

Rome Sand Plains Interview Form

Name: Doug Penns

Telephone: 315-853-8623

Position: Retired New Hartford HS Biology Teacher and Bird Rehabilitator

Date: October 5, 2001

Explained Purpose of Project: To develop a Comprehensive Management Plan for the public and conservancy owned lands in the Rome Sand Plains. The Plan is being prepared by a Team consisting of landowners, interested agencies and organizations and State and local government. The Chazen Companies has been hired to help prepare the plan. One of our tasks is to interview stakeholders to find out what goals and issues they may have with respect to the Sand Plains and what they would like to see happen in the future. You have been identified by the Team as a person with either particular knowledge or a stake in the future of the Sand Plains. Would you mind taking a few minutes to answer some questions?

What do you think are the major assets or best things about the RSP?

Biodiversity, finding unique organisms at this site. Uniqueness of the site. Different things on this site compared to other places in NYS. The geology is almost like walking in a coastal environment with the dunes and the sand. Very unusual. Uniqueness, biodiversity, unusual.

He wrote a book about wildflowers with 2 area college professors. He was able to take photos of wildflowers here that he would have had travel many miles south to find but for the Rome Sand Plains.

He has also done butterfly studies with Ernst Williams from Hamilton College, who also happens to be a neighbor of his.

What do you think are the major problems or issues with respect to the RSP?

While this is somewhat heresay, he has observed access by trailbikes and ATVs and the impacts that they caused. While he doesn't think that the RSP should be exclusively used by one segment of society, he does believe that there can be considerable environmental misuse by off-road vehicles.

He wondered as well about hunting. Upon further discussion, it became apparent that his concern was the conflict between the use of the area by hunters and by bird watchers and school children. He would hate to think of the accident that could be caused by this conflict. He is not against hunting if it is done with a proper ethic or thought about with a conscientious logical process.

What kinds of goals would you recommend for the future management of the RSP?

To try to keep the area as open as possible for usage by the rest of the people.

While he tends to like interpretive centers and nature centers, he doesn't think this would be especially beneficial in this area, because he isn't sure that the level of visitation is worthy of such a facility. He thinks it would be better, in this situation to spend the money on other things, where it would be more effective. He thinks that there is a problem with people not understanding what they are looking at. He would like to promote self guided trails or nature walks, where the brochures are in a mailbox, and people can pick up and leave as they go. Interactive, clearly marked trails that people stay on as they go.

He would like to see a trail or walkway into a bog area. Should not be too intrusive or cause too much damage if done right.

Have organisms that people are looking at marked better, so that they can identify the plant or animal, understand its importance, and educate why it is important to protect that species. When the area is established, he envisions regular nature walks, focusing on specific things, like a butterfly walk or a bird walk or a nature walk, lead by a volunteer or naturalist.

Important to keep ATVs and snowmobiles off of the area. Signs to stay out – damage to important habitat, and stick to trails. Doesn't see a problem with x-country ski trails or snowshoe trails.

Do you have any specific recommendations or suggestions for things you would like to see happen in the RSP or in this Plan? Same as above.

We then discussed educational opportunities for High School Students. He taught 12th grade ecology, which was a college credit course. He took the students out 3x a year to do observations of the area at different times. Kids were very interested about the plants and animals on the site. He prepared some worksheets and lab activities, and had the kids write up their own results. There are two means by which RSP curriculum could be developed and implemented in the classroom. One is CIBT – Cornell University Institute of Biology Teachers, and the other is BOCES Oneida/Madison, where one could develop countywide educational curriculum and conduct workshops to teach or develop the curriculum to the teachers with in-service credits.

Rome Sand Plains Interview Form

Name: Vince Gentile

Telephone: 315-339-1043

Position: Member of Trailbusters Snowmobile Club

Date: October 5, 2001

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What do you think are the major assets or best things about the RSP?

Historic character, geologic character. Different plants and animals that do not coexist in other parts of the state.

We then discussed the snowmobile trail system in the area. The snowmobile trail includes a section of the old Railroad Bed that is part of NYSOPRHP's trail system. It is maintained by local snowmobile clubs. Members pass through the area on this trail. In addition, one of the properties proposed to be acquired also has a trail on it. Snowmobiles don't need to be off the trail, except for local trails that allow snowmobilers to access the main trail. Typically local snowmobilers use skidder trails and local dirt roads.

There is the possibility that traffic can beat the frost down into the ground, possibility causing damage in the fields, but this has not been too much of a problem. The snowmobile clubs groom the trails to form them when the first snow falls. Any snowmobiles that go off-trail risk getting stuck in deeper snow, and so don't do that often.

The snowmobile clubs do not do education about the Rome Sand Plains, per se, but are required by NYS to do adult and youth safety programs, where the issue of crop and vegetation damage is discussed. They could do signage in the area of the Rome Sand Plains as well. They understand the importance of working with and respecting private landowners, because if they don't, the trails won't be there any more.

Snowmobile use is only allowed when there is more than 3 inches of snow on the ground. The clubs in this area tend to discourage snowmobiling until

there is 6 inches on the ground. In addition, the clubs do not open the trail system up until hunting season is over. The use of snowmobiles is policed by NYSOPRHP and local police. The law enforcement is out to check registrations, violations, trespass and compliance. A snowmobile trail is not legally a trail in the summer time, and they don't exist, technically, for use by other motorized vehicles. It is actually illegal to run ATVs on a snowmobile trail in the summer. For example, part of the snowmobile club trail system goes through a cemetery, and the trail is 20 foot wide and marked out with ribbons. That use is allowed by the cemetery because there is no impact on the ground. But summer use by ATVs is not allowed due to the impact to vegetation.

Snowmobiles are different in their use than ATVs or other vehicles that run during non-winter because there is not the protection of snowcover or frozen ground, and because it is more difficult to go off-trail in the snow than it is on dry ground.

ATVs are different than snowmobiles. The clubs tend to be smaller and more loosely knit. Snowmobile activity tends to be somewhat family oriented, with a family going out to dinner on a machine, whereas the ATVs tend to go out just for the thrill of riding. ATVs can travel anywhere they want, and are harder to catch because they can disappear into the woods or onto local roads. ATV trails tend to disintegrate after passage by 3 or 4 ATVs, because they impact the ground, whereas snowmobiles pass over the same trail over and over again. ATVs then spread out in order to get out of the ruts, causing wider trails and greater damage.

He sees a problem with the Whitehead property, which is perfect for growing lupines. He believes that the nature conservancy is thinking about purchasing it. It has a sand pit with a pond dug out of it, and it is being used extensively for ATV use. Issue for liability and environmental damage.

He knows that ATVs are going up to Forestport into a county owned ATV use, where people can ride. Also there is an area in Lewis county with Seasonal Roads that has been opened up to ATV traffic. Not too much damage, because the roads are so remote and not congested. Unfortunately it is 25 miles away.

What do you think are the major problems or issues with respect to the RSP?

Hunting. Can be a safety factor in conflicts between attracting people especially in fall to see the vegetation, while hunting is going on at same time.

Taxes. While he thinks it is being addressed by the efforts of the NYSDEC and conservancy organizations to offset some tax losses, issue of property off tax roles is a concern.

Still, more pluses than negatives.

What kinds of goals would you recommend for the future management of the RSP?

He would like to see more trails developed, and better marking of existing trails. Important that signs say "keep off the vegetation," and identify it too so people know what to avoid.

Need more parking in remote areas.

Everybody doing a fine job.

Do you have any specific recommendations or suggestions for things you would like to see happen in the RSP or in this Plan?

That was it.

Rome Sand Plains Interview Form

Name: Jim Rolf

Telephone: 315-336-2828

Position: West Rome Snowmobile Riders

Date: October 8, 2001

Explained Purpose of Project: To develop a Comprehensive Management Plan for the public and conservancy owned lands in the Rome Sand Plains. The Plan is being prepared by a Team consisting of landowners, interested agencies and organizations and State and local government. The Chazen Companies has been hired to help prepare the plan. One of our tasks is to interview stakeholders to find out what goals and issues they may have with respect to the Sand Plains and what they would like to see happen in the future. You have been identified by the Team as a person with either particular knowledge or a stake in the future of the Sand Plains. Would you mind taking a few minutes to answer some questions?

What do you think are the major assets or best things about the RSP?

The Rome Sand Plains Management Group is a very knowledgeable group. The RSP Management Plan is a good thing. Need to use the area for the advantage of the community and the region.

The RSP is a beautiful place, the historical value is impressive.

What do you think are the major problems or issues with respect to the RSP?

The Rome Sand Plains have two snowmobile user groups. The first user group are locals who do not ride on trail corridors, but tend to stay around the Hogsback Road area, which is not developed as an official snowmobile trail, and not part of the trail system, but is in local use within 2 miles of the homes of those individuals. The use over there is minimal by trail riding snowmobilers.

From a snowmobilers aspect, they only see Huckleberry Swamp along the railroad corridor. Before he learned about the RSP, it looked like "just another swamp" that he thought beavers had blocked up and made. Now that he has learned more about it, he is more impressed by the beauty of it. In winter, few people look at what they are riding past, they are just enjoying the beauty of the scenery. But he would like interpretative signage to explain what is being past. He thinks that the positive aspects of educating the public are greater than the negative aspects of upkeep and vandalism.

He is very upset about the lack of law enforcement in Oneida County on the snowmobile trails, a responsibility of the Sheriff's department. The Sheriff's tend to stay in the Rome – Stokes & Lee Center areas, and do not venture into the RSPs, they don't care about that area. As a result, what happens is that in the late spring, once snowmobile season is over, the ATVs come out and use the snowmobile trails illegally. The landowners call the Sheriff's regarding ATV use, and because the Sheriff's don't have adequate funding to patrol, the ATVs have taken over a number of private landowner parcels.

The snowmobile trail is only available in the winter. In the fall the clubs go out and make contacts with the landowners, secure the easements, sign contracts, mark the trails and buy insurance. The trail is used in the winter. In the spring the snowmobile volunteers who have maintained the trail through the winter go and focus on other things that they have neglected all winter. So then the ATV problems start. They tear down the signs, the fences, the landscaping, all of which has to be replaced at the expense of the snowmobile clubs. The law enforcement doesn't do anything to stop ATV use and it is very frustrating and discouraging. For example, the snowmobile club is now undertaking major landscaping work to clean out ruts in order to provide for a safe trails for snowmobiles. If a trail is rutted, the snowmobiles hit a rut and wreck their machine. The unauthorized ATV use puts snowmobile clubs in a very bad liability situation, and makes landowner relationships problematic too. He has been frustrated and upset about this for the past 9 years, with the past 3 being even worse because of the increase in ATV sales. And since snowmobiles and ATVs are sold by the same companies, the companies don't want to do anything to educate the users where and where not to ride.

There are 852 miles of designated snowmobile trails in Oneida County, and no legal ATV trails.

What kinds of goals would you recommend for the future management of the RSP?

He would like local law enforcement to be educated regarding the proper trail use in the RSP. He would like to see ATV use eliminated from the RSP. He would like to see the Railroad bed, which is still privately owned, purchased. The landowners of the railroad doesn't want ATVs on his property, and he cannot afford to fence, post or patrol the land. The issue needs to be addressed, and individuals involved in illegal ATV use or trespass need to be arrested.

With regard to Mr. Gentile's comments, nobody rides on 3 inches of snow. The swamps are not frozen, and the machines can get hurt. Need at least 8 inches, if not 12 inches of snow.

Do you have any specific recommendations or suggestions for things you would like to see happen in the RSP or in this Plan?

Fencing, gating, law enforcement, education, patrol. Interpretive signs along Huckleberry Swamp. Consolidate off-shoot trails from private homes to the main trail. Educate the local users through newspaper articles discussing what is and is not legal uses of snowmobiles and off-road vehicles in the RSP. Educate the ATV users about the delicate nature of the vegetation and the adverse impact that is being caused by ATV use.