

IMBA GREAT LAKES SUMMIT 2012 NOTES
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The IMBA Great Lakes Summit was held on June 8th 2012 in Crosby, MN. It was held at the Hearwood Senior Living Center. Yeah, an old folks home, only a super modern and super sweet space as well. The Heartwood was totally free and had a really sweet AV set up and on top of that catered the full event for about \$10 bucks a person. So I would encourage any of your clubs that are having meetings of this type to really look into all the alternatives you can come up with to find space like this.

We had 28 folks attend. The Chapters that were represented were, MORC, CUYUNA LAKES, COGGS, COPPER HARBOR, CAMBA, SUPER CYCLING and WOOLLY. In addition we also had LAMBA (from Cedar Rapids, IA) who just applied to become a Chapter and also a prospective club from Grand Rapids attend the Summit as well. The stated goal for attendance was quality not quantity and my original number in my head was 20.

Chapters that were not able to attend were. CITA, METRO, Southern Kettles, KORC and Central Wisco. It is for them that I am writing up a quick synopsis of what happened.

The Summit opened up much as it did last summer in Copper Harbor. We had each club that was present, stand up and report on what they are up to and what they are focused on this season. As usual it was pretty astounding to hear about all the great work that is going on across the region. We also had open questions for each Chapter at the end of their presentations. To end this session we had Ride Center Reports from both the Copper Harbor Trails Club (Aaron Rogers) and the Cuyuna Lakes Mountain Bike Club (Aaron Hautula) as well. Both these clubs and their trail systems exemplify quality mountain bike destinations in our region and it was really cool to hear how they are leveraging the Ride Center designation to both keep improving their systems and in maintaining them.

The next session was facilitated by Andy Williamson IMBA's RD for the eastern part of the Midwest region (Great Lakes States).

This session was really focused to help me as a director gain insight and focus on what our regions big picture goals are going forward. I have long had my own ideas of what I have wanted to accomplish in the next few years but after quickly gaining the number of Chapters that I have currently, I realized that I had an opportunity to gather input and direction from them. To me this marks a sea change in my position as regional director. When I started this job nearly three years ago, I had no IMBA Chapters. I then spent a hard fought 2 years asking for clubs to partner with me and with IMBA. I don't want to say that all of that time was spent in the weeds, but I will say that now with 12 Chapters and several others on the way, I do feel that I am now

able to literally start leading and working on much bigger picture goals. Those goals were what Andy asked folks to write on the back on 3x5 index cards in the session. The Chapters were asked to finish a sentence that started out with "To raise the level of quality Mountain Bike Experiences in the next five years (in the Midwest region) we need to....." Once we had gone around the room I was also able to then relate what I had in my mind to complete that sentence via a Powerpoint presentation, meat of the presentation being this....

1) Increase the profiles of local clubs and local trail systems. These are the clubs that do not have the selling point of being destinations. These are clubs and trail systems that are small in size, small in numbers but still provide high quality of life opportunities. The idea is to better organize the clubs to be bigger players in their communities as advocates. In other words, they could be as significant as the Elks Club, or any other mainstream philanthropic group by being organized and active and by creating valuable infrastructure and educational opportunities for their citizens. To that end however they need to step up their game and have better quality clubs and trail systems and also change their minds about what their clubs do and how they are perceived.

2) Turn my region (Upper Midwest), or at least zones of it into world class off road cycling destinations. The first and currently most established I am calling the Iron Curtain. This is a string of Ride Centers and Epic Trails that traverse my region along the old Iron Ore Mining and distribution communities. From Marquette, MI to Copper Harbor, MI to Crosby, MN including Cable, WI, Duluth, MN and also Grand Marais, MN and on to Thunder Bay, Ontario. These are the communities that have the ability to hit both goals at once. Both good quality of life for the locals and also a world class experience for tourists who want to come and see the unique riding opportunities that exist. Ideally I want a cartel or a consortium that can come together for political reasons, but also marketing reasons. The idea being that we can band together to get the word out on a regional basis. Of course we want to have a solid, consistent brand that we can all rally behind and use as a watermark for quality and that is IMBA.

I could see similar groupings in other parts of my region as well. IE the Mississippi River Valley. Northeastern Wisconsin etc. The basic idea here is that we are all in this together and that regardless of the destination each place has a unique and branded riding experience that should not be in competition with other areas, but should help cross promote them and create repeat visitors to each region.

Waypoints that need to be achieved along the way.

- *Increase the number of partners in the region and in the consortium. IE More IMBA Chapters.*
- *Strategize region wide actions to help those Chapters gain more membership.*
- *Create a communication network. A large model "Dirt Boss" system or Regional Leadership Council.*
- *Create a more strategic visioning process for IMBA's resource allocation. That*

means longer-term visions for where TCC, TS, myself and other IMBA resources go and why.

- *Use our regional Delegation to improve IMBA Chapter Resources and infrastructure.*
- *Figure out how to gain more pro staff on the ground, more staff support for bigger clubs and or statewide associations.*
- *Streamline pro trail builder/contractor models for clubs so they can get higher quality trails on the ground more efficiently. Also, figure out good models for the back end maintenance of these trails.*
- *Marketing plans for both the local clubs and trail systems and most certainly the clubs within the Iron Curtain or any other zone coalitions we create.*

Once my presentation was over we broke up into small groups and each group went through what they had written down. Each group then picked a few key ideas and at the end of the session we put up wall posters and wrote down what each group had prioritized as important goals going forward. I am currently now going through both the wall posters and the index cards to come up with what I consider the top 5 goals from the session.

Interestingly enough, there was a lot of overlap, similar thoughts and like-minded comments as we went through each group's reports. For me personally it was really cool to see that my original goals were not far off of what most people were thinking and I truly feel that IMBA Midwest has a solid vision for the future and I cant wait to get started on it. I have set June 20th as the date where I will list the top 5 goals I have prioritized. I have also decided to start sending out invites for the Regional Leadership Council this week as well. So by the end of June not only do I hope to have a start on some great big picture regional goals, I will also have solid input from my Chapter leaders on how to gain those goals. To me this was history in the making, we came into the meeting as individual clubs and IMBA Chapters, and I truly felt that we left the meeting as a regional team.

The final session of the Summit was on how to use professional contractors to build sustainable mountain bike trail systems. We had a great panel to do this, including Aaron Rogers of the Copper Harbor Trails Club and also an IMBA employee. We also had Reed Smidt who is both a MORC board member and also a Land Manager for the city of Woodbury. Lastly we had Ryan Lieske who is MORCs current leader. Pro-Trail builder Tim Wegner was also invited but was unable to attend due to some last minute schedule changes. This was a great panel as it had a pro builder, a club leader who has used pro builders and also a land manager who has used Federal RTP funds to fund his project. A lot of good questions were asked and a lot of great answers were given and I felt the goal of the session (to educate clubs on the process of using pro trail builders) was achieved.

Once the final session was over we all gathered for a fun group ride on the awesome Cuyuna lakes trails. The day finished up by filling Ya Betchas bar and grill with a bunch of hungry thirsty off road cyclists! Most folks that attended the Summit also stuck around for a highly successful Cuyuna Lakes Mountain Bike Festival as well!

Lastly, I would like to make sure that the Chapters that did not attend are given the chance to respond to the same question we asked of the group. What do you think we need to do to raise the level of quality mountain bike experiences in the next five years? Let me know and I will add it to the pile and hopefully the end product I come up with this week.

Thanks for reading.

Hansi Johnson
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