

## US 23 Heritage Route

Management Council Meeting Minutes

Monday, October 18, 2021 at 10:00 am

Location: Online



### **Present:**

1. Katie Wolf (Friends of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary)
2. Nathan Skibbe (Alpena Township)
3. Anne Belanger (Presque Isle County)
4. Chris Witulski (Besser Museum)
5. Don Gilmet (Alpena County)
6. Don Seal (Saginaw Chippewa Tribe)
7. Mary Ellen Jones (Alcona County)
8. Ken Gauthier (Sanborn Township)
9. Mike Mahler (Target Alpena)
10. Blake Gingrich (DNR)
11. Kevin Schaedig (MDOT)
12. Josh Grab (MDOT)
13. Scott Thayer (MDOT)
14. Heather Bauman (Arenac County)
15. Pat Wyman (Mackinaw City)
16. Erin Kellstrom (Oscoda Area CVB)
17. Montiel Birmingham (City of Alpena)
18. Belle Flora (Sunrise Coastal Coalition)
19. Dale Wiltse (AuGres)
20. Nancy Howse (Oscoda Chamber)
21. Scott Susalla (Tourism)
22. Beverly Bodem (Senator Stamas' office)
23. Brandon Schroeder (Michigan Sea Grant)
24. Dave Wentworth (Heritage Coast Sailing & Rowing)
25. Larry Clark (South Bay Corridor)
26. Denise Cline (NEMCOG)

**Call to Order:** Katie Wolf called the meeting to order at 10:05 am. Each member introduced themselves due to the number of new members.

**Agenda:** *Motion by Don Gilmet, seconded by Chris Witulski, to approve the agenda. Motion approved.*

**Minutes:** *Motion by Nathan Skibbe, seconded by Belle Flora, to approve the minutes. Motion approved.*

### **Management Council Membership:**

The following members are being added to the Council:

Arenac County - Heather Bauman (appointed by County BOC)

Alpena County – Don Gilmet (appointed by County BOC)  
City of Alpena – Montiel Birmingham (alternate Rachel Smolinski) (appointed by City)  
Oscoda Chamber – Nancy Howse (appointed by Chamber)  
Tourism – Scott Susalla (marketing and advertising)

*Motion by Nathan Skibbe, seconded by Don Gilmet, to add Scott Susalla to a Tourism seat on the Council. Motion approved.*

*Motion by Nathan Skibbe, seconded by Chris Witulski, to reconfirm Katie Wolf as US 23 Management Council Chair and Marlena MacNeill as Vice-Chair. Motion approved.*

### **NEMCOG Update:**

Website: Denise Cline reviewed the website statistics – users were down this year, but that is expected since 2020 was a very high use year. Ocqueoc Falls continues to be the top attraction on the site. Besides Tawas Bay area, the next highest community website sending traffic to US 23 is West Branch.

Print Materials: NEMCOG staff has received more requests than ever for print materials. All requests come through the website, so visitors are finding us online, but they still want physical copies of materials to travel with. Two new brochures are available – the North Eastern State Trail and the North Central State Trail. Denise worked with Top of Michigan Trails Council and Emily Meyerson in the development of the brochures. One more brochure is in the works – the Tawas Area (Iron Belle Trail).

FY 2021 Program Activities: The Council discussed the possibility of applying for National Scenic Byways status. Josh Grab updated the Council on that program. While new designations will be a few years from now, it would be good to get everything ready for an application when a designation round opens up again. Brandon Schroeder and Nathan Skibbe both volunteered to serve on that sub-committee. Anyone else willing to participate in that will email Denise.  
*Motion by Nathan Skibbe, seconded by Belle Flora, to begin working on National Scenic Byways designation.*

### **Updates:**

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary: The Maritime Heritage Center is still closed due to Covid. However, more research than usual has gone on this past year. Michigan Cares for Tourism was in Alpena. The *Lady Michigan* had a very strong year. Also, upgrades to the Maritime Heritage Center have been completed.

Alpena Township: Nathan Skibbe discussed ARPA funding and tasks required for that program.

Sunrise Coastal Coalition: Even though there currently is no Sunrise Coast organization, marketing efforts with Iosco and Alcona are on-going.

Sanborn Township: Dinosaur Gardens had a record year.

Rogers City/Presque Isle County: Application for Main Street designation for Rogers City has been submitted. Anne and Brian Belanger did a video for the application. Anne reported high numbers of tourists in Presque Isle County this year.

Chris Witulski: Besser Museum had a great summer. Art gallery upgrades were completed, the log cabin has been restored, and there is a new Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage exhibit.

US 23 South Bay Corridor: Katie Wolf updated, then Larry Clark gave an update. The project is on hold until a governmental partner can be identified. Clean-up day went well. Law enforcement issues at Partridge Point Park have been addressed. Design plans for the bike path extension and boardwalk are in place.

MDOT: Updates on MDOT road projects were given by Kevin Schaedig. Tawas/East Tawas will be in 2026. Alpena to Hillman Trail update was given. Josh Grab updated that US 23 has received \$9,000 this fiscal year for funding for brochures. He also noted that the MDOT driving guide will be reprinted this year. We have the ability to send updates to the guide, if needed.

Alpena County: Mike Mahler reported a busy summer. Development is happening with a new hotel being considered and a new Starbucks opening. Don Gilmet reported renewed interest in the boat harbor and cruise ships.

Arenac County: Dale Wiltse reported record attendance at events in Au Gres. However housing is needed. Heather Bauman reported that the EDC is working on a new event and agricultural center (\$11 million project). They are also working on Iron Belle Trail connections and housing/day care issues. She reported on Standish Depot events and a new park/splash pad in Au Gres. Denise noted the new sign at the Standish Depot that uses the US 23 logo looks great.

DNR: Blake Gingrich updated that the DNR is celebrating 100 years this year. Also – all statistics were up in the parks this year. He updated on Rockport trailhead and parking lot.

Tourism Reps: Eric Kellstrom updated that Oscoda had a great summer with full occupancy. There was a great turnout at events this summer. They worked with a design group for a fall marketing campaign. They are applying for increased assessments. They are applying for Trail Town designation. Scott Susalla updated on the Cheboygan County Community Foundation raising \$35,000 at the Jack Pine Lumberjack Show. Local Cheboygan business owner John Costin was featured in Traverse Magazine. [https://mynorth.com/2021/10/the-costin-effect-5-thriving-cheboygan-businesses-to-visit/?fbclid=IwAR00CBjLhqyhNWmK88HMI9rVo3a8wuwiGOFQ2JKsXPP\\_y\\_MMlCu5BHnGJ8w](https://mynorth.com/2021/10/the-costin-effect-5-thriving-cheboygan-businesses-to-visit/?fbclid=IwAR00CBjLhqyhNWmK88HMI9rVo3a8wuwiGOFQ2JKsXPP_y_MMlCu5BHnGJ8w)

Alcona: Mary Ellen Jones noted that Farm to Fork Small Farm Conference was cancelled for 2021 and 2022. Harrisville Arts Council had a great summer – Harmony Weekend and music

events went well. The Arts Retreat and Writers Retreats were held. There is a new pocket park in Harrisville.

Michigan Sea Grant/GLSI: Brandon Schroeder updated on the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Trail <http://www.greatlakesfisheriestrail.org/> which is cross-tied with US 23 Heritage Route <http://www.greatlakesfisheriestrail.org/collection.asp?ait=jv&jid=11>.

He also reminded the group that Meag Schwartz is the GLSI coordinator. Lastly, he updated on the Michigan Alliance for Environmental and Outdoor Education future conference.

Senator Stamas' Office: Beverly Bodem stated that she is pleased with the progress that tourism has made in the area.

Meeting adjourned at 11:50 am.

Submitted by Denise Cline