

September 3, 2020 3:00 PM ET
Wooded View Golf Course Patio
2404 Greentree North
Clarksville, IN 47129

Attendance

Board Members Present:

ATV Users- Tim Garrett*
Bicyclists- Greg Midgley
Equestrians- Yvette Rollins
Health/Higher Education- Pete Fritz*
Hikers- Terry Fletcher
Off-Road Motorcyclists- Rayce Guthrie
Pedestrians- Pat Martin*
Snowmobilers- Len Neisler*
Trails Support Groups- Angie Pool*
Users with Disabilities- Zully JF Alvarado*
Water Trail Users- Margaret Easton

Board Members Not Present:

Environmental Groups- Jenny Blake
Four Wheel Drive Users- Ryan Sweany
Mountain Bikers- Rich Moore
Parks & Recreation Agencies- Travis
Tranbarger

DNR Staff:

Allen Hurst- Outdoor Recreation
Amy Marisavljevic- Outdoor Recreation
Carman Jackson*- Outdoor Recreation
Dale Brier*- Outdoor Recreation

Guests:

Andrea Irland*- National Park Service
David Rollins
Jay Jackson- ABATE
John Bawcum- Panhandle Pathway
Julee Guthrie
Phillip Williams - Align Southern Indiana Trails
Richard Vonnegut- Indiana Trails

* Attended virtually

Meeting Minutes

Welcome & Introductions

Chair Terry Fletcher welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM ET. He thanked everyone in attendance for coming and initiated introductions. All Trails Advisory Board (TAB) members, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff, and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of the Agenda

Fletcher called for approval of the agenda. Margaret Easton motioned to approve the agenda and Rayce Guthrie seconded. Motion passed.

Review and Approval of December 5, 2019 minutes

Yvette Rollins noted a mix up of organizations within the equestrian user report. Greg Midgley motioned to accept the minutes with corrections and Rollins seconded. Motion passed.

DNR Report

Amy Marisavljevic announced that Dan Bortner is the new DNR Director. Bortner, who was formerly the Director of Indiana State Parks, started the new position in August.

Marisavljevic then moved on to the new Indiana Trails Program (ITP), the trails grant program that will be replace the existing Recreation Trails Program (RTP). She stated the amount of money and allocation of funds will be the exact same as the RTP. The Trails Advisory Board would also continue. The main difference is that the monies provided to grantees will now be state funds rather than federal funds. This change will allow grantees to bypass several federal processes, which should make them potentially more cost and time effective. Although the funds will be exchanged by INDOT, the DNR will continue to administer the grant program.

Jay Jackson asked how the arrangement between INDOT and DNR was established. Marisavljevic replied there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place that will be renewed each year. Jackson expressed concerns if the staff changed at INDOT to those who are not trail friendly that it may jeopardize the funds for projects. Marisavljevic replied that either agency could decide not to renew the annual MOU and if they did, the program would revert to RTP.

Andrea Ireland asked if Michigan opted out of RTP similar to Indiana. Marisavljevic answered they have not. Connecticut and Florida are the other two states that have previously opted out. Dale Brier added that they opted out for different reasons and that Indiana is the forerunner in this endeavor. He stated that ITP will have some slight changes to the criteria for 2021, but may have more changes in future years. He hoped to have more to share in December. He encouraged TAB feedback and to reach out to him with further questions.

Marisavljevic announced that Congress passed the Great American Outdoor Act, which fully and permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF will provide more federal money for federal public lands, including National Parks, Forests, Recreation Areas, and Wildlife Refuges. It also increases, by around double, state side funds available in Indiana for grants that go to state and local public lands. LWCF grants are a 50/50 match and can fund public land acquisition and outdoor recreation facility development. Applicants must have a park board and a five-year master plan. Those interested in the program should contact Bob Bronson.

Marisavljevic announced the 'Where to Paddle' interactive map launched at the start of July to great success. The map displays public access sites, rental locations, real-time stream data, river miles, low-head dams, and more to assist paddlers with safe trip planning. It has already had many visitors and received good press. She credited Allen Hurst for his work on the new resource.

Carman Jackson reported that the assistant property manager position has been approved at Redbird State Recreation Area (SRA). She will be reviewing applicants shortly. The Fall Night Ride is still planned on Oct 24-25. Lastly, she announced many new lake access sites at Interlake SRA had been added to the 'Where to Fish' interactive map.

Brier noted the significance of the assistant manager position approval due to Indiana's current hiring freeze. The only positions getting filled are 'critical positions.' The Division of Outdoor Recreation itself is operating with a 35% vacancy.

Old Business

Next Level Trails Update

Marisavljevic noted today's Discovery Trail opening in Clarksville. The 1.9 mile multi-use paved trail, which was funded by Next Level Trails (NLT), connects Clarksville to several trails, including the Ohio River Greenway. Both the Veterans Memorial Trail in Hebron and the Conklin Bay Boardwalk and Trail in Syracuse opened earlier this summer. Several other NLT projects from the first round are under construction and should be completed within the next several months. First round projects should develop over 42 miles of trail by the end of 2022. She reported that rounds two and three of the NLT program were put on hold in May due to the pandemic and economic fallout.

June Zoom Meeting Recap

Marisavljevic presented a brief overview of the informal meeting in June held over Zoom. Participants discussed how COVID-19 had impacted their recreation and the trails. Universally outdoor recreation use has increased, with significant surges seen in the spring. However, many trail related events were postponed or cancelled. Trail managers also had to deal with restroom, maintenance, and volunteer issues.

Phillip Williams mentioned how their Corydon trail counter went from 3,500 up to 11,000. Jay Jackson asked how trails counters worked. Williams replied they are usually a simple beam that gets tripped.

RTP Projects for FY2020

Hurst handed out the overview RTP 2020 reports showcasing the two awarded non-motorized projects, the Fishing Line Trail and the Tipton Trails-Phase II. The report also showed the designation of monies to the motorized properties, administration costs, and education set-aside. After an overview of the RTP projects Marisavljevic asked for a vote to recommend these awardees. Easton so moved and Midgley seconded. The motion passed and Fletcher signed off on the awardees.

New Business

Statewide Trails Count Analysis

Marisavljevic reported that the Division of Outdoor Recreation launched the new Indiana Trail Count Analysis. The analysis looks at statewide trail counter data from 2019 and early 2020. The first report was issued on June 30 and a new report will be coming in the next week or so. The results of the second report revealed a 67% increase of trail users in May 2020 from the same time in 2019. A 38% increase was reported in June. July saw only a 7% increase, but all the data was not yet in for that month. The first half of the 2020 saw a 52% increase from the same period in 2019. She thanked all the trail managers and stakeholders for voluntarily sharing their data. She hopes more trails will participate in the analysis in the future and those without counters will consider them.

Marisavljevic also noted trail use is up across the country citing the Rails-to-Trails and other reports. Guthrie noted the Lawrence County Recreational Park is seeing a big increase as well. Marisavljevic added that Interlake SRA also had a record month in revenue following a few months where fees were waived. She noted all of this helps show the importance of trails and outdoor recreation.

Other Business

Richard Vonnegut discussed a need for bicycle and pedestrian access over the Ohio River between Evansville, Indiana and Henderson, Kentucky. He noted that there are no plans for dedicated bike/pedestrian facilities on the new I-69 bridge. He hopes this can be incorporated or a new bridge with access planned.

John Bawcum announced that 29-mile road ride connector between the Panhandle Pathway and the Nickle Plate Trail had been officially signed. The road route connects the two trails from Logansport through Peru.

User Group Reports

ATVs – Garrett reported that ATV use is going well through the pandemic as users are still able to get out and observe social distancing. Some events continue to go forward while others are cancelled depending on local conditions.

Bicyclists – Midgley reported that several cycling events were cancelled, but many are beginning to be rescheduled. The B&O Bicycle Tour has been rescheduled to September 19. The White Lick Creek and Vandalia Trail Alliance is hosting the Airport Loop Bike Ride, a 20-mile fundraising ride around the Indianapolis Airport, on October 3. The last monthly National Road Heritage Trail Ride will also be September 19.

Midgley reported that several trails were developed or improved this year. In spring, INDOT started construction its one-mile causeway trail connecting Terra Haute and West Terre Haute. Indianapolis is current working on extensions of the Pennsy Trail. One extension should be open in fall and another extension in 2021. The Indianapolis Monon Trail bridge over 38th Street has been put in place and should be open by end of 2021. Marisavljevic added that a large section of the Fall Creek Trail was re-paved, while a new extension heading south should be done later this year.

Environmental Groups – No report.

Equestrians – Rollins reported the Greenways Foundation's (GF) Annual Luncheon has been re-scheduled for September 24 and will be virtual this year. The program will include footage of awardees receiving the GF's seven different awards. This includes awarding the Legacy Award to Governor Holcomb for his contributions to trails. The luncheon fee has a reduced rate due to no food. Visit GF's website for more information on registration.

Although the Annual Luncheon is a large fundraiser, the main source of revenue for the GF is their specialty license plate program. The GF uses these funds to provide grants. The GF will give away up to \$40k for projects. Rollins stated applicants can apply for up to \$10k and applications are still being accepted for those interested.

The Hoosier Backcountry Horsemen (HBH) have worked diligently in Hoosier National Forest. The trails there never closed and had high user impact. HBH, along with other organizations, have secured a gravel hauler and it's in high demand. The Red Hat Purple Chaps just finished working on the Vandalia Trail.

The Indiana Trail Riders Associations (ITRA) did 190 work hours in the Versailles Trail system in in 3 days. ITRA did work in Brown County and O'Bannon Woods. Rollins did trail work at Greene Sullivan State Forest on National Trails Day. Lastly, The Midwest Trail Ride is September 18-20 and it's ITRA's major fundraiser. All money raised goes to the trails.

Four Wheel Drive Users – No report.

Health/Higher Education – Pete Fritz reported on the multiagency bicycle and pedestrian work group that includes the Indiana State Department of Health. The work group rolled out a statewide survey for active transportation. Their aim is to help communities collaborate with necessary agencies and stakeholders to better implement active transportation projects. The survey takes about 15 minutes and asks communities what help they need to better create active transportation opportunities. The survey will remain open to the end of September or early October.

Hikers – Fletcher reported that most trail running events and trail workdays had been cancelled in response to the pandemic. He thought the Tecumseh Trail Marathon in mid-October may still happen with some restrictions. DINO was able to host small trail running and mountain biking events this year.

Fletcher reported that a part of the Tecumseh Trail near Indiana Hill Rd has been closed requiring hikers to bypass the section. He also noted a new shelter was built along the trail in the backcountry close to Wedding Chapel and Low Gap.

Mountain Biker – No report.

Off-Road Motorcyclists – Guthrie reported that the off-road industry is up 53% and lot of those sales are being driven by new users. However, the street bike industry is down. Racing events around the state were shut down for several months but are coming back with above average participation. Races are observing social distancing policies.

Lawrence County Recreational Park (LCRP) is seeing an increase in both off-roading and camping. Guthrie announced that the Southern Indiana Grand Prix has an event at LCRP the upcoming Saturday. LCRP will also host a Halloween event that includes a campout, adventure ride, night ride, movie night, and trick-or-treat at the campground.

Parks & Recreation Agencies – No report.

Pedestrians – No report.

Snowmobiles – Neisler reported little activity regarding snowmobiling over the summer months. There is an ATV event on September 26. The Indiana Snowmobilers Association Annual Ride-In is up in their air as hotels were not taking reservations.

Trails Support Groups – Angie Pool reported that the Indiana Trail Caucus launched in March right before COVID-19 restrictions went into full effect. The caucus will help push trail initiatives in the Indiana Legislature, including securing maintenance monies. The GF Annual Luncheon will go virtual this year in response to the pandemic. The award ceremony will occur during the virtual program. Pool reminded the TAB that the GF has grant funds for trails.

The Cardinal Greenway (CG), which remained open during the pandemic, has seen about triple the users. Issues with their portable toilets, which caused an uproar when they were not placed, have since been resolved. The CG cancelled their summer events. The Biketoberfest Ride will go virtual on October 5. The Turkey Trot event on Thanksgiving morning is likely also going virtual. Overall, Pool reported it had been a stressful year for non-profit trails.

Marisavljevic asked Pool about the Kitzelman Bridge and Trailhead. Pool replied phase one and two are finished, which include the bridge deck. The CG is raising match money for phase three and she hoped the bridge will be open to the public in October.

Users with Disabilities – Zully JF Alvarado reported users with disabilities are at increased risk to COVID, but there have been great opportunities recently to get trails truly accessible to all. She had received a call from the DNR about helping to purchase accessible trail equipment for Indiana Dunes State Park. The DNR will purchase three accessible chairs for the beach and nature center. Additionally, Indiana Dunes National Park has also increased their accessibility equipment. Alvarado stated there is a listing of all their accessible equipment.

Alvarado thanked Easton for referring her to the Elkhart Parks Superintendent who is looking to add accessible launches in their area. She recommended two potential sites for an accessible launch on the St. Joseph River and hopes to see them in 2021 or 2022. Marisavljevic added that two accessible launches were added by the Vigo County Parks this year.

Water Trail Users – Easton reported that her Paddle Michiana partnered with the Town of Bristol and their local library for a successful paddling event on the St Joseph River. Similarly, there was the Poker Paddle on Syracuse Lake. She was encouraged that different organizations and municipalities are realizing water-based activities are a tremendous opportunity for fundraisers and events.

Easton stated Elkhart County Parks Department (ECPD) has begun to open a 150-year-old hydro canal and had one workday so far. A highlight of the workday was engaging youth volunteers to assist. So far, 40 hours have cleared about a half a mile of canal with the eventual goal to clear two miles. When complete, the ECPD hopes to open it for paddling as well as get a historic designation for the canal. She also reported the low-head dam on the Elkhart River in Elkhart had been removed and the access site nearby is almost complete.

Easton noted that Northwest Indiana Paddling Association (NWIPA) cancelled all their events due to the pandemic. NWIPA have also applied for a \$250k grant for clearing final 16 miles of Little Calumet River to connect to lake Michigan. She stated North East Indiana Paddlers Association (NEIPA) completed a boat launch on the Wabash River near Bluffton. It is a hand carry boat launch. NEIPA did a virtual fundraiser and the funds raised are going towards water trail signage on a section downstream of the new access site and for maps. Easton reported there is now a permitting process for getting water trail signs mounted to bridges.

Friends of the White River is working on a new access site at Oliver Woods Nature Preserve. It will be open in 2021. Their 'My White River' app is completed. The Indiana Paddlesport Alliance (IPA) is applying for a GF startup grant. IPA will be sharing a physical address with NWIPA. Lastly, Easton noted increased activity on the water during the pandemic, which has both positive and negative effects.

Announcements

- September 24- Greenways Foundation Virtual Luncheon
- September 26- National Public Lands Day
- October 24-25- Fall Night Ride, Redbird SRA

2020 Meeting Dates

December 3, 2020

Adjournment

Fletcher asked for a motion to adjourn. Rollins made a motion and Midgley seconded. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 4:40 PM.