

GOVERNOR'S SNOWMOBILE COUNCIL
Minutes 3/4/2020

Present:

Pat Poulin, Chair
Paul Doucette, Police Chiefs and Southern Vermont Task Force
Sean Fowler, Vermont Fish & Wildlife
Dick Jewett, Governor Appointee
Gary Nolan, Law Enforcement Committee Chair
Jessica Savage, Vermont Forest, Parks & Recreation
Michael Smith, Department of Motor Vehicles
Tara Thomas, Vermont State Police

VAST Staff:

Cindy Locke
Ken Brown
Matt Therriault
Peggy Whiteneck

Guests

Phyllis Jewett
Joe Szarjeko

The chairman called the meeting of the 3/4/2020 Governor's Council to order at 3:06 PM.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the January 15th meeting be approved as submitted to the members (approval deferred at the February meeting for lack of a quorum). The motion passed. Notes from the February 5th meeting at which there was no quorum were reviewed without change.

SSTP Report

Matt reviewed the expense report from the SSTP, highlighting some areas that showed change from the Council's last review. It was moved and seconded that the report be approved as submitted. Motion passed.

State Police

Tara Thomas reported that there were 216 live classroom students for the safety course and 1,269 for the online course. Vermont State police logged more than 225 hours in snowmobile enforcement so far, and they are down an auxiliary due to injury. Emphasis of state police has been on broader visibility in snowmobile enforcement.

Vermont Fish and Wildlife

Sean Fowler reported his agency has logged well over 300 hours of snowmobile enforcement activity in one- and two-man patrols, with special emphasis on off-trail riding. The scheduling app for law enforcement coverage is improved though still a work in progress. Problem areas needing coverage can be listed right in the app.

Southern Vermont Task Force

Paul Doucette reported the southern part of the state is the busiest he's ever seen. The majority of tickets have been written for lack of safety card and for off-trail riding. He said there have been two recent snowmobile crashes, one serious, relating to operators driving too fast. The Task Force is putting together a wilderness first aid course. Weather hasn't been good this week, but the southern counties still have a lot more snow than farther north.

Department of Motor Vehicles

Michael Smith said there were 20,352 snowmobile registrations last year compared to 18,954 this year. Pat Poulin underscored the discrepancy that there are 6,000 more VT registered snowmobiles than there are TMAs.

Forest, Parks & Recreation

Jessica Savage highlighted the need to have the state grant agreement be consistent with our budgeting process, i.e., budget categories in the SSTP budget. The state's concern is that items related to safety be included in the SSTP budget. VAST's concern is that safety expenses are woven throughout its budgets and that a requirement to produce receipts for the state for every item we sell (e.g., maps and signs) would be unduly cumbersome vs. other options, such as moving those expenses from the SSTP budget to VAST's operating budget or having periodic financial reports to the state on gross sales of smaller safety items such as maps and signs. It was decided to work this out between FPR and VAST staff and then bring the proposed resolution back to the Governor's Council. Cindy Locke and Matt Therriault will work on this with FPR.

VAST

Cindy Locke noted that early bird TMAs are down by 221 this year with 65% of clubs not having reported yet for regular season. If we bring in additional sales for regular season, we'll still be in good shape in comparison to last year. Matt Therriault also mentioned that grooming expenses should come in significantly less than last year. VAST wants frequent groomers to be checking and remedying deficient signing along the way as this remains a significant issue. County trail coordinators have also been asked to ride the trails and report on signage.

Long range planning is addressing trail maintenance options as the climate changes. The insurance company is demanding that we close all water crossings in order to prevent falling through the ice or losing our insurance.

The free weekend saw a lot of NH sleds. Paul Doucette said he saw a lot more sleds from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania whereas in the past, it was mostly sleds from New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

Trails Report

Matt Therriault observed that Mother Nature is already taking the trails back. Season's end is in sight because of the excess water content in this year's snow.

Law Enforcement Committee

The Law Enforcement Committee met just prior to this meeting of the Governor's Council. Gary Nolan said he would like to continue the committee meetings throughout the summer in order to be better prepared with law enforcement proposals and resource recommendations when needed. The committee is placing great emphasis on training for law enforcement, including accident reporting. Local police will be approached for assistance with snow mobile enforcement to get more boots on the ground. Paying for ticket-related court time was cited as a pending issue, but Paul Doucette cautioned that traffic court appearances will see snowmobile tickets bunched with other traffic tickets so that it wouldn't necessarily be helpful or feasible to try to break out the court appearance cost of snowmobile infractions, and agencies should absorb those costs..

Legislative Report

Cindy Locke reported that the LVRT funding the governor has proposed for the capital bill is currently in the House Institutions Committee. The issue holding it up is whether the funding for LVRT completion should come out of the transportation bill or the capital bill. VAST's preference is the latter as proposed by the governor.

Trail language in the Act 250 revision would make trails exempt from Act 250 to be replaced with a Best Management Practices (BMP) system.

The Governor's Council will be making recommendation for how to deal legislatively with the issue of high decibel levels on modified snowmobiles using the stamp on the factory exhaust system to show the machine has not been modified. More conversation is also needed on the age of child riders. Michael Smith recommended a comprehensive review of the snowmobile statute to see if there are other issues that need addressing, and it was agreed to do this in preparation for next year's legislative session rather than to try to address the noise issue in this session.

Appointee Reports

Although Star was unable to attend the meeting, she reports there is no riding in Chittenden County.

Dick Jewett also said they're pretty well shut down in the southern part of the state.

There were no reports from the Northeast and Central regions.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Whiteneck
Recording Secretary