

SnowTRAC Committee Meeting

April 25, 2003

Meeting called to order at 9:34 a.m. by Chair Marianne Beckham. Quorum present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Marianne Beckham – Anchorage

Greg Barclay – Soldotna

Bruce Friend – Anchorage

Lee Johnson - TRAAK Board Liaison – Fairbanks

Christine Noakes – Big Lake

Craig Seibert – Trapper Creek

Mark Wilke – Juneau

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Kenton Bloom – Homer (excused)

Matt Divens – Fairbanks (excused)

Frank Woods – Dillingham (excused)

Staff present: Jim Renkert and Teri Gilpin (ASP)

Public: Gene Gerkin, Patsy Coyne-B.A.A.R.T., Jack Campbell-Mat Su, Cliff Larson-Division of Mining, Land & Water, Scott Lapiene, Jody Simpson, Joe Gauna.

Chair Marianne welcomed all committee members and public attending.

No Alternates or proxies.

Christine moved “to approve the minutes from January 30, 2003.” Mark 2nd. Minutes approved as submitted.

Agenda stands with no changes.

PUBLIC APPEARANCES

Patsy Coyne, B.A.A.R.T. Thanked SnowTRAC for the grants. BAART’s job is to go out and educate the public about avalanche safety. Presence in local schools and at Arctic Man again this year. They have been actively supporting continuation of SnowTRAC funding. Discussion/Comments on grant accomplishment and good proposals, and on contacting Senator Green’s office. Discussion. Committee members expressed appreciation to B.A.A.R.T. for a job well done and for submitting good applications.

Jack Campbell. Attending to learn what’s happening with SnowTRAC. He is interested in the grant process, specifically a particular section of the Iron Dog Trail that needs work. Discussion.

Marianne: We could easily argue that with the \$200,000 that was invested in SnowTRAC, if we could save the life of one person it would be a huge reward for a small investment. Just think of all the safety and other things that SnowTRAC has been able to do through the grant process. Discussion on impacts to grants and snowmobile registration fees if SnowTRAC not funded in 2004. The Capital Budget has already passed the House. Jody Simpson indicated we have about 72 hours to advocate for support of SnowTRAC funding. The legislature ends on May 20th. Discussion on the budget document. We need to concentrate on the finance committee right now.

Patsy: Shared telephone numbers of House and Senate members to call.

STAFF REPORT (JIM RENKERT)

Your packets include a couple of Brochures, Lisa Murkowski's bill and press release, and a follow-up email. Sent an email of the bill to Colleen McGuire-Washington Snowmobile Administrator, who circulated it nationwide via email. This morning we received an email response from Christopher Dowes, Federal Highway Administration, who oversees all recreational trail money, with comments on the bill. In other news, State Parks is awaiting the appointment of a new director.

2000 GRANTS

ASSA-Safety-They owe the program money for not properly completing their original grant. They got an advance; we may have to begin a collection process. Discussion with Bruce, he suggested calling Kevin Hite. Jim said a certified letter was sent last year with no response. Christine will talk to Kevin and see where it stands now.

Hatcher Pass-Brochure is done and in your packets. It will be distributed by State Parks.

Trail Mix-Project complete and the final report submitted.

Mat-Su, Point Mackenzie - Being closed soon, expiring.

Wasilla, Winter Trailhead - Extended until July 1st, 2003.

Wasilla, Trail grooming - Being closed, don't think they did any grooming this year.

Eklutna Cabin - Submitted final progress report, will be closed.

Eagle Song Lodge - A somewhat problematic grant. A certified letter was sent to them requesting they refund us a total of \$7,700.00, they appealed it. The Commissioner remanded it back to Parks. Parks requested they supply more information supporting and justifying their expenses. They submitted information as of a week ago that we will review. Sending out a letter today stating we received this information and will respond in 2-4 weeks.

2001 GRANTS

White mountain - Submitted a request for reimbursement. When we reviewed the request we noticed they had spent \$5,700 for labor. Their budget application had no funds budgeted for labor. We denied reimbursement for labor.

Copper Country, Trail Survey - Original grant was for grooming. When access issues were discovered, the grant was amended to a surveying and mapping project modeled after the Lake Louise project. New grant agreement signed in February.

Brevig Mission - There was a change in grant administrators. The project was done but documentation has some problems.

Anchorage Snowmobile Club - They submitted a request for reimbursement but they still need to send a copy of the cancelled check. They should also submit a request for an extension.

2002 GRANTS

Shatoolik - We sent a closure notice at the end of February. They submitted a request for an extension but we have not heard anything else.

Fairnet - The advance they received was returned. Grant closed.

B.A.A.R.T. - Project completed and grant closed.

Alaska Mountain Safety Center - This project has been a real success. Jill Fredston took the cd version and sent it to Doug Chabot with the US Forest Service in Montana. Chabot

modified it for use in the western US and Canada and printed 75,000 copies. Currently being circulated throughout the Western US and Canada.

Fairbanks Police Department - This was the all-time highest scoring grant application. They got an advance last year but have only used part of it, although they did do a lot of programs. Due to limited riding last two winters, they did more classroom programs. They want to make available statewide a lot of the materials produced. Expires end of May.

North Slope - They requested final reimbursement, we need some final documentation.

Village of St Michael - No progress reports submitted.

Ohogamiut Traditional Council - No progress reports submitted.

Interior Trail Grooming - No progress reports submitted. Lee heard the project was going well and the trail was groomed and used all winter.

Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers – Project completed and grant closed.

2003 GRANTS

Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers - Signed grant agreement. Not much grooming done this year due to lack of snow.

Mat-Su Borough - Signed grant agreement. Good to go.

Alaska Snow Cats, Petersville - DOT issued a permit to Parks, but we are on hold until the funding issue is decided. Grant agreement has not been signed.

Discussion on grant money and where the unused monies will go. Further discussion on subject postponed until that item on the agenda.

Aleknagik - Signed grant agreement, but have not heard anything yet.

Valdez Snowmachine Club - Submitted a progress report last week and requested reimbursement.

B.A.A.R.T. - Teaching a lot of free classes. Has been very well received.

Iron Dog - They have a new director who proposed some changes to the grant. Asked her to send a revised schedule. Marianne will contact her find out status. Discussion on extending grant period.

Curyung Tribal Council - Submitted progress report for review.

FINANCIAL REPORT

All Administrative monies have been used up. We are broke.

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

Please sign TAs and give them to Teri.

REPORT ON 2002 SNOWMOBILE REGISTRATIONS.

Registrations are up to 40,000 in 2002 statewide from 38,000 in 2001. Discussion. Along with a staff member from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Land Office, Jim and Cliff did a field inspection on part of the Iron Dog Trail and Houston Lake Loop Trail. We are close to finalizing easements for the Iron Dog Trail and Flat Lake Connector Trail. We hope to finalize the Houston Lake Loop Trail as well. Part of the trail goes along the Matanuska Electric Association inter-tie, which could be an issue. Discussion.

Break @ 10:30 am, Reconvened @ 10:35 am

SNOWTRAC STATUS AND 2004 SNOWMOBILE TRAIL GRANT FUNDING

Jim: Because this is the Governor's budget, DNR staff cannot lobby for reinstatement. It is up to public and clubs to convince Legislature to fund. If they don't hear public outcry they won't fund.

Discussion on DMV registration handout. 40,000 snowmobiles are registered in Alaska.

Jim: The number of motor vehicle registrations are used by Federal Highways to estimate how much of the gas tax goes back to a state. An estimate of unregistered machines is also factored in. If the numbers go down than the money goes down. Discussion on the FY02 numbers.

Discussion on snowmachine registration. Concern that people will not register if none of the registration money is returning to projects to benefit snowmobiling.

Bruce: Stated his belief that the money was appropriated and that, unless told otherwise, State Parks should act like this is SnowTRAC money. We have made statements to Grantees that we would consider extensions. We have good grounds to fund those grants that are active and have shown good history.

Mark: I think we have a precedent with this money. In the past, we used unallocated grant funds for other purposes.

Greg: One comment that I have heard is "why should I care about SnowTRAC funding when you don't give out the money that you have?" Some people have suggested that maybe the standards are too high. He disagrees with this. The State can't just give the money away without rules. Sometimes we are kind of stuck and this gives us a black eye in the community. We may not get the support we want.

Bruce: Suggested the Administration explore what costs will be and discuss at the next meeting. We should approve the admin fees for 2004. We should have the foresight to allocate an admin percentage out of the \$106,000 remaining. This would provide evidence that we consider the money ours regardless as to how this plays out.

Mark: I agree with the percentage for the admin cost. As far as the \$106,000, we have enough money to do another grant run. Even if we don't get money in this year's budget, we have this money and it should go out to the snowmobile community

Further discussion on getting zero new funds and continuing the grants that all ready exist.

Jim: We could do something slightly different with the appropriation instead of grants. The Department of Transportation has the Statewide Transportation Improvement Projects (STIP) - People nominate projects that are reviewed and ranked. They then run down the ranking and fund them till they run out of money. Something similar here is maybe instead of grants we ask for specific projects that you would like to see done with a specific dollar amount, and then those are reviewed and then we run down through those. Could also develop a grooming pool.

Craig: That is exactly what he was going to bring up. Give us a letter of why you think this project should get a high ranking. Take the money that we do have and allocate to the projects that have the highest priority.

Discussion.

Scott: Expressed appreciation to the Committee for willingness to let members of the public participate. Acknowledged Mat-Su Assemblyperson, Jody Simpson, bringing to his attention that there is a line item in the governor's budget regarding grant funding. Indicated he would like to hear this group discuss a Resolution.

Marianne: We will entertain a Resolution to that effect immediately following lunch. Discussion on resolution and guidelines of resolutions. Discussion on phone calls at lunch and other contacts.

Discussion on the safety issue and linking Lisa Murkowski's Bill.

SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI'S NATIONWIDE BILL

Discussion on Lisa Murkowski's nationwide snowmobile bill. It may be difficult for a freshman senator to pass a bill her first year. Christopher Dowes from the Federal Highways Administration reviewed the bill. His initial impression is some states would not support the bill as written because they do not have snowmobiling and it is unclear where the money would come from. Senator Murkowski is the chair of the Senate Transportation Committee. She held a hearing in the Mat-Su Valley that Jody attended. According to Jody, at least half the testimony at the hearing was on trails. The bill was developed from a trail grant that the Mat-Su Borough put together. Both Senators Murkowski and Stevens are very interested in trails and snowmobile issues. Jody encourages the committee to mention the registration numbers for snowmachines and ATVs as well as the gas tax figures.

Discussion.

Adjourned for lunch @ 11:40 am, Reconvened @ 1:15 pm

DISCUSSION ON RESOLUTIONS TO SENATE FINANCE ON FUNDING

Marianne presented copies of three documents to Committee. Document #1 is Resolution 99-1, document #2 is to Commissioner of DNR, and document #3 is to Legislature.

Review of past resolutions for example. Discussion.

Greg moved "to accept document #2 and send it forward to the Commissioner." Craig 2nd. Discussion. Review of Resolution changes. Motion carried unanimously and unofficially supported by all members of the public present.

Craig moved "to accept document 3 as written." Greg 2nd. Discussion on specifying the distribution of the resolution. Agreed it should be distributed to Commissioner of DNR, Governor Murkowski, and all Legislators. Motion carried unanimously.

SENATOR MURKOWSKI'S NATIONWIDE BILL

(Cont.) For information and discussion

Jim: Christopher Dowes is the Federal Highways Administration person in charge of the recreational trail fees in Washington D.C. Every state sends through their snowmobile administrator the number of registered snowmobiles.

Lee: Indicated that when he originally heard about this it was almost duplicating the Recreational Trails program. He thought there would be double dipping on the motorized money, but when I read this here, it is not. It is just to take that section that was derived from snowmobiles and make sure that it actually goes to snowmobiles. It could have the effect of reducing what would be in the recreation trails program, or just a modification.

Doesn't know if this will really do much for us, it is not going to change the amount of money. Although it may insure that the snowmobile revenue goes more towards snowmobile, where as now it goes more towards non-motorized.

Discussion.

Jody: Several of us from Mat-Su Borough spoke with delegation. They specifically asked us about the gasoline tax. What are the needs? We were surprised that they were talking about this at that time. Bill(?) Wolf from Murkowski's office was interested in how the money would be divided. One of the issues we talked about was the fact that we can't do our trail dedications until we get recorded legal access. A lot of the upfront time and money required is not funded through Federal Highways money.

Discussion on Sea Trails, TEA-21 legislation, TEA-LU, ATV clubs.

Jody: One of the issues that she heard was multiuse.

Craig: We are reforming a snowmobile club in the Petersville area. They spoke about making it a multi-use club. There were a lot of snowmachiners that did not want to involve ATVs because of the environmental impact. The good thing about winter trails is that they are on rivers and across frozen bogs that won't support ATVs.

Lee: This is a good starting point. If the ATVs see this as a threat they may get their language in there, and in the end motorized recreation may see more funding.

Discussion on this motorized and non-motorized use exclusion or not, and fuel tax.

Lee: Support for the gas tax from the non-motorized users was brokered by giving them a 30/40 split. It is a new year and there is a new congress and maybe that isn't the big issue anymore. This is going to change the Recreational Trail Program. Can't increase snowmobile funding without decreasing someone else. He thinks it is a good thing, putting the money back to where it comes from.

Mark: Are you sure this isn't an attempt by our congressional delegation to change the funding formula to percentage of fuel tax that goes to the TRAAK Program, as opposed to trying to change the million dollars that is in there, trying to get a million two hundred thousand by being more accurate in the counting of the snowmobiles being used? It is not necessarily how the money is spent at the state level, it is that the federal government is not taking enough time and care in figuring how much of the fuel tax actually go into this program. They are trying to get a bigger chunk to get into the program.

Jim: According to the Recreational Trails Program – Snowmobile Estimate for Alaska Federal Highways uses the registration numbers along with a factor of 5% to estimate the unregistered snowmobiles (30,000 for Alaska).

Discussion on the states getting money that do not have snowmobiling and ATVs getting registered as snowmobiles. Why should they get a pool of the money from snowmobiles?

Jim: This has to pass through Congress and large population states with OHV/ATM users may vote against it.

Discussion on the 30/30/40 formula. 30-motorized, 30-non-motorized, 40-multi-use (diversified, safety and education).

Lee: Thinks the board should take a position on this issue.

Craig: Thinks it is like any bond put in front of a group of people, it depends on who makes the strongest statement.

Discussion.

Jack: It seems to me that there is a problem with the separation of snowmobiles from OHV's. We don't have to separate the two; we are low impact compared to off road

vehicles. In his opinion this could be resolved with planning. There is sufficient terrain for all. I think they all can be accommodated when considering the impact.

Discussion.

Jody: I think this is so useful and should be passed on to Sen. Murkowski. I am sure that she would value all of your points.

Discussion on this being added to the TRAAK board agenda also.

Discussion on passing this information on to Sen. Murkowski in a letter or sending this section of the minutes.

Mark: He enjoyed this discussion very much. In this 30 30 40 split formula, there is 30% going to a group it doesn't or shouldn't benefit. This bill seems to fix this funding formula because it seems to very tightly restrict where these dollars can be used. He thinks that benefits the snowmobilers.

Lee: With the exception of states that the 30% motorized is less than the total revenue of snowmobiles, then that would not benefit the snowmobilers.

Jim: Suggests that a letter be sent to Sen. Murkowski in support of the idea of the bill along with some questions.

Greg moved "to send a letter supporting the concept of the bill and a copy of the minutes to Senator Murkowski." Christine 2nd. Motion carried.

NOTE TO STAFF: Put this section of the minutes and circulate to the board before the letter goes out.

Break @ 2:30, Reconvened @ 2:35.

STATEWIDE TRAILS NONPROFIT GROUP (JIM RENKERT)

There has been some discussion for a couple years on forming an Alaska Statewide Trails nonprofit organization to facilitate trail development and obtain corporate foundation monies for trail projects. The model for this in Alaska is Trail Mix, Inc. in Juneau. Trail Mix is a nonprofit that obtains funding from the US Forest Service and the City of Juneau. They have received several Recreational Trail grants along with one Snowmobile Trail grant. Trail Mix has been very successful in filling in some of the gaps with agencies. The idea of a statewide trails nonprofit is to form a statewide group. Bruce Friend is on the steering committee for this.

Bruce: The next meeting of the statewide trails nonprofit is April 28-30th at the Campbell Creek Science Center. Draft bylaws and a nonprofit description of the group have been written up. Among other things it aims at being a clearing house of information and a source of revenue, that would be viewed as not confrontational to motorized, non-motorized, and so on. The motorized community seems to be fairly under represented on the Steering Committee, as there are only two of them. A lot of agencies are taking part. He has always thought there is a lot of room in this area to get better at bringing groups together. The challenge is how motivated the motorized group gets in bring in more money, ethics, and input. The difficulties have been just getting enough money together to even plan a meeting. Where? Cost of getting the people there? Jim has a list of people on the Steering committee.

Discussion.

Jim: I was informed at lunch that a new Alaska State Parks Director has been appointed. His name is Gary Morrison and he has thirty years of experience with the US Forest Service. He will be located in Anchorage.

ALASKA TRAILS CONFERENCE, OCTOBER 2003, ANCHORAGE (JIM)

The 2003, Alaska Recreation and Parks Association meeting, the Rivers Management meeting, and Alaska Trails conference will be in October. The Alaska Trails conference will be October 16 & 17 at the Egan Center. That is Thursday & Friday, with possible Saturday morning or evening sessions on Thursday & Friday. The Alaska Recreation Parks Association part will be the previous two days (Tuesday & Wednesday). Discussion of the draft agenda. Registration will be around \$100 to \$150.

Bruce: He has a couple of contacts for West Yellowstone and a good one for ATVs from Utah. He can also help with a contact from Minnesota. Polaris may be willing to help sponsor someone. He will get information.

Some ideas for breakout sessions were a session for successful grantees to speak on their projects and a grant writing session. The group really liked the successful grantees idea.

NEXT SNOWTRAC MEETING

If we are not funded, we still need to have some type of meeting to determine the disposition of the unfinished business.

Discussion of date for the meeting. August 15, 2003. 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Christine: Hopes that everybody makes the calls and passes the information on to get the money back in the budget.

Lee: He brought information from the Fairbanks Borough Advisory Commission meeting, which came from Mat-Su/Susitna Borough Community Development Department. It was regarding development of uniform Ethics and Etiquette statements for trail users in Alaska. It is a resolution on this subject. Thinks it would be useful for SnowTRAC to adopt.

They are trying to get this distributed to trail groups statewide and get everyone on board. Jim has an electronic version and will send to all members.

Jim: Some of you may know that the Park Service is working on a backcountry management plan. They have a draft out. There are meetings this weekend. He brought a copy of the executive summary for everyone. He also brought a copy of their comment form for those interested in commenting. They want to hear what context and what bits and pieces you like. There are some really big changes planned, one of which is the use of corridors in the preserve area.

Brief discussion. Good points to put on the feedback form.

Bruce: In thinking about SnowTRAC one thing that crosses my mind is the limitation of \$15,000 for a grant. If we are funded, I think maybe we should increase amount and get more professional groups applying for grants. I think the quality of our grant applicants would be much better. What he sees is that the grants are so small that they are not useful for the activities that we would like to see happen. We are sitting here with \$50,000 left

over, in this case more. He would like to open this up for thought process whether is actually ever comes to pass or not.

Craig: Wants to speak on the same issues. This is something that was brought up in our last meeting. In working with Pat Owens in the Mat-Su borough in trying to develop a corridor. One of the things that we have done is we actually when out and brush lines based on some GPS coordinates. They came back and ran the mapping with some money we had. The trail system that was developed there, the \$15,000 dollars would mainly groom Safari Lake Trail and that would be it. It wouldn't hit any of the secondary trails. If there was more money we could impact a much larger area. We could possibly groom a system as opposed to just a trail.

Greg: The club that he's involved with is a little bit bigger than some. One reason that we do so well is because of its overall size and because we use pull-tabs for a lot of income. One of the things that are going to be killing nonprofits is the change that Gov.

Murkowski has on pull-tabs. According to his sources, it is going to impact his club about 50%. By the time we have that, the SnowTRAC goes away, if TRAAK cuts back we are dead. Here we are looking at least maintaining what we have, doing well, and having the equipment to do it. Pull-tab changes will affect every nonprofit out there.

On another note regarding committee seats, if we do survive and actually have seats anymore, he is way overdue on a seat change or reappointment.

Mark: He would like to take his time to see if we can map out a strategy in case funding doesn't get into the budget, because it is a real possibility. He would like to put it out to everyone. Discussion. There was suggestion for contacting Senator Lyda Green. Senator Wilkins would be a strong help. Bill Williams in the House, co-chair of finance.

Discussion of a bill. To guarantee the success of SnowTRAC takes two hands, the director and the legislature. One more idea is to raise the registration on snowmobiles. Discussion. Could have a hard time on this unless the money stayed in the program.

Marianne: We all seem to be in agreement. Is the Legislative Committee Chair (Mark Wilkes) willing to accept the responsibility of contacting Sen. Lyda Green with support of Craig Seibert, Bruce Friend, and Christine Noakes?

Mark: Agreed to monitor the budget very closely. If it doesn't (get in) then he will contact all members. It wouldn't hurt to call Sen. Green. Suggested we might ask Senator Elton to sponsor a bill. Good strategy to get to both parties in both Senate and House.

Jody: Thanks for letting her sit in and be here.

Joe: If SnowTRAC is going to go to the Legislature for short term funding this year, why not ask them to establish a proper snowmobile program like other states? Still bring in the volunteers like we do now, but have staff do this stuff. He thinks it might be time to do it a different way.

Discussion. Go for the short term and look for the long term. Suggestion that it be added to a future agenda.

Christine: That is what we need, we need it in there as a line item. That is where she thinks Sen. Lisa Murkowski's bill will probably join in with that. Discussion.

Marianne: If acceptable, the Legislative Committee will monitor this. When you need us to jump in and help, let us know. If we need to go down this road then we will reset our gears and invite the public members to be a part of this process.

Mark: Make your calls.

Marianne: If in the Legislature's wisdom and the Governor's decision that this group is not funded in the future, she wants to say it has been a great honor to work with each member. Thank you each for your time and work. This weekend is not too late to be making your calls. Put it on a personal level and call the people in your district. If you know of someone not in your area and that are part of the Finance Committee, please make that call. When we adjourn the meeting, we will finalize the resolutions.

MEETING ADJOURNED 3:51 PM.