

GOVERNOR'S SNOWMOBILE COUNCIL
Minutes 1/15/2020

Present:

Pat Poulin, Chair
Trevor Colby, Vermont State Police
Paul Doucette, Chief's Association & Southern Vermont Task Force
Shannon Fassett, Vermont DMV
Sean Fowler, Vermont Fish & Wildlife
Dick Jewett, Governor Appointee
Tim Mills, Governor Appointee
Gary Nolan, Law Enforcement Committee
John Pellegrini, Governor Appointee
Star Poulin, Governor Appointee
Jessica Savage, Forest, Parks & Recreation
Brian Smith, Vermont House
Mike Smith, DMV

VAST Staff:

Cindy Locke
Matt Tetreault
Peggy Whiteneck

Guests

Phyllis Jewett

The chairman called the meeting of the January 15, 2020 Governor's Council to order 3:00 PM. It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the December 4, 2019 meeting be approved as circulated. Motion passed unanimously.

SSTP Report

Matt Tetreault reported that all equipment grants have been paid. In the financial report, the line item Plowed Parking Areas that currently appears behind budget will show increased expenditure as snow develops. It was moved and seconded that the SSTP report be approved as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

State Police

Trevor Carbo reported that safety classes are still running despite lack of a Safety Coordinator. The Snowmobile Tour Guide course ran last week, with 20 attendees, and was well received. There was one accident related to a problem in signage in Waterbury. Snowmobile Vermont is responsible for signage there, and they handle their own insurance. Cindy will revisit VAST's contract with them to make sure all appropriate elements are included.

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Vermont Fish & Wildlife

Sean Fowler reported the snowmobile accident training held in Bennington was well attended with more than 50 people. Both Sean and Paul Doucette felt the training missed the mark a bit as the presenter focused more on crash reconstruction rather than accident investigation. Sean also noted a Sargent is working on a scheduling app that should be ready to go live next week.

Sheriff's Association

Bill Bohnyak is out of town. It was noted that there is a new sheriff in Orleans County, Jennifer Harlow, and that she is well qualified for the job.

Southern Vermont Task Force

Paul Doucette said not a lot going is on because of unseasonably high temps and lack of snow. A few riders were out on trails earlier, but any snowpack still left is thready at best though there is hope for snow this weekend.

Vermont DMV

Mike Smith noted that registration numbers over the last three years have been in the 17,000s.

Forest, Parks & Recreation

Jessica Savage reported that the state's Outdoor Recreation Program Plan has been completed with public input. The Ranking Committee meets on February 4 to allocate RTP funds.

VAST

Cindy reported 12,549 Early Bird TMAs this year to date, compared to last year at this time with 11, 921. She noted that 22 clubs have not yet reported and that some other clubs have only partially reported. In 2018, there were 10,383 in this time period, so this looks like a good year for increase. It has been a banner year for Chester, despite the increase in TMA costs. In response to a question from Brian Smith, Cindy said that about the proportion of instate to out-of-state riders is about 50-50.

Law Enforcement Committee

Gary Nolan reported there have been three productive meetings of the committee since the December Governor's Council meeting. Southern Vermont Task Force has been very helpful. The Committee also met with the Governor and the Commissioner of F&W to get consensus on law enforcement needs.

Several signed law enforcement contracts are in hand, with a few counties not contracting/not interested/not sufficiently staffed. To expand the usual coverage, Fish & Wildlife will staff three outposts with Southern Vermont Task Force staffing

others in order to reduce duplication of efforts. Cindy Locke will send Sean Fowler and Trevor Carbo a list of places with gaps in coverage.

Gary also reported that law enforcement is working to increase night patrols, corner patrols, and workday patrols. Trevor Carbo noted there is nothing on tracking sheets for corner enforcement. Paul Doucette said the Southern VT Task Force uses hourly tracking sheets, and he will work to make that more specific as to enforcement actions for cornering, speeding, etc. Matt Tetreault asked about the status of enforcement for illegal exhaust modifications, which can lead to trail closures from private landowners disturbed by the unnecessarily loud noise. This problem needs to be a component of law enforcement training.

Trails Report

Matt reporting things looked good early on but then we entered into a period of warming temps with no snow. Some areas in the north managed to avoid losing all the snow cover. Breakage from grooming has increased because there isn't sufficient snow cover to allow for optimal grooming of what *is* there.

Legislative Report

Brian asked for direction from the Council: members are encouraged to call him at 249-5920 if there are issues they want the legislature to address. Jane Kitchel sent in her proposed bill on safety course certification (copies provided). The main change, as Trevor Carbo noted, is allowing an electronic copy of the safety certificate to be shown via phone in lieu of a paper copy. The word "fine" in the bill was also changed to "civil penalty." The bill is still in committee in the Senate. No further concerns on the bill were expressed by the Council, which supports the change; kids will forget the paper, but they all carry their phones.

Paul Doucette noted that police can ask for photo ID to verify that the safety card/photo actually belongs to the rider, and Paul stressed they do spot check requests for photo ID (e.g. from school) because word gets around among young people that police are checking. It was suggested that we advertise in the magazine and any other media that people need to carry their safety verification in Vermont whether or not their registration state requires it to be carried there. Paul also thanked VAST for including the "hands on the throttle" message in the last issue of the magazine to discourage riders from dangerous and unnecessary hand signals.

Snowmobile Reporting on Accidents

In this discussion it was noted there are probably more accidents than we're aware of, usually only bad accidents or those that make the news. Personal injury and damage over \$500 require reporting. Still, law enforcement doesn't always get a report. Tour companies don't like reporting because of perceived negative impact on their business. Every law enforcement agency is online with state databases, with codes for snowmobile accidents, but again, actual reporting to law enforcement

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doesn't happen consistently and no agency is required to investigate accidents when they are reported. Moreover, the reporting as collected in the state databases is all proprietary, law enforcement agency by agency, so it's not possible to get global reports on snowmobile accidents in the state.

Appointee Reports

Northwest

Star Poulin reported that, despite the lack of snow, clubs are all managing to keep busy on various maintenance and other projects. Water, ice, and downed branches have been the rule on trails. There is an Essex trail relocation due to land development, and the clubs are working on wetland mitigation because all reroute possibilities are through wetlands, a situation to which the State is resistant.

Northeast

Ken Gammell was not present.

Central

Tim Mills said "ditto" on what the Northwest is facing. Weather is the biggest enemy for both the sport itself and maintenance projects related to it.

South

Dick Jewett noted there was a successful county meeting last night, and he also reported a couple of new trails have been opened.

The meeting of the Governor's Council was adjourned at 4:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Whiteneck
Recording secretary