

MINUTES
EAGLES NEST TOWNSHIP
SPECIAL MEETING-ATV TRAIL ROUTING THROUGH TOWNSHIP
June 25, 2021

Chair Floyd called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.
The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Sup Richard Floyd, Sup DeAnn Schatz, Sup Kurt Soderberg, Sup Frank Sherman, Fire Chief Larry McCray, Clerk Keely Drange and Treasurer Mary Beth Monte were in attendance.

Unless otherwise stated, all motions carried unanimously.

Agenda Approval

Sup Schatz moved, seconded by Sup Soderberg to approve the agenda, for the June 25, 2021 Special Meeting-ATV trail routing through the Township. Motion carried.

Supervisor Floyd explained, according to Minnesota state law, the definition of an ATV and the different classes of ATVs.

Ron Potter with the Prospector ATV Club explained the history and routing of Trail 4 in the prospector ATV trail system. He explained that the proposed route of Trail 4 would be the Northern Route to connect Ely to Tower from the end of the Purvis Road using the Bear Head State Park Road, the Walsh Road and Swanson Shores Road to connect to the Taconite Trail.

Ron Potter explained the southerly ATV route from Ely would cross the Beaver River to trail 5, 3, 1 and connect to Tower. The southern route will hopefully be completed this summer with a temporary bridge and ultimately a permanent crossing for both snowmobiles and ATVs. This route may siphon some of the traffic from being routed through the township. Ron explained the riders do not like riding on the blacktop of the Park Road or Walsh Road yet would prefer to find another route with less miles than the southerly route. So far, the club has yet to identify another route.

When asked if the trail could be routed through Bear Head State Park Mr. Potter explained that it is not legal to operate ATVs in state parks and only a few instances have had ATV use been grandfathered into a state park's master plan or where the status of the area has been changed from a state park to a state rec area. The use of ATVs in Bear Head State Park would require an act of legislation and is not likely to happen. Joe Majerus from the Minnesota DNR supported Mr. Potter's explanation by saying that allowing a route through Bear State Park would be a significant undertaking and would require legislation to change the rules of the state park.

Sup Floyd asked if it would be possible to split off the northern part of the state park in order to designate it a state rec area (in which ATV use is allowed) as currently there is only the Taconite trail and Eagles Nest Lake 3 boat landing. Mr. Majerus also felt that this would be a significant undertaking and would be highly unlikely that the MN parks and Trails division of the DNR would in favor of such an action.

Sup Floyd explained the safety concerns on the Bear Head State Park Road and especially Walsh Road with increased ATV use. The Speed limits on Walsh Road is set at 30 mph which is a very high speed for ATVs. There are blind corners on Walsh and many people walk and bike on the road. There is an increased risk of an accident especially if ATVs were to meet a vehicle or person walking around one of these corners. Another main concern of increased ATV traffic is the increased noise. Many residents live in Eagles Nest Township because of how quiet it is. Residents are very upset by the possibility of increased noise in their neighborhood.

Sup Floyd had spoken previously with Victor Lund the St. Louis County Traffic Engineer. Mr. Lund explained that ATV use on gravel roads doesn't not substantially impact the surface quality of the roadway. However, Sup Floyd, who is the Roads Supervisor, does suspect that the curved hill on Swanson Shores Road (near Migisi Road) would be impacted by increased speed by ATVs trying to get up the hill.

Sup Soderberg talked about increased ATV use within the township and the desire for residents to find a way to use the northerly route to access the railroad grade to get over to Tower. He feels that some ATV users will find illegal routes to access the trails. He also feels that there will be an increased presence on non-resident traffic that will drive around the township to find access and at times trespass on private property.

Sup Sherman asked Mr. Potter if there are any other areas on the Prospector Trail system that run through residential areas. Mr. Potter explained that portions of the trail system run through Ely and Babbitt. Sup Sherman asked what regulations these towns have in place for ATV use. Mr. Potter detailed that the same traffic regulations that applied to vehicles applied to ATVs. Sup Soderberg had spoken previously with Harold Langowski (Clerk/Treasurer) of Ely and he explained that the City of Ely has been trying to clarify the ATV routes through Ely with signs. However, Ely has had little success routing ATV traffic as many local residents in Ely ride the streets.

Sup Floyd relayed his earlier conversation with Mr. Lund (St. Louis County Traffic Engineer) and Mr. Lund was unable attend this special meeting. Sup Floyd took notes and detailed the highlights of their conversation. In 2016 St. Louis County passed an ordinance allowing the use of ATVs on their roads (outside of city limits). Saint Louis County can declare a corridor access trail (which is what is being proposed for the ATV route through the township). There is a committee (Executive ATV Permit Committee) that approves the use of these corridor access trails. At this time this route through the township has not been approved as a corridor access trail. If a road(s) is not approved to as a corridor access trail it cannot be shown on ATV trail maps and may therefore reduce ATV traffic. If it is approved as a corridor access trail it can be regulated by the county different than highway traffic but may be shown on trail maps and possibly increase traffic. Some possible regulations include restricting operation to certain times of the day or reducing the speed limit for ATVs.

Sup Floyd explained that a portion of the proposed trail 4 route of the trail system include Swanson Shores Road which is a township road. The township has complete control of the township road. The township board can approve or deny the use of a township road for ATV use or some level in between. Sup Floyd believes that the MN DNR will support the township's decision regarding the use of our township road for ATVs.

Sup Floyd asked for a show of hands from meeting attendees who would support the route. Only two people were in favor of the route of the thirty attendees, most did not approve.

Vick Lund reported to Sup Floyd that there are very few vehicle/ATV or pedestrian/ATV accidents and that the majority of accidents are single ATV accidents. These accidents are mainly ATV rollovers associated with excessive speed around corners. A St. Louis County study of gravel road use by ATVs showed little damage from ATV use.

Sup Soderberg made a three-part motion and was seconded by Sup Floyd to formally notify the DNR and the Prospector ATV Club that Eagles Nest Township formally opposes the use of the portion of Trail 4, either permanently or temporarily, using Bear Head State Park Road, the Walsh Road and Swanson Shores Road to connect to the Taconite Trail.

To encourage the construction of the southerly portion to connect to Trail 5 and to not open the Ely to Purvis until such connector is completed, permanently or temporarily.

To formally encourage the DNR to allow use of a small portion of the park for ATV use to directly connect with the Taconite Trail.

In the discussion of the motion Sup Sherman asked if anyone in the audience had an opinion to express concerning the proposed route.

Several township residents expressed concerns with the proposed route. Some of the concerns included accidents on both Bear Head State Park Road from increased speed and reduced visibility on Walsh Road, increased noise, increased crime, trespassing and litter from non-residents on ATVs.

Sup Soderberg encouraged township residents to write state legislators in support of an ATV route through the Bear Head State Park. He felt that if enough support was shown that it may be possible to change the rule or designation to allow the access route through the state park.

Fire Chief Larry McCray expressed safety concerns for ATV riders who ride at high speeds on Bear Head State Park Road coming off Purvis Road. He is also concerned about emergency vehicles responding to an emergency meeting an ATV going at a high speed. There would be little that the ATV could do to safely get out of the way of the Emergency Vehicle which creates an additional risk for first responders.

If trail 4 (the trail running down road within the Township) was accepted as a corridor access trail the ATV club could propose maintenance fees for Swanson Shores Road in their grant-in-aid application to share with the township.

Sup Sherman moved and Sup Soderberg Seconded adding an amendment to the current motion to request the Executive ATV Permit Committee to immediately meet and deny the portion of Trail 4 using Bear Head State Park Road, the Walsh Road and Swanson Shores Road as proposed on the trail map. Motion passes. The amendment was approved after discussion.

The motion as amended was read again by Sup Soderberg.

Motion:

To formally notify the DNR and the Prospector ATV Club that Eagles Nest Township formally opposes the use of the portion of Trail 4, either permanently or temporarily, using Bear Head State Park Road, the Walsh Road and Swanson Shores Road to connect to the Taconite Trail.

To encourage the construction of the southerly portion to connect to Trail 5 and to not open the Ely to Purvis until such connector is completed, permanently or temporarily.

To formally encourage the DNR to allow use of a small portion of the park for ATV use to directly connect with the Taconite Trail.

With the added amendment:

Request the Executive ATV Permit Committee to meet and deny the portion of Trail 4 using Bear Head State Park Road, the Walsh Road and Swanson Shores Road as proposed on the trail map.

Motion Passes.

A resolution similar to the approved motion will be drafted and discussed at the July Board of Supervisors meeting.

Sup Schatz suggested that the township should put together a list of legislators that the township and its residents can write to in support of the taconite trail through the state park allow ATV use.

Adjournment:

Sup Soderberg moved, seconded by Sup Schatz to adjourn. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 10:31 AM

Respectfully submitted,

Keely Drange, Clerk