

Massachusetts OHV Advisory Committee Meeting # 53 Notes
Saturday, June 1st, 2024
Venue: Notch Visitor Center
1500 West St, Amherst, MA

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

Scott Morrill (EoEEA / MA OHV Coordinator)

*Raffi Peterson - NETRA representative

*Randy Toth – SAM representative

Susan Smiley - SAM president

*Captain Jack Chapin – Law Enforcement / MEP representative

*Michael White – Mohawk 4x4 / OHV user representative

*Matt Westfield – OHV user representative

Jon Oulette – Southcoast Motorangers

Kate Preissler – DCR

Robert Gubabla – Patriots ATV club

10:10 Meeting is called to order.

Introductions are followed by Scott Morrill providing an EEA update.

Mr. Morrill began his update by announcing that the NOHVCC (National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council) workshop was coming up on June 15th and 16th. He also stated that the SAM grant award project for a bridge over the Farmington River was moving forward as Gerald Autler of DCR Trails had assumed project lead. Mr. Morrill also stated that they would continue to search for land that would be suitable for an OHV trail system, though issues of high land value in Massachusetts, competition with competing agencies and trusts, and parcel size large enough to support an OHV trail system were all difficult obstacles to overcome. Mr. Morrill stated that purchasing land adjacent to larger properties that are OHV friendly or purchasing trail easements might be a better option for utilizing the OHV fund.

Susan Smiley, the president of SAM, addressed the OHVAC. Ms. Smiley stated that SAM was continuing to work with DCR on multiple projects and they were happy with the relationship being formed between the two. Ms. Smiley also indicated that it was important to continue and foster this relationship as SAM needed to have their voices heard and their volunteering acknowledged. Ms. Smiley also sits on the DCR Stewardship Council and let other users know that getting in for a public comment during a public stewardship council meeting was a great way to be heard. Also, if so desired, they could apply to be a guest presenter during a stewardship council meeting.

The next update was provided by the NETRA rep, Raffi Peterson. Mr. Peterson said that it was difficult being a permitted rider in parts of the state as there are people that will dislike dirt bikes regardless of what they do. He noted that many dirt bike operators want to be registered and ride in sanctioned areas, it's just that there are so few places where that is possible. Mr. Peterson also stated that they were working with other user groups on trail projects and are having no problem working with other user groups.

Randy Toth was next to give the SAM update. Mr. Toth reported that due to an extremely poor snowfall year, memberships were down though it wasn't as bad as it could have been thanks to early-bird registration deals. There were also groomers that weren't used at all this season due to the poor snowfall. Mr. Toth stated that there wasn't a trailer raffle at last year's sled expo, but this year they plan on having the raffle once again. Mr. Toth also stated that legislative efforts had slowed down, but SAM was planning on putting more time into addressing this soon. Mr. Toth reported that Susan Smiley was elected as the new SAM president during their recent election. Mr. Toth also noted that SAM was pursuing an RTP grant for paying wages for those who groom trails.

Following Mr. Toth, Captain Chapin of the Massachusetts Environmental Police gave his update. Capt Chapin stated that snowmobile incidents and accidents were obviously way down due to the lack of snow and short season. Captain Chapin also mentioned that issues with people not registering their vehicles could be lessened by an option to register their vehicles at the point of sale. Michael White, the OHV user rep, asked if there was a way to clear up the confusion about the registration requirement for 4x4's. Capt Chapin stated that it should be looked into.

The following DCR update was provided by Kate Preissler, the west region director. Ms. Preissler stated that a DCR hiring freeze was being lifted and that she appreciates all the support and volunteering provided by the OHV clubs. Ms. Preissler said that she was supportive of all user groups and hopes to coordinate a congruent message to all stakeholders. Susan Smiley noted that the new commissioner structure could be positive for OHV users and that he is very proactive in addressing issues.

During open floor discussion Matt Westfield inquired about how to request access from DCR leadership. Susan Smiley responded by suggesting that OHV users utilize the stewardship council to have their voices heard. Michael White inquired about an OHV task force and was this a steering committee or advisor only. Mr. Morrill stated that the committee was not a steering committee, but rather a voice of information and advising on OHV issues for state agencies such as Fish and Game, DCR, MEP and EoEEA. When asked about how they could be more of advocates and enact change, Mr. Morrill suggested that they could form an organization as the limitations set for the advisory committee would not be the same in an organization.

