

IRON RANGE OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE RECREATION AREA DNR AREA TEAM / SITE DESIGN SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

IRRRB Board Room
Eveleth, MN
February 1, 2000

Meeting Minutes - Draft

PRESENT: Mark St. Lawrence, St. Louis Co Landfill; Scott Bidon, MN 4WD Assn.; Lance Omersa, No. MN Jeepers; Jim Sellner, DNR Minerals; Larry Olson, DNR Forestry; Barry Lesar, St. Louis Co. Mine Inspector; Dennis Pershern, Landowner; John Wudinich, Range Riders ATV Club; Les Ollila, Reg. II T&W; Tim Wallace, DNR F&W; Amy Loiselle, DNR Hydrologist; Ron Smith, DNR Enforcement; David Holmbeck, DNR Envir Review; Doug Thompson, DNR Fisheries; Ann Bjorgo, T&W Tower; Ron Potter, T&W; Brian McCann, T&W (recording).

Meeting called to order by DNR Team Chair Jim Sellner at 1:15 pm. Ron Potter explained key outcomes from the Site Design Subcommittee's meeting of January 27th. Meeting minutes were distributed along with a letter of concern from the City of Virginia's City Department Director, Mr. Terry Leoni.

DNR GRAVEL LEASE ? SECTION 16

County Mine Inspector, Barry Lesar would like the Hill Climb proposal dropped to limit public access to the pit bottom and to adjacent pits. State Statutes require that pit walls be fenced at the top and, in this case bottom fencing would also be required to contain OHV activity. Basin walls have failed in some areas, and this pit is expected to fill with water eventually connecting with the Missabe Mountain Pit. DNR Forestry proposes to recontour some of the steep slopes and stabilize soils in the area via planned gravel lease activities. Trails & Waterways would like to keep OHV use options ?open? pending further discussions of noise issues and gravel mining plans. T&W suggests labeling the area ?Possible Future Hill Climb Area?. Development at a future date would require review by DNR Staff and the approval of the Citizen's Advisory Committee (incl. public meetings). It would also require additional pit edge and in-pit fencing.

NOISE, DUST & SURFACE WATER QUALITY ? SETBACKS & BUFFERS

The City of Virginia is concerned about noise, dust, erosion, sedimentation and possible contamination of their drinking water supply resulting from OHV-related activity. These concerns can be dealt with effectively through a combination of activity setbacks, fencing, berms, buffers, barriers and vegetative plantings. In fact, the group felt that improvement over current site conditions was possible, given improved signing and fencing, increased regulation and enforcement, and added investment in site rehabilitation and mitigation (e.g., revegetation, landscaping, erosion controls). Noise and dust issues can also be addressed through a combination of trail design, traffic management and enforcement actions (e.g., speed limits, no acceleration zones, spot noise checks). ATV's and motorcycle (2-cycle engines) use can be limited in noise-sensitive areas. DNR will take those measures deemed necessary to address legitimate issues.

Erosion setbacks should be as stipulated in the DNR's Best Management Practices (BMP's) for road and trail construction. Forest Management Guidelines should be observed in all trail construction. MPCA Noise Standards will also apply to all activity on this site. State noise standards [65 dB(A)] may not be suspended or waived for any reason. Design criteria adopted by DNR at Gilbert call for even stricter noise controls of 55 dB(A) daytime. This same voluntary criteria, which is twice as strict as state standards, is recommended for Virginia. Noise testing can be conducted if competitive Event Areas, proximate to the City of Virginia, remain in the final design plan.

PUBLIC SAFETY & PIT FENCING

Because there are no specific fencing setback requirements in statute, fencing recommendations will be developed in consultation with the County Mine Inspector's Office. Fences must be placed between pit walls and human activity, however, there is no specific fencing requirement for mine dumps, tailings piles or overburden piles. Where fencing is required, a minimum 6-foot no-climb fence with 2'x4' mesh and 2 strands of barbed wire is typically used. However, 5' chain link fence without the barbed wire, or even split rail fence, may be more appropriate in particular instances. It is suggested that fences be used in combination with boulder barriers to stop vehicles, as well as people, from entering dangerous off-limits portions of the Recreation Area.

ACCESS TO MISSABE MTN & COMMODORE PIT (Sect. 9 ? NW Boundary)

The DNR Team recommends that continued trail access be provided to the bottom of the Missabe Mountain & Commodore Pits via the existing roads/trails in Section 9. Large boulders and fencing would keep vehicles at least 100' from the shoreline and within the statutory boundaries of the OHVRA. Fences would ensure that pedestrians do not gain entry into adjacent pits. It is proposed that visitors be permitted to walk to and picnic on the lakeshore. This would prompt DNR to clean-up the area, better control existing public use, stabilize streambank erosion, plant vegetation and remove materials illegally dumped in this location. It could also provide access for emergency Fire Rescue Crews who cannot currently access the pit lake. And, it would provide an interesting interpretive opportunity for persons who have never been inside of a mine pit. DNR will engage the City of Virginia, and the County Mine Inspector's Office in planning and designing this area for future public use.

OPTION #1 VERSES OPTION #2 - ENTRY ROUTE

The DNR Team prefers Option #2 from a resource impact perspective, because it minimizes the number of river and stream crossings, makes use of existing roads and trails, and is further from the Samich property than even the modified Option #1. Implementation of Option #2, however, would require destroying 2-3 beaver dams from the Pike River flowage, and it assumes some continuing level of beaver control. The DNR Team also supports the use of the existing Old County Road and its SW extension which is currently maintained by John Samargia to access his 40-acre seasonal property in Section 14. Use of this existing road is preferable, in their view, to constructing a new 2,000' trail adjacent to the North Fork of the state-protected Pike River. Based upon field reconnaissance, Roger Nelson (DNR Forestry) also suggested gating this road and curving it north to avoid two stream crossings and the dog-leg shown in Sect. 15. Samargia would still have license (from landowner Cleveland Cliffs) to use this route to access his property. DNR use of the trail would, however, obviate the need for Samargia to maintain it.

EASTERN CORE TRAIL & RELATED DEVELOPMENT

The Site Design Subcommittee was originally charged with identifying a feasible route traversing the eastern half of the Virginia Site, so as to permit access into and travel through this area. In order to accomplish this, the group recommended adding approximately 200 acres in Section 14. Efforts are underway to secure this addition. With this expanded boundary, the proposed ?Core Trail? road was flagged and mapped. In order to reduce impacts to wetlands, preserve natural site conditions, and in deference to nearby private landowners, it was further recommended that the core trail be limited in size to single-lane (8-10' wide) with turn-outs for passing. Finally, the Subcommittee suggested that no added development take place in this area ? ? at the present time? , except for the construction of the core trail.

Given this history, and the interim development limitation, some DNR Team members question whether the Core Trail itself should be constructed at this time. And, if not, then they question whether the Eastern Boundary of the OHVRA should also be shrunk to reflect actual use areas. This becomes important if DNR is to purchase lands within the statutory boundary of the facility. Trails & Waterways representatives, on the other hand, support construction of the Core Trail, and limited secondary trail development where feasible. The area in question represents approximately one-quarter of the total acreage within the Virginia Site, and it borders commercial-industrial (mining) property which requires no noise or development setbacks. T&W staff feel that trail development can occur without intruding on private landowners or impairing the ecological integrity of the area. Demographic research reveals that a majority of OHV riders do seek out and enjoy scenic areas, riding through the woods, and touring remote areas. This area could provide for that recreational experience. Members of the DNR Team will evaluate this area further on-the-ground and meet again with the larger group to formulate their final recommendation on this difficult issue.

PARKING, STAGING & CROSSING THE LANDFILL ROAD

Mark St. Lawrence reported that the Regional Landfill Authority will allow emergency access off of the Landfill Road, and that they will work with DNR and event promoters to stage 1-3 Special Events/year using this road. However, no at-grade crossings of this busy road, nor any extended closures, will be allowed for any reason. The DNR Team recommended that Trails & Waterways explore bridge and tunnel options to determine which is most feasible, economically viable, and least disruptive (during construction) to traffic on the Landfill Road.

MOTOCROSS COMPETITION TRACK

It remains unclear whether sufficient demand exists to warrant construction of either a Motocross Competition or Motocross Practice Track. Ann Bjorgo has been checking with ARMCA representatives and track owners across Minnesota to gauge interest in a state-run facility. At present, there will be two training tracks constructed at Gilbert, for beginning and intermediate level ATV and Motorcycle riders. No competitive events, however, will be allowed.

Construction of a motocross facility at Virginia will raise noise concerns, would be costly to construct and supervise, and its use would likely be limited to 1-3 Special Events per year. More information is needed on this topic from especially from motorcycle interests, sanctioning organizations and potential private sponsors. The City of Virginia will also need to weigh in on the matter given the track's proposed location on the city's eastern border.

HUNTING RESTRICTIONS WITHIN THE OHVRA

There is a need to clearly specify what the hunting protocol will be on the Virginia OHVRA property prior to public meetings. Need to secure an Attorney General's opinion on DNR's statutory authorities as regards hunting within the statutory boundaries of designated State Recreation Areas (MS 86A.05)? Can it be prohibited? What about private inholdings? Conversely, should OHVRA activity cease for a period of time each fall? For big-game and/or small-game hunting seasons? The Regional Landfill Authority is also concerned about the safety of their employees should this area be opened to public hunting. No hunting will be allowed at Gilbert, but the Virginia Site is considerably more remote and does not lie wholly within either the Gilbert and/or Virginia City Limits. Potter and McCann will investigate and report back.

NEXT STEPS

The DNR Team will meet again soon to address identified issues and finalize their recommendations to the OHVRA Citizen's Advisory Committee. The Site Design Subcommittee may also reconvene, if necessary, at the request of either the Citizen's Advisory Committee or the DNR Technical Team. It is anticipated that a preliminary Site Design Proposal will be available for public review during Spring 2000.

Chairman Sellner adjourned the meeting at 5:10 pm.

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 1-888-657-3929 (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. Look for these minutes and other up-to-the-minute information on the Iron Range OHVRA on DNR's Website @ www.dnr.state.mn.us.