

HB311 Rail Trail Study
Committee Minutes 11/9/21

Members Present: Representatives Linda Gould (Chair), Suzanne Smith (Clerk), and Greg Hill.
Senator David Watters

Guests: Joseph Gordon, (Chief of Police, Sandown), Trixie LeFevre (assistant to Sen. Avard), Dan Torrey (committee researcher) Alexis Rudko (Trails Bureau-DNCR), Craig Rennie (Director Trails Bureau DNCR), Shelley Winters DOT, Andy Bauriault (Lakes Region E-bikes), Ellen Kolb (NH Rail Trail Coalition), Matt Leahy (NH Forest Society)

Presentation by DNCR Bureau of Trails (BOT) Director, Craig Rennie.

Mr. Rennie presented a handout outlining the Bureau's history, and responsibilities and other information. He also shared maps of recreational rail trails in NH. (see attached)

Mr. Rennie stated that biggest challenge for the department is funding. BOT's funding comes from NH OHRV and snowmobile registrations as well as funding from the federal government. Funding is based on registration numbers based on an algorithm developed in 2009. He suggests that NH adjust the algorithm and not wait for Feds. There is also the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). RTP funds may be allocated to either or both motorized and non-motorized trail projects. Additionally, a portion of taxes on fuel purchased specifically for OHRVs and snowmobiles is allocated to the BOT.

He stated that the expenses related to converting abandoned rail tracks into a rail trail is very costly. The department has Best Management Practices for NH Trail Construction and Maintenance (<https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/trails-bureau/trail-maintenance>) which addresses erosion control, maintaining the natural flow of water in streams and wetlands, minimizing the risk of sediment and other pollutants getting into water bodies and provide a safe stable trail system. Department of Transportation (DOT) works with BOT and/or municipalities.

BOT currently does not have abandoned rail tracks tested for chemicals left over from rail activity over the years, herbicides sprayed along tracks or other possible toxins. If there is a known problem, then it is tested. If surface of trail is not fixed with stone then it probably needs to be tested.

Comments from Guests: Joe Gordon, chief of police Sandown testified about increased use of OHRVs and dirt bikes on the Rockingham Recreation Trail in his area. Use has increased over the years and noise is the #1 problem. Dirt bikes and OHRVs use the trail year round. In other parts of the state, trails are closed to OHRVs during the winter months. He stated that decibel limits (RSA 215A-12) cannot be enforced in the field because of competing noise.

Chief Gordon is also concerned about industrial waste along or under the rail trail. Town has a history of industrial use and the railroad was active for centuries. He also expressed concern about the waste running into the Exeter River

He would like to see lower speed limits on rail trail in residential areas, as well as better enforcement of the requirement that those between the ages of 12-16 take a safety course when using OHRVs/snowmobiles.

At the December meeting Shelley Winters and others from the Department of Transportation will present to the committee. The chair asked for input from members on other groups which should be called upon.

Rep. Gould made a motion to adjourn and Rep. Smith seconded.
The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 am.

Respectfully submitted
Suzanne Smith, Clerk



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Handout for November 9, 2021 LOB meeting regarding HB 311

Summary of the Bureau of Trails activities on State owned Rail Trails

1. Who are the Bureau of Trails (BoT)?

- The Bureau was created in 1973, by HB 10, as the “Bureau of Off-Highway Vehicles” and charged with overseeing the snowmobile and trailbike activities of the time.
- In 1993, the name changed to “Bureau of Trails” to reflect the expanding role of the Bureau, including non-motorized trails.
- Statutory authority: RSA 215-A, RSA 215-C
- The Bureau consists of 14 full-time highly skilled staff:
 - ✓ 1 Bureau Chief
 - ✓ 3 office staff for administrative and grant management
 - ✓ 3 district field supervisors
 - ✓ 7 equipment operators

2. What does the Bureau of Trails do? (RSA 215-A:3)

- Coordinate with the DNCR Division of Forest and Lands, the NH Fish and Game Dept., and the NH Dept. of Transportation to manage and maintain off-highway recreational vehicle (OHRV) and snowmobile trails in NH including:
 - ✓ Administer state and federal funds for trails
 - ✓ Act as liaison between landowners and trail users
 - ✓ Work with organized clubs in the support of the OHRV and snowmobile sport
 - ✓ Coordinate efforts to obtain easements and ROW for trails, and/or acquire property
 - ✓ We also are authorized to participate in studies on the effects of OHRV and snowmobile operations to the environment, like erosion and other potential damage
 - ✓ Provide planning, development, and maintenance for the **Statewide Trail System**
 - ✓ Promote the proper use of trails throughout the state, and protect their integrity for future generations
 - ✓ Encourage the use of trails for educational purposes through the use of signs, published material and trail adoption programs
 - ✓ Coordinate the development of the New Hampshire Heritage Trail designated in RSA 216-A:11
 - ✓ Assist communities with their trail programs
 - ✓ Support research and information gathering activities on the economic benefits of trails and improved environmental design of trails
 - ✓ Coordinate the efforts of motorized and non-motorized trail interests in the state
 - ✓ Maintain a list of recognized OHRV/snowmobile clubs
 - ✓ Recommend statutory/rule changes relating to OHRV, snowmobiles and rail trails when necessary
 - ✓ Receive all requests for OHRV/snowmobile highway road crossings and connectors

3. What is the “**Statewide Trail System?**” (RSA 216-F)
 - BoT is responsible for developing and administering a statewide trail system on state and federal lands, and assisting organizations, municipalities and trail clubs (both motorized and non-motorized) with trail-related activities on both public and private lands
 - BoT responsibilities do not include the NH Hiking Trails Network, but we do assist in helping non-motorized trails in maintenance and management on occasion
 - Included in the Bureau's management of the statewide trail system are:
 - ✓ 1000+ miles of wheeled OHRV trails
 - ✓ 7400+ miles of snowmobile trails
 - ✓ 300+ miles of state owned rail-trails

4. State Rail Trails
 - There are 19 state-owned rail trails in NH with 300+ miles of trails
 - Of these 300 miles, approximately 61 miles allow summer OHRV use
 - BoT partners with the NHDOT Bureau of Rail and Transit for management of these rail trails
 - ✓ The majority of maintenance is done by the BoT
 - ✓ The majority of land management (easement, encroachments, leases, etc.) is done by the Bureau of Rail and Transit
 - Trails with OHRV use allowed year round: Ammonoosuc, Sugar River and Rockingham Recreation Trail (Freemont branch)
 - Trails with OHRV use allowed year round, except mud season: Warren, Hillsborough, Greenville and the east portion of Presidential Rail Trail
 - Trails with OHRV use allowed with snow cover: Presidential, Profile, Cotton Valley and the Rockingham Recreation Trail (Freemont)
 - All state-owned rail trails that BoT maintains allow snowmobile use

5. How is the Bureau of Trails funded?
 - The BoT is funded *SOLELY* by OHRV/snowmobile registrations, and gas taxes on these motorized vehicles
 - ✓ All trail programs (insurance, maintenance, brochures, equipment, staff, etc.) are paid from these fees
 - The bureau does NOT receive general funds or State Parks tollbooth fees
 - The Bureau manages the Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Program, which comes from OHRV registrations, snowmobile registrations and road toll taxes (state gas tax).
 - The Bureau also manages the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), which come from federal gas taxes from fuel purchased for recreational vehicles

6. The Bureau of Trails published a Best Management Practices (BMP) manual for trail maintenance and construction activities, as required by RSA 216-F:6
 - Available free online, this manual is focused on erosion control and water quality protection. Hard copies provided.

7. Bureau of Trails information regarding fugitive dust:
 - BoT dust control efforts typically consists of applying calcium chloride or wood chips as needed for problem locations. Pavement can be used to control dust, but creates conflicts for other user groups like equestrian, mushers and snowmobilers.
 - Several OHRV clubs add calcium chloride to the rail trails to assist in controlling dust, examples include:
 - ✓ Presidential OHRV Club on the Presidential Rail Trail
 - 2021: No calcium chloride - very wet season
 - 2020: 50 bags spread
 - 2019: 100 bags spread over the season

- ✓ Ammonoosuc ATV club on the Ammonoosuc Rail Trail
 - Approximately 100 bags/year on average
- ✓ Mount Moosilauke ATV Club on the Warren Rail Trail
 - Approximately 50 bags/year on average
- Most rail trails are “capped” with compacted/crushed stone, or in some cases, pavement.
 - ✓ The Presidential Rail Trail from the Route 2 parking lot East to the Pike Industries gravel pit was paved this year to reduce dust near residential areas
 - ✓ Some dust can emanate from compacted/crushed stone when applied and capped, but that dust is not generated from the underlying soil

8. Bureau of Trails problems we encounter:

- Staff limitations
- User conflicts

9. Bureau of Trails opportunities:

- Continue to work on trail etiquette publications and signage. See our website regarding trail etiquette at: <https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/trails-bureau/trail-etiquette>
- Continue working closely with DOT Bureau of Rail and Transit on the State NH Rail Trail Plan
- Continue working with the White Mountain National Forest through a cooperative agreement to address snowmobile bridge maintenance in the National Forest

10. Bureau of Trails recent accomplishments

- We have successfully acquired, administered and closed a Federal Northern Borders grant to work on the Ammonoosuc Rail Trail east extension
- We have successfully acquired, administered and closed a Federal Lands Access Program grant for maintenance to the Pondicherry National Refuge section of the Presidential Rail Trail

11. Bureau of Trail future goals

- Create a non-motorized coordinator position within the BoT to work with the Bureau of Rail and Transit on rail trails, and to work with other non-motorized user groups on recreational trails