

**NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION**  
*Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee*  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
June 11, 2015  
Quality Inn, Monroe, MI

[www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr)

**PRESENT FOR THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION**

Commissioner Louise Klarr, Chair  
Commissioner Tim Nichols, Co-Chair  
Commissioner Vicki Pontz, Co-Chair

**PRESENT FOR THE MSPAC**

Julie Clark  
Ann Conklin  
Chris Graham  
Bob Hoffmeyer  
Mike McDonald  
Amy Trotter

**ABSENT**

Mary Pitcher  
Tom Baily  
Jim Hendricks  
Jeff Gray  
Mike Foote

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Jim Lynch, Detroit News  
Richard Mica, City of Monroe  
DNR Management and Staff

**MICHIGAN STATE PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MSPAC)**

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Commissioner Klarr called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. She then took roll call, made introductions and welcomed Renee Parker, DNR Chief Ron Olson's new assistant. There were no adjustments to the agenda offered.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Minutes from the April meeting will be approved at the August meeting.

## **PRESENTATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS**

### **Coldwater State Park**

Deb Jenson, Park Management Plan Administrator, gave the committee an overview of the General Management Plan for Coldwater State Park.

Coldwater State Park is a 400 acre park, purchased in 1998 with trust fund dollars. Of the 400 acres, 200 acres are farmed, with some wetlands and woodlands, with 100 acres of frontage on Coldwater Lake. Lake is built up all around it, the state park is really the only undeveloped lake shore. Currently 60 % is agriculture; farming will be reduced over time. Started plan with public meeting, the business plan was a blank slate. The community came to us questioning “what are you going to do with this state park.” They also came with big wish list. Some would like to see wildlife, nature trails, natural, and swimming. An online survey was conducted; most did not want to see much change. The Online survey asked what level of development they’d like to see; that didn’t give us much to go on. One of the significant activities is hunting; the only hunting area available in Branch County. The management plan is very conservative in its development of the area. Coldwater State Park is used now for very short season. We do want to make sure hunting opportunities continue in this area, as this is only public hunting in this area and was noted by both the public meeting and on line survey.

The board discussed the resolution for Coldwater State Park and determined this was a good plan.

Commissioner Graham asked for a motion on Resolution 06-2015-01, recommending Approval of the Coldwater State Park General Management Plan.

Commissioner Nichols seconded the motion; the motion unanimously carried and Resolution 06-2015-01 was approved and adopted.

### **Bewabic State Park Land Use Order**

Ron Olson reminded everyone that some parks are close to an ORV trail. We are trying to encourage people to camp and connect to this trail; Bewabic State Park has this ability. The Land Use Order, would let us by rule, establish that ORV’s can go thru the state park and connect to the trail. This would allow people to navigate from the campground to the trail.

### **Outdoor Adventure Center Fee Order**

Ron Olson informed the members that the DNR would forward a fee schedule to all members after the meeting. Ron also reminded everyone that one of the models of operations for the facilities was to rent out spaces for clinics, meetings, weddings, etc. perhaps as a way to augment operating expenses. The long term goal is for the OAC to be self-supporting. At this time we have exhausted our ability to raise funds and do additional features.

The OAC was built with a trust fund grant, a unique public/private partnership of which the results were very positive. All information related to the business aspects will be posted to the web site. All will be invited to the opening on July 16<sup>th</sup> (ribbon cutting), with the public launch being July 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Outdoor Adventure Center – Milliken State Park**

Vicki Anthes, DNR Planning Section Manager, gave the committee a status update on the OAC, indicating construction is nearly finished. Vicki detailed the various exhibits to both educate and entertain. Upon entering there is a group gathering area for guests and students to become acquainted with the OAC.

There is wonderful taxidermy throughout the OAC. At the front you'll find a duck hunting blind bird watching, drawing etc. birds will appear on the mural behind it. There is also a beaver lodge, where guests will see a beaver family. The level of detail is amazing. The contractor was very interested in this project and was very creative; there are fossils in the wall and paw prints. The assembly of the big tree began 3 weeks ago. There is a suspension bridge that is very stable and very fun for all. There are several simulators that the ORV programmers did a great job on, with feature videos of various trails including snowmobile trails. Both simulators work year round. The Grand Opening is scheduled for July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and will include a visit by the governor. Invitations will be sent to various regional school superintendents and business leaders as well as many others.

Marketing will continue for the OAC; so by fall there is wide visibility for school groups, foundations and other organizations that are eager to help connect with this as a destination. Many inquiries have been made already for corporate events, weddings and other special events.

Vicki also indicated that the OAC is partnering with Belle Isle to house fish in the aquarium. There is signage included that explains what this is doing for the fish. The OAC aquarium includes more native fish, while the Belle Isle aquarium has more exotic fish. This is a great partnership; with the opportunity for both to shine.

Ron Olson added that staff has been dialing in laser shot for a hunting experience. There are video screens for a simulated snowmobile ride, an Old ORV for riding, as well as simulated mountain biking. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor there is an eagle next where the wings flap as guests go by the exhibit, and an archery range. The vision for the OAC was to provide an experiential place to be a gateway to the outdoors.

It was also noted that Linda Walter is touring facility constantly with various teachers associations, libraries, business's, and media. Linda is very busy managing tours.

A guest of the meeting indicated that the Safari Club has someone going to various events and that has increased sponsorships.

It was also noted that this is one of the biggest educational undertakings the DNR has taken on.

Ron Olson explained that a full time maintenance man, from Central MI University, has been hired and a mechanical company to work with the OAC has been retained to handle all the fountains. The goal is to do this right as we go.

The question was raised regarding a combined family pass for the OAC and Belle Isle. Ron Olson explained that this may come in the future. Conversations are also being started with other museums in the area in an effort to establish other partnerships.

#### **STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM UPDATE**

Ray Fahlsing, DNR Stewardship Unit Manager, reviewed the efforts at William G. Sterling State Park. Through a grant from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), the Parks and Recreation Division has been able to restore the marsh area, restore lake plain prairie, repair dikes and install water control and control phragmites.

This has been a historically contaminated area of concern, with Sterling State Park just north. This project gave us an opportunity to address two concerns; the wildlife populations and habitat lost. The DNR has restored 18 acres of submerging marsh, and a large project was undertaken with the neighbors to control fragmities. The Hunt Club marsh of 190 acres now has water control back into place, an accessible paved pathway for fishing, and bird watching for shore birds which migrate to this area.

It was also noted that many communities, DNR departments and energy companies were involved in this project.

#### **PRESCRIBED BURN SUMMARY**

Ray Fahlsing also gave a short update on the prescribed burn summary that was distributed with the meeting materials. On average there are 55 burns proposed, we have completed 16. Of the 5,500 acres that composes about 1000 of those acres. Numerous issues prevent the prescribed burns; and we continue to struggle with these. Some periods the fire danger is too simply too high.

We are planning 190 acres of grasslands at the Hudson recreation area, next year we plan to plant 200 acres at Lake Hudson. Some areas are planted with little blue stem grasses rather than prairie grasses. At Sterling State Park we continue to plant lake plane prairie grass, which is an ongoing process.

Board members questioned the likely hood of fall burns. Ray explained that the last week of October and first of November starts to be too much going on with hunting, general habitat etc. We propose about 1/3 burns we would like to see done. We usually get about 1/3 of those done and it does have an impact on recreation. Need is there to do way more burning than we can currently do. Must have qualified resource, need ability to contract for prescribed burns, hasn't been done in the past.

### **INVASIVE SPECIES UPDATE**

Christina Bower has been hired, part time, to work within Parks and Recreation as well as Wildlife. She will work with grant applicants on invasive species plans that have been put forth.

### **MICHIGAN TOURISM CARES 2015 PROJECTS**

Maia Turek spoke about the Michigan Tourism Cares project. Tourism Cares is a national, non-profit; we are currently in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the statewide plan. DNR PRD partners with the group to do volunteer work throughout the state. Last year there were 400 volunteer's that painted bathrooms and playgrounds. For 2015 two events have been undertaken; the first the group helped paint the Sturgeon Point Light House, with 150 volunteers. Also some rough plastering, clearing of brush, and rebuilding a fence were undertaken. These volunteer projects have helped to save over 800 hours of staff time. Maia also explained that the last piece of the Lighthouse, the tower, was received from the Federal government, the patrician from the keeper's residence and the tower was removed as well. She noted that the Alcona historical society has been a great partner on this project.

We work with "Michigan Cares" to identify the project, organize the volunteer's and assist with getting the necessary gear to those volunteer's.

Maia spoke about the partnership with the Parks Division and the Chateau Grand Traverse. The winery has created three custom label wines and is donating the proceeds to benefit state parks, trails and waterways. The labels direct you to the website and invite people to vote on trails, waterways and tree replacement in our state parks. This also helps to increase awareness of our state parks. This campaign started before Memorial Day, and most are voting for tree replacement.

Three sample bottles for viewing were present and given to various board members who have had recent or upcoming birthdays.

### **PARKS AND RECREATION UPDATES**

Ron Olson noted that there is a Trails Update included in the packet materials distributed to all board members that covers all trail programs we intend to start building on. This update gives a good overview. It was also noted that the recreation passport numbers are also included in the packets. All passport numbers are up by 30% overall from this time last year. In Detroit the increase has leveled off, we are now comparing a year ago to present day, still up some 300%.

A brief update on Belle Isle included the recent media interest on the Grand Prix which was a muddy and rainy weekend. The layout of the Grand Prix requires parking on grass creating mud, this problem is being restored and the roadway will re-open this afternoon. Marketing Outreach will be doing a public survey to establish a baseline of information on attitudes and perceptions of Belle Isle. One more month and we will have the total one year attendance for Belle Isle.

From January – April there has been 601,000 visits to Belle Isle, we will be pushing close to 3 million people by year end. Numbers on several other locations are up double digits from the year before.

Ron Olson shared that we have been asked through legislative process to prepare financial scenario of what would it take per year over what number of years to reduce 300 million plus in infrastructure costs to manage parks. The board had a discussion regarding funding going forward. There is much interest out there in trails but funding is limited. The building of “new” only adds to the list of maintenance money that we can’t maintain now. Camping revenues are up 17% through the month of May, which is good, in spite of the upward fee adjustment.

Ron informed the group that he spent Memorial weekend at Silver Lake State Park on the new plan. Previously with the Voucher system we brought on 500 in an hour. With the new system we had about 800 in an hour. There were over 100 trained volunteers to help manage parking etc. There were very positive results from Memorial weekend. The new system helped reduce waiting lines and the sheriff was much happier. Silver Lake State Park contributes significantly to the economics of the area. Over all we had a very positive outcome from the weekend. The Silver Lake State Park is one of only three like this in the country; there is also one in Oklahoma and also California.

The DNR held a Camp host training last week; over 100 new hosts were trained. This continues to be a very robust program.

Ron also outlined the nice award received last week from the green initiatives team; Detroit Economic Club. Recognized by the Michigan Green Leaders through the Detroit Free Press. The DNR Parks and Recreation was picked as public sector winner, which is very nice recognition. All the big business leaders in the Detroit area were present. The resurgence of Belle Isle was spoken positively about by the leaders, and how Belle Isle has positively impacted the area.

Paul Yauk, DNR Acting Trails Coordinator, gave a brief update on the trails day held last weekend. There were 130 scout troops that participated by walking various trails, for a total of 2100 scouts. The scouts walked 14,000 miles, used the Iron Belle Trail.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Amy Trotter shared that the Michigan United Conservation Clubs; operates a summer youth camp and is there is still room for campers this summer. The MUCC has operated this program since 1946, during this time more than 55,000 youth have learned to enjoy the outdoors safely and left camp with a very

positive appreciation for the natural world they live in. Please see additional document submitted by Commissioner Amy Trotter.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Richard Mica, Commission on Environment for the City of Monroe was present and thanked the group for helping to clean up The River Raisin. Thank you for coming to Monroe.

**CLOSING BUSINESS**

The next meeting is scheduled for August 13, 2015 and will be held at Augusta in Battle Creek.