

Massachusetts OHV Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting name			
OHV Advisory Committee Meeting (8)			
Date		Time	
6-13-12		11:00 AM – 3:00 PM	
Location		Meeting host	
CCC Lodge, Pittsfield State Forest, Pittsfield, MA		Stephanie Cooper, EEA	
Attendees			
Stephanie Cooper (EEA)	Randy Toth	Ken Anderson	Sharon Jordan
Priscilla Chapman	Briere, Gary (DCR)	Celia Riechel (EEA)	Bill Riordan
Tad Ames	Dan D'Arcy	Chris Hasher (DCR)	Travis Clermont (DCR)
Gary D. (OLE)	Jane Winn (public)	Chris Mossman	
Absentees			
Colleen McGuire	Chris Baker (OLE)	Chief Ernest Horn	Peter Masiokas
Lt. Merri Walker (OLE)			

Synopsis of items discussed

1. Welcome and introductions.

The meeting was held at Pittsfield State Forest to allow the committee time to look at existing OHV trails and consider options for demonstration trail maintenance projects. No closure of existing trails is anticipated at this time; the closure of trails in October Mountain last year were due to extenuating weather circumstances.

2. Education and Outreach Subcommittee Report

Last meeting, the committee discussed that there has not been sufficient public outreach about the OHV laws. A subcommittee was formed to consider outreach objectives and strategies, in particular focusing on the general public. The subcommittee met twice. OLE's handbook on OHVs, targeted both at the riding community and the general public, has been finalized and is currently at the printer. Posters and pamphlets are also being printed. Now that there is good information, the focus should be on effectively disseminating it.

Some members of the committee still find the information on the state website to be confusing. The state website is currently undergoing a portalization process, and should be improved once the process is complete. The brochure just covers the basic information; it does not have sufficient space to go into all the details of the law. The idea is to make sure that people understand that there are laws, but send them to the website to get details specific to their vehicle type or rider age. All committee members can help distribute existing hard copy materials to their

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communities.

The committee discussed ways to make the link more effective—a photo or catchy phrase, and translating materials into other languages, particularly Spanish and Portuguese.

The committee discussed a draft letter that could be sent to various organizations (medical and safety organizations, equipment dealers, schools, churches, sports teams, local governments, scouts, YMCA, sportsmens groups, etc) to encourage them to put links to OLE's OHV safety information webpage on their sites. The letter asks for their assistance and offers to provide information or send someone to talk to the group. The idea is to make a connection with groups that can be maintained over time.

The committee discussed whether the letter is a good approach and decided to consult their communities. A revised version of the letter will be circulated, with a list of potential recipients.

The focus of the letter is on child safety, not on the impact of OHVs on the land. Environmental groups are equally concerned with child safety and with the environmental damage done by OHVs. The committee determined that this letter should remain focused on safety to reach the broadest number of groups. A second letter addressing the environmental impacts of OHV use could be written to target environmental groups.

Some committee members felt like efforts at outreach may fall short of changing behavior because people just ignore the information. OHV dealers may tell them about the law, but because this law and the government generally are not always viewed positively, some people are unreceptive. Dealers can look the other way, too. When purchasing an OHV, people are supposed to sign a form acknowledging that they know the rules, and that children may not ride. They say the OHV is for the parents, but everyone knows it's for the kids. People may also be resistant to the law because they feel like there are not enough legal riding opportunities in Massachusetts already, so riding they do here will be illegal already. This may be something of a feedback loop, as riders who are disrespectful or destructive cause riding opportunities to be closed, which in turn increases dissatisfaction in the riding community.

The committee discussed whether to place a cap on expenditures for outreach and education efforts, to preserve the majority of the fund for increasing and improving riding opportunities. Much of the education efforts to date are essentially free, as they will be distributed electronically.

The subcommittee drafted a letter to the legislature requesting that OLE be given the discretion to determine the appropriate registration type for each vehicle type, whether stickers, plates, etc. The intent of the legislation was to increase visibility of the registrations, and stickers don't work well for all vehicle types.

3. OHV trails and season update

Since the committee last met, there has been significant reorganization at DCR. DCR is trying to maintain its levels of service despite staff cuts, but there has been an

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unavoidable drop in capacity in the Berkshires. Positions that have been lost may not be immediately refilled.

Two seasonal employees were able to be hired for October Mountain. The free permit system for riding begun in 2010 for Pittsfield SF helped DCR staff coordinate, and provided a good opportunity for communication with riders. It also established a means for ensuring rider safety on smaller trail networks by setting a daily limit on the number of permits—50—but this limit was never reached. Last year a survey was conducted at October Mountain instead of the permit system, and this year the free permit system was expanded to all three facilities allowing OHVs: October Mountain, Pittsfield, and Beartown.

There was initially some complaining at Pittsfield about the expansion of the permit system, but it has been easy and straightforward and there aren't many complaints now. Instead, requiring riders to get a permit from the ranger provides a point of contact, an opportunity for a conversation and a reminder about the regulations. For regular riders, they get to know the ranger and they can build rapport; people like having someone to talk to. Riders can get permits to ride in Beartown and October Mountain by sending an email request, so they haven't built the same kind of relationship. Beartown doesn't always have staff because the campground is closed.

Although the numbers are not easy to compare across years, DCR does have rough numbers on riders. On Memorial Day, there were 38 riders in Pittsfield, 20 in October Mountain, and 18 at Beartown. A more typical weekend in Pittsfield might see 12-20 riders.

The committee discussed requirements for sponsored events on DCR lands. Events require special events permits, but DCR still needs to know who all the participants are. Event coordinators should provide this information to DCR so that participating riders will not be required to get individual day passes. The limitations on daily riders are in place to ensure safety. Organized events should have some control over riders and this may allow an accommodation of greater numbers of riders, if the event provides adequate support.

DCR rangers do patrol trails, but they are somewhat limited because they have to maintain a presence at the parking lot, and they have to patrol in pairs. Unpermitted riders are not uncommon.

The Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) has about 70 officers across the state, most of whom focus on boating enforcement. On a good day, there might be four officers covering 30 cities and towns; on a bad day one officer may have to cover that area. Added strain is placed on officers by certain types of calls, such as large animal calls, which require multiple officers to respond. This low level of staffing makes it difficult to determine how many unregistered riders there are. The OHV fund can help build patrols that can focus on OHVs.

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Some data from Pittsfield, Beartown, and October Mountain:

The average MA resident drove 78 miles to get to their riding location.

The average non-resident drove 99 miles.

Beartown had the highest proportion of non-resident use: 70% of riders were from CT. It also had a higher percentage of motorcycle use.

One complaint DCR is hearing from riders is the unavailability of the safety course. They may be listed online, and then they get cancelled. This is due to low staffing at OLE and low or no turnout at the courses. It's a significant waste of staff time to have an officer offer a course and have nobody show up. People can call the number online to get a course, but this may need to be clarified on the OLE website so that people understand that they can always call to request that a course be offered. There is also a portion of the course that can be completed online.

4. Trail planning and evaluation update

There have been problems with the trails at October Mountain for many years, largely because none of the trails currently open to OHVs were designed to handle that kind of use—this puts a lot of wear on them. Hurricane Irene significantly compounded the damage, took out two bridges on the Schoolhouse Trail, which served as an important link to allow riders to connect to different trails while staying off of the road. DCR is working to rebuild these to allow trails to reopen, but because the trails haven't been maintained, they are particularly susceptible to dramatic weather events. OHVs may possibly be permitted to ride on some portions of existing gravel roads, but that would require coordination from OLE. These are often town roads, so there must be local support. The Committee should consider sustainability as well as the safety of trails, given the reality of resource constraints.

The Committee discussed whether the OHV Fund could be used to fix the Schoolhouse Trail link. About \$100,000 has been set aside for a specific pilot project. We expect about \$344,000 in the fund by the end of the year for trails. The costs are fairly large, but some expressed that Schoolhouse Trail might be a good choice. Permitting for work in Pittsfield SF is already in place. The approx. 2 mile section of the Skyline Trail that the Committee will see later today has an estimated cost of \$600,000 to fix, partly because it would require specialized equipment to fill because you can't use traditional highway equipment. The trail is completely entrenched, giving water nowhere to go. The cost is compounded because you lose the investment every couple of years. This raises the question: do we want to spend money constantly to maintain trails, or do we want to identify trails that are sustainable, that will cost less to maintain over time? DCR is looking for cost-effective, appropriate, and compliant solutions for the Skyline Trail to serve all kinds of uses.

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5. OHV Fund update

Currently a drop in revenue from FY11 is projected for F12. This is partly due to a 16% drop in registrations. This may be partly due to the lack of snow this past winter. It may also be due to difficulty and delays in the actual registration process, which may discourage some who would otherwise register. OLE is open to suggestions for improving the registration process so that it is easier and quicker.

The Committee discussed whether there should be a limit placed on the amount of the OHV Fund to be used for enforcement.

Next steps/action items

1. Review, finalize and distribute child-safety outreach letter.
2. Consider drafting a second outreach letter focusing on environmental impacts.
3. Identify trail and section to be improved as a test case, and determine amount willing to spend from the OHV Fund.