

MINUTES

NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION

Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee

August 11, 2016

MSU Diagnostic Center
4125 Beaumont Road
Lansing, MI 48910

PRESENT FOR THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

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

PRESENT FOR THE MSPAC

Jim Bradley
Mike McDonald
Ann Conklin
Bob Hoffmeyer
Brad Garmon for Chris Graham
Tom Bailey
Jim Hendricks
Amy Trotter

ABSENT

Julie Clark
Mike Foote
Chris Graham
Mary Pitcher

OTHERS PRESENT

DNR Management and Staff
Ron Olson
Vicki Anthes Mary Nardo
Debbie Jensen Eric Jazdzyk
Paul Yauk Doug Donnelly
Jacklin Blodgett
Anna Sylvester
Jason Fleming

PUBLIC PRESENT

Roger Calhoun, Livingston Wildlife and Conservation
Bruce Wojcik, Ruffed Grouse Society
John Paige, MUCC

MICHIGAN STATES PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MSPAC)

OPENING COMMENTS

The meeting was called to order at 9:06 a.m. by Commissioner Louise Klarr. Commissioner Klarr welcomed everyone, and reminded them to please sign in. Commissioner Klarr asked the commissioners to each introduce themselves and tell where they worked. Commissioner Klarr also asked all present to introduce themselves.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes were approved for the June 9, 2016 meeting. One change was noted; Jim Hendricks was present at the last meeting and should be added to the attendance list. Commissioner Klarr motioned for approval of the minutes with Jim Hendricks seconding that motion. Motion to accept minutes with the above correction was passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ann Conklin noted the letter included in each commissioners packet. **Ron Olson** stated the recently received letter was regarding a concert event at Belle Isle State Park. Further explaining that there are some that feel the location was not appropriate. The Chavri Concert was held last week, however, it was formerly held at Milliken State Park.

Mike McDonald suggested that while addressing the customer's concerns we should also note the positive things that are happening on Belle Isle. The members advised the DNR to respond to the customer and copy them on that response. It was also decided that the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee would also be copied on the response.

INFORMATIONAL BUSINESS

Finance Workgroup update: Commissioner Klarr introduced Jacklin Blodgett. Jacklin presented a review from the finance workgroup meeting held 2 weeks prior. Jacklin presented various charts showing highlights of revenues from the recreation passport. Recreation passport sales are up 1.5%, and total yearly sales are expected to be just below 32%. Sales of the recreation passport were up at the Secretary of State offices and the parks.

Last month we saw the first negative report on passport sales for the Metro area; sales were down .01%. Non-resident passport sales are up 12% compared to last year. Harbor reservations are up around 12% for the year. Belle Isle attendance is up this year with 2.3 million visitors compared to 1.9 million last year.

Jacklin noted that going forward figures for the Outdoor Adventure Center (OAC) will also be included in our financial update. Information provided for the OAC was a snapshot of the first year. Ron Olson also reviewed the revenue model that is being used for the OAC with the committee members. Ron noted that the goal is for the OAC to be self-sustaining. Currently an RFP is out for a new software application that will assist with tracking visitors, reservations, revenues etc.

Tim Nichols spoke about his recent visit to the OAC, sharing that the OAC was packed. Tim suggested we should all take our kids and grandkids to the OAC as it is phenomenal and a great experience for everyone.

Jacklin continued with the ORV numbers, showing that license sales are up, bringing in more resources and revenues to the program. Snowmobile sales are down; this reflects the lack of snow for last season and the downward trend we've been seeing.

The committee learned that mineral revenues to the Park Endowment Fund for 2016 have been less than projected. A planning meeting will be set up to address this issue and where we need to go with this new information and the need to discuss the various ways we might increase revenue. Commission members **Brad Garmon** and **Mike McDonald** expressed thanks for collecting this data and questioned the various ways we might encourage people to renew their recreation passport.

Jason Fleming noted that we are working on ways to target how we are marketing the passport. We want to encourage more individuals to purchase their passport at the Secretary of State office. **Mike McDonald** indicated that he would be in support of a small increase to purchase your passport at the park. Suggesting this would incentivize people to purchase the passport at the Secretary Of State. Mike also suggested working with radio and TV stations to get the word out on the passport and the perks the passport offers. **Ron Olson** reminded the commissioners that in January vehicle registration fees will go up and this may impact people purchasing the recreation passport.

After a short discussion it was determined that the finance committee should meet again in late August or early September to discuss this issue further. **Brad Garmon** asked about ORV bill 5275 that would open up forest roads to ORV's and the impact that would have on resources and revenue.

Firewood Policy:

Jason Fleming gave a brief informational on the firewood policy. A recent survey conducted captured information about firewood usage. Jason stressed that the policy is currently under review; that there is not a ban.

Jason spoke about the long horn beetle and other issues that are impacting the change in policy. Commissioner also asked about where people are purchasing firewood. Jason explained that approximately 25% bring wood from home, about 3% are purchasing firewood near their home and the remainder is either purchasing wood at the park or nearby the park.

Commissioner Nichols commented that he frequently receives calls asking if they can bring firewood into the state park. Jason suggested telling them to buy wood locally, which should be stressed. **Mike McDonald** asked about the current UP ban on firewood. Jason explained this is not a ban; you are not allowed to move wood across the bridge from the Lower Peninsula.

Jason also spoke about the camper survey and how that was conducted. The results of that survey showed that 91% of campers had a good or very good experience at state parks. That 71% of campers stay in motor homes, trailers or pop-up campers, and 28 % stay in tents. The average stay is 4.25 days.

GENERAL UPDATES

Current Project Results:

The committee reviewed the highlights of several projects currently underway, including efforts to improve efficiency and contain costs at state parks. **Vicki Anthes** introduced **Mary Nardo** to speak on various projects (see agenda) and provide an overview of the programs provided statewide. We currently have 122 statewide projects, Mary further explained the breakdown of districts and how field planners function within those districts on our various projects. Mary noted that we do have a 300 million dollar backlog that presents some significant challenges, and we are continually working on ways to sustain our parks into the future as project costs continue to rise.

Mary spoke about the following projects specifically as well as shared photos of these projects:

- Muskallonge State Park electrical system
- Fayette Harbor new dock system
- Warren Dunes State Park improvements
- Silver Lake State Park day use area
- Holland State Park Play equipment
- Wilderness State Park
- Van Riper State Park
- Hoffmaster State Park
- Straits State Park

Commissioner Klarr spoke on the standardizing of buildings and how that makes sense; noting that MDOT has recently standardized rest area buildings.

FEMA Safe Room Engineering and Grant Update:

Mary Nardo gave an update about a unique opportunity through the Michigan State police to participate in a federal grant through FEMA.

The safe room concept would develop emergency preparedness facilities in state parks using funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Vicki Anthes spoke about this year's construction challenges, as we are competing for the best contractors. Unfortunately we have had to fire 2 contractors this year; it has become increasingly hard to provide enough oversight to make sure projects are up to our standards. We are working with DTMB on this challenge. Some of the challenges we face are many bids are coming in high and we have to go back and review the project, make adjustments and cuts to get back within budget.

Mary Nardo passed out a detailed spreadsheet about projects as she explained how we define projects.

- Minor – routine maintenance
- Middle – major maintenance
- Large – items that need contracted out

Trails Update:

Paul Yauk, Chief Trails Coordinator, presented a general trails update and introduced **Doug Donnelly**, new Iron Belle Trail Communicator.

Michigan has 12,500 miles of trails, and 2,600 miles of rail trails. Benefits of these trails are numerous; they provide close to home recreation, improved local economies, as well as health benefits.

Paul also spoke about the many partners involved in our trail system; Michigan Trails Advisory Council, Natural Resource Commission, Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee, many clubs, and friends groups. Paul noted that the Michigan Department of Transportation is a significant partner on the TAP program.

Paul shared how the non-motorized program provides a wide variety of recreation. We are continuing to upgrade and improve hiking trails and bike trails. We have funding programs for ORV, boating, etc.; there is a need to work on funding programs for bike trails. The impact of bikes on our economy is 21.9 million dollars per year.

In 2014 there was an increase to license fees for the motorized trail program, in 2018 that fee increase is set to sunset.

There is a need to inform the public of the benefits of that fee increase so we can keep that money going forward. The increase helped to fund the replacement of bridges, culverts, and signage and numerous other items.

The DNR has recently signed a contract to purchase the first piece of land in order to partner with Oakland County parks on an ORV park.

Iron Belle Trail: This trail is the governors showcase trail. The Iron Belle is the largest and longest state trail in the nation. The DNR is working with great partners around the state to make this possible. Currently 60% of the biking portion of the trail is complete. We are also looking to private funding to help fund this project.

Goals: We are increasing exposure by building community teams around the state. Various planning and marketing efforts are being looked at.

National Trails Day: We had scouts from around the state participate in National Trails Day. This year there will be a stewardship project on the trails for scouts to participate in. Michigan wants to promote and participate in National Trails Day each year; people want to come to Michigan to see our trails. Michigan has the ORV council coming to Michigan in 2018, and in 2019 we have the snowmobile conference coming to Michigan.

Reminder: Michigan has FREE ORV weekends coming up.

Western Upper Peninsula Storm Update:

Anna Sylvester, Northern Field OPS Chief, spoke about the July storm event that did significant damage in the Upper Peninsula. The area was declared as a state of emergency which will assist in funding of the recovery from these storms. It was necessary for some visitors to be evacuated. Guests were called and worked with on changes and accommodations to their reservations. This rain event dumped 8 inches in 1.5 hours. Staff from all over the state assisted with clean up and moving of a cabin at risk of falling into Lake Superior. The Department of Corrections sent a crew to assist at no cost; the crew has repaired one bridge already this week. There were 3 bridges that failed as a result of this storm.

Anna's slideshow presentation shared pictures of storm damage and how it impacted many areas. There were no public injuries in our parks as a result of these storms.

ACTION ITEMS

YANKEE SPRINGS STATE PARK GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Debbie Jenson, Park Management Plan Administrator, presented an overview of the Yankee Springs State Park General Management Plan. This plan was reviewed by the stewardship subcommittee last week with only minor changes

Yankee Springs State Park is located in Allegan County; this is a large park that borders Gunn Lake. Yankee Springs State Park is also adjacent to the Berrien Game area. There are a number of lakes in this recreation area.

This site was developed as a recreation demonstration area in the 1940's by the National Parks Service and has a long history with Native Americans.

Formerly there was a stage coach route that went through the park. This area is very popular with mountain bikers due to the topography of the area and the numerous recreational opportunities it provides.

Input for the plan was developed from an online public survey, the Gunn Lake Tribe, and stakeholder meeting was held that went well. The public meeting had 45 attendees. The park means a lot to the local community and there is lots of history to tell about this park.

The online survey found that the primary season people visit Yankee Springs is "year round" Summer is also a popular use time, Fat tire biking is extending the season into the winter. The survey found that mountain biking is the most popular activity enjoyed at the park.

Debbie reviewed the park map showing where wetlands, primitive and core areas of the park are located at. We see an opportunity to develop a beginner mountain biking trail in the future. Also we see an opportunity to provide a modern restroom/shower facility here. The survey showed people like the rustic feel but modest amenities would be welcome.

The game management unit is on the east side of the park; we worked closely with wildlife to work on the game area.

Issues:

We see a need to follow-up with a stewardship plan. The Gunn Lake Tribe would like to establish wild rice beds on Long Lake. There is building restoration and reuse slowly going on as well. We are looking for local partners for funding support on some of the larger buildings.

This location has an aging sewer system that needs to be replaced. Some drainage problems exist in the park that need to be addressed. There is an opportunity to provide smaller, modern cabins as a long term goal.

Deb also spoke about the Devil's soup bowl; an attraction in the park that has overgrown that many would like to see opened back up. The over growth has restricted the views. The day use area of this park is very well used.

Upon completion of the presentation a resolution of support was requested.

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF: Chair Klarr asked for a motion of support for approval of Resolution 08-2016-02 for the Yankee Springs state park general management plan. The motion was seconded by Brad Garmon and Bob Hoffmeyer . The vote carried unanimously.

Commissioner Klarr complimented Deb on work done on these plans.

Other:

Ron Olson noted that the October meeting would have representatives from the Flint Community in attendance to speak about the riverfront project being developed in their community.

The next workshop is scheduled for September 13, 2016, we will discuss infrastructure and some of the challenges we face and the strategies to handle them going forward.

The meeting was adjourned at 11: 45 a.m.