

Crossroads

The Quarterly Journal of the County Road Association of Michigan

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Fall 2016

SNOW ISSUE

How do they do it?

Winter maintenance
on island roads

Page 10



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Living memorial doubles as snow fence
- **Member Profile:** Keweenaw County clearing roads in Michigan's snowiest county





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Crossroads

Crossroads is the quarterly publication of the County Road Association (CRA) of Michigan. The 83 county members of CRA represent the unified, credible and effective voice for a safe and efficient local road system in Michigan.

The Association, headquartered three blocks north of the State Capitol, is dedicated to helping members promote and maintain a safe, efficient local road system in rural and urban Michigan.

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Next Publication

The Winter 2016 *Crossroads* will cover best practices and innovations from the summer 2016 construction season.

Crossroads' editorial team wants to highlight the most interesting county projects of 2016. Call CRA at 517.482.1189 and let us share what you worked on this summer!

PRESIDENT'S CORNER



In my first article, my goal was to remind everyone how important working as a team is to the success of an organization.

I encouraged all county road agencies

and their employees to be part of the CRA team to strengthen and move the association forward.

In this article I would like to raise another important factor in making county road agencies and CRA more effective organizations.

Road agencies and CRA staff are constantly under pressure from special interest groups demanding legislative action to dictate how road agencies must interact with their special interest.

Most of these "special bills" come about because the interaction between the special interest group and the road agencies was negative, leaving the group feeling wronged and wanting to get even.

This, of course, is politics.

In an effort to minimize negative interactions and keep politics in check at

the Marquette County Road Commission, I ask my staff to have the following philosophy:

- If possible, find a way to say "yes" without deviating from approved policies and/or the law of the land.
- If "no" is the only answer, explain why. "No," just because you said so, is simply unacceptable.
- Regardless of the answer, discuss the issue, be polite, be respectful, be understanding.

The bottom line is to have a positive interaction with everyone you encounter. That doesn't mean you give them what they want.

It means, whether the answer is "yes" or "no", the discussion maintains a positive and professional tone. Acknowledge their position, and do your very best to help them understand yours, especially if it's contrary to theirs.

One of the greatest compliments I received came from a critic. In an email rant between several people that did not like my position on an issue (which lasted over three years!), one of my biggest critics said, "He's still polite ..."

With that statement, I knew I had won! I wasn't going to change her mind and she wasn't going to change my position. The issues were still the issues, but she was not making personal attacks anymore.

Instead, she was defending me from others making personal attacks against me. I had won the only battle I was going to win on the issue. I had won her respect.

I encourage you to help yourself, your county road agency, and the CRA with the politics.

Fight hard toward what you believe in, but always be polite, respectful and understanding. Find a way to say "yes" if you can, and if you can't, explain why. If nothing else, win every issue by gaining their respect, regardless of the outcome.

Jim Iwanicki
CRA President
Engineer-Manager of
Marquette County Road Commission



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MEMBER PROFILE

KEWEENAW COUNTY

➔ **Located at the tip-top of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Keweenaw County might be a study in extremes: The most snow in Michigan, along with the smallest population and smallest geographic area – unless you add in Lake Superior land rights, which makes it the largest county in the state.**

SNOW AND HOCKEY

When people think about the UP, snow and hockey come quickly to mind. The **Keweenaw County Road Commission** (KCRC) has strong ties to both.

First, the hockey. KCRC's cold storage equipment building sits on the location of the once-popular Glaciadome, built in 1909 by the Mohawk Mining Company. For 30 years, Glaciadome was the area's entertainment center holding a large skating and hockey rink, and at times, bowling alleys and a ballroom.

Heavy snow is a given for the Keweenaw Peninsula, surrounded by Lake Superior on three sides.

"We can get 'lake effect' snow from three directions," said **Gregg Patrick**, PE, engineer-manager of KCRC since 2003.

Keweenaw gets about 245" of snow in an average year, compared with 82" at

Houghton Lake or 101" in Traverse City. Keweenaw's all-time snow record is 390" in 1978-79.

Suffice it to say: There's a whole lot of plowing going on by KCRC.

"We've had our guys plow 60 to 70 days straight without a day off," said Patrick, a nearly-lifelong resident of the UP and graduate of Michigan Technological University.

Where to pile all that snow is a challenge, although the county is largely rural. Snowbanks along US-41, the main artery, can reach anywhere from 4 to 10 feet tall.

"To maintain visibility and provide space for additional snow storage, our plow operators

usually make a "bench" on the snowbank at about 3 to 6 feet tall with a grader wing or an Oshkosh wing," Patrick said.

Forecasting snowfall is as much art as science at Michigan's northernmost point.

"For low level precipitation events, Canadian radar works better for us than the National Weather Service in Marquette, because of the Huron Mountains (Marquette County) we can't see what's coming," Patrick said. "We use the NWS, the Canadian weather service, the Weather Channel – about four different sources."

KCRC also benefits from the forecasts of a professional meteorologist celebrity, John Dee, who moved from Chicago to



“**The first day on the job, my predecessor says you budget and plow for winter and whatever you have left over is what you can use for summer. We still live that way – it keeps our schedule very fluid. Fifty percent of our budget is winter maintenance.**”

– GREGG PATRICK,
ENGINEER-MANAGER, KEWEENAW COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION

JUST THE **Facts:**

Keweenaw County Road Commission

Office location: Mohawk

Staff: 15 full-time, 4 part-time, 7 summer staff

No. of commissioners: 3 (elected)

Miles of paved roads:
122 = 99 primary + 23 local

Miles of unpaved roads:
54 = 4 primary + 50 local

MDOT contract: Yes (129 lane miles)

No. of bridges: 3

Annual budget: \$2.6 million
(inc. MDOT contract)

Local revenue: \$274,000 (thru 2020)

Annual snowfall: 245" average

KCRC established: 1913

Office built: 1916

Oldest vehicle: 1970 Oshkosh
plow truck

FUN FACT: KCRC offices are located in the 100-year-old former Mohawk Mining Company machine shop. With railroad tracks originally delivering iron and other goods to the shop's heavily reinforced concrete 2nd floor, that's where KCRC parks and services its trucks. Offices are on the first floor, making it possibly the only road commission office housed under the garage.

KCRC does much of its work in-house. With new funding, KCRC used its own equipment to do crush and shape and roadway prep for the first time in 20 years.

Keweenaw because of his love of snow.

KCRC receives about 1,500 tons of salt a year, primarily for its MDOT contract, and uses about 350 tons in a 9:1 sand-to-salt mix.

Salt isn't routinely used because putting it down at the beginning of a snow event of unknown duration can create a days-long slushy mix that is actually worse for drivers. Keweenaw also doesn't have the traffic volume that allows road salt to be most effective.

IMPLEMENTING EFFICIENCIES ON THE PENINSULA

→ **CHANGING ROUTES.** Declining road funding has changed the level of service KCRC delivers to the county's 2,100 residents, particularly over the last decade.

"Years ago you could set your watch by the road commission. We used to have 25 to 30 employees on the plows every day, doing the same route at the same time – even if there was 1 inch of snow," Patrick said.

"We have implemented some efficiencies, which change the routes depending on the conditions," he said. "It took a while, but people have gotten used to it."

Regardless of the amount of snow, most Keweenaw County residents are plowed out between 5 and 10 a.m.

→ SHARING ROUTES, BUYING TOGETHER.

Keweenaw and Houghton counties share about four miles of plow routes, which improves efficiency for both counties. The two also buy, trade and sell materials on a regular basis, and share equipment.

KCRC performs the plowing and heavier street maintenance for the villages of Ahmeek and Copper City, the latter located in Houghton County.

→ **DOING WORK IN-HOUSE.** KCRC does as much work as it can with its own staff.

"About a decade ago we purchased an asphalt zipper to crush our own pavement," Patrick said. "The plan at the time was to crush and shape, chip seal and then hire the surface to be paved over a three-year period. With the lack of funding, we've been unable to do that."

However, with new local funding this summer KCRC has been able to do its own crush and shape and roadway prep for paving, for the first time in 20 years. "Seeing some progress made is encouraging; it's been stagnant for so long," Patrick said.

→ **CULVERT REPLACEMENT.** Playing to its strength, KCRC has been stretching its road funds by slip lining culverts, rather than removing and re-installing new pipe.

"Many of the culverts installed in Keweenaw County in the 1960s were 'way oversized, which works well for us today," said Patrick. "We've been slip-lining culverts with our own forces since I've



been here, meaning we've been installing a slightly smaller pipe inside the existing, deteriorating pipe. We're hoping to get another 50 years out of them.

"With slip-lining we don't have to open-cut the road to put in a new culvert, and we don't create new dips or heaves in the road," he said. "The DEQ has allowed us to reinforce some of our rusted-out arch pipe culverts with reinforced concrete in the bottom if the sides are good."

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Much of Keweenaw County's revenue depends on tourism and logging, and Patrick notes the road commission has become creative in supporting them.

Of course, the seasonal roads are not plowed in winter and most of them become popular snowmobile trails. Maintaining access to them is very important to the area's winter tourist economy.

For tourists visiting from spring through color tours, Patrick is very aware of the need to have good roads.

"You take Brockway Mountain Drive, which is almost nine miles long," Patrick said. It was originally constructed by KCRC in 1933 with dollars from a Depression-era public work program.

"Today, sections of it are awful – yet it is one of the crown jewels of the Midwest, and even the entire US," Patrick said. "We heard from our hotel and restaurant operators that the road was so bad it was deterring some tourists from going up there."

"With our dwindling budget, no way can we afford to fix the whole nine miles. So we decided to make two miles of patches with crush-and-shape and double chip seal last year," Patrick said. "We made the road better for tourists and local business, by stretching our funds with shorter segments of surfacing."

Logging is the area's number-one industry, and requires special attention from the road commission.

"We work to help our loggers by plowing some seasonal roads until mid-January so they can pull timber out," Patrick said. Keweenaw also uses its forest funds primarily to improve all-season roads and expand the network for loggers.

Patrick believes positive interactions with loggers come down to regular communication and relationship building.

"I know all of the foresters in our county; I have known some of them for decades," he said.

"My foreman was a former logger. Foresters working in the area will find him and let him know what they're up to, when he's out and about in the county," Patrick said. "In addition, if the road where they're working is a questionable area, they will contact me first."

"Like everything else, it boils down to good communication," he said.

ONE OF MICHIGAN'S NEWEST COUNTY-WIDE MILLAGES

Keweenaw County has five townships, and utilizes full asset management planning including PASER ratings, traffic counts and identifying current and future business locations. It has developed a five-year plan in collaboration with its stakeholders.



KCRC's Transportation Asset Management Council dashboard indicates just 15 percent of federal-aid roads are in good condition. Its local roads, which represent most of its road miles, are in considerably worse condition.

In August 2014, the voters in Keweenaw County passed a new county-wide millage.

"It started out as one township was interested in a local millage. That supervisor talked to his neighboring township and they thought they might like to do it, too," Patrick said. "We talked about it for six months and then they all said let's go for a county-wide millage, and the county commission agreed to put 2 mills on the ballot."

The road commission wasn't sure the millage would pass. There were a couple of articles in the local newspaper and some local meetings that were not well attended.

"At the county meeting, we had 13 people – half of them being local elected officials," Patrick said. "So we were shocked when it passed by a 68-to-32 margin."

The first funds were collected in 2015, and this construction season KCRC has been able to pave some local streets.

As part of the millage, Keweenaw set up a county road millage committee that includes five township supervisors, KCRC and one road commissioner. The group meets periodically to decide which roads should be a priority.

NEW ROAD FUNDING

"With the new road funding, I tell people to be patient," Patrick said. "Not only do we have bad roads, but we have old equipment, and we have an old building. We have both short- and long-term plans,

and our board of commissioners is currently reviewing how best to approach all of the things we need to do."

Patrick said he works closely with the board on all issues. Over the years, it has had very diversified members, with everyone bringing a unique perspective on roads.

With winter demands so uncertain from year to year, KCRC also needs to keep its schedule fluid – meeting its match on federal-aid projects first, addressing future utility projects and seeing what's left to address complete mix of right-of-way issues.

"Fixing all of our roads will take some time," Patrick concluded. ➡

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Think your roads are tough?

→ Islands by the numbers:

Island road miles under road commission jurisdiction.

CHARLEVOIX COUNTY

Beaver Island (Lake Michigan)

- 100 road miles
- 3 employees

CHIPPEWA COUNTY

Drummond Island (Lake Superior)

- 88 road miles (80 miles for Chippewa County Road Commission; 8 miles for MDOT.)
- 2 employees

Neebish Island (Lake Superior)

- 30 road miles
- 1 employee

Sugar Island (Lake Superior)

- 60 road miles
- 2 employees

ST. CLAIR COUNTY

Harsens Island (Lake Huron)

- 27 road miles (20 miles for St. Clair County Road Commission; 7 miles for MDOT.)
- 1 employee

Try keeping an island road running clear!

Michigan has 120,000 miles of vehicular roads, at least 300 miles of them running across islands. Three CRA members maintain roads for year-round residents of sizable islands in all three Great Lakes.

While island roads are certainly exotic – they bring planning headaches and higher costs to road commissions that must service them.

Crossroads spoke with three county road commissions to get an inside look at what it takes to maintain an island in the winter.

Battling against Mother Nature: How to get there from inland

For landlubbers in Michigan, maintaining island roads is a foreign concept. But for the road commissions in Charlevoix, Chippewa and St. Clair counties, islands are a high-cost, high planning feature, especially in winter!

Each island has varying degrees of snow, weather conditions and accessibility.

Winter weather can make accessing an island impossible. Winter interruptions to ferry service and ice formation make getting items to an island a daunting task.

In the case of Neebish Island in Chippewa County, ferry weight restrictions are a serious limitation.

“The Neebish Island ferry is limited to 50,000 pounds on the deck which limits materials that can be hauled over there,” said **Chippewa County Road Commission** superintendent/manager **Robert Laitinen**, PS.

Point of Reference

Inches of snow accumulation per year:

BEAVER ISLAND	74"
HARSENS ISLAND	41"
DRUMMOND ISLAND	69"
NEEBISH ISLAND	120"
SUGAR ISLAND	120"

Items such as the gravel crusher are too heavy to be transported to Neebish Island. To move any equipment more than 50,000 pounds, Chippewa CRC will either hire a marine company to move the machinery or if available, the transit company will move the larger ferry from Drummond Island to Neebish Island to move a piece of heavy equipment.

During the winter, Neebish Island has a standard truck and a spare truck for backup because there is no ferry service from January to March.

For Beaver Island, 32 miles off the Lake Michigan coast of Charlevoix County, the only option for delivering materials is by plane from January through March.



+ Aerial view of Beaver Island

"All your winter supplies have to be at the island before winter: Spare tires, blades. We always fill the fuel tank before winter — a 10,000 gallon tank gets through winter," said **Charlevoix County Road Commission** manager **Patrick Harmon**. "It's not like the mainland where you place an order and the next day it's delivered. The logistics of getting anything there is why it costs so much."

When a furnace stopped working this past winter at the main garage on Beaver Island, a contractor for Charlevoix CRC had to disassemble the new furnace and load it onto a small 10-passenger airplane. Once on location, the furnace was reassembled.

St. Clair County Road Commission assigns one truck to Harsens Island for the winter. The truck is loaded with salt and that supply will be used all winter. If necessary, the truck can be brought back and forth on a ferry in winter months.

However, if ice interferes sometimes the federal government has to help.

"Access to the island is the biggest challenge, especially during times of ice floe," said St. Clair County Road Commission (SCCRC) managing director **Kirk Weston**. "There are times when the river will block off and we will have to wait for the Coast Guard to open it back up to get through."

No one's allowed to drop the ball

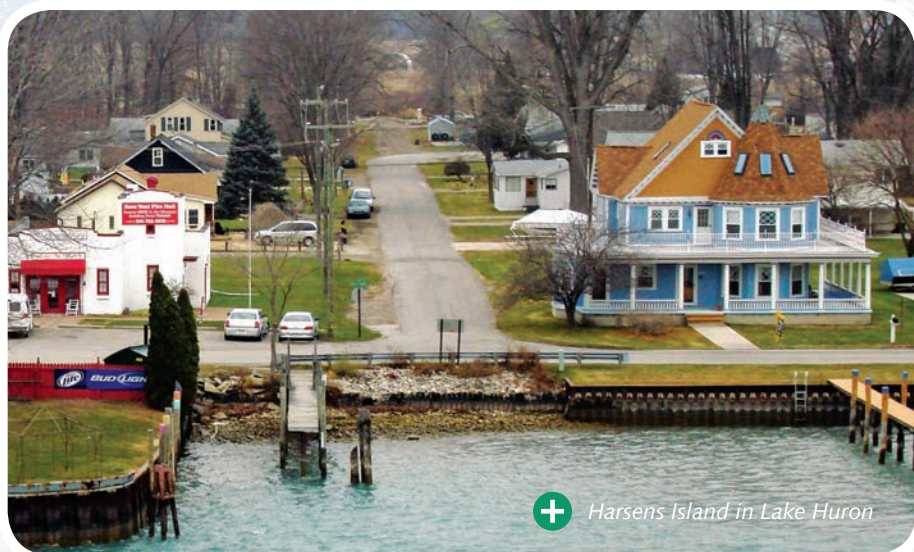
Another rule of thumb is islands with roads have less staff than mainland road commission garages.

Some islands vary staff numbers throughout the year, but typically an entire island's road maintenance falls into the hands of one or two employees.

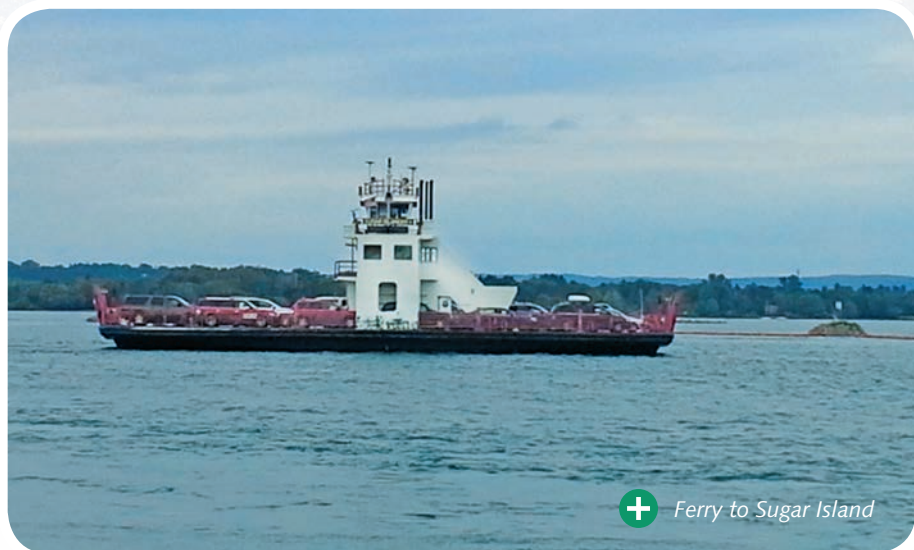
On Harsens Island, one employee maintains the 12-square mile island in the winter. Other staff can substitute if needed. Employees who maintain Harsens don't live on the island.

Beaver Island's three employees live on the island.

For Drummond, Neebish and Sugar, staff live on the islands they maintain. Neebish has one employee; Sugar and Drummond have two each.



+ Harsens Island in Lake Huron



+ Ferry to Sugar Island

Winter maintenance equipment used on the islands

Chippewa County: Drummond, Neebish and Sugar Islands

- One standard single-axle truck with front plows and underbody scrapers on each island.
- One tandem-axle truck with front plows and underbody scrapers each on Drummond and Sugar islands.

Charlevoix County: Beaver Island

- Three single-axle dump trucks with underbody scrapers, front plows and sanders.
- One grader with snow wing.
- One loader.
- Pickup truck with plow.

St. Clair County: Harsens Island

- One tandem truck.

If an employee needs leave time or falls ill on Sugar or Drummond islands, the second employee could cover. If that happens on Neebish Island, it would be a challenge to keep the roads clean (Neebish gets an average of 120 inches of snow a year.) That hasn't happened, but it's something that keeps Laitinen awake at night.

"When we have to get someone to fill in, it throws a wrench in operations — especially in the winter months," Laitinen said.

Island staff are also limited in taking personal time off during the winter season.

"Employees have a hard time having any sort of private life. If there is any sort of

weather event or call-out, we can't share that call-out with anyone or have anyone else cover their overtime. They are the only ones," Laitinen said.

"A tree down, a sign down, you name it -- we are limited in the people that can get to the island to respond to things."

Big out of pocket costs

Of the three counties with drivable island roads that *Crossroads* interviewed, all agree everything needed to maintain an island in the winter costs "three times" more than on the mainland.

Several factors affect how much an island costs to maintain, but a "big ticket" item is transportation to the isle.

Transporting staff and equipment depends on ferries, airboats or airplanes during the winter months, and sometimes even snowmobiles.

On Neebish Island, if a part is needed and the ferry is not running due to seasonal shutdown or weather conditions, bringing parts across the ice via snowmobile may, indeed, be a last resort.

Chippewa CRC's annual costs associated with using ferries to Drummond, Neebish and Sugar total about \$20,000.

The winter months are not kind to island maintenance. Through the dedication of the various hardworking county road commission staff, the residents of Beaver, Drummond, Harsens, Neebish and Sugar Island can still drive to stores, visit friends and family, attend appointments and get to work. ➕



CROSSROADS EVENT Calendar

September 14-16

NMARC/ASMCR 4th Annual Joint Conference

Join county road agencies from across the Lower Peninsula for educational and networking sessions, the NMARC and ASMCR 4th annual business meetings and more. At Boyne Mountain Resort.

October 27

Public Relations Workshop: Digital Communications 401

CRA's Public Relations Committee hosts a workshop on creating a practical digital communications workflow for your county road agency. At the Comfort Inn & Suites, Mt. Pleasant.

December 8

Legal Issues Symposium and Road Funding 401 Workshop

This year's Law Symposium focuses on right-of-way issues. Road Funding 401 picks up where Road Funding 101 left off! Learn details of the Michigan Transportation Fund. At the Comfort Inn & Suites, Mt. Pleasant.

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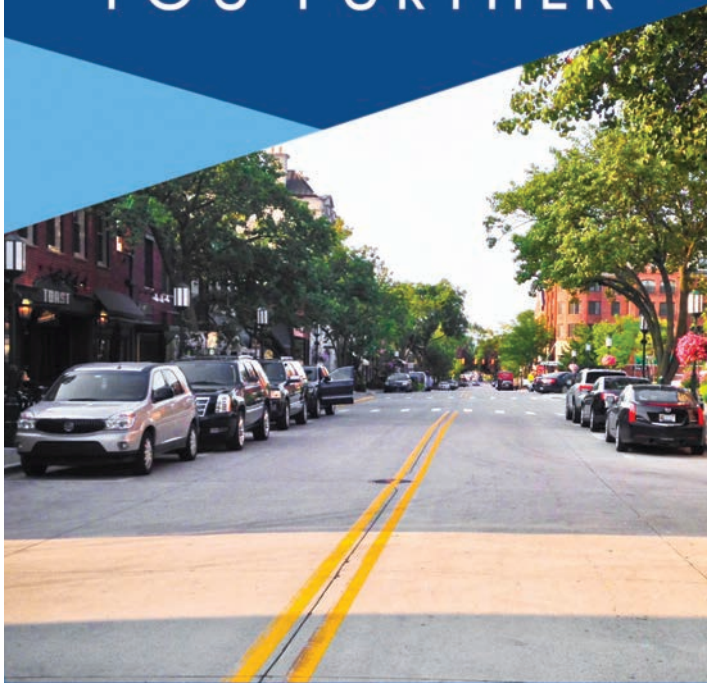


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Roscommon's living snow fence pulls double duty –

Increasing safety and serving as a living memorial

There isn't a county road agency in Michigan that doesn't deal with the hazards of blowing and drifting snow every winter.

But when a young college student died in a car crash in Roscommon County after encountering this hazard on her nightly drive home, the **Roscommon County Road Commission** (RCRC) knew it had to take significant action to decrease the risk of driving in this particular location.

The county turned to an innovative solution: Utilizing living plants to work with the environment.

County Road 603 is a primary north/south road in Roscommon with a history of winter-related accidents. One of the worst of them occurred in March 2013, when Roscommon resident Alexa Luck had a tragic fatal accident on CR603.

After investigating the situation, RCRC leaders put their heads together and came up with an innovative solution: plants. They settled on the concept of a "living snow fence" to help reduce future accidents, and memorialize the young woman.



2016
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AWARD

+ The sign from Tim and Cheryl O'Rourke dedicated to Alexa Luck on CR 603

"After a lot of discussion we wanted the fix to be a testament to the life of the young girl who died at the location," said RCRC Manager **Tim O'Rourke**. "She was a student at Kirtland Community College and this is the main route most of the Roscommon students take every day to and from class."

As with many road projects, RCRC was faced with a funding dilemma after initial bids came in at nearly double the cost of the original forecast.

"We wanted a 'forever' kind of fix, not a fix that would come and go with budget constraints," said O'Rourke. "Sometimes doing the right thing just has to trump the budgetary concerns. What is that one life worth?"

The road commission eventually decided they could perform the work themselves closer to the original estimate. They then worked closely with MDOT's Local Agency Program safety initiative to secure additional funding to complete the project.

RCRC removed trees and improved embankment slopes in October 2014, and began planting about a year later.

In total, 660 bushes were planted in a triangular pattern along CR 603. An extra 40 shrubs are planted off site, as backups.

The final cost of the project ranged from \$6-\$10 per foot, O'Rourke said. The project was also a learning opportunity for RCRC that will influence future projects.

Along with reducing blowing and drifting snow, RCRC's living snow fence should also reduce repeated plow time, and limit equipment wear and material usage, O'Rourke said.

But perhaps most importantly, it will stand as a living testament to Alexa Luck's life, something with which O'Rourke and his wife, Cheryl, have a deep personal connection with.

After Tim and Cheryl O'Rourke personally funded a new sign for the living snow fence, Luck's family was invited out to see the memorial that would help keep Roscommon residents safe in the future.

"It helped to have a private moment with them to just hug and cry," O'Rourke said. "We just can't imagine what they are going through. No parent could." --



PLANNING FOR THE LONG-TERM AND WINNING

Congrats to 2016 TAMC Organization and MCA Award of Excellence winners

Thinking ahead has several benefits, including winning awards! For that reason, the Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council (TAMC) honored the **St. Joseph County Road Commission** (SJCRC) with the 2016 TAMC Organization Award.

TAMC recognized SJCRC for its Asset Management Bridge Plan and Training Guide; its PASER work with adjoining counties; and efforts to educate local officials and the public. The award was accepted by **Donald Preston**.

St. Joseph County Road Commission maintains 1,022 miles of road and 97 bridges.



+ TAMC president Joanna Johnson poses with Donald Preston who accepted the 2016 TAMC Organization Award on behalf of SJCRC.

Solid Concrete "Award of Excellence"

The **Kent County Road Commission** (KCRC) received an Award of Excellence from the Michigan Concrete Association (MCA) for its 36th Street reconstruction project completed last summer. The project replaced asphalt pavement with concrete to better support the commercial traffic in the area.

Jeff Fischer, the project's inspector, accepted the award for KCRC. Members of the project's team included **Eric Rodegher**, PE, project engineer; **Gene DeRuyter**, assistant project engineer; and **Ed Vrugink** and **Chuck Shiroda**, project staking.



+ Jeff Fischer accepted the Award of Excellence on behalf of KCRC.

CRA Unveils New UNIFIED PERMITS

Over the last year, CRA's Engineering Committee and Permit Subcommittee have worked closely with CRA engineering specialist **Steve Puuri, PE**, to update the uniform transportation permits.

The updated transportation permits were distributed for adoption by the counties in two groups: The first set of permits was released in March; the second batch was distributed in August 2016.

Crossroads sat down to talk with **Puuri** on these new transportation permits and why CRA members should adopt them.

CRA: Steve, we'd like to open things up by asking how did such a complex task get completed in under a year?

Steve Puuri (SP): This update was truly a collaborative effort by many highly experienced weighmasters and engineers from county road agencies across the state. Their insight helped to create a modern set of

permits that provides a unified set of rules and methods for both county road agencies and industry.

CRA: When was the need to revise these permits first identified?

SP: There were significant efforts in the early 2000s to standardize the transportation permits that county road agencies use. While these earlier updates produced a great platform, something more substantial has become necessary. Recent legislation and an unfavorable Attorney General opinion in April 2015, that provided weight restriction exemptions to truckers, required county road agencies to make major revisions.

CRA: How will the new unified permits impact counties' workflow and overall permitting atmosphere?

SP: When these updated permits are adopted by county road agencies, the trucking industry will have more certainty of the rules and regulations they

must follow. This can strengthen relationships with commercial entities, and demonstrate to the Legislature that we can solve our own issues.

CRA: Do the updated permits include uniform fees?

SP: Yes. The updated unified permits include a uniform fee structure that would need to be considered and adopted by each road agency in accordance with the public hearing procedures for adjusting fees. Also, the applicant may be responsible for additional permit processing fees, due to additional inspection and other expenses relevant to that project.

CRA: Now that these permits are being rolled out by CRA and a comprehensive Guidance Document is coming, do you have any general advice for counties?

SP: Counties need to review the updated permits and guidelines with their boards and move to adopt them. Also, the new permits are executable online forms or can be used as hard copy documents that can be

Permits available at tinyurl.com/UnifiedPermits

- Agricultural Seasonal
- Milk Haulers Seasonal
- Public Utilities Seasonal
- Single Move
- Annual Move
- Single Mobile Home Move
- Annual Mobile Home Move
- Super Move

added to a road agency's website for download. CRA will publicize the new permits to stakeholder groups and the Legislature.

CRA: Thank you, Steve.

SAMPLE PERMIT



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CRA Seasonal Ag
Revision 10-19-15

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☐ Seasonal

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Inspection/Other _____

Receipt Number _____

Counties can download the permits from tinyurl.com/UnifiedPermits. A general information page on unified permits can be found under "Doing Business with us" on micountyroads.org, on the "Permit Information" page. ---

+ Sample seasonal agricultural transportation permit.



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Road agencies implementing new WINTER PRACTICES

There's no shortage of innovation among road agencies across the state. From collaborating for cost savings to creative engineering methods and new snow removal tools, there's some serious outside-the-box thinking going on to best manage Michigan's roads.

Borrowing from the neighbors

Roscommon County Road Commission (RCRC) needed road widener equipment for a project. Manager **Tim O'Rourke** called the **Alpena County Road Commission**, asking to borrow theirs. Alpena loaned the equipment to RCRC for a low rate and both road commissions were happy.

That simple exchange caused O'Rourke to realize if Roscommon bought a road widener his seven adjoining counties also could borrow it and pay a little of its overhead.

"This started a conversation about what equipment the other counties have that could be shared," O'Rourke said.

That conversation led to the development of a master equipment inventory list among all 11 counties in the CRA East Central Region Council. It was the first step toward a formal shared equipment program for the region.

"We all have equipment we're not using. We all benefit from sharing,"

said O'Rourke. "If I can send some of my equipment somewhere and make some money on it, why not? It's a win-win for all."

The next step to formalizing the shared program was drafting a rental agreement outlining rates, equipment maintenance and return policies, operator allowances and training.

Superintendents had lots of questions about the plan.

"There were plenty of 'what ifs' and fears about giving something away," said O'Rourke. "But the realization was this is not going to break the system; ultimately it'll help streamline things."

A new Shared Equipment Plan was unanimously approved by the East Central Council in May. It was the first time the board has voted unanimously for something, O'Rourke said.

"It's really a matter of being neighborly. You can't be afraid to loan and/or borrow equipment. You realize you can get along with less equipment if the road agency next door has one you can depend on. It's a savings for both and

allows us to buy additional equipment," said O'Rourke.

Purchasing a road widener was on RCRC's capital five-year wish list. O'Rourke said they would not have bought the \$40,000 piece of equipment without the willingness of other counties to borrow it and offset the cost.

The long-term result of the Shared Equipment Program will be the ability to collaborate on major equipment purchases.

"Ultimately why is there a line between one county and another?" asked O'Rourke. "Why can't we cross those lines and help each other?"

DIY auger converting

Chain sanders are widely used in the winter by road agencies to disperse salt and sand on roads. Annual maintenance is costly – up to \$2,300 per year per sander. The **Delta County Road Commission** (DCRC) decided there must be a better way.

They converted chain sanders to augers using a hydraulic motor to turn. Annual maintenance on augers runs about \$80 per year.

Initially, the idea was to buy new augers for the trucks, but the price was too high.

"We figured we could cut the cost by changing over what we have rather than buying new," said **Jody Norman**, DCRC manager. "We found a local vendor to build an auger to fit our needs and we did the conversion work ourselves."

Delta County's first conversion in 2014 cost about \$10,000 and took some tweaking to get it right. The next one was done for half the price in half the time.



➕ *Converting chain sanders to augers reduced annual maintenance costs from \$2,300 to \$80 at Delta County Road Commission.*

"You have to weigh out the reward for the upfront cost," said Norman. "Within three years each one we convert should pay for itself easily."

Downtime for repairs is significantly reduced from the typical two days required for chain sander maintenance.

"There are very few things that can go wrong on an auger and there's easy access for quick repair when and if necessary," said Norman.

Perhaps best of all, plow drivers report auger performance outshines chain sanders, spreading sand in a continuous, consistent flow and never dropping lumps of sand.

Icebreaker – baring pavement

In Antrim County once it starts snowing residents usually don't expect to see pavement until April. But that might change as the **Antrim County Road Commission** (ACRC) busts out a new piece of equipment that breaks through the snow layer to make pavement visible all winter — even on gravel roads.

TOP 3 REASONS TO CONVERT CHAIN TO AUGER

1. Significant maintenance cost savings.
2. No sander truck down time.
3. Improved quality of sand spreading.

Antrim's new icebreaker attachment is capable of cutting through ice build-up several inches thick and getting down to pavement in one pass with a plow.

The attachment, first-of-its-kind used in Michigan, is a drum-like cylinder with one-inch spikes. It hooks onto the front of a plow truck.

As the truck drives the drum rotates and the weight of the truck drives the spikes into the ice, breaking it up. An underbody scraper removes the crushed ice from the road, exposing bare pavement.

Burt Thompson, PE, ACRC engineer-manager saw the icebreaker at a trade show in 2015, and ordered one for a three-month trial. They bought the \$30,000 piece of equipment following the trial period.

Thompson believes the icebreaker is a valuable tool for winter road maintenance, especially in Northern Michigan.

"We have roads with hard-packed ice. It gets cold and we can't use salt effectively. The icebreaker saves time and money by peeling ice away and getting back to the surface," said Thompson.

It also cuts through built-up ice on gravel roads to get to a smooth surface.

"We don't use salt on gravel roads. In the past there wasn't much we could do in the winter for people living on these roads," said Thompson.

The icebreaker mounts easily on any truck or plow with a quick hitch. Driver training is minimal, but required some focus on the proper speed for best use. ---

3 BENEFITS OF THE ICEBREAKER

1. Saving money on salt use.
2. Saving time in clearing icy roads.
3. Improving winter maintenance of gravel roads.

+ *The icebreaker saves time and money, peeling ice away on paved roads and cutting through built-up ice on gravel roads to get back to a smooth surface.*



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LEGISLATOR PROFILE

REP. ROB VERHEULEN



Rep. Rob VerHeulen, serving District 74, gave us the chance to get to know him during a recent conversation with CRA's Deputy Director **Ed Noyola**. The lifelong Michigan resident talked about his path to Lansing – from corporate attorney to mayor to state representative – and the important role road commissions play in keeping legislators informed about key road issues throughout the state.

CRA: What is your understanding of your local road commission (Kent County Road Commission) prior to and after your election to the Michigan House of Representatives?

REP. VERHEULEN: As mayor of Walker for 11 years, I developed an excellent relationship with our road commission. Once elected to the House and appointed chair of the Transportation Appropriations Committee,

I was not shy about reaching out to the road commission on road issues; they are knowledgeable, have good judgment and great stewards of resources.

CRA: Did your relationship with the road commission have an impact on votes you have taken as State Representative?

REP. VERHEULEN:

Yes, definitely. As a recent example, being in touch with local road commissions and the County Road Association was important in passing the "Green Light Bill" – House Bill 5242, allowing green lights to be used on snow plows and other government vehicles in winter conditions. We relied on the road commissions' assessments and expert testimony to inform and educate us on what was needed and what would work best.

CRA: Is your road commission your go-to source for transportation legislation?

REP. VERHEULEN:

I find road commissions to be helpful and have a solid

understanding of reality in Lansing; knowing what's doable and what's not.

I have an open door policy with my local road commission and I feel the same with them. In an era of term limits, you cannot be an expert on everything; you have to depend on the experts in each area. My local road commission has credibility and solid expertise. That makes my job easier. The CRA has earned respect and trust, too, which is a huge benefit to both legislators and road commissions.

CRA: How important is the new transportation revenue to you and your community?

REP. VERHEULEN:

It's a huge step forward. You can't have economic development without adequate infrastructure and good, safe roads. It's a very positive step for the entire state. Passing the transportation funding package was a big accomplishment. I am pleased to have participated.

FROM CORPORATE ATTORNEY TO THE HOUSE OF REPS.

Rep. Rob VerHeulen never intended a career in politics. He loved history and viewed government as important, but he was content working as a corporate attorney for Meijer. When the mayor of his hometown of Walker reached out about a position on the zoning board of appeals, the 35-year resident could not turn him down.

Several years later, VerHeulen was encouraged to run for mayor. He was elected to office on September 11, 2001. There was no celebration. His legal training and business skills were put to the test during three terms as mayor.

"Times were tough. With revenues slashed following 9/11, income tax revenues dropped. We hunkered down, cut spending, closed city hall offices on Fridays and weathered the storm together," explained VerHeulen.

Looking back, VerHeulen considers navigating through those tight times his greatest challenge. Now his community is able to invest in the future.

VerHeulen is looking forward to being re-elected in the fall and continuing his leadership in the state.

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FIVE STEPS FOR SETTING ROAD FUNDING EXPECTATIONS

- By the CRA Public Relations Committee



Everyone knows the story. For 18 years road agencies struggled to get the Michigan Legislature to address road funding.

Road agencies appreciate that the Legislature and Governor Snyder have agreed to increased revenue for transportation.

Now that they have, road commissions and departments face a new set of challenges: The funding package falls short of the need, it's phased in over five years and the second half of the funding is not constitutionally dedicated.

Those three points mean it's more important than ever to proactively manage the expectations of local communities and taxpayers. Many people believe the road funding problem is solved, and within a short period of time all the roads will once again be pristine.

In fact, for most counties, the roads will likely get worse before they get better. At least through 2017, when some new money begins to arrive.

So, how to get the public to understand that the road commission probably won't be repaving their subdivision this summer? In other words, how do road agencies manage those expectations?

The answer is to aggressively, proactively, consistently and repeatedly communicate the realities of this situation.

Here are five steps that a road agency can implement to achieve transparency with the local community.

1. HAVE A PLAN FOR THE NEW MONEY.

The first step is make sure the road commission has a plan to use the new money as effectively and efficiently as possible. While it may not be as much new money as hoped for, it will be new dollars.

County road agencies are the local road professionals, and each county road agency in Michigan has the expertise to put

together a solid plan to get the biggest bang out of the new bucks.

This is important for two reasons: First and foremost, it's good business practice and county road agencies need to be excellent stewards of public funds.

However, a very important part of a road agency's message is to be able to say they're using the new money in the best way possible. That as the leading road experts in the community, the county road agency has reviewed the needs and the options, and selected the best way to make the most improvements on public roads.

This fact must then be part of county's messaging going forward: This is the best plan to use the new money.

2. BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT WHAT WORK CAN BE DONE AND WHEN.

Road agencies must begin as soon as possible explaining exactly what can be done with the new dollars. Be very clear – don't sugar coat.

While a road agency may not need to immediately list exactly which roads will receive which treatments, do identify how many miles of resurfacing can be done over the next several years, how many miles of chip sealing, reconstruction, widening and other treatments.

For perspective, compare the additional quantity of work that can be done due to the new money. For example, "we'll be able to resurface five additional miles of roads each year, chipping away at our list of 100 miles of roads that need to be resurfaced."

3. IDENTIFY THE KEY MESSAGES TO GET ACROSS.

Such key messages will probably include:

- There is a plan for the new money;
- The new money won't fully address the problem;
- New dollars will be phased in from 2017 through 2021.

Clear messaging and a transparent, visible plan will keep the trust with the public, local officials and the Legislature.

4. START NOW TO SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.


Use these key messages in any communication pieces related to future road work or road funding. Include them in public presentations and conversations with the media, local officials, community leaders and other local thought leaders.

5. BE CONSISTENT IN MESSAGING.

In the field of marketing, there is an old adage that prospects need to hear a message at least seven times before they will act on it.

Road agencies can apply this lesson as well: It's safe to assume road commission audiences need to hear the key messages repeatedly before they fully understand and internalize the information.

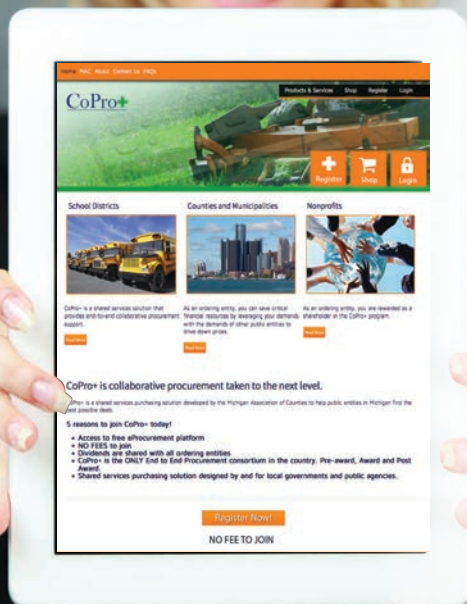
Whenever there's an opportunity – with the media or talking to a community group or local officials – share the key messages. Be consistent and stick to the key points. Stay on message.

The more successful road agencies are in messaging about the 2015 transportation package, the more likely the public will understand the real limits of the new dollars. They won't be surprised when all the roads are not miraculously perfect overnight. 



This road sign, social media campaign template is available from CRA with county highlight.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Here's hoping you have a lovely finish to summer! Our family had fun in several communities these past few months, and we took a lot of local roads to get there.

Settling back into fall – and as the legislators return from their summer campaigns – we find neat opportunities and great challenges awaiting the Association.

Two neat *opportunities* for the Association are:

→ **Christina Strong**, the CRA communication specialist, who joined our staff in late May. A MSU grad, she was the digital media manager for WOOD/WOTV television in Grand Rapids, and is an excellent writer and creative thinker.

By the time you read this, Christina will have activated our new Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages; created guidelines for using the CRA logo; organized the October PR Workshop; and put out two PR Tips packages along with this magazine. You will begin seeing Christina at meetings and conferences soon!



→ **Cynthia Dulaney**, the new accounting and administration manager, who joined our team in late July. Cindie has served as controller for a large insurance company, and was formerly VP of finance and membership with the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce where she supervised staff and coordinated events. We're looking forward to her guidance as we strategically plan the future of CRA.

Summer projects have allowed the Association to make progress toward the next-generation MISCRAM, create a website-based "bill watch" document (external and members-only versions), implement revisions to local bridge board appointments and consider options for working with the logging industry.

The board has worked in two strategic planning sessions, as it contemplates the future and challenges to right-of-way authority.

We're completing the 2016 Law Symposium on "right of way" issues,

and **Ed Noyola** is drafting the Road Funding 401 presentation. Both of these education programs are set for Tuesday, December 6.

The *challenges* we face as summer turns into fall are big:

- The final report of 21st Century Infrastructure Commission and possible 'lame duck' bills.
- Resolution of the lockbox stand-off that will siphon \$100 million of new road funds.
- Gov. Snyder's unexpected call to change Act 51.
- Some concerning pieces of utility-sought legislation.

And don't forget the upcoming election that will bring many new faces to the Michigan Legislature: One-third of House seats will turn over in November!

We must be sure the new legislators understand road funding, the total right-of-way picture and the role of county road agencies in addressing these challenges.

Denise Donohue

Denise Donohue, CAE, APR



Key transitions at...

Road Commissions and Departments

Charles Arbour has been appointed commissioner at **Montmorency County Road Commission**

Keith C. Richard has taken over as director of operations at the **Monroe County Road Commission**.

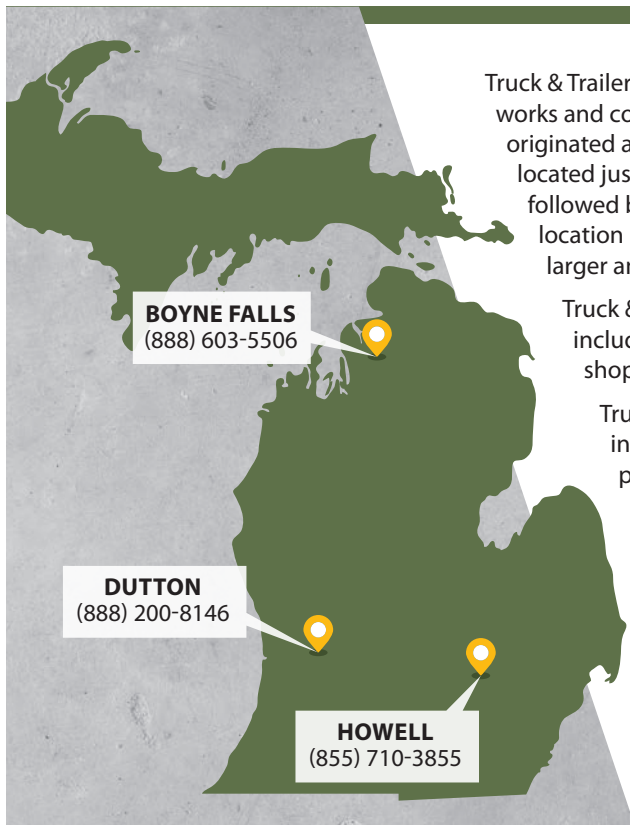
Richard Frighetto has been appointed as commissioner at the **Iron County Road Commission**.

... CRA

Cynthia Dulaney has joined CRA as accounting and administration manager.

In Memoriam

On June 1, 2016, **Bill Weisberger**, commissioner at the **Ionia County Road Commission** passed away. Weisberger was a road commissioner since 2011.



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