**Washington State Parks**

**SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**2023 Winter Meeting**

**February 4, 2023**

**Minutes**

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Tom Shields (Area 1)

Bob Henrie (Chair, Area 2)

Norris Boyd (Vice- Chair, Area 3)

Kurt Millard (Area 4)

Roger Brittain - (Area 5, Absent)

Steve Riggin (Area 6)

Justin Davis (Non-Motorized)

John O’Brien (Non-Motorized)

Cindy Hoover (Non-Motorized)

Larry Leach (DNR)

Tony Leonetti (WDFW)

**Washington State Parks Staff:**

Corey Tolar (Manager, Winter Recreation Program)

Jason Goldstein (Winter Recreation Program)

Travis Larson (Winter Recreation)

Travis Travis (Winter Recreation)

**Guests**

John Baronowski, WRAC

Nick Whitman, LandTek

Ty Locke, Stampede Summitt Seekers

Jason Holmes, WSSA

Randy Skillman, Skagit/Whatcom

Glen Wilkinson, Skagit/Whatcom

Mary Boros, USFS

Alex Ross, USFS

Tim Ryais, WSSA

Dee Alred, WSSA President

Wayne Mohler, WSSA

Florence Mohler, WSSA

Bill Burgess, Pacific Mountain Services

Billy Burgess, Pacific Mountain Services

Diane James, Lake Wenatchee Rec Club

Sean Culp, Greenwater Grooming Coordinator

Travis Huff, R&R Grooming

Rob Jones, Grant County Fair

Ron Lind, R&R Grooming

Shannon Lawler, R&R Grooming

Jim Kingman, WSSA Past President

Matt Mead, WSSA Publicity Secretary

Tim Penelerick, Boulder Creek Enterprises

**February 4th Agenda**

**Item Summary Action**

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| Welcome, Introductions | Bob Henrie welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. Matt Mead was thanked for leading the group snowmobile ride the day prior. | No Action |
| Review Agenda | Bob moved onto reviewing the agenda and no changes were requested. | No Action |
| Review/Approve Summer Meeting Minutes | The summer meeting minutes were approved. They were complete except for images. | **Motion Passed** |
| Committee Members Area Reports | Bob moved on to committee member reports starting with Tom Shields.  **Tom Shields, Area 1**  Reported that the season started off good with snow then slowed down in the middle.  **Bob Henrie, Area 2**  Reported good early snow but suffered a mid-season melt. He then discussed the 1st annual vintage snowmobile event for 85 and older. There was ample programing for the event.  **Norris Boyd, Area 3**  Reported like conditions to everyone else. Good early base but not enough snow. He then expressed frustrations with the groomer for Mt. Spokane.    **Kurt Millard, Area 4**  Reported the season started on the 1st of December. Everything has been going well, but a snow removal contractor went out of business. Other than that, everything has been going well.  **Roger Brittain, Area 5**  No representative present.  **Steve Riggin, Area 6**  Reported the season started on the 1st of December. It was currently snowing in his area, and he expressed hopes for the conditions to continue.  **NonMotorized Reps**  Reported the need for increased parking following the pandemic. A comment was made that grooming on Blewett Pass has been good.  **Tony Leonetti, WDFW**  Reported that compliance in NE Washington is down. He also gave a shout out for Mt. Spokane folks.  **Larry Leach, DNR**  Reported that communication between the council and DNR is great. New early snow issues arose in Autahnum. The area is also struggling with grooming and side by side cooperation.  **State Parks**  Another thanks was given to Matt Mead. Good turn out and cooperation in the previous day’s snowmobile trip. | Information Only |
| Groomer Reports | **Skagit/Whatcom**  Reported that grooming started early in December and that the low elevation snow is gone.  **Burgess’ Logging**  Reported that grooming started on the 1st of December. There was good early snow with a January thaw. Described current snow conditions as Cascade concrete.  Praying for snow.  **Boulder Creek Enterprises**  Reported that grooming started on the 14th of December. There was good snow and then it went away. At higher elevations conditions are frozen.  **R&R Grooming**  Reported that grooming started on the 15th of December. Snows came in from the SE. This is a little different from previous years. There is also less snow depth than previous years. There is melting down towards Greenwater. They are also hoping for more snow.  **LandTek**  Reported that grooming started on the 1st of December. There was a trail blowout but reroutes worked out.  **Apple Country (not in attendance)**  Started by saying thank you and happy 50th anniversary. Reported early snow but January warming. Bluett Pass opened on February 2nd. They also stated that they may run through funding early and that there was an issue with one of the on-board computers on a groomer.  **NonMotorized Rep. Question**  What does early snow mean budget wise? Some scheduling is reduced to back out hours and stretch grooming. Volunteers are key so that groomers are in cats doing their jobs instead of cutting trees. There will also be less money if snowmobile registrations are down. It will be tough for some groomers given the early snow. | Information Only |
| WSSA Update | The next WSSA event is set for President’s Day Weekend. It will be a three-day riding event, Fri-Sun for various levels and smaller groups. The event will be held at Yakima Museum and will include a scavenger hunt and raffle. | Information Only |
| Avalanche Safety Check Stations | **Jason Holmes, WSSA District 5**  Reported that he is working with a supplier to get up to 15 transceiver check stations along with WRAC priority 5/6 funding requests for more stations. The first will be placed in Salmon LaSac. Many will also be placed in Kittitas County. Attendance of avalanche awareness classes are way down across the board. He stated that they have been fortunate, but no tragedies means that any push/demand is down. They are hoping to get funding from SMAC/WRAC, but it is also a call to clubs to sponsor or help pay for a station. The cost is $1,500 per station. The limit will likely be 15 with global supply and demand.  Many folks are using the right gear to justify going into potentially dangerous situations. There is a lot of data that equipment isn’t being used correctly, but when it is, it is effective.  Awareness is terrible throughout the community. There is the mentality that “I just ride trails,” but at some point, it is likely you will be riding through avalanche territory.  There was a concern raised about vandalism of the signs, but it has been proven to be effective with over 3,000 people who stopped to check at the stations.  The audience was very much in favor of awareness building.  In Skagit there are four stations. | Information Only |
| Break |  |  |
| GPS Units/ Nordic Pulse Updates | Request to consider a two-day agency (WDFW) paid (for WDFW officers) Avalanche Safety course. We don’t have it in the budget now, but it would be a beneficial course if this situation changes.  We are in our 6th year Using AtlasTrax GPS units on snowcats. This aids in being able to audit since grooming hours are paid by engine meter hours and helps reduce fraud risk.  This year we renewed a one-year lease agreement but have had issues with the new GPS units sent. This service has allowed for private tracking and live feed, but with staff cuts, we couldn’t maintain the data collection/processing in the summer. The accuracy wasn’t quite right this year, so the public map was pulled.  Nordic Pulse is a pilot project running at Stampede pass. More information can be found by googling Nordic Pulse Washington. The pilot will also be implemented at Naches. This system will need more input from the groomer. “Great public interface map” (Nick LandTek). Parks will wait for public feedback before deciding to expand the coverage.  R&R started the pilot a week ago. It was difficult due to Wi-Fi issues. The downloads are not always downloading all the points. It works better with iPhone than Android. There is also an option for a satellite receiver for a monthly fee for remote areas.  Concern: There may be a hidden cost to groomers that may have to have better personal or company phones that should be considered. It is also a concern with cell phone reception within groomers (essentially metal boxes). It can be manually edited by contractor administrators, but this could be an added time commitment.  Nordic Pulse could also be used for audit purposes like AtlasTrax.  The public facing interactive map for the AtlasTrax system is non operable. We have had minimal help, but the maintenance overtime is difficult given current staffing.  Comment made about “Chinese Spy Balloon.” The audience laughed. | Information Only |
| Budget Status/Repairs | State Parks owns late 90s early 2000 model groomers. We are putting money into older cats and fixing issues as they arise. A windshield was broken in Cle Elum which took out a groomer for weeks, impacting grooming in the area.  An older cat in Spokane is out for repairs. The Nonmotorized program is covering with their cat. The question was asked: “Why would we repair, when we can buy a used for around the same price?” This is a decision that must be made. This has affected grooming this season. Another question was asked: “Can we go private?” It will cost more to groom, but the equipment will be on the contractor’s end. It makes sense not to privatize because we  have staff and labor in that location. We should evaluate the cat in Mt. Spokane. These are some decisions that need to be made. Lucas can be sent out to ascertain the groomer’s status. We have a way to finish the season, but with reduced grooming. There was a meeting earlier this week and the issue of what is being groomed with this groomer. The cat is owned by State Parks.  Action: Get someone out to find out status of cat in Spokane.  Wayne:  The Okanogan groomer may be in a similar situation. The cost per mile was projected on a big screen in the conference room on a trail grooming summary sheet. Public grooming programs averaged $16 per mile; Private grooming programs averaged $31.75 per mile. 95% of the dollars budgeted were spent. The reason for this difference is the cost of old equipment that hasn’t been replaced. The question was raised: With the budget that is allocated, do they get 100% of the areas covered?  In the summer the average cost per mile will likely have to go up and be figured into the future budget.  The question was raised: How much money do we take out of grooming to pay for older equipment? We could also switch to private, but the cost will be increased.  There was a comment made by the WRAC chairman that a public groomer equipment cost + grooming may still be cheaper than  private when compared in the long  term. They make a point of keeping a healthy equipment fund to accommodate for the public side of grooming.  A comment was made that private grooming contractors have the incentive of profit. This is not the case for public grooming contractors.  An audience member made a call not to remove funds from slush funds and use it for things it was not intended for. The audience agreed. | Information Only |
| Snowmobile Registration Numbers | We were up by 927 but are currently down by 682.  Currently 17,028 sleds are registered. | Information Only |
| Snow Removal Contractor Challenges | A comment was made that it is getting tougher to get snow removal contractors for up in the mountains.  Mt. St. Helen’s issue: A snow removal contractor for Marble Mountain went out of business and didn’t initially inform State Parks. Backcountry Plowing and Grooming came in to provide emergency relief.  Hourly grooming rates are going up because of fuel and labor. With the warm period mid-season contractors have not been over billed, but some areas they are close.  Touchet Corral issue: the company changed but the contract is still good.  Cloverland issue: Contractor didn’t rebid.  Johnson Creek issue: area does not have sanitation services. No one will bid. | Information Only |
| Lunch | Skipped |  |
| New Trail Connection/ Blewett/Coluckum | The SMAC approved a 5,000 grant for a SEPA study to connect the old trail. USFS required study.  A joint group met in the area and found a way to get this done without the 5,000.  The new location opened, and the gate was strategically located. This will be open to Jeeps/off road vehicles in the summer.  DNR/USFS helped clear out brush to expedite the process. | Information Only |
| Open Discussion/ Public Comments | There was a discussion on traffic counters. Useful data was collected by DNR.  Question asked: Is there something being done about overcrowding in the I-90 corridor? Phase 2 of the I-90 project will include expanding the roadways. We have been hitting hurdles to expanding Sno-parks. State Parks did open a couple more Sno-parks this season though.  Question asked: Is there a breakdown of different motorized registration? Yes, but it will be a more intensive process with DOL. The database does not currently have a distinguishing mark on the registration. Thanks were given to the committee for funding law enforcement and education efforts. There was a call for continued funding for E&E efforts.  Question: Have we looked at a way to fund the program when things are becoming increasingly electric [A switch to electric vehicles]? We are looking at the next 10 years. Especially as this relates to the gas tax/milage fee. We talked about sustainability and increased miles, but we have not had sufficient time to discuss the issues in further detail.  There was a call on State Parks to forecast the budget to better prepare the advisory committees to make sound budget decisions. There was also a call for Parks to take a more involved role in leading or preparing the advisory committee.  Recommendation: Strategy meeting in April/May to follow up on all of this.  Someone made a call for a conversation on increased registration costs.  There are increased tensions with costs increasing for contractors and revenue stagnating or only increases slowly.  Norris made a motion. Move board task/staff to look at both short-term and long-term strategy and come up with a plan that they can support in order to get the board more involved in the budget, both short term and long term. Furthermore, to define a 5-year plan. We can start to look at it, but there will be challenges.  Amendment 1: The motion was amended to include a workshop session to dig into replacement cost, capital requests to improve infrastructure, better define gaps in needs, request funding sources, to better articulate our needs. In short, to convene to discuss the above.  The motion was seconded.  Statement was made: Perhaps we should look at alternate ways to fund to address the issue of stagnated funds. This discussion has come up before and can be brought up in the agenda for the meeting (alternate funding sources.)  The motion was passed.  Amendment 2: Request for a remote meeting to discuss strategy. Not just for next year, but a longer-term view.  It was brought up that the RCO grant funding ($400,000) will not be available next year because the grants were not submitted. It was raised that priority 5/6 may not be able to be funded. | **Motion Passed: A follow up strategy meeting will be held virtually in Apr/May** |
| Elections/Terms | There was a call for all for extending members to stay on through Summer.  Kurt nominated Bob as chair, seconded, confirmed.  John Nominated Norris as Vice-Chair, seconded, confirmed.  Hold elections for chair/vice-chair as needed if replaced. | **Bob Henrie Re-Elected as Chair**  **Norris Boyd Re-Elected as Vice Chair** |
| Next Meeting, Date, Location |  | **Summer meeting to be held July 29th in Wenatchee, WA. Arrangements to be made by Staff.** |
| Adjourn | Bob closed the meeting and thanked everyone. |  |