indicated they are in the process of correlating where people live and where they ride. Mr. Clark added that the number of registered users seems low given there are many individuals that do not register their ATV. It is difficult to identify the non-registered users, but the question is why individuals don’t want to register their ATV?

Mr. Buerkle continued to discuss two separate surveys that were completed. The first survey was completed in 2003 and consisted of a random sample of 1,500 registered ATV owners in PA. A total of 250 surveys were completed for a response rate of 16 percent. The current survey consisted of an online survey through the use of emails and social media blasts. There were 4,679 survey responses to the online survey with 72 percent consisting of PA residents. Out-of-state responses consisted of New York, Maryland and Ohio residents.

Major findings concluded household income increased 84 percent as compared to the 2003 survey. As such, Mr. Buerkle concluded ATV riders make an investment to pursue the sport of trail riding, they want to have a safe riding opportunity and are willing to travel to ride. ATVs per household increased from 1.6 ATVs in 2003 to 2.2 ATVs currently. Favorite riding areas based on respondents indicated private areas were preferred. Other preferred riding areas included the Allegheny National Forest, Snow Shoe Rail Trail, Whiskey Springs, Bloody Skillet, Rock Run, Anthracite Outdoor Adventure Area. Mr. Buerkle confirmed respondents still desire new trails, followed by the improvements to existing trails. Also, riders still prefer long trails, while medium length trails were least preferred.

Mr. Buerkle discussed the methodology for suitability of new riding areas. The breakdown includes suitable or potentially suitable. Exclusions of use are categorized by environmental restrictions and internal policy. Safety of a new trail location is compared to Explore PA Trails to buffer non-motorized trails. Various other land databases were reviewed for protected lands to avoid. Suitable lands are based on 10 layers including mine lands, barren lands, forest areas and certain soil types. Mr. Buerkle confirmed federal land is not suitable, along with agricultural land. Mr. Norbeck questioned why federal land is not suitable when the Allegheny National Forest Trails exist? Mr. Buerkle indicated the National Forest was not interested previously in participating with trail expansion.

Mr. Norbeck added that DCNR is looking at a 15-mile trail connector and confirmed the assessment of properties should be discussed on a case-by-case basis, referring to federal land. Mr. Buerkle continued to discuss how Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis will be used to further evaluate the suitability analysis.

Mr. Buerkle added that part of this ATV trail study will conclude with an online inventory of riding opportunities, including private riding areas. Mr. Sain questioned what will be done with the information from the clubs and how will it help the clubs? Mr. Sain clarified of all the 500 members of his club, none of them would look to DCNR’s website to find a riding area. Mr. Bruggeman added that one of the best deliverables of this study is to map out the additional private riding areas and municipal roads open to legal ATV use. Mr. Sain requested DCNR share a link of the riding area.

Mr. Bruggeman questioned if the survey data collected would allow for the separation of Class I and Class II ATV users. The goal would be to determine where the Class II riders are using trails, since there has not been historic data on Class II users and they are selling more than Class I users. Mr. Buerkle confirmed that would not be studied.
Mr. Bruggeman disagreed with a component of the suitability model to not allow proposed ATV trails to intersect any non-motorized trails. There were various examples referenced where ATVs have not impacted non-motorized trails illegally.

**DCNR Status Update:**
Mr. Norbeck indicated DCNR has revisited the ATV situation as it relates to public lands and private lands. DCNR would like to review the current issues and stressed it is important to have committees like the Snowmobile/ATV Advisory Committee to share current information and to work with other ATV organizations. Mr. Norbeck summarized a recent meeting with the Central Mountain ATV organization and the Snow Shoe Rail-Trail club. Mr. Norbeck clarified an important component to proposing the expansion of new trails is to think about how they will be maintained in 5 to 15 years in the future. Mr. Clark compared how the Allegheny National Forest has historically coordinated maintenance efforts with ATV clubs and have managed their trail system based on suitable conditions throughout the year.

Mr. Saylor confirmed they invested $300,000 within the last year on the ATV trails where approximately $100,000 came from DCNR funding. Another couple hundred thousand dollars is projected for maintenance in 2017; however, the decline in ridership is causing a decline in maintenance dollars. Recently, $150,000 to $200,000 was generated in one year. In 2015, $106,000 was generated. Mr. Sain added that a 6,000-acre private riding area opened nearly adjacent to the federal trail.

Mr. Buerkle added that everyone wants to complain about DCNR moving slow to add trails, but the reason is to do it right and responsibly. Mr. Norbeck discussed how unsafe the trails are in the Sproul State Forest. Mr. Bruggeman questioned if he was referring to the Bloody Skillet trails that have deteriorated and if the trail design manual was used? Mr. Hall confirmed the trail design manual will be used for 2017 trail maintenance.

Mr. Norbeck confirmed DCNR is meeting with club representative to review path widening maintenance and reviewing safety areas. Mr. Clark appreciates the willingness of DCNR to work with the ATV clubs.

**Motorized Recreation and Improvements:**
Mr. Hall confirmed Whiskey Springs reopened May 27, 2016 at the completion of the Acid Mine Drainage project since it was closed the prior two years. Mr. Hall confirmed the afternoon’s ride on Jack’s Mountain ATV trail system will allow attendees to view the 17-mile trail system, with 3 additional miles proposed for construction in 2017. Improvements will still need to be completed for the parking lot and kiosks. Mr. Hall added the Bloody Skillet Trail has an additional 2 to 4 miles of trail proposed. Approximately one, half-mile that has been historically closed, will now be added to the system. Of the referenced improvements, part of the expansion will be the easy route option departing the brickyard trailhead. Mr. Norbeck clarified some connector options around Monument were under investigation to use a railroad bridge as part of the easy connection from Orviston to Bloody Skillet trails.

A feasibility study is proposed to connect the Bloody Skillet trail with the Whiskey Springs trail according to Mr. Hall. Mr. Bruggeman questioned if the Whiskey Springs to Tamarack connection was still an option? Mr. Hall verified an independent contractor would study the feasibility of that connection.

Mr. Hall verified Tiadaghton State Forest purchased a new snow groomer and the Loyalsock State Forest did, as well. Both the Bald Eagle State Forest and Moshannon State Forest are planning to purchase groomers next year.
Mr. Norbeck confirmed DCNR will announce in 2017 that it will allow Class II ATVs with a width up to 64 inches and max weight of 1800 pounds on some of their trails. An on-going assessment was occurring at the time of the meeting.

**Snowmobile and ATV Accident and Youth Training Statistics:**
Mr. Hall reported two snowmobile accidents occurred in 2016 with no injuries. ATV accidents included 166 crashes, which consisted of 149 involved injuries and 24 fatalities. It was noted there are 43 active youth snowmobile safety instructors and 56 active youth ATV instructors. There are two or three trainings scheduled for the spring of 2017. In 2016, three snowmobile safety classes were presented to a total of 42 students. Ms. Krug believed up to 8 snowmobile classes were presented. Mr. Hall confirmed there were 116 ATV safety classes in 2016 with 324 students attending. Eight students were ages 8 and 9 and 244 students were between the ages of 10 and 15.

Mr. Clark confirmed PaOHV is still interested in seeing adults be allowed to take the DCNR youth training course.

**Legislative Report:**
Ms. Shade reported Act 97 separates funds into the snowmobile restricted account and the ATV restricted account for use of registration, certificate/title activities, education, enforcement and grants in-aid related to construction and maintenance of snowmobile and ATV trails. An audit would be required every two years on the restricted account. The SAAC committee also would be modified to include a member of the Department of Community and Economic Development and the Pennsylvania Economic Development Association. The two members that represent non-motorized recreation would be removed from SAAC.

Act 136, as passed by the Governor requires, youth ATV riders, ages 8 and 9 to adhere to the placard warning label on the ATV, i.e., the federal regulations. ATVs without warning labels would require youth to follow the engine restrictions currently in place.

Mr. Walsh provided additional details on Act 97 and noted the two year audit results will be posted on DCNR’s website and will be provided to appropriate committees. Prior fiscal years 2013/2014, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 confirmed income of about 85% from ATVs and 15% from snowmobiles. Various handouts were provided to summarize the findings. A separate component of Act 97 will allow for two grant periods for the motorized grant requests.

A discussion occurred on the grant workshops and Mr. Hansford confirmed DCNR is proactively providing workshops across the state to inform applicants how to apply for grants.

**Next Meeting:**
It was agreed the next SAAC meeting would be scheduled in about six months, April or May 2017.

Meeting adjourned at 12:13pm. Various participants toured the Jack’s Mountain ATV Trail system within the Bald Eagle State Forest. Part of the recently completed expansion of the trail system was reviewed by the SAAC and DCNR meeting attendees.