

Massachusetts OHV Advisory Committee Meeting # 55 Notes
Tuesday, December 3rd, 2024
Venue: Purgatory Chasm State Reservation
198 Purgatory Rd, Sutton, MA

In Attendance: (* Indicates OHVAC member or sitting in for a member)

Scott Morrill (EoEEA / MA OHV Coordinator)

*Thomas Galvin - MA Law Enforcement representative

*Raffi Peterson - NETRA representative

*Jeff Miller – SAM representative sitting in for Randy Toth

Robert Gubala – Patriots ATV Club

*Colin Novick – Non-profit representative

*Captain Erik Tynan – Law Enforcement / MEP representative

Tim Craig – MA DCR Trails

Ale Echandi – MA DCR Trails

*Matt Westfield – OHV users representative

*Michael Toomey – Friends Group representative

Chip Jones – Guest speaker for universal access and inclusion / SAM member

10:05 Meeting is called to order

Introductions are followed by Scott Morrill providing an EEA update as well as the 2025 OHV Program strategy plan which is as follows:

Massachusetts Off-Highway Vehicle Program
Strategy Plan for calendar year 2025

Develop a list of public riding areas and a trail assessment plan to accompany each location.

Continue working with SAM to assist with their trail assessment plans.

Develop a list of trails with regards to vulnerability and sustainability. Review options for repair or possible reroutes. All trail closures should ideally be accompanied by equal or greater trail replication for public lands.

Find a way to utilize and spend out of the OHV plan avoiding overly long waits for small to mid-size purchases.

Increase program capacity by acquiring GPS mapping tools for use with site inspections, land survey, and the to-be-created trail assessment program.

Continue to explore possibilities for creating a new OHV trail system at a new location. Locations in the central and eastern parts of the state should take priority. This may or may not be in conjunction with the OHV Program Land Grant.

Approach DCR with the list of topics created during the program's first attempts at a meeting with the DCR commissioner.

- Pilot program for side x sides
- The discussion about exploring new locations for OHV use. What has prohibited them in the past and what can be done about assessing properties for this particular use moving forward.
- The state of MOU's and whether VSA's are sufficient. What would they like to see in the VSA's?

Revisit the Massachusetts OHV Land Acquisition Grant. Understand what is in the fund, what can be reasonably allocated, and what will be admissible for the grant. There are aspects of this that need to be kept in mind.

- Understand the market and price of land in MA
- Availability of large land sales in MA
- Other ways to spend the fund, such as trail repair or easements
- Opportunities to leverage the fund with other partners

Work with state partners, MEP, and dealers to create videos regarding OHV safety, BMP's, trail etiquette, and where to ride info.

Continue to work on developing a brochure that can be handed out at dealerships and events.

Revisit the legislation that will improve the OHV program and assist MEP in carrying out their duties.

Work with MEP and EoEEA officials in finding a permanent OHV training area in the state. If possible, near central MA and on state land. Leasing land with the OHV fund may be an option.

Develop a program for club outreach and planning assistance.

Research and explore options for public safety assistance regarding equipment procurement.

<END OF 2025 STRATEGY PLAN OUTLINE>

During Mr. Morrill's update and presentation of the 2025 OHV Strategy Plan, multiple points and ideas were provided. Colin Novick of the Greater Worcester Land Trust

offered a suggestion of land acquisition for providing new riding areas as there wouldn't be a need to rely upon any agency for providing the opportunity. Novick made the point of taking control of your own riding area and ensuring its use for years to come. Raffi Peterson of NETRA suggested the persistence of discussions with DCR in opening up more of DCR properties to OHV use. Mr. Peterson raised the point of DCR being the largest landowner in Massachusetts, having the resources, and having insurance that makes it easier for them to setup an OHV trail system than any other way. There was also a suggestion of DCR having land donated by the OHV fund for them to develop an OHV park as designing an OHV park from "the ground up" would be easier than attempting to recover an already damaged trail system with questionable trail design. Ale Echandi of DCR Trails stated that it would have to be a multi-use park as DCR does not purchase land for a singular use. OHV users were in agreement; however, questions were raised regarding DCR's capacity in trail maintenance as well as current trail conditions throughout DCR. Mr. Morrill, while discussing the OHV Fund, suggested that land prices in the state are elevated and there are options in fund spending such as current trails repair, land acquisition, or trail easement purchases. Mr. Peterson stated that the state is far behind in meeting the required 25% OHV Fund spending on trail creation and maintenance and that this issue needed to be addressed. Mr. Novick also proposed that there is also the option of purchasing land that is currently available, even in small quantities, with the goal of adding more land in the future and slowly building out a larger property for conservation. Jeff Miller cited multiple issues regarding possible trail connection losses and the need for securing these sections; possibly by purchasing easements.

Following Mr. Morrill's presentation and update, Chip Jones offered his perspective on OHV use and the importance it plays in his accessibility to nature. Mr. Jones stated that he has always enjoyed nature and emphasized the importance it plays in his life. Mr. Jones recounted the times in his childhood when he would go out into the forest for countless hours, with his family, training his dogs. Mr. Jones stated that the only issue with his ability to access and enjoy nature now is accessibility. Mr. Jones stated that he is extremely grateful for snowmobiles and the ability it gives him to still enjoy nature. Mr. Jones also stated that although his ability to access much of the forest has diminished, his love for nature and the outdoors has not. Mr. Jones also stated that outdoorsmanship means the world for him and people have a legal right for access to nature and was concerned about threats to his ability to access it.

Raffi Peterson followed Mr. Jones with his NETRA update. Mr. Peterson began with highlighting the clubs that volunteer at state parks across the state. Mr. Peterson stated that there are multiple clubs that help where they can in the state and hold events throughout New England. Mr. Peterson stated that there were approximately 60 successful NETRA events that happened in 2024 with countless hours of volunteer work that happened at every park in the state which provides OHV access. Mr. Peterson stated that at his club's (Pilgrim Sands) last event of the year that was held in Rhode

Island, the attendance was 576 people. Mr. Peterson also wanted to thank MA Environmental Police for all of their assistance and the Colonel's quick response to NETRA's requests for registration exemptions related to their events. Mr. Peterson also mentioned the King Philip's Club cancelling an event out of consideration for the dry season and fire warnings, highlighting NETRA's concern for public safety and taking full precautions for their events. Mr. Peterson also discussed current projects and delineating happening at Freetown / Fall River SF in relation to an ongoing RTP project that he and the Pilgrim Sands Club have undertaken. This project is in addition to a bridge project which was completed at that same park earlier in the year.

The next update was provided by Jeff Miller, standing in for the SAM representative Randy Toth. Mr. Miller began his update by saying that SAM attended the 2024 MA Trails conference and that it was a wonderful success. Mr. Miller stated that OHV and snowmobile use was greeted and welcomed by all of the other trail users and that almost all those visiting the table were amazed at the amount of trails SAM had throughout the state. Mr. Miller stated that he was joined at the table by Scott Morrill and Chip Jones. Mr. Jones stated that it was great to meet so many people, especially those from DCR (Ale Echandi, Tim Craig, Stella Lensing) and that he was encouraged about partnerships with DCR in the future thanks to those interactions. Mr. Miller stated that the 2024 Sled Expo at the Big E was also a success. Mr. Miller stated that numbers were slightly down, though vendor numbers were level from last year. Mr. Miller stated that SAM has deals with Garmin, Polaris, BRP, and Trackmaps. Mr. Miller also stated that SAM has created a new trail team in hopes of having dedicated people to address trail issues and address any problems that may arise in the future. Mr. Miller also stated that SAM was working on legislation that creates a 3-day reciprocity with neighbor states which will bring more snowmobile enthusiasts and revenue into the state. Mr. Miller also stated that SAM was inquiring further into possible grant opportunities with the USDA.

The next update was provided by Captain Tynan. Captain Tynan updated the committee on current registration numbers which were: 6,779 registered snowmobiles, 17,145 OHV's, 1,225 of which are out-of-state registrations. Captain Tynan then updated the committee on 2024 accident numbers through September which were: Four snowmobile accidents from last winter, zero of which were fatal. 51 OHV reported accidents, five of which were major, three were fatal. Two of these accidents involving fatalities took place on closed courses. Captain Tynan also stated that there were a number of calls related to OHV's operating on city streets and that public perception of OHV use was being harmed by these incidents due to all OHV use being lumped in together.

The next update was for DCR. Mr. Morrill stated that it was a successful OHV season for DCR, and after visiting the western OHV riding areas in the prior weeks, no reports were made of any significant issues or injuries. Trail repairs were needed, though they

were all open and there were no closures this season despite there not being a DCR OHV Trail Crew. Ale Echandi provided updates on multiple OHV projects that are happening such as: multiple snowmobile bridges being replaced at Mt Greylock, a parking lot that had been repaired and updated at October Mountain SF, and permitting for trail bridge replacements on Navin Trail in October Mountain. Ms. Echandi also stated that Gerald Autler, the DCR Trails director, has taken responsibility of a long-standing bridge repair project across the Farmington River. Ms. Echandi also noted that DCR has updated their trail proposal form which – although being a bit longer than the previous one – will be easier to understand and fill out.