

SnowTRAC Committee Meeting
632 West 6th Ave., Anchorage
January 31, 2003

Meeting called to order at 9:33am by Chair Marianne Beckham. Quorum present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Marianne Beckham, Chair - Anchorage

Matt Divens – Fairbanks

Christine Noakes – Big Lake

Craig Seibert – Trapper Creek

Lee Johnson, TRAAK Board Liaison, - Fairbanks

Kenton Bloom – Homer

Bruce Friend - Anchorage

Frank Woods – Dillingham

Mark Wilke – Juneau

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Greg Barclay - Soldotna (excused)

Staff present: Jim Renkert and Teri Gilpin (ASP)

Public: Pat Kukertz-Anchorage Snowmobile Club President, Murph O'Brien- Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT), Dave Heier-DOT

Chair Marianne welcomed all committee members and public attending.

Discussion on where the snowmachining is happening. Turnagain, Lost Lake, and Hatcher's Pass are all closed. Paxson and Eklutna have decent snow. Petersville and Big Lake there is very little snow and not much riding. Juneau Forest Service opened some trails, had one night of good riding before it rained. Fairbanks and Big Lake had just enough snow to ride locally, but hard on the machines. Airboat Trail was pretty good. Tanana Flats was not bad. Bristol Bay has bare ground, still on 4-wheelers.

No alternates or proxies. Greg Barclay was absent and his alternate, Howard Davis, was unavailable.

APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER MINUTES

Chris moved "to accept the minutes from November 8, 2002." Kenton 2nd.

Marianne made a change on page two; Marianne spoke on behalf of SnowTRAC instead of ASRA. Lee wanted a change on page eight; DOT said they were not in priority order. Lee disagreed; they should not be listed that way. Minutes approved as corrected. No objections.

AGENDA ADDITIONS/REVISIONS

Break at public appearances. Lunch at 11:30 am at LaMex. No changes to agenda.

CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

Discussion of the format of conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest should be declared at every meeting.

Marianne: declared a conflict of interest with ASSA, ASC, and Iron Dog.

Jim led a discussion on the operating procedures and ethics. Read from item 21. These are only draft operating procedures that have not yet been finalized. Discussion on whether these ethics apply to the SnowTRAC committee or not.

The Municipality of Anchorage also has a conflict of interest provision. Similar to state's but different. Suggestion to marry the two documents and bring something together that the board could adopt so that this is all very clear and not in flux. Discussion.

Jim spoke with a DNR ethics attorney. Ethics attorney said that SnowTRAC should come up with their own and adopt that. We need to finalize this.

Bruce: declared conflict on ASSA and ASRA

Christine: no longer on B.A.A.R.T.'s Board of Directors, still on Response Team as volunteer.

Mark: on the board for Trail Mix, Southeast Alaska Avalanche Center, and Juneau Snowmobile Club. Mark asked, "Is lobbying allowable?" Marianne responded that we will address this.

Matt: Fairbanks Snow Travelers member, Iron Dog volunteer, Fairbanks Convention Visitors Bureau, Alaska Travel Industry Association, Chamber of Commerce, and Princess Tours

Frank: declares conflict with Tribal Council

OLD BUSINESS

Need to resolve the alternates and proxies issue. Discussion. Frank shared information on what he found. Section needs to be simplified and cleared up. Will work on this at the next meeting.

Break @ 10:28 am, Reconvened @ 10:30 am

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Pat Kukertz, Anchorage Snowmobile Club-President. He had spoke with some SnowTRAC members, and it became clear that there was some confusion with the Anchorage Snowmobile Club's grant status. Here to confirm/figure out what their status is, are they short on paperwork and if so what do they need to get in? Open grant was to groom the trails of Chugach State Park. They are currently on a 1 or 2 year extension and it doesn't look like they are going to be able to get much done this year. They are hoping for another extension for next year. ASC wanted to make sure they are in good standing with SnowTRAC.

Marianne: My perception is that Anchorage Snowmobile club is in good standing with us. We will discuss extension in a little bit. As far as paperwork goes, Jim will address that.

Craig: When we spoke on the grants from 2000 and 2001, there were lots of loose ends.

Jim: Anchorage Snowmobile Club has one denied. If there are questions on this grant, copies of the score sheets are available for the applicant to review. As far as the grooming grant, we have a progress report, but it was missing information. We need receipts or a copy of the cancelled check for reimbursement.

Lee: a clarification on terms, this grant did not score high enough, not denied but disqualified.

Discussion on clarification of a receipt and an invoice, what is covered with the grant (maintenance, gas oil). Discussion of extension, scope, and flex budget.

PETERSIVILL ROAD REPORT

Marianne: Restated that the grant to Randy Crosby was for \$15,000 to groom a 17-mile trail with conditions. DOT had oversight and we had to comply with regulations. Randy could get a permit, but it had to go to State Parks and then Parks would permit.

Jim: Grant was awarded conditionally. Before grant agreement could be signed, all DOT conditions had to be fulfilled.

Murph O'Brien-State DOT: With certain conditions (public notice, support from the borough, address non-motorized concerns, miners), a permit could be issued. Letting the miners know raised a question on public road access and right of way.

We would hope ideas would come from working with the community. We're looking at this from a broader picture. Signage has been proposed, but still needs some work. The other issue is the non-motorized users. We want to know what has worked before and what information can be provided to us.

Jim: He has been playing phone tag with Kevin Hite about a plan. Trying to work this out.

Discussion.

Bruce: We have to take a little risk. There is not a lot of season left, and some disappointed users. Discussion.

Murph: What DOT is asking for is how the risks are going to be mitigated. How can we get this to work? There is some signage, but needs more communication and details. Discussion on signage and how other places have addressed this.

Mark: Normal rules of the road apply, why do we need to come up with a new set?

Marianne: We need to establish use of this road. There have been times when trucks, snowmachiners, walkers, and four-wheelers have all met on this road.

Discussion.

Dave Heier-State DOT: There are statutes that deal with this, but it doesn't apply to snowmachiners; it applies to licensed drivers. The same for speed limits.

Discussion on users of this road, signing, and making it a winter trail. Making people aware of the multiple users and the possible dangers. Discussion on this area not being marked or groomed.

Murph: This is what we want to hear and see, something so that the information gets out. It is better to get the community and organization involved.

Discussion on maintaining, marking, and signing.

Craig: This is a project that the community is behind and should have been handled months ago. This should have been a non-issue. If there was same interest here as Hatcher's Pass, this could have been resolved. This road has been multi-use for years.

Frank: Suggested adopting an ordinance for non-motorized and motorized use.

Post signage stating that this is a multi-use trail, non-motorized users have right of way.

Post signs for the non-maintained season.

Kenton: The process is frustrating for both sides. Coming up with a plan and example so that there is a starting point.

Discussion on designation of route, funds, and policies.

Mark: Suggested spelling it all out: non-maintained times, all of the multiple users, and carry it from state to each level.

Marianne: Is there something that SnowTRAC can do to help move this along?

Dave: We need a plan, everything else is worked out. We need details and then we can issue a permit. This was made clear to Randy.

Murph: If there is a need for more public notice, we can do that.

Discussion on coming up with a plan for Randy.

Marianne: I have a problem with the board coming up with a plan for Randy. It is not the board's responsibility, it is his.

Discussion.

Discussion on speed limits. The state is the only one that has say in limits.

Marianne: Subject is closed. We want to see this happen, but we are not writing the plan. Thank you to Dave and Murph for coming. Thank you to each board member for their comments.

STAFF REPORT (JIM RENKERT)

FORAKER GROUP

Brochure in folder. Discussion on the background of this group. Encouraged the board to look at the training offered and check out the web site.

ADMIN FINANCIAL

Unused funds from 2002 were \$5,000, and last year there was \$74,000. Total of \$106,000 of unused funds, and more coming back. Discussion of the possibility of the funds being swept back into the States Operating budget. Per Jim, Accounting section said no. Discussion.

Break for lunch @ 11:40 am, Reconvened @ 12:50 pm

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

TA's turned in. Members will complete travel and send in with original receipts.

2000 GRANTS

ASSA- never submitted proper documentation. They need to refund us everything. Sent them a certified letter, haven't heard anything back. Unused portion will return to the program. They got an advance of \$10,650. Was turned over to our Accounting Section for collection. Craig suggested delegating grants among board members for more regular contact. Discussion on contacting, forward funding, collecting of debts, and credibility. Chris volunteered to contact Kevin, get facts from Jim.

Hatcher Pass- Brochure sent to the printer.

Lake Creek- Going to submit a reimbursement, lots of good press on this project.

According to Mark Wilke new USFS supervisor worked with them everyday. Discussion on getting the good press out there to be seen.

Kroto Creek- There was left over money; they got a second grant and have not yet used all that money. If not used, it will be closed and the money will return to the fund.

Point Mackenzie- Discrepancies in the stuff they submitted, so we will get a letter off to them, we may need more receipts.

City of Wasilla, Winter Trailhead- They want an extension thru July 1, 2003. Discussion on extension. Christine moved “to extend this grant to July 1, 2003.” Bruce 2nd. Discussion. Motion passed.

City of Wasilla, Trail grooming- No snow to groom, got an extension to 3/31/02. Last fall they came in and wanted to do a different project, grooming a section of the Iditarod. Through discussion with Tim, they are not going to pursue this. They do want to extend their trail-grooming grant. Discussion on this grant getting extended, and on limiting the number of grant extensions, possibly having an expedited reapplication process. This will be taken up during the next grant cycle.

Eklutna Cabin- We should be getting final report in the next two weeks. They have \$1400.00 left. Has been a successful project.

Eagle Song- State Parks accounting did an audit of all four grants (one Snowmobile Trail Grant and three Recreational Trail Grants). For their snowmobile grant they were awarded \$11,000, got an advance of \$8,300. The audit found a number of discrepancies. Certified letter sent informing them they need to reimburse the State a total of \$7,700. Discussion.

ASSA- Certified letter sent to them in May. No response. We are going to close.

2001 GRANTS

Fairbanks Snow Travelers- They have \$200.00 left. We are going to close and return the money to the fund.

White Mountain- They have \$5,500 left. We requested a progress report, said they would submit next week.

Copper Country- Changed their project scope to surveying. They need to be approved and sent a new grant agreement. Craig moved “to accept change in project scope to surveying.” Christine 2nd. Discussion. Motion passed.

Big Lake- Held up because not all easements in place. Big section of the Iron Dog trail that we finally have Mental Health Trust looking at, hoping they won’t come back with any major problems.

Brevig Mission- They said they would get something to us; if not in 30 days, we will close.

2002 GRANTS

Shaktoolik- Have heard nothing from them. If no response in 30 days, we will close.

Fairnet- They received an advance of \$3,200. They will return the advance and we will close. The contact person moved away.

Alaska Mountain Safety Center- Snowmobile avalanche brochure completed. Printed 60,000. Discussion.

Fairbanks Police Department- Received an advance of \$11,000. They did get a program going. We gave them a one-year extension because they did not spend much money. They have a safety program scheduled for early March at Chena Lakes.

Kroto Creek: Asked for a one-year extension due to not much snow.

*North Slope Borough-*They requested a reimbursement of \$9,100. We need photos and documentation first.

St Michael- No progress reports received.

Ohogamiut Traditional Council- No progress reports received.

Lake Louise- Haven't received anything recently. Mat-Su Borough is paying for a state employee to work on them.

Chena Hot Spring: Haven't received anything from them. We have contacted them a couple of times, but no response.

Lee: Spoke with the contact person and asked them to contact Jim. Even if there is nothing to report, they still need to submit something or contact us.

2003 GRANTS

Cabin Hoppers- They never got the grant agreement; we sent another one.

Mat-Su Borough- signed their grant agreement and is good to go.

Alaska Snow Cat- Still working on their permit.

Valdez Snowmobile Club- They called with a couple of questions, working on things. They were interested so we are sending some of the new snowmobile avalanche brochures.

Curyung-All day workshop on avalanche safety training, Saturday 10-5 and Sunday 10-4. Free and open to all ages and all communities.

B.A.A.R.T- Christine helped with a training class last week. Last year alone 4,000 people were educated, most were school age.

Iron Dog- They have a new executive director. She requested that some changes be made to the grant. We haven't heard back from them yet. Consider extending. Discussion. Need to have a response with in thirty days.

Trails and Recreation Access Across Alaska (TRAAK) BUDGET

There are two parts to TRAAK funding 1) Recreational Trail program, and 2) DOT Statewide Transportation Improvement Projects (STIP). They get 11.5 million dollars a year for STIP projects that include projects like trails, bike paths, and trailheads. A change in administration has changed this amount. They are going to reduce the TRAAK amount and move it into the highway projects. The TRAAK Board may also be done away with. Discussion. The primary staff for TRAAK is DOT, other staff is DNR and Fish and Game. Meeting on Tuesday with the Acting DOT Commissioner and the TRAAK board.

Two issues to discuss- Snowmachine Position, and Suggestions regarding the next grant cycle.

Break @ 2:05 pm, Reconvened @ 2:10 pm

SNOWMACHINE COORDINATOR POSITION IN STATE PARKS

Marianne: In the first few months of SnowTRAC there was a vote that this money would not go to a bureaucratic position. With the volume of work being done now, I would now support a full time snowmobile grant coordinator position for the intent of managing the snowmobile grant program, and to work with state parks and other interested parties on a trail system including snowmobile trails.

Frank: Not only are we in a dilemma with the administration changes, we haven't spent all of our money. With the money it is use it or lose it. In the lower forty-eight, they promote snowmobile safety in general. We can't do this if we don't have the manpower. He is in support of this position.

Craig: He is not in favor of any additional state employee positions. He would like to see it from a private sector, not to get bogged down by the bureaucracy. Someone with a passion for the sport, not just about being on the job.

Lee: Thinks that there is a need for a full time coordinator, however there are so many unknowns about where this administration is going. He feels that the state should already be doing this. Until we have an idea of where things are going, should wait.

Matt: Aside from the Administration, or regardless of what we feel, will this position help more grants be awarded?

Kenton: He was there for that meeting where the initial vote took place. He once did a job with a similar situation. They ended up hiring a full time agency coordinator because it worked better and gave more credibility to the program. He understands the need for a full time coordinator, and is in full support.

Bruce: There need to be a more clear focus on where the state is going in terms of support or not of our current system. We need more time, and a better perspective. Not in favor of this position at this time. Doesn't see this position in our best interest.

Christine: Eventually, but not now. We do need to go in that direction because people do need to be trained.

Mark: Having spent time talking with legislatures, and legislative staff, one issue that keeps coming up is the fact that there is no safety program in Alaska. Changes in laws, which were relatively minor, almost failed because they (the legislature) were hung up on this issue. We, as leaders in the snowmobile community, have to take a leading role in addressing safety. We can't do it solely with volunteers and we can't do it ourselves. I think it will take a full time staff person.

Discussion on participating in the hiring of this position, job specifications.

Discussion if DOT does this instead of DNR, and who has the money to get this done.

Christine: Suggested that this be on the next agenda to discuss.

Marianne: 1 hour on next agenda.

Discussion on criteria of this position. Further discussion on the coordinator position, money for this position, and the safety program.

Marianne: Your assignment for the next meeting-Each of you represents some one and some area. Discuss this with snowmobilers that you come in contact with. At least 15 people. Present this to them as if the money were available, would they be in support of a position at the state level to coordinate the SnowTRAC grants, safety and education program, and an Alaska state trails system.

Lee: This may be a good opportunity to educate people on what the money is going for.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NEXT GRANT CYCLE

Bruce's suggestion: Grooming grants that are turned back due to lack of snow, but in compliance, receive expedited handling during the next grant cycle.

Craig's suggestion: An intermediate step for grants that are good, but lacking elements in the application.

Discussion on grant process, clarifying the grant and scope of services. Also discussion on a grooming pool. So much money being tied up in grants that can't use it. Possibly come up with a grooming pool so that places that do have snow can use it.

Bruce: One thing we might consider is to suggest to people that are going to apply, is to use someone to help through the grant writing process, instead of us having a meeting to pre-review. Helping to get a good grant submitted off the bat.

Marianne: Shared that with the city they have done a workshop on grant writing. Discussion on this workshop idea.

Kenton: Would be happy to facilitate, idea of a web site for grant writing.

Bruce: Love the idea, but would like to turn it over to someone that professionally does this stuff. (Foraker group)

Frank: Not too up on the idea. It would be helpful, but I agree with Bruce, on a group that does this with no conflict of interest.

Lee: Some years ago when Ron Crenshaw was involved with TRAAK, they did this, but the people that need the help weren't coming to the workshops. So he is not really sure if this would really help. If the applicant needs help, they should be asking the organization not the board members. Try to keep the board members out of the technical part.

Marianne: With the city, we don't do the technical, but just answer the question.

Lee: It would be good if other entities were aware of this application process, then maybe they could also help people put together better applications.

Craig: I think a workshop is a good idea. An on-line project of some kind would be a good idea. There are people in this state that write grants. We could attach to the application a message, if you need help contact this/these person/people in your area. And in addition to this, these workshops will be available.

Matt: I don't think we have the resources for these workshops. Give an example application.

Jim: Grant applications include samples of good application responses.

Mark: A well-written grant is a strong indicator of a real good grant recipient. We need to be real careful on trying to lower the bar. If it is not a good grant, let's not fund it. I don't think that we should proof the grants; we need to have a level field.

Christine: Mention on the application that having a good application needs to have good follow through.

Jim: One thing that we did is adjusted the scoring for needs and benefits. SnowTRAC committee members have to be careful about coaching applicants. You have to review the grant applications and remain impartial. For the first time, this past year two unsuccessful applicants contacted me for their score sheets.

Marianne: Two things to think about, my suggestions: adjusting either, our policy and procedures, or make it clear in the grant; future grant eligibility may depend on past performance and/or non-performance of grants. Should we base future grants on past performance? (If not in compliance for one, not eligible for another?) We need to limit the number of extensions.

Craig: When it comes to some of these, we need to be somewhat lenient, towards the first time grantees.

Brief discussion. Several committee members made comments that applicants need to aspire to minimum level to obtain a grant. We need to keep the bar fairly high.

AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

Next meeting April 18, 2003

For the next meeting, look at two sections, safety education and use of state public transportation- chapter 2.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Jim: Looking back to 4 years ago and where we are now, we are making progress. SnowTRAC committee members are the leaders in the snowmobile community. At this time, state parks has an acting director. No word yet on who our new director will be.

Kenton: Two snowmachine groups on the Kenai Peninsula, the Caribou Hill Cabin Hoppers and the Homer Snowmads. Communication between the two groups could be improved.

Bruce: Being new in this group, it seems sometimes, the process of grants, maybe is there a consideration for a larger grant?

Lee: Parks Highway Plan, two rounds of meetings already held. If anyone is interested, there is some good stuff related to trail heads and available on State DOT web site (Dave Post, Manager 269-0520), Central Region Planning. Winter Transportation Study, Chapter one, page one, the fourth bullet is not true. There was a huge piece of information that was left out. He will bring to the next meeting or e-mail link.

Craig: Keep in mind we are developing something new here and we are learning as we go. We are constantly getting bombarded with changes. It is okay to remain unsatisfied, rather than dissatisfied. We are not perfect and we are moving in the right direction. This grooming pool is a great concept.

Marianne: We need to think about the criteria of the pool.

Matt: The Fairbanks North Star Bureau met in September. One of their recommendations was to use funding to survey and purchase easements for all trails proposed. It ties in with the coordinator concept. It would be nice if it were someone friendly to the sport. Discussion.

About the earlier conversation, he is in favor of the coordinator position but not too soon. Grooming pool is a great idea.

Mark: We really do a lot of very good work and it is helping snowmobiling become a safer sport. We have a lot to look forward to. I think getting to know some of the grantees is a great idea and maybe do a meeting in the different areas.

Christine: It's a good idea to get around, to see where the members live and what it's like for them. The pool idea is great.

Bruce: Is it possible that the date of granting let each year is a result of the funding we got from the first year? Maybe we don't fit the criteria of the people applying for the grants because of the timing of grant submission.

Discussion on the grant process, availability of money, and overlapping problem.

Discussion on the grooming pool. Board research project, Marianne will do this with help.

Christine moved to adjourn.

MEETING ADJOURNED 4:02 PM