

Stamford ATV committee meeting 10/14/2021

Attendees:

Casey Merritt - National Forest District Commissioner for Recreation Management out of Manchester; Collin Fisher - National Forest service enforcement; Natalie Yorke – ATV committee member and Stamford citizen; Marta Miller – ATV committee member and Stamford citizen; Mike Smith – VASA representative; Rob Bouchard – ATV committee member, Stamford citizen, Stamford Ridge Riders club representative; Brandon Fields – ATV committee member, Selectboard member; Carol Facchini – ATV committee member, Selectboard member; Jessica Tatro – ATV committee member, President Stamford Ridge Riders; Dave Tatro – ATV committee member, Stamford Road Commissioner

Additional attendees:

Jess Tatro; Deb Burchard; Pam Tourig; Thomas Nazzewski; Laura Champain (Vice President Stamford Ridge Riders); EJ Tatro; Karen Kuranda (asked to take the minutes); Mike Kuranda

Mike Smith, VASA, stated he was just here to answer any questions about ATV use in general.

Casey Merritt, National Forests – also stated she is here to answer any questions as they relate to the National Forest regions.

Minutes from the last meeting. Voted to accept the minutes as written. Seconded. Approved. Have to check how the town puts this on file. The agenda should go to Lori Shepard for these ATV committee meetings should be posted on the town website.

FIRST THING TO REVIEW IS THE 23 VSA31 LAW FROM THE STATE

Old law did not require a tag sticker. On Oct 2, 2020 added that VASA or legal riding roads for ATVs must have a legal VASA tag sticker. Mike Smith from VASA provided clarification that any ATV off of your personal property has to be properly registered, has to be insured and has to have a VASA tag on it. The only exceptions are for agricultural use. The idea is to begin to manage the problem – five years ago there were 2500 ATVs in the state of VT and only about 2% of them were legal. So, the law came about when it was felt that it was needed to start managing this. There in excess of 10,000 ATVs now with about 7500 registered. So, the registration is still an issue particularly down here in southern VT.

The ultimate idea for VASA is to connect five communities southern VT. with a recreational trail that keeps people off of the highways with ATVs. Mike Smith of VASA stated that almost every town that has opened all their town roads wishes they hadn't done it. VASA's desire is that town roads are a means to get to a trail. Your local community needs to pick trails to get to the corridor – but for Stamford this would be County Road. Comments from many were made that this is problematic for the people who live on County Road plus the increased traffic disrupts everyone, - who is going to pay for the erosion, damage and maintenance of the road. EJ Tatro suggested to entirely stop maintaining class 4 roads in. Mike Smith of VASA said there is no money for them to maintain it..

Marta is asking for the document on the Clean Water Act and can we get a copy of this please. Dave Tatro said we have to maintain gully erosions on class 4 roads. We can go on the Agency of Natural Resources website to look for class 4 road information as they pertain to Act 64 to discuss at the next meeting.

DETAILED SPECIFIC PROPOSAL FROM THE STAMFORD RIDGE RIDER ATV GROUP

Jessica Tatro did not give a detailed proposal from the Stamford Ridge Riders as requested. Instead, she said it is all about whatever ordinance the selectboard puts together. She said let's just try something and see how it works. They would like the loop back for the residents that are on Risky Ranch, Klondike and County Road. Put trailhead parking there and people can get out of town – ride to Wilmington, ride to Readsboro, ride all over the place. So, she said she essentially supports everything Mike Smith of VASA is saying that the ultimate goal is to connect all five communities. She clarified that they are a VASA club.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE.

Route 301 – north to south Stagecoach Road – is in fact the National Forest going to improve and allow ATVs on that trail? This plan to improve the Sucker Pond south of route 9 IRP. This is not a done deal. National Forest specifically stated that we don't create self-standing ATV trail systems. They only provide connector trails in the shortest distance barring ecologically sensitive areas. To clarify, as long as County Road is not opened, the forest service will not improve this trail and allow ATV use on this trail – and the whole project would be stopped.

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL AND ITS PROXIMITY TO NORTH-SOUTH SUCKER POND TRAIL

Mike Smith of VASA said there is some illegal use of ATVs on the Appalachian. The AT doesn't encroach on anything involved. Anyone on a VASA trail – these are considered multiuser trails in the state for everybody not just ATV – hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking. VAST trails are referred to as multiuse trails that snowmobiles are allowed on. There is no room for two parking lots so the AT and VASA would be combined.

For the Sucker Pond connector road, if you shut County Road down, then there is no way from here to get to a legal trail system. unless you build it on private property east of route 8. Marta: These roads are shut down now. This is the area actually more suitable to ATV development according to the National Forest Plan and the south of route 9 plan. West of route 8 is designated diverse back country which is supposed to have extremely minimal development in this way. Keep in mind there is no development here - this is restoration of existing routes and a recreational connection between the five communities.

No beef with Stagecoach Road, because to get there - there is a fantastic parking lot and a trail head. When you say that there is no place for people to ride – it is just five miles away. If you purchase an ATV, you should know where there are legal places to ride are. For some of us in town, part of what has changed is that ATVs have changed and they are not abiding by the law.

Mike Smith said it is unenforceable to try to stop ATVs from riding on town roads. VASA rescinded funding of Bennington county sheriffs. He said we are working on an alternative to this.

Mike Smith said Country Road has been traditionally open. Marta says class 4 roads no – they not automatically open to ATV. We have \$250,000 to \$500,000 in damage and we can't afford to maintain this kind of damage. EJ Tatro says let's just not maintain these roads at all so we don't have to use taxpayer dollars for damage.

If have a VASA trail on a class 4 road. They maintain them and build them You have to designate that it is suitable for ATV use and that VASA will maintain it. If you want to restore that road back to the town at a later point, you still can't rescind ATV use.

WHAT HAS VASA DONE TO MAINTAIN STAMFORD TRAILS SINCE 2008.

Built with RTP state funding. One of the requirements is that these trails have to be open to everyone. 50-50% cost breakdown between local and VASA for trail maintenance like rebuilding after washouts and such. Only commitment that the town has to make is that the trail be left open for recreational use for the usable life of the trail. Depending on the trail, it could be 3-5 years or more. National Forest has no funds of their own.

Mike Smith brought a copy of an ATV ordinance that was prepared in advance of this meeting by VASA lawyers for our town to sign. There is also a VASA long term commitment letter we would be expected to sign as well.

Ordinance gives you the ability to manage – except it doesn't – because there are no game wardens, no sheriffs, or anything. There is no enforcement at all currently. Tom says the ATV community needs to start enforcing themselves. Motorcycles, dirt bikes and ATVs. We all know who goes too fast in town and no one does anything to self-police themselves. Enforcement is a future big issue to discuss. It is illegal to ride down class 3 road at any speed. When you purchase an ATV you should familiarize yourselves with the rules of riding legally.

REGARDING THIS TRIAL PERIOD OF ONE YEAR THE STAMFORD RIDGE RIDERS ATV GROUP IS PROPOSING.

There is no one year trial – it is 3-5 year minimum. Most of our residents have said that we do not want anything that even remotely resembles or facilitates in any way ATV tourism. So, when you came to us and say VASA's goal is to connect the five communities, our town immediately said stop. We don't want to be connected to the other towns. VASA does not advocate tourism because VASA can't afford it. VASA does not have the funds to fix damage resulting from this. The connections are to give townspeople legal places to ride. Unfortunately, the only connector that was approved was the trail from Bennington. VASA will try to work with us which would require a modification to the National Forest plan.

ATV LAW ENFORCEMENT

Other problem is that with so many people out of work right now, too many ATVs are out riding. Readsboro have had to repair trails four times now.

National Forest is absolutely topped out on man power nationwide in a lot of rural areas where they can't enforce things. There is not enough of an honor system in the ATV user groups to keep the law enforcement compliance for the regulations. During hunting season, they can't cover ATV issues at all. Collin has a territory for just him from the MA border to midway in VT to the Finger Lakes region in NY – this is a huge territory for one person. Stamford only pays for 15 hours a week for a sheriff.

VASA spent \$8700 on law enforcement in Bennington County and not one ticket was issued - which is why VASA shut down their contract with the Bennington sheriff's department. At least 30% did not even have license plates on their ATVs, they are trying to get more time from VT for the game wardens.

Purpose is to come up with recommendations for the Selectboard. Please research much more and all gather back in two weeks and each say this is my vision of what should happen and come up with common ground. Next meeting should also provide information on exact weight limits for ATVs and engine size.

Next meeting is October 28, 2021 at 6 PM. Meeting adjourned at 7:47 PM.