



IRON RANGE OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE RECREATION AREA CITIZEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mesabi Community College, Virginia, MN

6:00 - 8:00 pm

July 22, 1999

Meeting Minutes

ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Rep. Tom Rukavina, Chair; Sen. Jerry Janezich; Bob Cass, ATVAM; Bill Aho, Iron Trail Conv & Visitor's Bureau; Ann Bjorgo, T&W Tower Area Supv.; Dave Buczynski, MN 4x4 Assn (ALT); Lois Campbell, MN 4x4 Assn.; Chuck Neil, Izaak Walton League; Al Mathwig, ARMCA; Charlie Baribeau, Virginia City Council; Bob Manzoline for Commissioner Liz Prebich, St. Louis Co. Board **ABSENT:** Todd Devich, Gilbert City Council

DNR TEAM: Ron Potter, DNR OHV Coordinator; Les Ollila, T&W Reg. Supv.; Brian McCann, T&W Planner (recording).

GUESTS: Rep. David Tomassoni, District 5B; David Schotzko, T&W Tower; Scott Kelling, T&W Metro Region; Ray Svatos, IRRRB Mineland Reclamation Unit; Victor Wilson, Reactions OHV Consulting.

Chair Tom Rukavina convened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

INTRO / ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Brian McCann discussed proposed changes in Advisory Committee Bylaws prompted by discussions with the Attorney General's Office. The reason for the proposed changes is to simplify the Bylaws and make them more consistent with statutory directives (ML 96, Chapt. 407 as amended by SF 2226, Conf. Comm. Report 1999). Since the Local Area Advisory Committee is purely consultative and lacks any spending authority or funding sources, the Treasurer's position was abolished and all references to spending or contracting were deleted. The other significant change regards provisions for public meeting notices. In order to comply with Minnesota's open meeting statutes, McCann suggested providing a seven-day notice for all regular committee meetings and a three-day notice for special or emergency meetings. Notice would be posted at both Gilbert and Virginia City Hall on the official notices board. Notice would also be provided individually to those requesting special notice (a sign-up sheet was circulated for this purpose).

Chair Rukavina questioned whether members could modify the make-up of the committee. McCann responded that the composition of the board was statutorily determined, and that appointments were to be made by the DNR Commissioner, OHV Organizations, by the State House and Senate, and by other interests represented at the table. No action will be taken until the next meeting to give members time to review proposed bylaw changes. The Chair nominated Charlie Baribeau and Ann Bjorgo, respectively, for the position of committee chair - both declined. Rukavina indicated that he will continue to serve as chairman until a successor is elected. The Vice-Chair and Secretary (vacant) will also continue until replaced.

GILBERT LAWSUIT UPDATE

Brian McCann explained that Summary Judgement had been granted June 2nd by District Court Judge Hallenbeck on all three of plaintiff's allegations. Plaintiff's are expected to appeal this decision to the MN Court of Appeals in St. Paul. An appeal will take approximately six months, bringing us to February 2000. Although there is no injunction to halt planned construction, it remains unclear as to whether bids will be let and site work will begin while an appeal is pending. This will depend upon the nature of the appeal, whether an injunction is filed, and the duration of general construction contracts and permits.

PROGRESS AT GILBERT

Contracts between DNR and general contractor RLK Kuusisto, the City of Gilbert's engineering firm, will soon be finalized. RLK will oversee engineering design and construction at the Gilbert Site, including plans to extend Dakota Avenue to the OHVRA's main entrance. Working drawings and blueprints for the project are being prepared. RLK will secure necessary construction and building permits for the project, and construction is slated to begin Fall 99. The OHVRA should be open to the public, on a limited basis, by mid 2000.

A DNR permit for taking the State-Listed Grapefern has been granted, and the "no impact zones" specified in the permit, will soon be delineated by contract botanists. These exclusion zones will be mapped and fenced in order to protect the ferns at the Gilbert Site. They will be monitored and maintained indefinitely. DNR-funded Botrychium research will begin in these areas later this summer. Wetland delineation was also recently completed at Gilbert. DNR Commissioner Garber briefly toured both the Gilbert and Virginia properties with key staff on June 29th and was very positive about this project.

PROGRESS ON VIRGINIA ADDITION TO THE OHVRA

The 1999 State Legislature approved a 3,325 acre addition to the Iron Range OHVRA just east of the City of Virginia. This legislation also added two new members to the Citizen's Advisory Committee - Charlie Baribeau, Virginia City Council and Todd Devich, City Councillor from Gilbert. Since this legislation was passed, the DNR Team has met and digital base maps have been prepared. Assignments are being sorted out and preliminary resource assessments are being conducted. A field tour was conducted July 22nd involving about 20 DNR Staff and OHV group representatives. The T&W Archeologist has been contacted regarding the need for historical / cultural investigation. Steering Committee members earlier approved spending for a general summer plant survey of the Virginia Site. This survey will complement one done last fall on the Virginia Site and one done in Fall 97 as part of the range-wide Botrychium (tailings basin) investigation.

McCann proposed an approximately 10-month planning process (attached) for the Virginia Site - similar to that conducted in Gilbert, except that social, economic and design consultants will probably not be retained. The planning team has learned enough from the previous exercise to go forward without such assistance, and there are no project dollars specifically earmarked for consulting contracts. Moreover, the Virginia property will be used principally for trail riding, as opposed to the strong emphasis on vehicle staging, special events and training at the Gilbert Site. The Citizen's Advisory Committee will again drive this process, ensuring that planning for the Virginia Site, like Gilbert, is thorough, thoughtful and participative. McCann suggested that a Design Team be appointed to oversee site design - a task last time handled by consultants.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Councilor Baribeau emphasized the City of Virginia's concern for potential impacts to their water supply. He reminded the group that Virginia residents expect a full and open public discussion of these and other potential project effects before easements, permits or other local approvals will be granted. Lance Omersa of the Northern Minnesota Jeepers complained that his group felt left out of the OHVRA planning process, and that the Minnesota 4-Wheel Drive Assn has not provided them with adequate information or representation on the committee. Omersa argued that current MN 4x4 Assn representatives Lois Campbell and Dave Buczynski (Alternate) have not engaged local 4x4 groups and cannot provide an appropriate iron range perspective without added local input. As a result, Omersa et al have cut ties with the statewide organization. The Jeepers remain, however, generally supportive of the notion of an OHV Park on the Iron Range.

Lois Campbell pointed out that she and the MN 4x4 Assn **have** sought to engage members of the Northern MN Jeepers in planning for the Iron Range OHVRA, and especially in DNR's Statewide OHV Trail System Planning at the local level. Their knowledge of and familiarity with the Mesabi Range makes them critical to an informed planning process. Campbell also indicated that the MN 4x4 Assn had offered Omersa a second alternate position on the OHVRA Advisory Committee, but that Omersa had declined. Campbell reiterated MN 4x4 Assn's willingness to work with Omersa and the No. MN Jeepers to resolve existing problems and address continuing concerns. Chuck Neil also indicated the committee's strong desire to listen to local residents and ensure that their interests are well-represented in all committee discussions.

The Jeepers asked how information is disseminated by the OHVRA committee. McCann responded that press releases are distributed to all statewide print and electronic media. It is up to local radio, TV and newspaper editors to determine whether and/or when they will run these releases. Meeting minutes are published in the legals section of the Mesabi Daily News, the Biwabik Times and the Eveleth Scene/Gilbert Herald. Mailings are directed to committee members and alternates, DNR technical team members, IRRRB and mining representatives, USFS and DM&IR reps, private property inholders, media outlets and ex-officio members (City Clerks, Mayors). As per proposed changes to the Bylaws, official meeting notices would also be posted at Gilbert and Virginia City Hall, and first-class mailings would be provided to those requesting advance meeting notice.

Duane Peterson of a Grand Rapids off-road club voiced that group's interest in pursuing a second OHV Park near Coleraine (Buckeye Site). A representative of the "Range Riders" ATV Club offered her club's qualified support for the Gilbert and Virginia Sites, but asked that no new sites be considered until these two are up and running smoothly. Dave Kryzer from ATVAM also voiced his group's continuing support for the OHVRA planning process, the Gilbert and Virginia Sites, and for the Local

Area Advisory Committee's work to date. Private property inholders Pershern and Samargia expressed their keen interest in the planning and design of the Virginia Site. At this point, Sen. Janezich temporarily assumed the Chairmanship from Rep. Rukavina.

NEXT FULL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Acting Chair Sen. Jerry Janezich summarized the outcome of the evening's discussions as follows:

To address complaints, the committee agreed to provide meeting notices to those requesting advance notice;

The Committee agreed to form a Site Design Subcommittee with diverse representation, including local landowners, business owners, mining interests, OHV groups, private property inholders, enforcement officers, city and county officials, and others potentially affected by this proposed development. Chair Tom Rukavina and Ron Potter will accept nominations for membership on the Site Design Subcommittee, and the Chair shall approve membership on the subcommittee.

Sen. Janezich and Rep. Rukavina indicated that they would introduce legislation next session which removes themselves from the committee, and adds more local citizen representatives to the advisory committee.

Sen. Janezich asked that the committee reconvene in late August to review construction bids received for the Gilbert Site. At that time the committee bylaws will be revisited, as will the formation of the Site Design Subcommittee. No date, time or location was set for the August meeting.

Acting Chair Jerry Janezich adjourned the meeting at 8:10 pm.

FFI: Please contact Ron Potter (651/297-2362) or Brian McCann (651/296-8397) with questions or for additional information. DNR's Toll Free number is 1-888-MINNDNR. The TDD Number is 651/296-5484 (Metro) and 1-800-657-3929 (MN Toll Free). Trails & Waterways' mailing address is c/o Box 52, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4052. All information is available in alternative formats upon request.