

Evaluation Plan: Oversight of Motorized Grants and Routes

MRR offers the following basic evaluation plan and estimate of costs required to provide local government sponsor oversight of grants-in-aid as part of a beneficial, sustainable, properly scaled and planned motorized recreation system.

The fiscal ability of the local unit of government to provide necessary evaluations should be considered in determining a sustainable scale of route development. Additional routes should not be provided if current routes are too expensive to properly oversee and administer.

MRR observes that townships and small cities typically do not possess the resources (in terms of both funding and specialist staff expertise) to provide sufficient oversight of grants-in-aid. We have consistently found that routes administered by small units of government do not receive sufficient oversight to guarantee compliant administration and application of grants. MRR recommends (and believes it should be required by law) that only counties and larger cities (at least 50,000 population) sponsor motorized routes for grants-in-aid, as only these larger units of government possess resources sufficient to provide effective oversight.

Documentation Review:

Every year, grant-in-aid files should be reviewed and updated. Some of this review is most efficiently conducted by the land manager(s) responsible for authorization of the route(s). Document review ensures that all required documents are present and complete, as the local government sponsor is legally responsible for fulfillment of grant terms and provision of adequate paperwork in the event of an audit.

MRR recommends that copies of all grant-in-aid paperwork be kept in one location to facilitate retrieval and review.

Documentation Review Activities

- **High-Quality Maps:** Updates are required as alignments change or formats improve. Maps should be clearly dated, up-to-date, provide complete alignments, and be scaled and featured adequately for evaluation of route ownership characteristics. It may be necessary to have several maps on file, each showing portions of the complete route, in order to ensure adequate resolution. MRR recommends that a route corridor appear no more than 50 feet wide, or twice the legally permitted width, whichever is greater, and that no route corridor should appear more than 100 feet wide for validation purposes. Note that ground-truthing will need to be done to corroborate map alignments, and monitor new construction and re-routes.

- Ownership Lists: Updates are required as alignments or ownerships change. Lists should be reviewed and corrected at least annually by contacting landowners.
- Landowner Permissions: Updates are required as lands are sold or otherwise change hands, or as permissions are withdrawn or acquired. Re-routes necessitate a re-evaluation of ownership along the relocated route segment(s) as well. Permissions should be evaluated for completeness upon submission, and permissions attached to each file should be reviewed and corrected at least annually by contacting landowners.
- Resolutions: New resolutions to sponsor routes are required each year. Most recent resolutions should be on file and readily available.
- Regulatory Permits: Required permits for navigable water crossings, wetlands impacts, environmental assessments, and any and all other required permits or paperwork should be present in applicable files.
- Yearly Applications: New applications are required each year and should be present in the appropriate files for each year.
- Requests for Reimbursement: Currently, these forms are required to account for all grant-related expenditures and should be present in appropriate files for each year.
- Trails Authorizations: These are not strictly grant-in-aid papers, but are permissions given by governmental organizations for routes on public lands. Copies of authorizations should be on file with other required permissions, even if they originate with the local government sponsor.

Field Review:

Field review is a crucial but expensive part of grant administration. It is necessary because liability that accumulates in the absence of regular field review can be even more costly. Local government sponsors should provide the following minimum field review of their sponsored routes to guarantee compliance with grant agreements, required alignments, landowner permissions, and current land uses. MRR recommends the “Michigan Model” requiring qualified land managers to travel the entire length of each route several times yearly to monitor and evaluate conditions. Review is carefully documented and the records produced kept on file for future review and planning assistance. Winter and summer use routes should be reviewed at least twice annually in the representative seasons of use. MRR finds that combining GPS waypoints, digital photographs, and written checklists is an efficient way to create records.

Field Review Activities

- Create accurate survey or GPS/GIS record for initial approved construction alignments and approved re-route alignments. Keep up-to-date records on file.
- Verify all finalized construction with the same accurate survey or GPS/GIS record. Keep up-to-date records on file.
- Annually verify route alignment with the same accurate survey or GPS/GIS record, and make and record corrections where required. Keep up-to-date records on file.

- Evaluate and document existing and potential drainage concerns and other site-specific maintenance issues and challenges at least yearly. Keep up-to-date records on file.
- Note and document evidence of illegal use and trail proliferation regularly. Keep up-to-date records on file.
- Effectively and proactively discourage future illegal use and trail proliferation with route closures or referral to law enforcement officials as required. Keep up-to-date records on file.
- Monitor and remove or otherwise manage invasive plant populations. Keep up-to-date records on file.
- Note and correct unpermitted or illegal stream and wetland impacts. New and existing permit requirements should be continuously evaluated, and up-to-date records kept on file.
- Monitor route widths and compare to permits to determine compliance. Ensure and encourage compliance as required. Enforce trespass. Keep up-to-date records on file.
- Monitor for and correct safety hazards. Keep up-to-date records on file.
- Evaluate signage of route for adequacy, safety and compliance, especially at road and trail crossings. Keep up-to-date records on file.

Costs

A careful and realistic appraisal of costs and, more importantly, a commitment to be accountable for these costs is central to the success of any plan. The efficiency of a grant-in-aid system that decentralizes construction, maintenance and grooming responsibility is balanced by increased oversight costs.

Field review costs tend to increase fairly directly with increasing route mileage, while documentation review costs increase both with route length and with number of grants administered.

Field review of continuous routes is much more efficient than monitoring of a disjointed route system and motorized recreation opportunities should be planned with this in mind.

Personnel training represents another significant cost: invasive species recognition and monitoring, wetland impacts, route design, permit requirements, and GPS/GIS mapping are all required proficiencies for adequate oversight.

We estimate (based on our own field audits) that the above field review can be completed satisfactorily by qualified personnel at the rate of about five miles per day. Initial surveying and construction oversight may take considerably longer, while routine tasks may be completed more quickly under optimum conditions. Where routes are remote or access difficult, five miles per day is unlikely as it may take much of a workday simply to reach a site. An OHV or bicycle may be useful for access, but we find that the depth of environmental interaction required to satisfactorily monitor a diverse set of criteria precludes any great speed, and especially under some of the wetter conditions a vehicle may prove more of a liability than an asset.

