

Tower Area Trails Plan
Steering Committee Meeting #2
October 4, 2021, 4:00 p.m.
Breitung Township Community Center

Goal of Meeting: Review survey results, identify conceptual trail connections,
and identify biggest barriers to maintenance of existing trails.

SUMMARY

Welcome and Introductions

Russell Habermann, Senior Planner at ARDC Planner, welcomed attendees and asked them to introduce themselves.

Attendees: Dan Broten (Penguins Snowmobile Club & Prospectors ATV Club), Brad Dekkers (DNR Trails), Aaron Kania (Citizen), Steve Lotz (Lake Vermilion Trail JPB), Bob Manzoline (Mesabi Trail), Kevin Norby (Tower City Council), Michael Schultz (TEDA), Mary Shedd (Howard Wagoner Ski Trail), Dianna Sunsdahl (Breitung Township), Roxanne Tea (Citizen)

Survey Results Review

Habermann summarized results of the Tower Area Trails Survey, which was administered from August 16 to September 15. When asked for their reaction to the results, attendees noted the following:

- Maintenance needs of the Mesabi Trail were mentioned by respondents, and there is upcoming work planned for the trail
- The feedback provided was not surprising, and it was good to see that everything desired was realistic/doable
- There wasn't a lot of input about motorized trails
- There seemed to be confusion about what trails are available in the area, which demonstrates a need for better communication about trails and a reason to develop a single information point for Tower area trails
- The results provide a good "snapshot" of what we have versus what is desired – it will be a good basis for our trails planning work

As a side comment about ATVs, attendees noted that Tower has not opened all roads up to ATV use; but there are designated alleys where ATVs are allowed to make connections.

Exercise: Conceptual Trail Connections

Habermann set up posters that identified existing trails, identified issues, and draft goals for each trail use activity in the area. He asked attendees to spend some time reading through the posters and making comments/additions/corrections on them. Habermann also provided maps of existing trails with desired trail destinations for reference.

Information on each of the posters (including notes from attendees in parentheses) is identified below.

□ **Hiking**

- Ancient Cedars
- Howard Wagoner – Summer
- Jasper Peak
- LVSP/SUMSP
- Bear Head Lead SP
- Arrowhead State Trail (A lot of wetlands)
- Taconite State Trail (A lot of wetlands)
- Hiking trails north of Tower (Separate from ATV Trails, Quiet Rec, Connect to Hoodoo)
- Around the Horn

ID'd Issues

- (Maintenance)
- Washroom access
- Lack of rest areas
- (Restrooms)
- (Parking)
- (Connect networks)

Draft Goals

- ID washroom needs
- ID rest area needs
- Develop trail info hub
- North Country Trail routing (Campsites, back country/backpacking)
- Master all-trails maps

□ **Walking/Wheeling**

- Hoodoo-McKinley Trail Loop
- Harbor Trail (Sidewalk from marina to town sidewalks)
- Mesabi Trail (Maintenance)
- Bois Forte Trail
- (Mountain bike north of Tower)

ID'd Issues

- Pavement Quality – Hoodoo Trail & Mesabi (*)
- Trail bridge west of Junction Road
- Trailside vegetation management
- Winter trail maintenance – Plowing (*, Groom for skate ski)
- Poor communication about trail/allowed use
- Road crossing signage
- Washroom/rest areas (*, Signs and timed locks)

Draft Goals

- Complete Mesabi Trail – to Ely and Embarrass
- Reconstruct Mesabi between Tower and Soudan
- Construct Lake Vermilion Trail from Tower to Y-Store (Pike Bay Drive)
- Complete Hoodoo-McKinley trail loop
- Connect Harbor Trail to Marina and Mesabi – through playground park
- Develop trail information hub (*)
- Road crossing signage needs
- ID washroom and rest area needs

□ **Skiiing**

- Howard Wagoner (Track ski, Classic style)
- Fortune Bay
- Bear Head Lake SP
- (Mesabi Trail Skate Ski – LVSP to Ely)

ID'd Issues

- No trails in LVSP (Loops, conflict with snowmobile)
- No lights along trails (Cost)
- Washroom access/rest areas
- Dogs allowed?
- (Maintenance)
- (Sled dog trails?)
- (Snowshoeing)

Draft Goals

- Groom LVSP hiking trails for skiing
- ID washroom/rest area needs
- Communicate about allowing dogs/skijoring (Decision needed, Designate dog/skijoring trails – Extension?)
- (Master all-trails map)
- (Skate ski extension to Wagoner)
- (Other extension on west side – another 2-3K possible)
- (Designation as year-round non-motorized – then it can be enforced)

□ **ATVing**

- Tower to McKinley Park Trail (Northside loop?)
- Prospector Loop
- Taconite State Trail – Select segments

ID'd Issues

- (Need designated routes only)
- Taconite Trail quality
- Connections – Hoodoo to Soudan, Soudan to Prospector (Being designed/constructed – Murray to Soudan)

- Access to overnight accommodations
- Washroom access/rest areas?
- Side-by-side trail use? (Allowed almost everywhere ATV Class I are allowed)
- (Resource damage)
- (Priorities on dual use trails [ski])

Draft Goals

- Maintenance of Tower to McKinley Park Trail (Part of Prospector grant-in-aid)
- Construct trails that parallel paved trail system
- ID UTV demand in northern St. Louis County
- (Master all-trails map)

Snowmobiling

- Tower Area Trail
- Iron Ore Trail
- Putnam & Fishing Lakes (Can't get to)
- Arrowhead State Trail
- Taconite State Trail

ID'd Needs

- Washroom/rest areas
- (Clear signage through town)
- (What is not open in summer?)

Draft Goals

- ID washroom/rest area needs (Existing trail shelters need maintenance/replacement)
- (Parking vs. rest area? – Focused on communities)
- (Permanent easements/ROW for non-state trails)
- (Master all-trails map)

Water Trails

- ???
- (Lake Vermilion kayak trail)
- (Connections/portages to Burntside/Bear Island, Bear Head)
- (From Harbor out to Pike Bay)
- (Also to Swedetown Bay lunch spot)

Other (Snowshoeing, MTBing, Horse Riding)

- Snowshoe: Ancient Cedars, LVSP, SUMNSP, Bear Head Lake SP, Arrowhead State Trail, Taconite State Trail
- MTB: Arrowhead State Trail (?), Taconite State Trail (?) (Not good MTB trails), (Lookout/Laurentian Divide)
- Horse: Arrowhead State Trail, Taconite State Trail (Mow?)

ID'd Issues

- Maintenance of state trails for summer use
- Poor communication
- Washroom/rest areas (Trail heads, parking lots)

Draft Goals

- Develop maps – summer and winter
- Develop trail information hub
- ID MTB interest for local area
- ID washroom/rest area needs (Parking)
- (Markers)
- (Master all-trails map)
- (Maintenance)

After the exercise, Habermann asked the group to reflect on their thoughts during the exercise. Attendees expressed the following:

- Developing trails is a big task that requires lots of money
- Something that the Mesabi Trail and snowmobile trails have encountered in recent years is securing easements and renewing those easements when they time out; often, losing an easement happens when a property changes ownership
- When an easement is lost, rerouting a trail can be difficult or impossible; getting a perpetual/permanent easement is becoming an even more important part of sustainable trail management
- There seems to be public confusion and a need of clarity about the purpose of each existing and future trail; intended use dictates design, and intended/designated use is often tied to grant funding
- Long term maintenance is almost a bigger concern than development because it takes a sustained effort (and people) to keep things in shape; for example, it was an intentional choice not to include washroom facilities along the state trails – it would just be too difficult to maintain these buildings in the long-term

During this discussion, attendees also brought forward the Culture & Tourism Grant opportunity from IRRR and the Northern St. Louis County Trails Task Force, which is a forum for trail development topics in the larger area.

Discussion: What barriers exist to maintaining Tower area trails?

Habermann asked what barriers exist to maintaining Tower trails and invited the attendees to spend a few minutes offering up their thoughts.

The attendees brought forward the following barriers to trail maintenance:

- Money (both for initial construction and ongoing maintenance)
- Capacity/people (volunteers or staff)
- Information (sharing knowledge about trail systems and continually pushing the info out)

- Online presence (trail information needs to be up to date and current on agency webpages and social media)
- Making sound trail investments (trail use counting is becoming a more common metric when agencies apply for trail grant funding – we don't want to put public money into unused trails)
- Access to maintenance equipment (can equipment be shared between agencies?)
- Confusion about roles in trail ownership and maintenance (e.g., government's role in trail development and management – many governments are not bought in, though trails are a public good and governments benefit from an attractive trail system)

It was also noted during this conversation that trail kiosks are a useful tool for informing the public about trails. It was expressed that having one physical location in the area that was a well-known source of comprehensive trail information would be beneficial.

Next Steps

- ARDC Planning will develop and distribute a meeting summary.
- ARDC Planning will take the information provided at the meeting and create a draft plan.
- ARDC Planning will distribute the draft plan document to the steering committee and ask for suggested revisions to prepare the document for public review; ARDC Planning will also hold "office hour" sessions so that the steering committee can join and talk through issues as needed.
- ARDC Planning will provide a final draft document and administer a public review period.
- ARDC Planning will set up a final steering committee meeting to review public feedback and finalize the plan document.

The meeting adjourned at 5:09 pm.