

NEW YORK STATE TRAILS COUNCIL MEETING
Saratoga Spa State Park, Administration Building Executive Meeting Room
19 Roosevelt Drive, Saratoga Springs, NY
April 8, 2017 10:30 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

APPROVED MINUTES

Call to Order

Correction/Approval of Minutes of October 15, 2016 Meeting

Motion to approve minutes: Jane Daniels Second: Quinn Wright
Motion passed unanimously.

Council Attendance:

4-Wheel Drive –

All-Terrain Vehicles –

Equestrian – Dan Gruen, Carol Schmelz, Mark Wehnau

Hiking – Jane Daniels, Quinn Wright

Nordic Skiing -

Off-Highway Motorcycles -

Off-road Bicycling – Michael Vitti

On-road Bicycling –Ivan Vamos

Running – Hugh Davis

Snowmobiles – Bob Bryant, Dominic Jacangelo

Snowshoeing – Katie Henrickson, Peter Fedorick

Universal Access – Denis Livsey

Water Trails – Tom Casey, Mike Prescott

FHWA -

National Park Service – Karl Beard

HRV Greenway – Scott Keller

Canal Corporation –

NYSDEC – McCrea Burnham

NYSOPRHP –Chris Morris, Tom Hotaling

NYSDOT – Tom Benware

PTNY – James Meerdink

ECNHC – Brian Yates

Presenter: Scott Keller

Others in attendance: Jerry Smith, Central NY Trail Council

First Presentation

The Empire State Trail—Scott Keller, Acting Executive Director, Hudson Valley Greenway

For more information, see: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-presents-20th-proposal-2017-state-state-complete-empire-state-trail-2020>

Scott gave an overview of the EST, which was approved by Governor Cuomo. It will run from New York City to the Canadian border and from Albany to Buffalo. The plan involves 250 new trail miles, for a total of 750 new miles, 750 total. Seventy-five percent of the mileage will be off-road, with 85% of the Erie Canalway mileage designated for shared use. The budget for the project is \$200 million, with 2020 set as the completion date. Scott also applauded the efforts of Commissioner Rose Harvey in advocating for the trail.

A discussion ensued. Dominic Jacangelo and Mark Wehnau raised various concerns about the concept, mostly regarding multi-use access. Dominic observed that there can't be one rule for all sections of the trail. Jerry Smith asked questions about the trail surfacing and the overall cost of the EST. Ivan Vamos asked about the Beacon rail-trail link, where one track currently in use will remain and the other used for a trail; Scott replied that MTA is completely on board with the idea. James Meerdink noted that the Erie Canalway Trail alone would be the largest project in the country. He commented on the complexity of completing the routes, given the various land-managing agencies involved. Scott Keller remarked that

we would love to have all of the trails off roads, but it will not be possible. He added that getting the Empire State Trail in place will encourage the growth of other trails. Jane Daniels noted, "There have to be compromises. You can't satisfy everyone every inch of the way." Tom Benware said that DOT is trying to make road sections as safe as possible. Karl Beard remarked on that this is the first time a statewide trail system is being discussed statewide. "We all need each other for all of this to succeed."

Second Presentation

Quinn Wright participated in Hike the Hill, an event where trail advocates descend on Congress. He discussed studies by the National Outdoor Recreation Association on how much outdoor recreation puts into the economy: \$646 billion annual consumer spending on outdoor recreation. Bicycling and trail sports (running, hiking, etc.) lead in dollars, day trips and number of participants. Equestrian use was not considered in the studies, largely due to having fewer participants. For snowmobiling, the Association said the low response from users meant they had less confidence in the figures for the sport. Hiking generates \$231k per mile (Quinn's analysis).

Chris Morris announced a next meeting date of October 14 at Saratoga Spa State Park.

Lunch Break

Delegate Reports

Denis Livsey, Universal Access, discussed trying to gain paddling access at Boreas Pond and Kaaterskill Falls; the latter has improved access but is still challenging.

Dominic Jacangelo, Snowmobiles, reported on a mixed season, with some clubs pulling their trail signs in early March for lack of snow and then having to put them back after heavy snowfalls. He mentioned that there were 24 deaths, 6 of which were drownings on lakes. There are too many out of control riders. One was speeding recklessly, hit and killed another snowmobiler who had pulled all the way to the right. The operator was killed also. We are working on finding funds for law enforcement to patrol trails. Statewide, we are trying to educate new users on safe snowmobiling. Advertisers don't help, with their portrayals of what is essentially wild riding.

He mentioned the controversy over Boreas Pond, regarding how close motorized access can come to it. Snowmobilers would like a trail around the pond but don't expect to get it.

Snowmobilers are trying to legalize a tax credit for private landowners who allow trail access. He encouraged other user groups to advocate for the credit.

Michael Vitti, Off-road Bicycling—In March there was a grand opening for a Sterling Forest loop trail.

On Long Island, CLIMB is helping the county with the Port Jefferson-Wading River Rail Trail.

Vision Long Island held a complete streets symposium, at which he spoke.

Mike mentioned an April 20 pitch pine-planting event at Sears-Bellows County Park to replace trees lost to Southern Pine Beetle.

Dan Gruen, Equestrian—Dan mentioned that equestrians, too, are interested in access to Boreas Pond.

He distributed placards/handouts from NYS Horse Council about users yielding to other users on trails. Bikes yield to pedestrians and horses, pedestrians yield to horses. Dan hopes these can be placed at OPRHP and DEC trailheads.

Mike Prescott, Water Trails—Mike also expressed concern about Boreas Pond. His primary concern is letting the Adirondack Park Agency know that there are many types of users who would like access. Older, less athletic people are a large group. Mark Wehnau asked if the Trails Council could send a letter expressing its views on Boreas Pond. Dominic Jacangelo said the public comment session is over, but we could still influence the final decision when the state offers its alternatives for use. He mentioned the Access for the Adirondacks Alliance, which is pro-access.

Mike raised the issue of abuse of High Peaks trails, some of which are greatly overused. A discussion ensued. Jane Daniels remarked that social media, by focusing on popular places, encourages overuse.

Katherine Henrickson, Peter Fedorik, Showshoeing—Little to report.

Mark Wehnau, Equestrian— A quiet season.

Ivan Vamos, On-road Bicycling—Ivan is working on the next NY Statewide Highway Safety five-year plan. Mass transit operators, health departments and other agencies are paying increasing attention to pedestrians, bikers and other vulnerable users. He is still working on moving the Safe Passage Act through the state legislature. Carol Schmelz mentioned horses on roads are subject to speeders and horn honkers; she asked Ivan to mention the problem to the state and perhaps include more specific mention in driver's manuals.

Jane Daniels, Hiking—NY-NJTC website has been overhauled. New information ranks trails by difficulty. Breakneck Ridge at the height of the season average 900 hikers a day! Overuse obviously is still an issue. She mentioned educational efforts in the Catskills on trail use, including Spanish-language events.

Hugh Davis, Running—Hugh mentioned Trailsrock.org, a website worth checking out.

He expressed concerns among runners on using trails during hunting season. People feel there is not enough information available. Mike Vitti noted that the DEC website contains the relevant information on hunting dates.

Carol Schmelz, Equestrian—Carol relayed a request from riders in Little Valley about logging operations being done as holiday weekends (Memorial Weekend and Labor Day Weekend) approach. Over 100 equestrians go out on the trails for 4-5 days those weekends. Organized rides are planned weeks in advance. If a trail is going to be shut down by felled trees, signs indicating the trail is closed need to be posted long before the riders must turn around and figure out a new route. McCrea Burnham noted that organized events need a Temporary Revocable Permit.

The DEC's Chataqua County Equestrian Trail System need more signage and maps available to visitors.

The big issue in Western NY is the Carlton Hill Wildlife Management Area. Several meetings with the DEC have been held by invitation only. Half of the existing horse trails will be shut down due to protection of a ground nesting bird. More meetings will determine which trails that stay open are forthcoming. Equestrians are working with Emilio Rende, DEC wildlife manager, Region 9.

Carol asked if money was still earmarked for trail head expansion at the Old Rodeo Grounds at Luzerne. No one knew.

Carol was concerned that equestrian use wasn't listed as a use for the Empire State Trail. More equestrians would support this trail if they were permitted to use it. The towpath had historically had been built for equines in the first place.

Is there any formula for allocating DEC trail patch receipts to any specific use or trail? How does the DEC allocate those funds? McCrea Burnham replied that there is no formula, and DEC has received only received \$10k anyway.

Carol had a concern about Allegany State Park. The riding season is getting shorter and shorter. Sunday hunting put an end to equestrians' only safe day to ride in the fall. Now trails are closed either October 15th or the 30th. This is understandable on DEC lands where hunting is allowed, but not in a state park. Oftentimes November is still is very good month to ride.

Jeff Binga forwarded a letter from NYSORVA regarding an online safety course and other safety efforts. There is also a petition drive to raise the weight limit for ATVs to 1500 pounds. This involves side-by-sides, or UTVs, which are in a legal Neverland now, too big to be registered as ATVs and too small for on-road use. Dominic suggested legislation to create a separate category of registration for UTVs.

Tom Casey, Water Trails, raised the issue of illegal commercial dumping in parks. Did anyone else have experiences in their areas? Apparently, it's a Long Island thing.

Samantha Langton, On-road Bicycling—In her absence, Chris Morris read her report on a new single track project in Minnewaska and other events

Agency Reports

OPRHP—Chris Morris is working on the Breakneck Ridge management plan. We still have a backcountry trails program working on trail improvements in Sterling Forest and Palisades. The Taconic master plan is wrapping up. OPRHP has started a management plan for Bennington Battlefield Historic Site. Rockefeller State Park Preserve plan will commence in late spring or summer.

Tom Hotaling discussed the RTP process. He is new on the job and hopes to move applications along soon. Jane Daniels complained about part of the funding on a bridge project being pulled because DOT had construction requirements that were overkill and onerous for a pedestrian-bicycle bridge. She also said there is no way to apply for a grant between \$15-20,000. For that situation Tom suggested bundling projects and scaling up the grant.

Jane reminded the Council that volunteer hours count for grants at the Federal rate of \$27.59/hour, but administrative labor doesn't. Tom Hotaling said direct administration of the project in the field is OK, indirect (office work) is not.

DEC—McCrea Burnham said DEC has hired Laura Dibetta to oversee coordination of projects. He distributed a flyer for Trail Supporter patches. Jane Daniels asked why isn't DEC and OPRHP cooperating on a patch? McCrea also distributed a draft UMP schedule.

There was a discussion of how hard it is to buy a patch. They are not available at Regional Offices, McCrea can't take money because of internal controls, Dick's and Walmart have them but don't train people to sell them.

PTNY—James Meerdink said PTNY completed a trail count in the Capital Region, their first use of an intensive electronic count. The highest-use trail was the Erie Canal Trail in Niskayuna, with 300,000 uses a year. Clean Sweep is Earth Day weekend, to clean up local sections of the Canalway; 100 events scheduled. This is the 200th anniversary of the start of the Erie Canal in Rome. Supposedly, it's also the 200th anniversary of the bicycle.

I Love My Park Day, May 6 will have thousands of volunteers; see PTNY website.

PTNY is happy about Empire State Trail and optimistic about full funding.

Bike Friendly New York is a statewide program aimed at businesses near trails, the Canalway in particular. It involves, for example, hotels having repair kits and bike racks available.

PTNY wants to broaden the types of projects supported by Complete Streets.

May is Bike to Work Month.

National Parks Service—Karl Beard said he and the Canalway Corporation are working on a water trail plan from Rome to Waterford on the Erie Canal. Also has a grant for a water trail guide of the canal.

NPS is working on 28 miles of rail-trail connections in Ulster County. One at Ashokan Reservoir is over 11 miles.

In Dutchess County NPS is working with the health department on a Parks Rx program. It is also focusing on urban areas, including Albany and Rensselaer. Karl expressed frustration at having to turn down several projects for lack of time and staff.

NYSDOT—Tom Benware: A Pedestrian Safety Action Plan getting in high gear, with education, enforcement, and engineering elements.

DOT is working on a GIS map of bike routes in NYS, hoping to explore synergies with Empire State Trail.

DOT is also putting together a FHWA highway safety program. Dan Gruen asked to have horses included. Ivan Vamos said current rules do not cite specifically what is a safe distance. Ivan, Carol, Dominic, Dan and Mark will work on crafting a letter to legislators about vulnerable users and safe distances.

Jane Daniels mentioned the Hudson River Valley Ramble in September. Go to the Hudson Valley Greenway website to register.

Old Business

Carol discussed this year's National Trails Day letter from the Trails Council. Look for it in an email and review it by April 20 so it is ready by May.

New Business

Motion to adjourn: Tom Casey Second: Bob Bryant

Next Meeting: Saturday, October 14, 10:30 AM at Saratoga Spa State Park.