

Unpaved roads would see benefit of summer temps

Written by Peter Nocerini

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IRON RIVER—The Road Commission seems ready to hire temporary workers next summer—if it fits in their budget. __PUBLIC__

The matter was discussed by the commission during its Dec. 10 monthly meeting here. No action was taken.

Commissioner Ernest Schmidt is behind the proposal, which he made after hearing complaints from township officials about road grading work that they want done on their unpaved roads.

Schmidt proposed hiring four workers—two for each side of the county—“so our regular crew can do their thing, without taking the guys off the graders. I’d like to really see the graders going all summer, weather permitting.”

By union contract, the temporary workers can only be used for six months. Schmidt said they can be hired from May to October. From November to April, the Road Commission would go to its winter temporary workers, as normal.

With temporary summer workers, the Road Commission’s regular grader operators would be freed from other work to run the machines. “We’re trying to improve the roads, put the ditches back in, reclaim the gravel from berms and put a crown back on the roads.” He also said all crewmen should get training.

Commissioner Joe Sabol cautioned that every day work may be too taxing on the machinery. “It’s a good idea,” he said, “but you can’t run them five months at a time, every day. You can go maybe for a week and a half, but then you better get them off and give them a break.”

Dean Stolberg, the head mechanic, said the commission has “close to four” grader operators right now.

Several township officials in the audience said their biggest complaint is that the crowns on unpaved roads are not being maintained. “It’s flat as a pancake,” said one.

Superintendent Doug Tomasoski said one reason for that is because most of the grading has been done by a truck with an underslung plow—not an actual grader. That way, “You can’t re-establish grades.”

Also, he noted, there’s often little material available that can be used to create a crown. “They’ve been crowned and crowned and ditched. So now you have channels.” In some areas, crowns can be rebuilt. “But it’s not as many as we think.”

“We have to start somewhere,” Schmidt answered.

Commissioner Charles Battan had the biggest question: “Can we afford it?” Tomasoski didn’t have an answer. “We can look at that,” he said, with an answer to come in January.

“Can we fix it in one year?” Commissioner Chris Sholander asked. “Probably not. Can we put a dent in it? Maybe so.”

Chairman Dan Germic said he is willing to give it a try. “I don’t think it will break the bank.”

He, Sabol and Battan said the use of the temporary workers should be up to management’s discretion. “Too many things come up,” said Battan.

In the end, Schmidt’s motion to hire temporary summer workers was seconded but then tabled until after Tomasoski reports back on the cost.. Schmidt estimated it would cost about \$60,000 for the four workers.

“We should have all the information on the table before we vote on it,” Germic said. If the commission approves the move, temp workers could be hired in February or March and start work in April.

- The icy aftermath of the recent storm that glazed many roads throughout the area was

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discussed.

"Our road conditions are terrible," said Grant Helgemo, Bates Township supervisor. "I know I hear it's too cold for sand and salt and all that, but I see U.S. 2 is clear. In Caspian, the roads are all clear down to blacktop. So something works."

Helgemo also complained that he had no place to call—the Road Commission's answering machine didn't help much. "There should be something set up so someone's available.

"I realize we have money problems and personnel problems, but I still think with the ice storm we should have had trucks out all weekend." Helgemo mentioned that Bates Township's road millage comes up for renewal next year, and icy roads don't make voters happy.

Tomasoski said the Road Commission's first priority during a winter storm is taking care of the state highways. He said the county had used 15 tons of sand (which it mixes with salt) the day before.

The weather forecast on the day of the storm, he said, called for just 1 or 2 inches of snow—but, like many times before, the weather didn't follow the script. The snow lingered longer than expected and then turned to freezing rain. "Once it was on there, we did what we could."

After that, temperatures plummeted below zero and stayed there. "We can dump all the salt in the world out there," Tomasoski said, "and it's going to do nothing but make it slicker," because any melted ice refreezes right away in subzero weather.

"What we're going to be doing is continue to sand, sand, sand and try to scrape off when we can."

"It just got so cold, so fast," Sabol said. "I hope people have a little more patience. If it's really cold, that sand doesn't stick."