

Marathon County Forest Citizens' Advisory Subcommittee

Members present: John Burke, Susan Haug, Dale Heil, Greg Klos, Mike Lane, Aaron Ruff, Ryan Schleifer, Susan Stomieroski, Marcell Wieloch, Gary Weiland

Excused: Paul Klocko

Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Rec. and Forestry Department staff present: Tom Lovlien-Forest Administrator, Jamie Polley-Parks, Recreation and Forestry Director

Other Interested Parties: Pat Peckham

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairman Lane

I. Minutes

Motion by Wieloch to approve the June 17, 2020 minutes. Motion **carried** unanimously.

II. New Business

A. Forest Citizens' Advisory Subcommittee Appointments and Introductions of Members

Members introduced themselves. Aaron Ruff replaced Mark Chickering as the mountain bike representative. Ruff is the current President of the Central Wisconsin Off-Road Cycling Coalition. The Forestry/Recreation Committee approved all the other appointments.

B. Update on the Revision of the 15-Year County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Lovlien said the plan is currently at the DNR for a 30 day review. He discussed the process the plan has gone through to get to this point and said there has been very little changes except for some minor grammatical errors. The DNR will not change any policies in the plan but is more concerned with legal and forest certification parts of it. The Subcommittee doesn't have a meeting scheduled before the next Forestry/Recreation Committee meeting approves the final plan. He thought this group could either pass a motion tonight supporting the plan as is and he will email them any major changes from the DNR or they could schedule a separate meeting. No one requested a separate meeting. **Motion** by Stomieroski to recommend approval of the County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2021 – 2035 to the Forestry/Recreation Committee. Motion **carried** unanimously.

C. Review the Fall 2020 Timber Sale Package

Lovlien discussed the five sales in depth. The sales offer 381 acres of timber with an estimated 25,260 tons and 277.0 thousand board feet. The bids will be opened on September 28th. It was the consensus of the Subcommittee to support the sale package.

D. Results of the 2020 Forest Certification Audit

Lovlien said the in person audit occurred and there were no findings in Marathon County or the other three counties for the second year in a row. The recreation programs on County public forest lands, especially at Nine Mile, exceeds their standards and are a model program through the country. Questions were answered.

E. Active Timber Sale at Nine Mile County Forest

Lovlien reported that there is a seventy acre pine sale occurring at Nine Mile. The eighty-year old stand is being clear cut. The area will be disc trenched, sprayed and replanted to red pine trees in 2022 or 2023. The sale is visible from Springbrook Road and Hwy KK so interpretive signs were placed to help the public.

F. WEMS Mountain Bike Race Participation and Revenue

Lovlien said this was the only race held at Nine Mile to date and it was pretty small. There were 49 racers and the total revenue was \$555.25.

G. General Discussion on Allowing Winter Snow Biking at Nine Mile

Lovlien said there has been some discussions over the years about winter snow biking at Nine Mile, however, staff has not met with the bike club to discuss any formal proposals. Ruff is interested in working with the County on a formal proposal and wanted to have a general discussion at this meeting.

Ruff explained that winter fat biking at Nine Mile has always been something their club would like to accomplish. It is the number one question they receive from people. It is one of the fastest growing aspects of off-road biking because of the climate here. Their group grooms winter fat bike trails at Ringle landfill trails, the Big Eau Pleine Park and at Underdown in Lincoln County. The Club is completing a formal proposal and wants to keep all of the interests of the different user groups in mind. They had some success in the past when they held a winter triathlon at Nine Mile which included cross-country skiing/snowshoeing/winter fat biking. He understands there will be a lot of questions that have to be answered especially when it comes to skiing and trail crossings, etc. People want to ride all year round at Nine Mile, minus hunting season, and already go there as a winter destination so fat biking could be another option as well.

Burke said some of their board members have no problems with bikes out there while others have major issues with it. Some things they would have to address would be trail crossings, and user conflicts particularly more so with snowshoeing. The worry about the trail crossings comes down to safety, especially at some of the downhill sections and the other concern is the amount of snow and trail damage. Even though the bikes are easy on the trails, there is a concern that they still could drag some dirt from the off-road trail across the ski trail. He didn't believe anyone had ever formally asked the ski club if they were in favor of it or not and thought it had been turned down at a Department level. Ruff said winter fat biking is similar to skiing because it is very weather dependent and groomed trails are needed. He agreed that being able to ride in good conditions was a very important consideration. Ruff said the footprint of the winter bike trails would essentially be the same as the summer bike trails and discussed how their volunteers do all the grooming. Ruff also said this has worked in other places. They do have a unique setup at Nine Mile where the trail systems integrate pretty frequently so they do want to minimize conflict. The mountain bike community would want to be able to charge a winter trail fee.

Lovlien said currently the forest plan and County ordinance doesn't allow winter biking so there would need to be an ordinance change and a revision of the plan to be allowed. Plan language says not to create another recreational activity that's going to create user conflicts so that would need to be worked out. He felt their two groups need to work together and it would go a lot further if they came in with a joint proposal. He recognizes that there would be no damage to the resource, the groups would have to work together, and the County would need to support the change. Nine Mile is a premiere cross country skiing area in the winter and premiere biking in the summer. Lane said his concerns are if there is going to be enough facilities to take on the extra traffic, if they will be compromising some of the snowshoe trails, and that there is a moratorium on new trails. Ruff said there won't be any new trails it will be grooming the existing bike trails footprint. Polley said a lot of work needs to be done to minimize potential user conflicts, and a formal proposal is required for staff to review.

H. Member Items

Haug said she was interviewed for an article in the Natural Resource magazine and she and another member were also interviewed for a Wausau Pilot and Review article. Burke said the ski club has annually held its ski swap the first weekend in November at East Gate Hall in conjunction with the Alpine club. They haven't made a final decision but are considering doing it separately this year on a different weekend mainly out of concern for pandemic precautions. Polley discussed if there is an event open to the public, staff will work closer with the organizers because they will be required to submit a plan to the Health Department. Burke discussed how their group is changing some things for their winter ski season this year. Polley discussed some items the Department may be able to purchase with Covid-19 grant funds. Lane discussed the Fish and Wildlife's intent to delist wolves in the western great lakes areas. Lovlien mentioned that some granite will be replaced on trail #1 at the Burma County Forest ATV/UTV trails.

II. Old Business

A. Update on the Mountain Bike Maintenance and Improvement Project

Lovlien said this project started mid-July and the first two phases should be finished up in the next two or three weeks. The mountain bike proposal had been approved back in March and there some rerouting of trails because of safety and or resource damage. The project is going really well. One more phase will be completed next year. Ruff said it

has breathed some new life into the system and they have been receiving a lot of positive comments. Burke agreed that it is a lot nicer for a beginner not looking for a real technical ride but still has options.

B. Update on Verso Corporation and Assistance Being Provided in Attempts to Sell or Re-open Mill

Schleifer reported that the mill shut down at the end of July and the company has enlisted the help of a third party firm to help market the mill. Lovlien said some people have been trying to form a multi-stakeholder group to buy the mill but that would take awhile to happen if it is even feasible. He thought it would take a long time and lots of money for someone to re-tool the mill. The worst case scenario is if they sell it to a scrap company and it gets demolished. Some good news is that the mill in Park Falls is open again and using about 150 cords a day. Heil discussed how that mill is using white birch and making xylitol for sugarless gum. He felt if the Wisconsin Rapids mill stays idle too long they will have to start over with a new base of suppliers. He is curious to see what the County bids are going to look like because of the downward pressure on pricing. Lovlien is hopeful because a couple of loggers have expressed interest and also because the County is centrally located. Revenue is important, however, being able to manage the woods to keep them healthy is also a priority. There are other markets, but markets are shrinking, even before Covid-19 and the Verso shut down, the pulp and paper industry has been slowly declining.

C. Nine Mile County Forest Remaining Fall Events

Lovlien said some smaller cross country running races have been scheduled this year. He said one occurred on Sept. 1st and there is one on September 17th and on September 24th. There is an ATV safety class on October 10th. On October 17th there will be a Wausau West conference meet and an Ironbull Red Granite bike race the same day. Those were the two races that were approved the closest Saturday to October 15th through a policy that was passed last year. Cancelled events include the Wausau 24 Bike Race, one of the IronBull races, two of the national interscholastic cycling association events, and the Ragnar running race.

D. County Deer Advisory Council Update

Lane said the CDAC met earlier this spring to determine the antlerless quota permits which remained the same as last year. CDAC is going to meet this fall to determine whether or not to increase, decrease or keep the deer population the same. They are also going to discuss splitting Marathon County into two different zones because the southeastern area has a much higher population of deer than the northern part of the County. Lane discussed the makeup of the Council and that previously Conservation Congress did not have a vote and now it does. Lovlien mentioned the DNR is having a public hearing on October 2nd which is a scoping review for the DNR Board to allow to do a potential change in the management units.

IV. Remaining 2020 Meeting Date – December 16, 2020 at 6:00 pm.

V. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Klos. Motion **carried** unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:25pm.

Thomas Lovlien
Secretary