

Massachusetts Off-Highway Vehicle Advisory Council Meeting #46
Tuesday, September 6, 2022
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

*Randy Toth – SAM representative

*Lt. John Girvalakis – MEP ATV and Boating Safety

Nick Vanderheld - DCR

*Katie Kearney – Child safety representative

*Matt Westfield – OHV user representative

Jon Oulette – Southcoast Motorangers

*Michael Toomey - Friends group representative

Meeting #46 was chaired by Scott Morrill from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs (EOEEA). The meeting was held in the conference room at the DCR Purgatory Chasm State Reservation Visitor Center, in Sutton, MA from 10 AM to 2 PM. There were 10 attendees; 7 official committee members.

Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP) representative, Capt. Merri Walker, announced that this would be her last meeting as she is retiring from active duty with MEP after 38 years. She received a resounding round of applause from the crowd. Merri and the SAM Representative (Randy Toth) were the only two charter members of the OHVAC and OHVWC left and often acted together to explain historical OHVAC activities to the rest of the group. She will definitely be missed. Meanwhile EPO John Girvalakis will be filling in for Capt Walker. He is looking forward to participating in our annual Sled-Expo as is Scott Morrill who attends every year.

MEP continues to hire new EPOs trying to stabilize low numbers and retiring personnel. They are teaching 2-4 OHV classes per month; but attendance is low in the western portion of the state. They have also been training municipal police, fire and medical personnel as well as DCR personnel in the use of OHVs for their jobs.

EOEEA, Scott Morrill, reminded us that the National Off Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC) would provide a free trail building workshop on April, 29, 2023 for 25 participants. This multiday event will be by invitation only. This workshop is primarily for representatives from various OHV Groups, NETRA, SAM, and DCR. Scott expects to invite some legislators and the press as nonparticipating observers. This workshop would allocate perhaps 6 spots to the various organizations. More details will be forthcoming at a later date.

Scott continues to try to find lines of communication to the public for trail closures, safety information, and volunteer activities. Mr. Morrill, as with other state employees, are not permitted to operate and maintain any social media accounts in respect to their official duties as state employees.

Mr. Morrill also tried to submit proposed legislation regarding landowner tax breaks (for OHV and snowmobiles) and a "Maine" type liability protection statute into the MA Environmental Bond Bill; it is unknown where those proposals are in the legislative process.

Randy Toth, The SAM representative, gave a briefing covering trail news, trail passes, the upcoming Sled-Expo, RTP news, the upcoming Massachusetts Trails Conference and national news including the Blue-Ribbon Coalition's lawsuit against the federal government for misusing the Antiquities Act to lock up vast tracks of land from recreational land.

Nick VanderHeld (DCR western Mass OHV Trail Coordinator) reported he and his trail crew had been busy this summer doing trail repairs and re-decking bridges. They even rented a skid-steer for bigger jobs. They are losing one longtime trail worker to another position. They are still hampered by internal DCR policy governing existing trail maintenance. The state doesn't have any rules pertaining to repairing trail damage (i.e., washouts) near streams or wetlands. As a consequence, no repairs can be legally made to severely damaged trails without a full environmental review even when these are fully permitted trails.

The New England Trail Riders Association (NETRA) representative, Raffi Peterson, spoke about their trail maintenance, their event planning and difficulties at times with communication with some parts of DCR.

A motion was made by the SAM representative to conduct most of the OHVAC meetings online with face-to-face meetings when necessary for speakers and special events. It was thoroughly discussed and then passed.

The next OHVAC meeting has been tentatively scheduled for Tuesday 12-06-2022.