

NOTES OF MEETING OF AUGUST 12, 2021

New Hampshire State Rail Trail Plan
New Hampshire - Statewide
MAX-2018023.01

DATE PREPARED: August 13, 2021

LOCATION: Littleton High School Cafeteria
159 Oak Hill Avenue, Littleton, NH

ATTENDEES: Shelly Winters, NHDOT
Shannon Rogers, PhD, UNH
Mark Debowski, GPI
Carolyn Radisch, GPI
Nicole Rogers, GPI
Public Representation

PURPOSE: New Hampshire Rail Trail Public Meeting #3

Discussion:

1. Introduction – Shelly Winters (NHDOT)
 - a. Project Overview
 - b. Project Team
 - c. Stakeholders
2. Project Scope – Mark Debowski (GPI)
 - a. Update Rail Corridor Inventory
 - b. Economic Impact – Shannon Rogers, PhD (UNH)
 - c. Tiered System for Prioritizing State Investments in Rail Trail Projects
 - d. State Funding Mechanisms
 - e. Rail Trail Maintenance Definitions, Costs, Insurance, Agreement Template
 - f. Recommendations on Ensuring the Integrity of Publicly Owned Rail Trail Corridors
 - g. Rail Trail Design Standards
 - h. Final Report
 - i. State Rail Trail Pamphlet
 - j. Public Engagement
3. Timeline – Mark Debowski (GPI)
4. Requested Public Feedback – Mark Debowski (GPI)
 - a. Tier System for Prioritizing State Investments
 - b. State Funding Mechanisms
 - c. Other Items
5. Public Comment Period

Rep. Tim Egan – Grafton County District 2

Q: Is there a reason as to why Fish & Game is not included in the Stakeholders Committee as they are the ones that perform search & rescue on these rail trails?

A: Fish & Game was not purposefully excluded, but we will check with our sister agency, DNCR, to see if they have any feedback as to why they may have been left out but may be because of their position as enforcement.

Zach Shepard – Littleton Off Road Riders (LORR) President

Q: Safety needs to be considered. There are trails with rails still intact in some areas which is a safety issue for snowmobiles. Have you looked into any accident data? Perhaps trails with high accident rates receive priority for funding.

A: Thank you for your comment. We will look into that.

Q: What percentage of trail upkeep is funded by OHRV use, registrations, etc.? OHRV users contribute the most money into the trails and that should be considered when prioritizing funding.

A: We do not have that percentage at this time in the study.

Q: Have economic impact surveys been collected in the Littleton area? It should also be noted that the trail connecting Twin Mountain to Littleton has been lost. This reduced our winter snowmobile volume dramatically and therefore survey numbers may be skewed.

A: We do have good representation statewide of snowmobiles. We have surveyed users on the Ammonoosuc and Upper Coos trails and plan to expand to the Presidential Trail.

Q: Rail lines have been pulled in some areas but significant debris was left which is a safety issue for snowmobilers. Who oversees the construction contracts?

A: In the specific instance of recent projects in Littleton, the DNCR Bureau of Trails puts together specs, etc. and DOT signs off on these contracts. DNCR is mostly responsible for direct project oversight, but DOT is more involved in the current (ongoing) phase. Safety is a paramount concern to both State agencies, so please report any specific safety concerns for State staff to review.

Erin Hennessey – State Senate District 1

Q: Has the economic impact of first responders and emergency rescue been analyzed?

A: The plan is following Senate Bill 185 closely and therefore the economic impact on first responders and emergency rescue is not included in the economic impact analysis, but we understand increase mileage and use of rail trails has other costs.

Q: In regard to potential funding management, there should also be funding provided to the entity that controls the funds in the future.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Rep. Suzanne Smith – Grafton District 8 (House Bill 311)

Q: Senate Bill 311 is establishing a committee to study rail trail best management practices. We will certainly be looking to the take input from the findings of the NH State Rail Trail Plan. Some things we will be looking at are surface conditions (crushed stone, dirt, paved, etc.) and also how to maintain trails with multiple different surfaces.

A: Thank you for your comment; we are hopeful this plan will be helpful for that effort.

John Hennessey – local resident

Q: In regard to prioritization criteria, population centers should be accounted for. There is great economic impact near downtown areas especially for biking/hiking usage. Length and connectivity is also important as it extends time on the trails and allows for greater economic impact in multiple areas. Communities with 5,000-6,000 population are great candidates.

Please look into trail count projections to assess future ROI.

Equity is also important in regard to surface condition.

Regarding user fees, NH taxpayers should receive discounts.

A: Thank you for your comments.

Evelyn Ferrell – NH Snowmobile Association (NHSA) Grafton Director

Q: When was this study started as this is the first time we are hearing of it? There could be better communication to trail user groups.

A: The study commenced in January 2020, and it was understood that members of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee that interfaced with OHRV groups (Kim Bergeron as the motorized use rep and Chris Gamache as the DNCR rep) were providing updates to this user group. We will follow-up with these members and ask that they provide more information with the stakeholder groups they represent/interact with.

Q: The NHSA is doing our own economic impact study and we would love to share that with you. Are you considering out of state users?

A: Yes, the economic impact study does ask place of residency. Tourism is incredibly important. We are open to reviewing other economic impact studies to consider how these may be useful for this plan.

Michelle Murray – Littleton Off Road Riders (LORR)

Q: Snowmobiling is a family thing. The economic impact figures should be much higher.

A: We are happy to collect any economic impact analyses trail groups may have conducted as well as any anecdotal information.

Evelyn Ferrell – NH Snowmobile Association (NHSA) Grafton Director

Q: NOVA and the NHSA have completed economic analyses. We encourage the project team to take a look at this for more accurate representation of snowmobiles economic value. The study should show that snowmobiles are 2nd only to skiing in NH for economic impact.

A: The economic impact analysis is an average of all different users which includes hikers or bikers that frequently don't spend any money on the trail. This is why trail count information is incredibly helpful to further breakdown data. Please be advised that we are looking at State-owned rail trail corridors only.

Steve Hight – Littleton Off Road Riders (LORR) Director

Q: Snowmobile community brings in a lot of money due to gas, equipment, second homes, family events, etc. There is a great economic value to the region as trails allow us to have breakfast here, lunch there and dinner there. Mr. Hight was previously a tour guide in which there were a lot of out-of-state participants who were looking to recreate but also potentially relocate.

It is recommended that the project team look to banking institutions to see the winter vs. out of season economic impact. Regional tourism is a priority.

Regarding fees- these are multiuse trails yet the only ones who maintain and pay to use the trails are the OHRVs. Bikers/skiers do not pay which is unfair. Other users need to pay and a bicycle tag could be a way to raise additional funding.

Day passes seem unfeasible, as there are no parking kiosks and multiple ways to access the trails.

The rescue budget also needs to be figured out.

A: Thank you for your comments.

Bryan Hadlock – Ammonoosuc OHRV Club / Insurer / NH Fish and Game OHRV Safety Coordinator

Q: What is the ROW typically? It is difficult to hear that encroachments are even a thing.

A: The ROW is typically between 33-99 feet. In most cases, DOT owns these assets but DNCR manages. Safety is our top priority. We are unfortunately lacking state staff to enforce encroachments and are looking for suggested improvements.

Q: Potential suggestions to deter encroachment are trees, fences (specifically for children/pets). If property owner wants a barrier, it should be provided. Fish & Game may also be able to provide enforcement and tickets may also aid in additional funding. That being said, Fish & Game is also underfunded.

Recommend not using money with restrictions (based on use). Electric bikes/scooters do not pay. There are everchanging conditions and we need to plan for those future uses.

Rental and tour guide industry is expanding. There is a lot of out-of-state travel to use these assets.

Has a rail line ever been taken back over by a rail company?

A: The State normally acquires railroad corridors for restoration of railroad service and permits interim use, including rail trails. DOT rail trail agreements always have a termination clause with municipalities. It is a long federal process, through the Federal Surface Transportation Board, to change the status and use of a railroad corridor including reactivating an abandoned rail line (being used as a rail trail) to an active railroad line with an operating railroad. There have been few cases that we are aware of where the status has reverted from abandoned back to active.

Q: It is recommended that the entity that ends up managing the funds is run by a business and not politicians. A business backing is important to properly manage and allocate funding.

There is an insurance program available to insure state associated affiliations who maintain trails. Recently, non-profits are looked at more favorably by insurance agencies.

Rail trail parking should be considered. Lack of parking results in lack of area to load/unload and therefore that is down on private property. State owned land adjacent to rail trails should be converted to parking areas. Also need to consider parking as to not take away parking from small town businesses.

A: Thank you for your comments.

Steve Hight – Littleton Off Road Riders (LORR) Director

Q: Several ideas to enhance trails include proximity to natural areas (fishing holes/natural wildlife) and picnic tables provided along trails.

Are there inactive state-owned rail lines that could possibly be converted to extend snowmobile lengths and therefore reach of economic impact? There seems like there should be a lot.

A: This study focuses on state-owned rail trail corridors only. Some of the rail corridors may be private/municipal owned or the state may not have acquired old rail lines back in the day. DOT & DNCR continue to review & discuss other corridors that should be considered for additional rail trails for various modal uses.

Evelyn Ferrell – NH Snowmobile Association (NHSA) Grafton Director

Q: Have you considered overlaying the snowmobile route maps over the maps provided to see any connectivity possibilities?

A: We have not but will consider this in the future. Thank you.

These minutes constitute our understanding of the discussions and conclusions reached. Please advise us within ten (10) days, in writing, of any exceptions or corrections.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Rogers
Project Engineer

cc: Mark Debowski, GPI
Carolyn Radisch, GPI