

STAFF REPORT: Recreation



REPORT TO: Council
MEETING DATE: December 8, 2008
REPORT NO.: DOR 08 46
SUBJECT: Snowmobile Trails
PREPARED BY: Shawn Everitt, Director of Recreation

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report DOR.08.46 "Snowmobile Trails" for information purposes and supports the reopening of the 12th side road to snowmobile traffic for the 2009/10 season.

B. Background

This report is requesting the removal of the prohibition of snowmobile use on the 12th side road. The prohibition was implemented in 2000 after several complaints of local residents of the noise from snowmobiles at both day and night and dangers posed by snowmobilers to motorists, horses and riders, and pedestrians on the narrow winding side road.

The County of Grey also made notice to the Collingwood snowmobile club that the use of County Road 19 as a portion of the connecting link trail into Collingwood and Clearview would not be renewed past the 2007/2008 winter season with the agreement ending March 2008.

Snowmobiling is a significant aspect of local and regional tourism and continues to have a strong presence within the Town and its neighbouring Communities. The Town in the past has allowed the use of portions of opened and unopened road allowances. The Town and the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs enter into land use agreements on Town lands including roads to ensure the Town is held harmless in the event of snowmobile trail use resulting in damages, injury or death.

Staff has worked with a group of representatives of local stakeholders regarding the future strategic planning of sustainable snowmobile trails. The Committee consists of representatives from the County of Grey, The Blue Mountains, Ontario Provincial Police, Blue Mountain Snow Drifters Snowmobile Club, Meaford and District Ridge Runners Snowmobile Club, The Blue Mountains Council, The Blue Mountains Engineering Department and The Blue Mountains Recreation Department.

The Committee has reviewed in depth the Trails that historically have been used as well as trails that have been closed for a number of reasons, including changes in land ownership as well as developers removing usage and have highlighted all aspects to the existing trail used during the 2007/2008 winter season.

As a result of these discussions it was determined that the trails from The Blue Mountains – Meaford Townline through Grey Road 19 west of Banks are relatively static. The existing Gas Trail from Grey Road 40 along Grey Road 13 into the Town of Thornbury continues to be a struggle each year, in particular with removal of gasoline services at the former Thornbury Mini Mart. This forced snowmobilers to travel along Highway 26 to go into the only remaining gas bar. The main focus of strategic trail planning became the need for sustainable trail use from the Banks area to connect with Grey Road 21 for the Collingwood connection as well as the Grey Highlands and Clearview connections.

As a result of the County of Grey giving notice that agreement for use of County Road 19 not being renewed, the Committee agreed that with the preliminary planning of a sustainable trail system underway, a request be made by the Blue Mountain Snow Drifters Snowmobile Club to the County of Grey for a 1 year extension for the use of County Road 19 for the 2008/2009 winter season. This request was granted at the May 8th 2008 TAPS Committee meeting with a requirement being the provision of insurance in the amount of \$5,000,000.00 naming the County of Grey as an additional insured by the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs.

At these strategic planning sessions a number of possible run routes were reviewed using aerial mapping, as well as actual site visits. The owners of privately owned lands in the area that had historic trail use and have since had privileges removed have also have been contacted by Town staff has again denied access of these lands. Each of these routes all provide obstacles, however the preference to reopening the 12th side road requires the use of only town owned road allowances both open and closed while easily connecting to the existing trail system. The reopening of the 12th side road to snowmobile use is not without obstacles, however the obstacles are more easily remedied and once again the use of existing town open and unopened road allowances allow for a more sustainable trail system. The Town partnering with the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs as well as the local snowmobile clubs could offer funding possibilities through the clubs, provided that appropriate timing of application periods is achieved.

The Snowmobile Committee invited the residents of the 12th side road to a meeting in March 2008 and requested that concerns that they may have of reopening the 12th side road to snowmobile use be brought forward. The concerns that were brought forward were the following:

NOTE: Residents in attendance – Leslie Worts, John Worts, Vera Svoboda, Georgina Schurman, Clive Turnock, Cathy Lane, Norm Griffiths, David Roffey.

The delegations of 6 homeowners from the 12th side road were in attendance at the meeting. They all have similar concerns. There was surprise expressed by the group that the issue of opening up the 12th side road was coming up again as it was noted that this road had snowmobile use prohibited on 2 previous occasions by Council. Since that time there are more residents using the road, walkers, bikers, horses, dogs, children combined with the blind corners of the road which would make snowmobile use a dangerous situation.

The committee was told that it was felt the 12th side road was part of the Bruce Trail and that the Bruce Trail has banned the use of motorized vehicles from all the trails. The feeling also was that members of the snowmobile clubs cannot be controlled now so if the road is opened up it will be an accident waiting to happen. The road has very deep ditches on either side so when driving on the road everything is in the middle of the road and that there is no room on either side of the road for snowmobile trails. The fact that there was an idea that the Snowmobile Clubs would police this activity was shown not to work as there has been consistent use of the road throughout the ban.

The residents further noted their concern as taxpayers would be increased, with type of situation there is increased liability both for the taxpayers and the Town. It is understood that if the snowmobile trail groomer could not groom particular areas of the trail the OFSC insurance coverage would not be applicable.

Mrs. Georgina Schurman informed the committee that she and her husband, Mr. Clive Turnock are residents of the 12th side road. She presented a map showing the layout of the road. She drives the road daily and says that it is a dangerous road. In her opinion there are 6 places where this road is dangerous beginning at the one lane bridge, blind curves, steep hills and ravines. She also had concerns that guests visit the Scott Mission and sometimes they travel in a school bus up the hill. Mrs. Schurman recounted an incident where she was driving down the road and came around a sharp bend only to find 6 snowmobiles abreast across the road. She indicated that she was lucky to get her vehicle stopped. Mrs. Schurman then thanked the members of the Committee and then Mr. David Roffey addressed the committee. Mr. Roffey voiced similar concerns as other residents. He noted that perhaps a ban on either snowmobiles or a ban on uses other than automobiles should be considered.

The Committee has also received correspondence from 12th side road residents The Scott Mission, Carla Hanisch, John and Leslie Worts, Sally John, Neil Harris and Katie Taylor, Vera Svoboda, Norm Griffiths, and Georgina Schurman and Clive Turnock, noting their concerns with the possibility of the snowmobile ban being removed.

12TH SIDE ROAD REMEDIES & IMPROVEMENTS

Staff feels confident that remedies to all issues could be reasonably provided by creating additional travel areas along ditch lines, creation of landscaping buffers, appropriate signage, reduced speed limits and a commitment of increased enforcements patrolling by Ontario Provincial Police as well as increased numbers of STOP Officers in the two local snowmobile clubs. Snowmobile Trail Officer Patrol (S.T.O.P.) is a partnership between the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs. This community based enforcement program uses the assistance of Special Constables to better the sport of snowmobiling. The goals of the S.T.O.P. program are to;

- Increase public awareness of snowmobile safety and the dangers of drinking and riding a snowmobile
- Educate snowmobilers on safety and nuisance concerns and promoting voluntary compliance with the snowmobile laws.
- Enforce the Motorized Snow Vehicles Act (M.S.V.A.) and, where applicable, municipal snowmobile bylaws.

This group also assist police in sobriety enforcement. For MSVA enforcement purposes, S.T.O.P. Officers have the same authority as police officers. This authority comes from the Police Services Act and is granted by the government. This gives a S.T.O.P. Officer special powers for the Province of Ontario only to enforce the Motorized Snow Vehicles Act (M.S.V.A.) only for a set period of time.

The power to issue tickets comes from the Provincial Offences Act Section 1(3) and the designation of Special Constables is signed by the Solicitor General. This permits the Commissioner of the O.P.P. to appoint the S.T.O.P. Officers as Special Constables. The O.P.P. Provincial Coordinator holds the signed designation in Orillia empowering the S.T.O.P. Officers to be appointed as Special Constables to enforce the M.S.V.A.

Therefore under the M.S.V.A. a S.T.O.P. Officer can carry out the same duties as a Police Officer by definition (Sec. 53 (3) Police Services Act) and may even make an arrest under Sec. 16(5) of the M.S.V.A..

The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs will also provide a land use agreement with the Town providing \$14,000,000.00 insurance coverage for each occurrence and also include holding the town harmless in case of incident. It is suggested Town Staff that all town road allowances require land use agreements when motorized vehicles are being used for recreational purposes by any groups, businesses, or individuals on a regular basis.

REQUIREMENTS FOR USE OF THE 12TH SIDE ROAD

The overall goal of reopening the 12th side road would be to provide as much of the trail off the travelled portion of the road as possible while still staying within the 66 foot road allowance. Additional ditching and some road widening already planned for by engineering and public works could achieve the majority of these works. An area of concern is the deviation curve in the road that currently creates a blind spot for motorists and pedestrians, cyclists and horseback riders. It has been suggested that trail works provide a route of passage using the town owned road allowance that has an existing rough trail, making the trail go straight rather than taking the deviation curve, additional signage would then be required to warn all uses of upcoming curves and oncoming traffic. The trail would then continue along the 12th side road to the 2nd line allowing for a new connection using the existing 2nd line unopened road allowance South and crossing at County Road 19 and continuing along the existing trail. This section of new trail requires three new watercourse crossing two of which would be the replacement of two significant pedestrian bridges as well as 1 new bridge across a small creek.

The main trail using the 12th side road from the 2nd line West would continue along the 12th side road to between the 5th line and 6th line, connecting to the existing trail. This trail that currently leads to the 6th line requires approximately 8 kilometres of road running and this trail would ultimately be closed.

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan

Preserving and enhancing natural and environmental features, and cultural heritage of the community.

Supporting the development of social and recreational programs to meet the broad range of needs in the community.

D. Budget Impact

Road Works as projected in the 2008 Engineering and Public Works operational budget for spot repair

Clearing of pathway approximately 6 meters wide completed by OFSC volunteers and providing proof of insurance that the Town will be held harmless during work

Partnership with Town and OFSC of Construction of 3 Watercourse crossings for both pedestrian and snowmobile travel, a capital project sheet has been prepared for 2nd line pedestrian trail and snowmobile trail enhancements for water crossings and trail surface enhancements in the amount of \$146,000.00

with to be funded partially by the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs, Bruce Trail and the Town.

E. Environmental Impacts

To ensure sustainable use of snowmobile trails while ensuring appropriate use of town property and environmentally significant lands and watercourses.

F. Attached

1. Westerly snowmobile trails
2. Central snowmobile trails
3. Kolapore Area snowmobile trails
4. Southerly snowmobile trails
5. Optimum Trail system
6. Remedies on 12th Side Road required

Respectfully submitted,

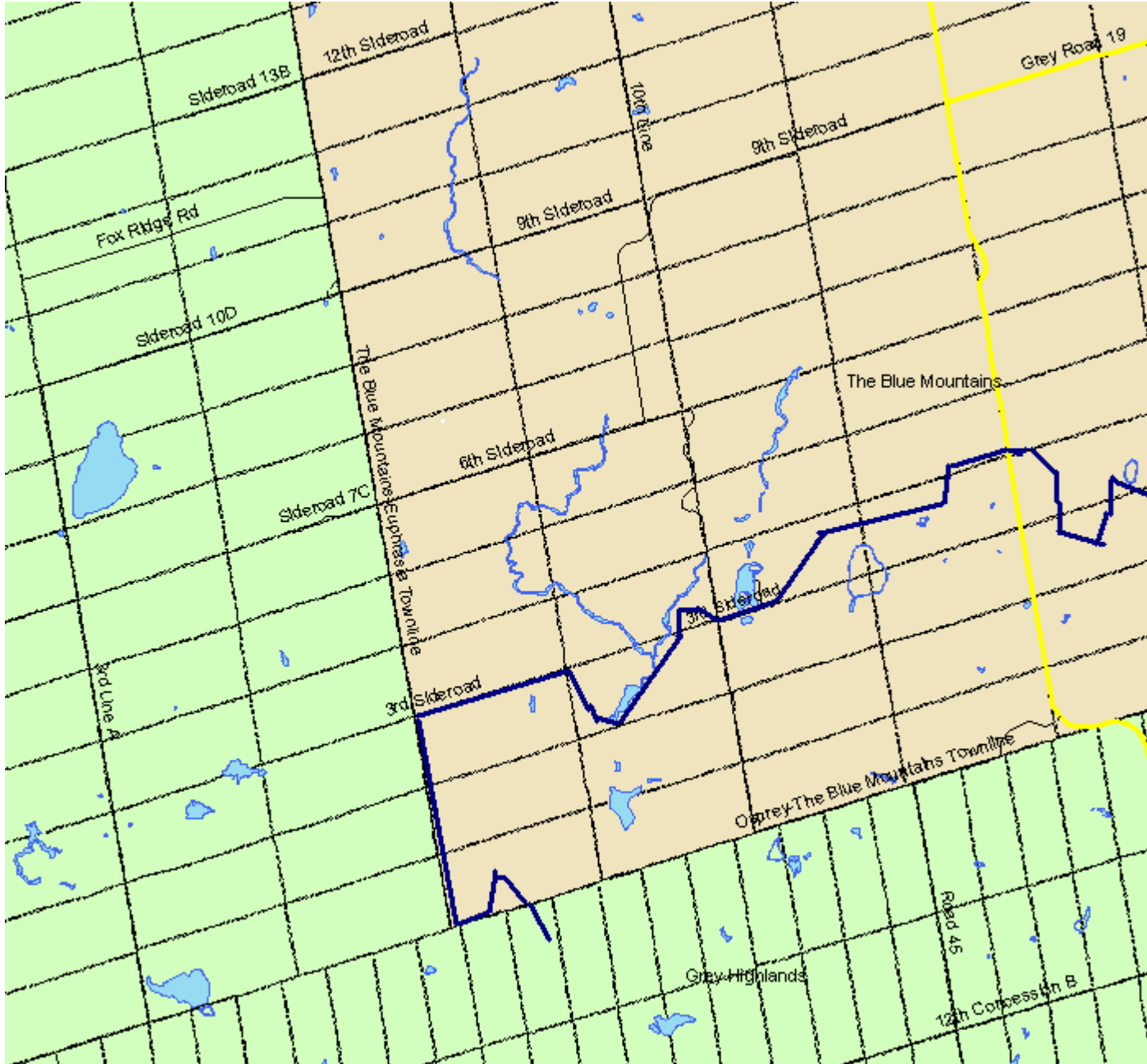
Shawn Everitt, Director of Recreation

2) Central snowmobile trails



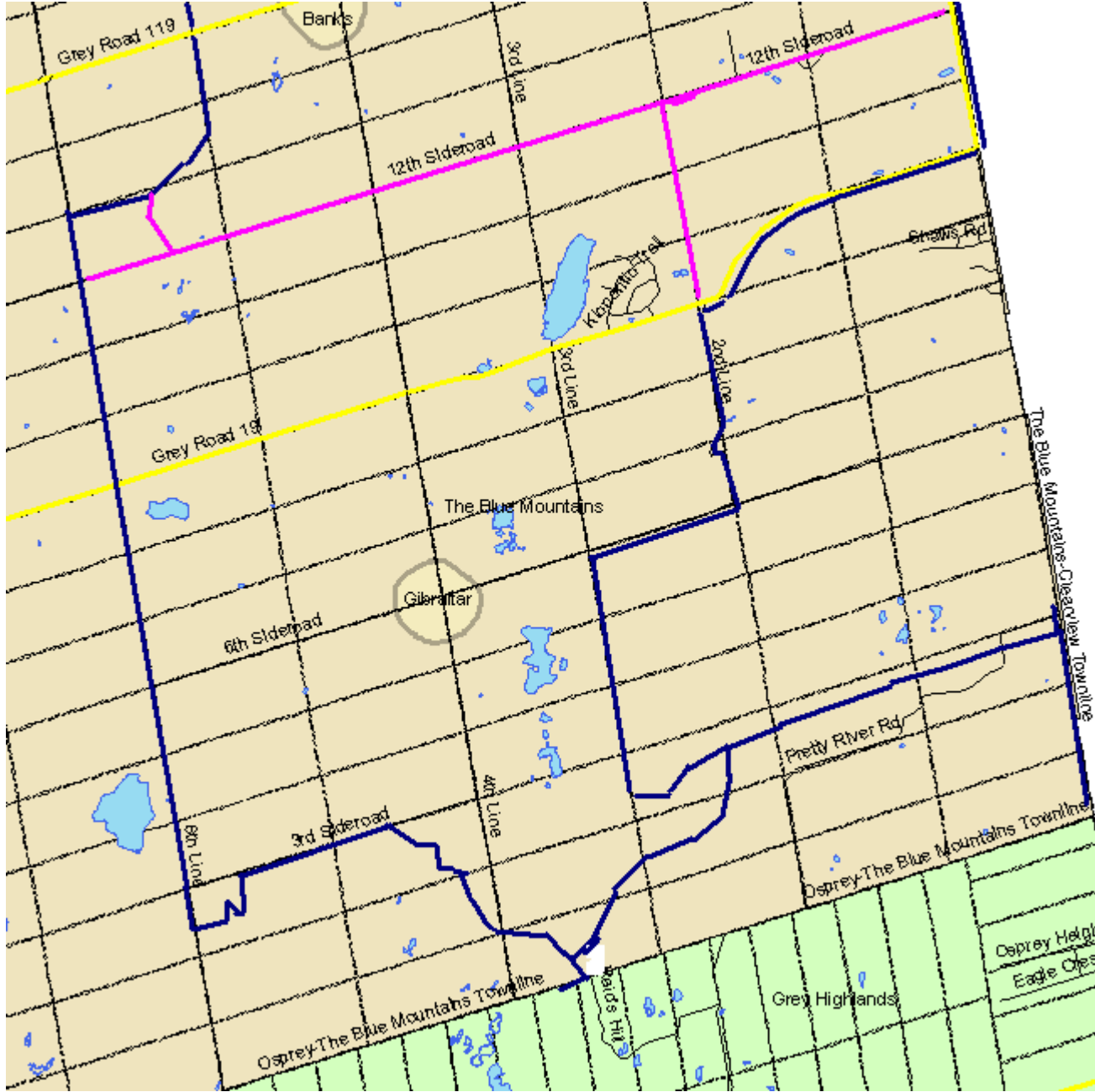
Blue is Existing Trail
Pink is Optimum proposed
Yellow are County Roads

3) Kolapore area snowmobile trails



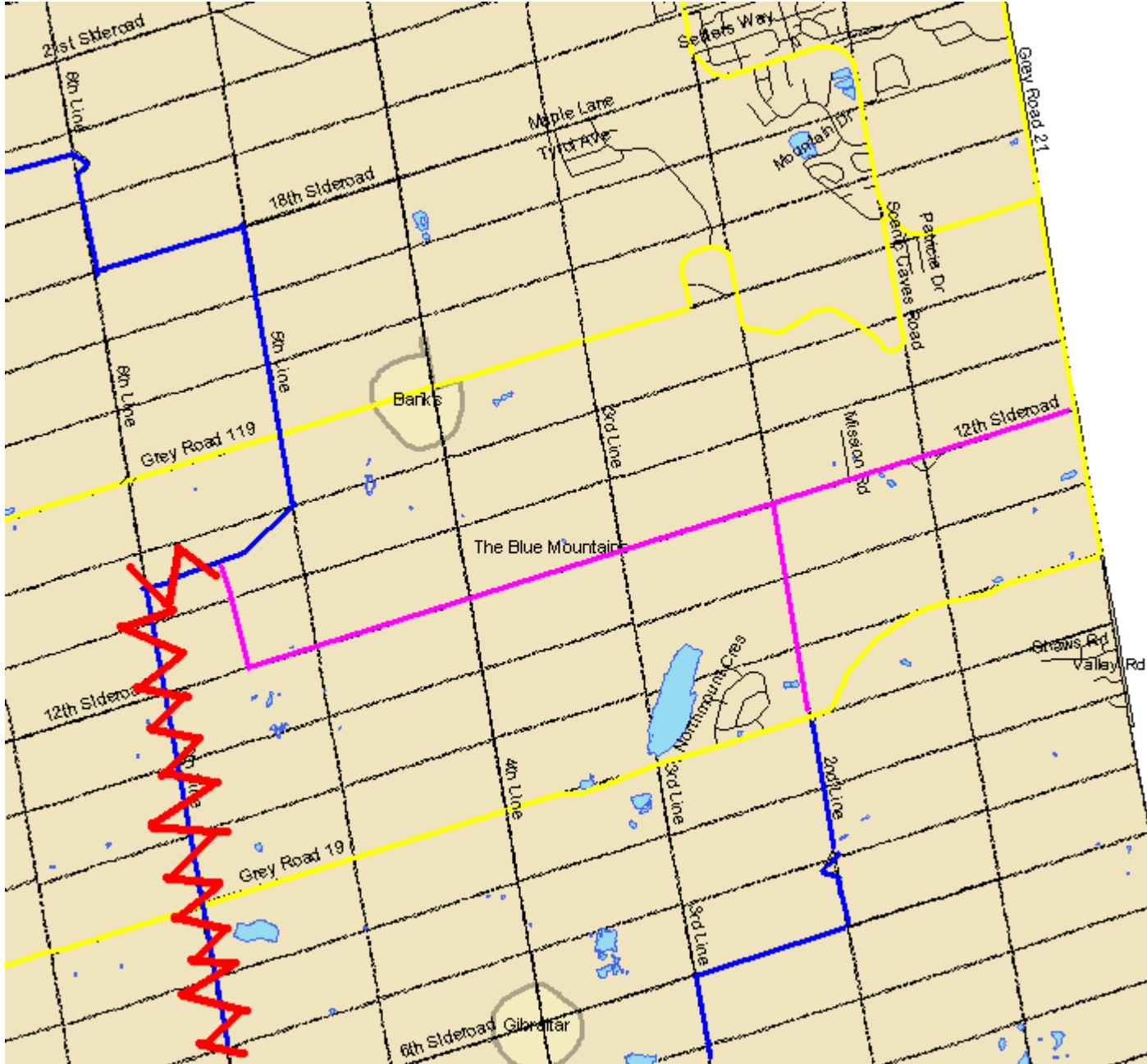
Blue is existing snowmobile trail

4) Southerly snowmobile trails



Blue is existing
Pink is optimum proposed route
Yellow are County Roads

5) Optimum Trail system 12th Side Road and 2nd Line



Blue is existing Trail
Pink is optimum proposed area
Red crossed is proposed removal of 6th Line road travel
Yellow are County Roads

6) Proposed 12th Side Road route and area remedies

