

MINUTES

NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION

Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee

June 9, 2016

Jay's Sporting Goods
Gaylord, MI

PRESENT FOR THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Commissioner Christine Crumbaugh, Co-Chair
Commissioner Tim Nichols, Co-Chair

PRESENT FOR THE MSPAC

Tim Nichols, Co-Chair
Christine Crumbaugh, Co-Chair
Mary Pitcher
Jim Bradley
Mike McDonald
Julie Clark
Bob Hoffmeyer
Tom Bailey
Brad Garmon for Chris Graham
Jim Hendricks

ABSENT

Chair Louise Klarr
Amy Trotter
Ann Conklin
Mike Foote
Jefferson Gray

OTHERS PRESENT

DNR Management and Staff

MICHIGAN STATES PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MSPAC)

OPENING COMMENTS

The meeting was called to order at 9:07 a.m. by Commissioner Tim Nichols. Commissioner Nichols welcomed everyone, and made introductions.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes were approved for the April 14, 2016 meeting. No changes were noted. Commissioner Nichols motioned for approval of the minutes with Christine Crumbaugh seconding that motion. Motion to accept minutes as written passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Wayne Coppa, Crawford County, Grayling, Michigan

Mr. Coppa spoke about connecting Hartwick Pines, Otsego and North Higgins Lake State Parks with a trail. Mr. Coppa expressed his concerns about users having to cross a very small trail over the I-75 overpass, which is very dangerous. The county would like assistance with a separate non-motorized bridge over I-75. Mr. Coppa shared photos of the proposed bridge that the county has been promoting since 1996, and feels that there is money and funding adequate to support this. The county did submit for a trust fund grant to try and work on other segments of the proposed trail. Due to various issues with the trust fund grant process, they are having difficulty with this submission. The county would like to partner with DNR to make this bridge a reality. Mr. Coppa also indicated that the County Road Commission is willing to assist in any way they can to make this project happen. Mr. Coppa again requested support and assistance from the DNR on the proposed bridge.

Several commission members asked questions regarding the grant process and if another unit of government could possibly apply for grant funding. Mr. Coppa explained that the Road Commission is not able to apply for this funding; that the statute is very specific as to what units can apply.

Ron Olson further explained that grant funding requires a 5 year recreation plan as well. There is no reason however, that the county, village, or township couldn't develop a recreation plan and then apply for the grant. Ron Olson indicated that the project sounds like a worthy cause and Mr. Coppa should stay in contact with Paul Yauk, State Trails Coordinator, to assist with moving this trail forward.

Paul Yauk spoke about the great work Otsego County has been doing through the years. Paul Yauk reassured Mr. Coppa he would work to make this final piece happen.

INFORMATIONAL BUSINESS

Belle Isle Public Survey Results:

Ron Olson, Parks and Recreation, spoke about how the survey came about, how it was conducted and the reason for conducting the survey and the objectives of the survey. Funding for the survey was provided by an outside source. The results of the survey showed high satisfaction with the park among those who have visited and high satisfaction with the state's management of the park. Proposals for the survey were sought from the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and several others to address the scope of work for this survey. Mr. Olson further explained how the survey itself was conducted, how many individuals were interviewed and how they were selected. Individuals interviewed were from Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties plus a subset from the City of Detroit. The survey itself was conducted in August 2015. The survey showed that two-thirds of those surveyed thought that Belle Isle was an appropriate venue for large events, including the Grand Prix. Some questions were tailored to understand the impact of the Grand Prix overall. The survey also showed that visitors valued the cleanliness and safety of the park. All stats for the park are up since the DNR began managing Belle Isle; and Belle Isle is becoming a very popular destination.

Jim Hanson, commission member, asked about the cost associated with the grand prix. Mr. Olson further explained that the Grand Prix pays \$200,000 a year to use the island for the race. The Grand Prix has also invested over 13 million dollars in the island. They have been a critical partner in helping to rehabilitate the island. Mr. Olson shared that last weekend's race brought in \$600,000 for the conservancy for improvements to the island and further stimulates the local economy approximately 50 million dollars each year.

There was some discussion on the future of any boat launches on the island, and how the infrastructure needs are the priority currently being addressed and the DNR is working hard to bring the island up to standard.

Commission members also expressed that money donated by Penske and others to rehabilitate the island should be better promoted. Commissioners shared that the message needs to get out about the many ways the race has brought in revenue to the island and the community.

Pet Friendly Lodging Pilot Program:

Ron Olson spoke briefly about how pet friendly lodging is a very interesting issue to deal with in our state parks. Ron turned the presentation over to **Maia Turek**. Maia explained that while looking at opportunities to increase our visitor services, one thing was noted, customers consider pets as part of their family. That 77% of travelers have a pet that influences their travel decisions. Thus the committee evaluated the opportunity to do a pilot program in four pilot locations for 2017. 2017 was selected due to the time that is needed to adequately inform guests and prepare for pet friendly lodging in pilot parks. The pilot parks selected were Lime Island, Cheboygan State Park lodge, Harrisville State Park cabin and Leelanau State Park cabin. Not all units will be considered pet friendly; some units will not have pets and will be kept separate.

Each location will have pet-free options available to guests during the pilot program. Background research was done on current going rates, other lodging, and a survey of other state parks systems. PRD found that 10 out of 13 other states offer pet friendly lodging. The pilot program will give PRD the chance to evaluate how the pilot works, evaluate the cost benefit analysis, and receive input from staff as well as customers. Only parks that volunteered to participate have been included in the pilot program.

Commission members asked questions regarding PRD's efforts to assist veterans as many veterans need assistance dogs. They also expressed that this information needs to get out to veterans so they are aware of the pilot program. Questions regarding potential costs and comparisons with other locations such as hotels should be conducted.

MSPAC Finance subcommittee:

Jacklin Blodgett gave an overview of the budget for state parks, recreational boating and trails. There were two subcommittee meetings held that looked at revenue and expenses over a 10 year period. The next meeting is scheduled for July. The committee decided that identification of the total program and revenue sources and how they all tie together was imperative. As well as identifying the capital improvement dollars, how they are spent and where the funding for these improvements comes from.

Revenues for the state parks, boating and trails programs totaled \$106.4 million in FY2016. Of that amount \$64.2 million went towards state park funding, \$22.7 million to state forest and trails funding and \$17.2 million to recreational boating. The remainder went to the RAM Center and Sterling State Park revenue bonds. It was also noted that 62% of revenue comes in through the park improvement fund, an additional 3% of general fund money comes in to assist with the operation of Belle Isle. There is now a small amount of general fund dollars included for the Iron Belle Trail.

Committee members expressed some concern about the amount of money from the Park Endowment Fund that must be utilized for operating expenses. Concerns regarding the amount of deferred maintenance (320 million) were also expressed. Members are concerned that it appears that approximately 42 million per year is required for preventative maintenance and infrastructure projects. A list of infrastructure needs, system wide, will be presented at the next meeting.

GENERAL UPDATES

Big Oaks Equestrian Campground:

Anna Sylvester and **Paul Yauk** spoke about the recently re-opened Big Oaks Campground for equestrian use. The Big Oaks campground was closed in 2009 and on May 7, 2016 was the official ribbon cutting for the reopening. This campground includes 26 miles of trails for riding. Also noted was the Michigan Horse Council gave a gift of \$1,000 to help enhance the campground. The Campground is located near Avery Lake and Lewiston.

Paul Yauk shared that last Saturday was National Trails Day. Boy Scouts walked over 6,800 miles on that day, each one earning a patch for this.

Trail Corridors in State Forests:

Paul Yauk and **Anna Sylvester** gave a report on rail-trail corridors and land administration of these corridors. Administration of these rail-trails has been discussed since the 2012 transfer of forest recreation to the Parks and Recreation Division. The divisions are working together to further clarify administration of these trails. The committee is currently working on a trespass policy as well, which will cover rail trails and rail corridors.

Paul Yauk further explained that a trail corridor is the full width which often varies, generally they are 100 foot wide and the trail is actually the 10 – 12 foot portion going through the middle. Michigan currently has 26,000 miles plus of rail trail.

WORK SESSION

Ron Olson started the work session by explaining that the events permitting process has been an ongoing issue. That numerous entities want to utilize state parks for functions and staff is working to make things fair for all. Ron then turned the exercise over to Jason Fleming.

Jason Fleming reported to the committee on the scoring and pricing of events within state parks. Jason reviewed the background and history of the current policies; he also presented an exercise to have the commissioners assist with the scoring of an event to gather their feedback. The scoring tool helps gauge the impact of events on park resources. The Parks and Recreation Division are working to establish a policy that will simplify the process for local staff. The intent is to establish a policy that recognizes that some events, such as commercial or for-profit events should be treated differently than community, non-profit, local government or school related events.

The exercise began with Jason walking the committee members through an actual event plan. The details of the event were shared with commission members, such as number of people for the event, hours of use, set up and tear down, first aid etc. Many committee members asked questions regarding the details of the event.

Upon completion of the exercise committee members shared their scoring and how they arrived at that cost. Numerous ideas and suggestions were offered by members for this policy.

Ron Olson spoke about the various models that could be utilized for charging fees for different types of events and groups; this new policy would go through a multi department review process with the proposed changes taking effect for 2017.

Meeting adjourned at 11:58 a.m.