

**Washington State Parks
WINTER RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
2024 Winter Meeting
February 3rd, 2024
Minutes**

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

John Baranowski (Chair, Area 5)
Peter Valaas (Area 2)
Jim Rhodes (Area 1)
Dave Phillips (Area 6)
Tim Penelerick- (Motorized)
Glen Warren (Motorized)
Emilie Blevins (Area 4)
Joe Chavez (DNR)
Tony Leonetti (WDFW)

Washington State Parks Staff:

Corey Tolar (Manager, Winter Recreation Program)
Travis Larson (Winter Recreation)
Kari McNay (Winter Recreation)

Guests

Lara Gricar, WA State Parks Eastern Region
Keegan Hull, USFS

Saturday February 3, 2024, Agenda

Item	Summary	Action
Welcome, Introductions, and House Keeping, New Member Introductions	John Baranowski welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.	No Action
Review Agenda	John moved onto reviewing the agenda and no changes were requested.	No Action
Review and Approve Summer Meeting Minutes	John asked if any committee members had any additions to the meeting minutes. Peter Valaas motioned to approve the minutes. Joe Chavez seconded the motion. John called for a vote. Motion passed unanimously.	Motion Passed
Program Manager Update	<p>Corey Tolar, Winter Rec Program Manager</p> <p>Corey briefed the committee on the general status of the program. He reported the efforts made by State Parks for ADA improvements in sno-parks such as Crystal Springs- toilets, signage, etc. Addressed the vandalism of an ADA toilet at Crystal Springs. Summarized the youth outings to Hyak put on with the allotted youth outreach funds.</p> <p>John mentioned liability challenges with youth outings, noting that school field trips seem to be the safest way to accomplish these. Also mentioned that Lara [at Mt. Spokane] has shown interest in this program. Mentioned that the USFS has a similar youth winter rec outreach program (as informed by Naches RD).</p> <p>Reported the safety issues at Pineside Sno-park with a reportedly dangerous individual, causing grooming operations to shut down there.</p> <p>Mentioned upcoming changes to the structure of the summer budget meeting, with the addition of staff recommendations and more orderly</p> <p>Jim asked if we set aside money for transportation outreach in the I-90 corridor. Corey confirmed that we have, but due to staffing and weather conditions, that money has not been touched. Peter asked where unused budget funds go after the fiscal year ends and Corey confirmed that those funds stay in the program and carry over.</p> <p>Joe asked about the progress with the Lake Easton groomer. Corey confirmed that the groomer has been purchased and after a late start to the season it has been in operation. Tim elaborated on this, and the committee discussed the details of the groomer. Tim asked about the snowcat that was replaced at Lake Easton and Corey/Travis confirmed that it was used for trade-in. Discussion of how surplusage works followed.</p>	

	<p>Dave Phillips brought up a concern regarding public transportation trends and the lack of bussing to sno-parks.</p>	
<p>Committee Members Area Reports</p>	<p>John moved on to committee member reports starting with Michael Burns.</p> <p>Emilie Blevins, Area 4 Briefed the committee on an organizing meeting with different entities prior to the season. Mentioned a challenge with getting real-time information on road status, which is crucial for groups and recreators who must travel to sno-parks. Reported that communications have been a challenge affecting the number of people able or willing to get out on the trails. Mentioned that the status of grooming has been good.</p> <p>Jim Rhodes, Area 1 Noted the challenges with snow conditions this season. Mentioned working with Cascadia Daily News to communicate with Whatcom County.</p> <p>Dave Phillips, Area 6 Reported lower participation than past few years due to snow conditions.</p> <p>Tony Leonetti, WDFW Noted that WDFW has been focusing more on writing tickets as opposed to giving 14 days' notice as has been done in the past. Due to lack of snow this season, this hasn't been a major issue.</p> <p>John Baranowski, Area 5 Mentioned the portable warming hut built and the inability to get a liability policy, which caused a delayed open. The USFS agreed to take possession and ownership of this. Will go through Wenatchee RD. Warned committee about the difficulty in opening warming huts. Discussion regarding warming huts in different areas followed.</p> <p>Posed question received about the multiple towing vehicles per permit issue. Corey mentioned public feedback regarding multiple vehicles, asked the committee for feedback. Also asked for feedback regarding permit placement in the vehicle. Peter mentioned that this concern has come up every year. Mentioned that when prices were lower it made sense to only have one per vehicle. Suggested, due to raised prices, that we open it to 2 vehicles. John supported leaving this as is. Emilie showed support for the 2-vehicle option. Travis briefed the committee on the feedback that the staff has received from the public on this issue. Noted that the 2-vehicle pass would help with vehicle transfer issues. John mentioned the current abuse of the permit system. Joe mentioned the issue DNR has found with people taking both vehicles at the same time with a single, two-vehicle permit. Travis mentioned that if we want to implement a change, we would either need to have a special session or implement it in a later fiscal year. The committee discusses the details of this issue further. Corey reminded the committee that before any changes to the passes can be</p>	<p>Permits subcommittee formed. Emilie Blevins elected as committee chair.</p>

	<p>implemented, Winter Rec would have to send it through the Commission and the Legislature. Peter suggested a subcommittee for this issue. Emilie volunteered to further look into this issue. John asks for other volunteers for a subcommittee. Tim and Joe also raise their hands. Emilie elected as chair of this subcommittee.</p> <p>Peter Valaas, Area 2 Reported grooming began late December. All areas have received adequate snow and think they can hold on a bit longer. Reported good grooming conditions at Lake Wenatchee. Noted that Ice Rink never opened this season and requested this be looked at during the summer budget meeting. Praised the Lake Wenatchee grooming reports. Noted that White Pine (newly funded sno-park) as “dead in the water” and unopened. Stemilt (also newly funded) made progress but did not open this year either. Travis updated the committee regarding snow removal contracts in the area. Peter notes potential for Stemilt in future season.</p> <p>Read report from Jon Brown with Loup Loup about satisfied userbase with grooming. Noted that Loup Loup will be better working on updating their grooming calendars and conditions for the public. Jim asked for receipt of user count for South Summit.</p> <p>Glen Warren, Motorized</p> <p>Tim Penerelick, Motorized Noted wet snow, need for rubber tracks to start the grooming season earlier, especially with Lake Easton. Mentioned that he has received public concern regarding the lack of grooming in certain I-90 sno-parks, despite grooming at Cabin Creek. Travis mentioned that Lake Easton may request another side-by-side for early grooming, but Winter Rec has suggested rubber tracks. Tim mentioned request made in last summer’s meeting for both motorized and non-motorized E&E from USFS. Noted lack of USFS E&E presence this year and stated that he will not be requesting this moving forward. Mentioned the possibility of Gold Creek being shut down for 2 years beginning in the 24/25 season. Asked the committee if there are any other updates on this. No new updates.</p> <p>Joe Chavez Mentioned the strategic plan being put forth by DNR. No other updates.</p>	
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<p>Special Groomed Sticker Discussion</p>	<p>John moved on to the special groomed sticker discussion.</p> <p>John Baranowski, Area 5 Invited discussion regarding what should trigger the need for the special groomed sticker.</p> <p>Corey stated that 4+ days a week of grooming constitutes the need for a sticker, notes that 3 days doesn't meet the criteria in his opinion. Invites discussion.</p> <p>Committee discusses the need for enforcement to make the special groomed program effective/functional.</p> <p>John brings up the need for stronger guidelines when implementing special groomed status. Tim asks if we are looking for a motion. John states need for further conversation. Corey notes that current special groomed areas average roughly 4.5 days of grooming. Mentions that 4 days a week is a majority of the week, which could be a good standard for special groomed status.</p> <p>After discussion about grooming frequency, John calls for motion. Peter motions that 4 days a week be the grooming standard for special groomed and that Priority 5 & 6 hurdles must be cleared before status can be granted. Motion seconded. Motion passed.</p>	<p>Motion Passed</p>
<p>Groomer Reports</p>	<p>Keegan Hull, USFS Noted issues with snow conditions in the Colville area. Spending time filling tree wells and managing wet snow. Spending time working with school groups and USAF survival school to make sure that groom routes are not negatively affected by either and that grooming is done immediately after. Mentions issues with berms and barricades in the area. Usually this is not an issue, but due to poorer snow conditions, this year has been more of a problem. Summarized grooming equipment.</p> <p>John asks about training for grooming. Keegan noted that he spent a lot of time in grooming forums and information provided by Tidd Tech.</p> <p>Travis asks about frequency. Keegan notes that this year, due to snow conditions, they are averaging roughly one day per week.</p>	<p>Information Only</p>
<p>Break</p>	<p>Committee breaks for 15 minutes</p>	
	<p>Committee reconvenes.</p> <p>Travis presents repairs update. Notes very few non-motorized repairs this season. Corey mentions that Naches RD has reached out stating grooming has been affected by equipment constraints. Warns committee that there may be a funding application coming up from them.</p> <p>Jim asks how long the equipment lasts. Corey notes that DES "useful life" is 10 years. Travis notes shift in committee that repairs are the responsibility of groomers now.</p>	<p>No Action Taken</p>

	<p>Jim asks about expenditures. Corey states that Winter Rec does not have official and accurate data yet. Travis notes that right now, expenditures would be low as we have only received December billing for those who had enough snow to operate then.</p> <p>Corey mentions challenges with Marble Mtn and Naches budgets, requiring us to cut into emergency snow removal budget (roughly \$5k of \$30k allotted). Corey mentions that a few sno-parks on the snowmobile side were closed this year due to inability to find contractors to plow.</p> <p>Returning to equipment, Joe asks who provides maintenance for operations purchased snowcats. Corey states that he believes Parks (not WR) pays for those repairs but will verify this. Joe also asks if we will have a “cleaned up” equipment list for the summer meetings. Corey agrees that we will.</p>	
Sno-Park Permit Sales Numbers	<p>Travis begins presentation for online permit sales up to 1/29/24.</p> <p>Online sales are down from last year but have been trending up since January. IT has reported that we are at about 80% of last year’s online sales. Notes that revenue-wise, this will be a down year, but will also be a down-year in terms of expenditures due to lack of snow as well.</p> <p>Travis notes that Winter Rec has received encouraging reports regarding Parkeons and from vendors.</p>	Information Only
Committee Sidebar (Non-Motorized & Motorized Revenue)	<p>Tim addresses the non-motorized usage of motorized sno-parks and the motorized funds being used for these activities. Also notes the lack of one-day passes for motorized activity, leading to daily permits being sold to motorized users, without the motorized budget receiving funds from sales.</p> <p>Winter Recreation concludes that usage data would be needed to address this issue further. Committee discussion follows.</p>	No Action Taken
Finance Subcommittee Report	<p>John presents report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Provides background for windfall sales/windfall spend. -Notes that actual spending has gone up significantly since last year’s budget. Notes that “endorsed permit” grouping does not bear significant burden of non-endorsed group. Not necessarily subsidizing other parks. -Addresses forecast assumptions: 2.5% across-the-board increases, \$30k/yr additional priority 5/6, flat permit sales, 95-97% of budget spent. -Presents projections for SY24-25, 25-26, & 26-27.- By projections, program would be required to cut \$183,923 from the program assuming that expenditures are maintained. -States this is a “warning call” for program. -Lists considerations: 1. \$10 fee increase to seasonal permit, would fund for ~5 years if we don’t increase priority 5/6 approvals. -Bottom line: Consider increase, but ALSO consider <i>fiscal restraint</i> with new projects (priority 5/6). 	Information Only

	<p>Discussion of assumptions and conclusions follows. Peter suggests that fiscal restraint is necessary now, fee increases can be held off.</p> <p>Jim suggests not approving any new priority 5/6 projects this year. Peter suggests not rolling Year 1s, 2s forward. John notes that it is precedent to roll those forward, but not required.</p> <p>Corey states that Year 2s approved last year were \$35k, Year 1s were \$110k. Travis notes ongoing legislative action to bring Winter Rec interest back to program from general fund (~\$80k).</p> <p>John concludes presentation with no official conclusion/request.</p>	
Lunch	<p>Committee breaks for lunch.</p>	
	<p>Committee reconvenes after the lunch break.</p> <p>Lara Gricar (Inland Manager WA State Parks) and Paul Knowles introduce themselves and begin a presentation on happenings at Mt. Spokane State Park.</p> <p><i>Acquisition:</i> Bear Creek Lodge- purchased last fall through RCO grant & park land acquisition account. In current legislative session, asked for funds for assessments- structural, HVAC, water, etc. The property is adjacent to the park and has trail connectivity (snowmobile loop/mountain biking) and opens up more parking to avoid hitting capacity as early during peak seasons. Looking into a shuttle service for Mt. Spokane State Park. No real plan for property until assessments are done. Tubing, snow play, camping, etc. considered for area. Lodge may be used for either park office, temporary housing, restaurant, environmental learning center, etc. Multiple organizations interested, so RFP will go out. Facility on land being considered for park housing as well. Emilie asks about creek crossings in the area. Bridge exists but is old/aging. Committee poses questions about the operation of the sledding hill. Lara mentions that State Parks would find a concessionaire to run that and would not be running it on their own.</p> <p>Paul begins presenting. Notes that he is developing a trail plan for Mt. Spokane (last update was 2014 and new recreational trends need to be accounted for, snowmobile trail system has decreased with closures). Phase 1 plan involves research, inventory, assessments, use counts (summer and winter). Demographics and population growth will affect plan- biggest public concern. Paul notes that usage at Mt. Spokane increases roughly 5x during winter from summer. Mt. Spokane snowmobiling has the smallest trail system in the region (due to IEP lands becoming unavailable). The Nordic trail system is largest. Discusses winter use agreements- Inland Empire Paper Cooperative Agreement, Riley Creek Lumber Winter Use Agreement, Idaho Dept of Lands Use Permit (Nordic). Goes over inventory for Nordic and snowmobile trail systems. Introduces public engagement plan (phase 2). Winter Rec will be a part of agency/program engagement. A task force will be assembled for this plan. Should be done by end of year. Winter Rec will be continually updated as plan progresses.</p>	Information Only

Website Update	Travis introduces new website to committee and walks them through the pages related to Winter Recreation. Committee discusses the mobile layout of the new website and the difficulty that they have had navigating on mobile.	Information Only
CCWRC	Corey begins a presentation on behalf of Karen Behm from the CCWRC. This includes updates regarding Hyak, Asahel Curtis, Gold Creek, Easton Reload, Cabin Creek, and Crystal Springs. This includes the updates on their Priority 5/6 signage at Crystal Springs. Karen's contact information was provided to the committee for further questions/comments.	Information Only
CCRA	Corey provides update on behalf of Joy Cordell regarding the status of ADA at Cabin Creek and Crystal springs and other CCRA efforts.	Information Only
Terms/Elections	<p>Travis notes that after the summer meeting, Jim, John, and Tim's terms will expire. Reminds these members to look for individuals to fill their positions. Requests that these individuals send in applications and suggests possibly bringing potential nominees to the summer meeting.</p> <p>Travis shares that Mike Burns has denied the chair position via email.</p> <p>Peter nominated Emilie as chair. This nomination was seconded. Emilie accepted the nomination.</p> <p>Emilie was elected as chair.</p> <p>Peter nominated Glenn as vice chair, The nomination was seconded. Glenn denied the nomination.</p> <p>Tim nominates Peter for vice-chair. This nomination was seconded. Peter accepts the nomination.</p> <p>Vote held for Peter; Vote held for Mike.</p> <p>Peter Valaas elected as vice-chair.</p>	<p>Emilie Blevins elected as Chair.</p> <p>Peter Valaas elected as Vice-Chair.</p>
Next Meeting, Date, Time, Location	<p>Committee discusses various dates for the summer meeting. Corey provides a preferred month of August. Travis notes that the 17th of August is open for WRAC as the SMAC will be at a WSSA event. Notes that motorized reps may be in conflict.</p> <p>August 10th proposed for meeting. Group decides on August 9-10 in Yakima, WA. Arrangements will be made by Winter Rec staff. Loose discussion of agenda follows. Meeting will likely start Friday evening for a couple of hours and will pick up in morning on Saturday.</p>	Summer meeting to be held August 9-10 in Yakima, WA. Arrangements to be made by Staff.
Adjourn	John closed the meeting and thanked everyone.	

