

- Blue Mountain Newsletter -

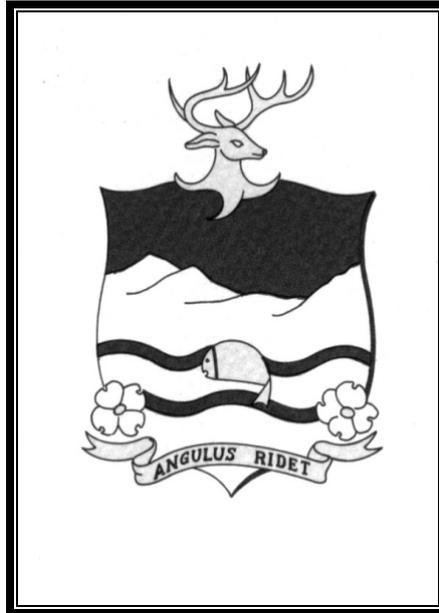
Our Thirty-Third Year of Publication

Blue Mountain Property Owner's Association----- Spring 2007

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

In May 2004 Blue Mountain property owners voted to borrow up to \$200,000 to begin paving parts of some of our steepest and most difficult to maintain gravel roads. This decision resulted from a well meaning, but not well engineered, initiative to improve safety and reduce maintenance costs. A new board solicited advice from a respected Virginia highway engineer and then acted on that advice. Over the next three years parts of three roads totaling .53 miles were paved at a total cost of \$113,000. We learned a great deal during this experiment:

- The cost of preparing the roadbed to minimum standards for paving was much greater than property owners had been told;
- The platted right of way for many of our private roads is too narrow for two lanes. Passing vehicles have to leave and return to the pavement, which cracks away the edges of the pavement;
- As expected, the short term costs of maintaining the paved sections proved to be cheaper than gravel;
- However, the smallest amount of snow or ice makes these steep paved sections extremely slippery resulting in out of control vehicles (even with 4WD) requiring quick application of abrasive which is expensive and difficult to arrange.



Executive Board

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Jim McManaway	635-7630
1st VP	
Jonathan Morrison	636-8349
Treasurer	
Pete Plourd	636-3657
Secretary	
Cathy Berger	635-1259
Directors	
Nynette Rourke	635-6381
Chuck Campbell	635-3848
Jack Davis	941-346-5253
Tim Winfield	540-878-1375
Jeff Rash	703-989-9478

Email the board at:

bmpoaboard@yahoogroups.com

Board meetings are held at the Lodge the 2nd Monday of each month from 6 to 7 pm. All property owners are welcome and encouraged to attend...Check: www.bmpoa.org for updates.

- Because of their position and slope they do not heat up and dry out like paved parts of Route-638;
- Asphalt and delivery costs rose somewhat with the price of oil and is expected to continue rising;
- We had to increase the quality and thickness of asphalt beyond the original plan, but still below state standards, to reduce the chances of its breaking up under the load of heavy trucks. (The original plan was to lay only 4" of asphalt on the existing roadbed);
- The ditching along paved roads required extensive and costly reworking and filling with large stone called "surge" to prevent the pavement from caving in.
- We now know that it will cost at least \$225,000 to properly prepare, ditch and pave each additional mile of one-lane road;
- We had to take funds away from gravel road maintenance for two years to pay off the loan we took out to pave 1/2 mile. Paving each additional mile of road would consume at least four years of gravel road maintenance and we cannot let that happen again.
- To avoid leaving succeeding property owners with an intolerable financial burden, we have to begin a "sinking fund" to repair any paved road that does not hold up. The more we pave, the greater the "sinking fund" required. (Continued Pg. 2 Col. 1)

We own a total of 15 miles of roads and cannot afford \$3M to \$4M to pave all of them. Even if we could afford to pave 1/4th of them many members would view this as unfair since all would be paying to pave roads that would end up benefiting a fraction of our members.

Because of these realities, lessons learned, and the current budget, this board has concluded that it will not pursue further paving.

New Lodge Use Fees:

Since Jon Morrison, Emily Ford and their many friends voluntarily fixed up and repainted the Lodge in 2005 it has enjoyed increasing visibility, usage, and demand which presents a few new challenges for us all.

Our agreement with Warren County precludes our using Sanitary District (SD) fees or taxes for social events. Consequently, we have to charge modest fees for use of the Lodge to provide basic necessities. The board believes that members who use the lodge for private social use, such as a birthday party or wedding, should continue to pay a small fee to cover those costs. However, a few members (and non members) have requested to use the Lodge for commercial or for-profit purposes. In these instances, we believe the fees should be higher because SD fees are used for Lodge upkeep, insurance, security and utilities.

The Lodge is not now in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Although members can use it, we cannot rent it to non-members. However, we have plans to bring it into compliance both for the enjoyment of those members with a disability and to allow it to be rented to non-members at more competitive rates.

Another issue is that some members who have reserved and used the Lodge have not done an adequate job of cleaning afterwards so the amount of cleaning deposits will be increased.

The board is developing a new tiered system of user fees and cleaning and breakage deposits for members and non-members. The new fee structure and contract for use will go into effect as soon as the board approves it. The summer newsletter will include the new user fees.

Roads Report

I would like to introduce myself as your new Roads Chairman. My wife and I moved to Blue Mountain in the summer of 2004 and have since fallen in love with the beauty and peacefulness of this mountain. I became more interested in how I could volunteer my time to make this a better place to live for both present and future residents. That will require us to keep the balance between quiet, peaceful living, and convenience. Our roads play a huge part in this idea. It would be a shame if Blue Mountain became just another Northern Virginia suburb.

We increasingly have more full time residents, and therefore more daily commuters. This means more wear and tear on our roads which clearly weren't engineered or intended to carry this much traffic. With that said, no one likes driving on poorly maintained roads. When I volunteered for the position of Roads Chairman I knew it would be a challenge with our limited budget. Our road paving experiment reduced our gravel roads budget by half for two years while the paving loan was being paid off.

As you know last winter's ice storms and snow plowing took a serious toll on our roads. My goal this year is to use our available road funds to bring them up to an acceptable and passable condition. We will be clearing ditches, grading the worst roads, and laying new gravel where needed. Our contractor just completed work up on Tomahawk, has been busy filling potholes and is working her way down the mountain. Our limited road funds won't allow for many permanent improvements this year. Next year, I expect to have the funds to make additional lasting improvements such as more culverts for better water control and more gravel for a better road base. Because the board has decided that further paving is cost prohibitive, my philosophy is to maintain our gravel roads in a manner that everyone can live with. I value input from all property owners. If you have a question or concern, please feel free to contact me at 703.989.9478. Jeff M. Rash

**LOOK FOR YOUR RECREATION
AREA PASSES IN THIS ENVELOP**

Two Cabins Burn on Blue Mountain

Two Blue Mt. cabins caught fire earlier this year. One was totally destroyed and the other suffered significant damage. One may have been caused by an electrical overload. The county Fire Chief thought that the other one was destroyed to the point that they may not be able to determine how the fire started.

Had these fires occurred during a very dry period the fire could easily have spread to nearby woods and endangered many other cabins and homes.

Most of the cabins built in the 50s through the 70s were not intended for year round use. Wiring and water pipes were left exposed under uninsulated floors. Later, some property owners extended their use to winter by wrapped exposed pipes with heat tapes and leaving power on. In the depths of winter, hungry mice will chew on exposed electrical wires (Romex wiring, extension cords, etc.) which can short out, fry the mouse and start a fire. An even greater risk is that a heat tape thermostat can stick closed and any part of that heat tape that is covered in thermal insulation can overheat, melt the wire insulation, short out and start a fire. In most cases the short will blow a circuit breaker -- but not always.

These hazards are real. Each of these things has actually happened on Blue Mountain.

In unoccupied cabins in winter months, it is best to completely drain cistern water pumps and pipes and shut off the main power at the breaker box.

Open Burning Illegal in Blue Mountain

We received a couple of complaints recently about open burning. In one case, a member called the Sheriff's department which incorrectly replied that the department had no jurisdiction to control open burning. The County Sheriff was contacted and he has verified that we are indeed included in Warren County No Burn Ordinances and has instructed his deputies to respond to our reports. Considering the severity of our risk of a forest fire, members are encouraged to report open burning to the Sheriff's office at 635-4129.

The ordinance states: **§ 92-2. Outdoor burning prohibited in designated locations.** "Except as hereinafter provided, all open burning is

prohibited in the following designated areas of Warren County, which, in the opinion of the Board of Supervisors, are so heavily populated as to make such burning dangerous to the inhabitants thereof or their property:

B. Within the boundary lines of all sections of Blue Mountain Subdivision, as shown on Warren County Tax Maps 15A; 16A; 24A, Sheets 1 and 2; 24B, Sheets 1 and 2; and 24D."

Open burning is, however, permitted in an enclosed grill, pit or outdoor fireplace for cooking food.

Unpaid Sanitary District Fees total \$7,000

A report from Warren County shows that about \$7,000 of the Blue Mt. Sanitary District (SD) Fees due to the county in December 2006 have not been paid. These fees are our only source of revenue to pay for road repairs, snow plowing, insurance, common area maintenance including the lodge, lake area, and dam, as well as all other administrative expenses such as newsletters, web site and required financial audits. Therefore, the board plans to publish a list of delinquent payers in the next (Summer) newsletter.

Some property owners may not be aware of this legal obligation or have misplaced their bill. Some payments are late because some settlement firms neglect to either collect the fees at settlement or fail to inform new owners of this obligation. Some mortgage companies build the fee into mortgage payments. Others leave it to the owners to pay. Most Front Royal title companies and lawyers know to include the SD fees as part of the closing. Problems usually arise when out-of-area closing firms call the county to get Real Estate Tax amounts but do not know to ask for amounts due for SD fees. Regardless, it is the seller's ultimate responsibility to make sure that the information is correct at closing.

The county assesses late payment fees and interest to these unpaid bills and can place a lien against the property for non-payment. If any property owner is unsure if their SD Fee has been paid they should call the Warren County Treasurer at 540 635-2215 armed with a legal description of all owned properties. We will obtain and use an updated list of delinquent payers from the county prior to publication this summer.

Wildfire Mitigation Program

Based on the Va. Dept of Forestry designating our subdivision as being in an extreme category of risk for a forest fire, the board made an application to the state for a grant of \$31,250 to pay for removing deadfall piled up by members and to trim the sides and canopy over our roads to improve natural firebreaks.

The grant money will be available for only six months so in order to take advantage of this federal program, we must get as much deadfall possible piled up along our roads this spring and early summer.

The ice storms of Thanksgiving and around Christmas brought down many thousands of branches which, when dry, will add a significant amount of fuel load to what is already on the ground. In order to get the full amount and use of this federal money, and reduce our extreme risk of an uncontrolled forest fire, we have to significantly increase our efforts to pile up deadfall. To date we have logged only 350 hours of "in kind" effort which converts to only \$5,550 in state paid contractor work -- only about 1/6th of the funding we could get from the state.

This program is for your safety and the protection of your property, homes and family. **Let's get as much of our tax money back as possible** by

piling brush and deadfall about 100 feet apart along any road. Please report your name, road, the total number of person hours of work. Please tell us whether any equipment was involved which counts double. Simply email jstuard1@aol.com or phone Don Richards at 635-3571 and leave a message.

Every hour of work you report is worth \$15 in federal money. And the number is doubled if you use any kind of equipment. Also, the state will accept for credit any amount you personally pay to have someone do the work for you. Just let us know your name, address and amount paid to get matching dollars in federal assistance.

Newsletter Available via Internet

Our Bylaws require that the newsletter be mailed to the owner of record at the address appearing in county records. The cost of producing, printing and mailing the newsletter costs the Association about \$1,000 a year so if you are no longer a property owner and are receiving the newsletter in error please let us know. Some members, especially new owners might like to have back issues. We have two or three years of back issues on computer files that can be emailed on request in either .doc or .pdf format. Just email jstuard1@aol.com.



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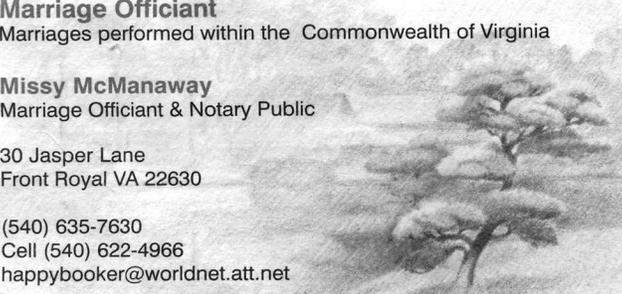
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