

MINUTES

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION *Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee (MSPAC)*

February 12, 2015
Lansing Center

PRESENT FOR THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

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

PRESENT FOR THE MSPAC

Tom Bailey
Ann Conklin
Mike Foote
Brad Garmon, for Chris Graham
Jefferson Gray
Jim Hendricks
Mike McDonald
Mary Pitcher
Amy Trotter

ABSENT

Jim Bradley
Julie Clark
Tom Ferguson
Bob Hoffmeyer

OTHERS PRESENT

Jim De Clerck, Saginaw Field and Stream
Dick Zook, Mid-Forest Lodge/Michigan Resource Stewards
Drew YoungeDyke, Michigan United Conservation Corps
Todd Gulich and Cathleen Francois, Greening Detroit
Chris Klaver, Gongwer News Service
Other 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 around the room and asked if there were any additions or adjustments to the agenda. No adjustments to the agenda were offered.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Klarr asked if the committee had any edits, changes or discussion regarding the Minutes from the December 11, 2014 meeting. No additional edits or comments were offered.

Tom Bailey motioned to approve the December 11, 2014 Minutes; Jim Hendricks seconded the motion; the motion unanimously carried and the December 11, 2014 Minutes of the MSPAC were approved and adopted.

MICHIGAN RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION (MRPA) ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Ann Conklin, Executive Director of the MRPA and member of the MSPAC, welcomed everyone to their annual conference. She mentioned that Secretary of State Ruth Johnson received the State Elected Official of the Year award from the MRPA for her work supporting Michigan's parks, historic sites, forests and other recreational activities, and for her commitment to parks and recreation through her activities to raise awareness for the Recreation Passport program.

Ann further reported that the MRPA held a legislative luncheon on Wednesday, February 11, where parks and recreation leaders from across Michigan had an opportunity to meet and talk with their legislators about the importance of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) and educate them about the impact parks and recreation has on the well-being of communities. Guest speaker, Dr. John Crompton, Distinguished Professor of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, spoke to the legislators about the economic benefits of parks and recreation, trails and tourism, and the value of the land in this Great State.

The committee also had the pleasure of attending the All-Conference Breakfast this morning. Mr. Mickey Fearn, former Associate Director of the National Park Service, was the guest speaker and discussed emerging challenges and opportunities for public parks and recreation agencies, organizational culture, and programs and services required to effectively address those challenges. He stated parks and recreation has transformed from a non-essential service to an essential service for viability and health of communities, focusing on the health aspect of what we do.

Ann also mentioned that the MRPA was one of 12 agencies to receive a Michigan Health Endowment Fund grant (funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield). Their goal is to come up with standard instruments that reflect the importance of recreation, as well as create tools that can measure the impact of recreation in this state.

Ann also reported several bills were recently introduced that may divert MNRTF dollars. She commented that it is this committee's job, as well as the MRPA and every outdoor recreation leader, to get more active and involved in promoting the importance of the MNRTF. The MNRTF needs to become an entity that does not come under a lot of scrutiny. We need to encourage our citizenry and local officials to be more outspoken with and educate their legislators, which is one reason why they held the legislative luncheon.

Ann closed by commenting on the systems approach to managing state parks and recreation. Citizens are unaware if they are visiting a local park, county park or state park. As professionals, we need to take the lead in collaborating and working together for one cause, which is to educate and promote healthy lifestyles through our parks and recreation systems statewide.

Commissioner Klarr agreed that this state has multiple layers of park systems, so the systems approach is valuable and important. One theme we all have is collaboration, and we are here for the public. We need to get the word out so people have the right information, and understand the importance of preserving our natural resources and their funding sources for generations to come.

As an example, Ann mentioned 170 professionals attended the Trails Summit at this year's conference. The Michigan Departments of Transportation (MDOT) and Natural Resources came together at the Trails Summit, showing their spirit of cooperation and collaboration with the trails initiative in this state.

Some discussion ensued regarding collaboration and partnerships for the parks and trails system statewide.

Commissioner Klarr thanked Ann for her hospitality, for inviting and accommodating this committee and the Natural Resources Commission, and for making special arrangements for them during her annual conference. She also commented that this is a great time to work together with all agencies and partners on all initiatives while the door is open.

McLAIN AND STRAITS STATE PARK GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLANS

Deb Jensen, Park Management Plan Administrator, gave the committee an overview of the General Management Plans for McLain and Straits State Parks.

McLain State Park

Discussion ensued regarding the recent press release announcing 32 campgrounds at McLain State Park will be closed (out of 103) due to the shoreline erosion that occurred this year. Deb responded that the park's general management plan was funded by a Coastal Zone Management (CZM) grant. Park staff worked with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to conduct a study on erosion rates along the Lake Michigan shoreline. Erosion does not always occur over time; one major storm can cause erosion. The goal is to develop a new master plan and transition into a long-term plan to address the erosion issue.

Acting committee member Brad Garmon asked if there has been any discussion about using the canal for canoeing/kayaking or fishing. Deb responded that some discussions have taken place regarding the use of the canal for recreation as part of the long-term plan.

Committee member Jim Hendricks asked about the timeframe for a long-term plan and getting the campgrounds reestablished. Deb responded that if they apply for another CZM grant and are successful it could be around December before those funds are released, but they already have a transition plan in motion.

Chief Olson commented that the sewer line also had to be removed. Years ago, the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) had a program to fund infrastructure problems like this (i.e. breakwalls), but they have not been funding breakwall repair or replacement for a few years. The last time the department received special funding from the ACOE was when the Alanson Lock mechanically failed. He further commented that the division has ways of doing some analysis, but the CZM grants help to conduct these studies and develop these plans. The division currently works in cooperation with the DEQ but they also do not have any direct funding, except for CZM. He mentioned this will be one of the discussions they have with the

ACOE at their annual meeting, which is being held at the end of March, especially since the ACOE has a small parcel within the park boundary and maintain the breakwall on the channel.

There was no further discussion regarding McLain State Park or the General Management Plan.

Straits State Park

Discussion ensued regarding the aged Welcome Center building/site that lies outside the boundary of the park off I-75. Deb responded that there have been discussions about turning it into a Father Marquette Museum, to accompany the Father Marquette National Memorial that is within and maintained by Straits State Park. However, the building is too large, there were too many complications involved with obtaining or leasing it from the Department of Transportation, and it comes with a high price tag.

Tom Bailey, committee member, commented that there has been a lot of talk about putting this facility to good use but, due to bureaucratic policies and other restrictions, the consensus locally is that it probably isn't worth pursuing.

Deb also mentioned that a friends group for the park was recently formed. The friends group and the locals have really taken ownership on future developments at Straits State Park. Since the park is split in half by I-75, the one major concern is safe access from the east part of the park to the Father Marquette National Memorial and educational zone on the west side of I-75.

Committee member Mike McDonald commented that opening up the old Welcome Center as an interpretive center/museum, and possibly including conference rooms so the facility could be used as a meeting venue, would add to that feeling of ownership for the locals. It would give them a place where they too could hold township, Lions Club, or other types of local meetings.

Deb responded that there is a lot of local interest and talk about making that the main entrance to the park if they could collaborate with MDOT to get a proper Welcome Center there, to include a foot trail and safe access from the Welcome Center into the park and into the historical area across I-75, a mini-museum, brochures, and possibly a meeting venue.

There were no further discussions about Straits State Park or the General Management Plan.

Mike McDonald, acting chair of the MSPAC Stewardship Subcommittee, reported that the subcommittee was thoroughly briefed on both plans and were in full support of moving both plans forward to the full committee for review and approval.

Commissioner Klarr asked for a motion on Resolutions 02-2015-01 and 02-2015-02 Recommending Approval of the McLain State Park and Straits State Park (respectively) General Management Plans. Mary Pitcher motioned to support the Resolutions; Tom Bailey seconded the motion; the motion unanimously carried and Resolutions 02-2015-01 and 02-2015-02 were approved and adopted.

OAK WILT DISEASE

Heidi Frei, the southwest Michigan Natural Resource Steward for Parks and Recreation, gave the committee a presentation on oak wilt disease and the devastating effects it has had on some of Michigan's state parks, and what the division is doing in cooperation with the Forest Resources Division to control and eradicate oak wilt and maintain forest health.

Oak wilt is an invasive and lethal vascular fungal disease that prefers red oaks, but can also impact white oak. It mostly spreads underground and through the root system 90% of the time, but it can also be introduced above ground through open wounds in the tree and spread by native beetles. To treat oak wilt, it has to be tackled at both ends by cutting down the tree, destroying it and destroying the root system. A vibratory plow method of treatment is 100% effective in eradicating and controlling the spread of the disease through the root system.

Oak wilt has devastated many of the state parks, especially the campgrounds, due to the clear cutting required to eradicate the disease. At Hoffmaster State Park, the disease was detected in one tree near campsite 43 in 2011. The campground was approximately 80% red oak and was first treated in 2012, then again in 2013 and 2014 at other areas where the disease spread. The park has lost close to 200 trees, with about 60 trees that were estimated to be 80+ years old. The clear cutting has not only affected the landscape and aesthetic appeal of camping, it has also cost a lot in staff hours and time, and has caused other problems such as campground flooding, land erosion and loss of revenue.

Other state parks that have been affected by this disease include Wilson State Park (removing approximately 15 large oaks each year), South Higgins Lake State Park (removing 30-40 oaks each year), as well as Interlochen, Hartwick Pines, Rifle River, Waterloo, Brighton, Warren Dunes, Island Lake, North Higgins Lake, Otsego Lake, Traverse City and several state forest campgrounds in the northern lower peninsula.

Heidi also touched on another invasive species concern known as the Asian longhorn beetle (ALB) that primarily attacks and kills maples, but may also attack birch, sycamore, willow, hackberry and other species. The beetle has not hit Michigan yet, but it has been detected as close as Chicago.

Heidi closed by reporting that the department has established a firewood workgroup to develop a long-term action plan, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, for the control and eradication of this disease, and to prevent the spread of these invasive species. The biggest task right now is education and outreach, and continuing to treat and control infected areas.

The committee briefly discussed the ban on movement of firewood. Heidi reported that this is one of the areas the committee is reviewing.

Commissioner Klarr thanked Heidi for her eye-opening presentation.

PARKS AND RECREATION UPDATES

CAMIS 2014 Year-End Report

Jason Fleming, Resource Management Section Chief, gave the committee a snapshot of CAMIS' year-end report that covered the period from November 1, 2013 to November 1, 2014, which included statistical information on advanced reservations versus walk-ins, types of sites reserved, as well as fun facts like the top revenue campsites, parks, cabins, lodges and harbor slips. CAMIS is the agency that manages the parks and harbors reservation system, housed in Ann Arbor.

ADA Sites

Jason reminded the committee that he was asked to provide a report on the division's policy for reserving ADA accessible sites. Basically, practice in the field has not matched up with policy, so the division is in the process of reassessing their inventory and reevaluating their policy for next season. They have appeared before the Accessibility Advisory Council regarding the same issue and will report back in the near future. For now, they have made necessary adjustments to the reservation system and are educating CAMIS and park staff regarding the policy.

Update on Silver Lake Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Process

Chief Olson reported that they held a public meeting on January 12 at the Golden Township Hall in Mears to discuss the Silver Lake ORV process and gather public input and ideas. Approximately 250 people attended. As a result of this public workshop, four (4) task groups were created and will hold their first task group work session on February 13 in Lansing. The task groups will focus on a) permit sales alternatives and a vehicle pre-check process, b) customer communication and signage, c) reliable process for traveling visitors, and d) effective parking and additional parking options. The objective is to come up with some action plans and wrap up this review in early March, then pursue an amended Land Use Order. Chief Olson will report back to this committee at the April meeting. In the meantime, the committee and the general public can keep apprised of the division's and the task groups' progress by visiting the Silver Lake State Park web page at www.michigan.gov/silverlake, and selecting "ORV Scramble Area Voucher System."

Annual Report on Belle Isle

Chief Olson also reported that the Director gave their annual report about Belle Isle to the Detroit City Council in early January. They received a lot of positive input from the council, and Recreation Passport sales for the Metro Detroit area have increased dramatically since Belle Isle is being managed as a state park.

Trails Program

Chief Olson reported that the snowmobile season is in full swing, with nearly 70 partners that have received grants to help groom trails, mostly in the Upper Peninsula.

MRPA Conference

Chief Olson attended the MRPA's annual conference this week. He reported there was a lot of interaction and good discussion, especially at the Trails Summit and regarding the Iron Belle Trail. A new brochure will be coming out soon highlighting the Iron Belle Trail (formerly known as the Governor's Showcase Trail); copies will be distributed to this committee. He also mentioned they have a lot of local agencies willing and ready to collaborate on trail development and connectivity, as well as possible funding.

Olson also reported that the trail system is underfunded when it comes to non-motorized trail development and maintenance. Another upcoming funding issue will be the development of water trails, so the division has asked for additional trail specialist positions to work on the Iron Belle Trail, water trails, a non-motorized trail system, and other trail issues.

Camping Fees/Recreation Passport Campnights

The committee was reminded that these reports are contained in their meeting packets. A list of campgrounds, showing the increase in the camping fees that went into effect this camping season, was also provided based on the committee's request from the December 2014 meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Todd Gulich, Greening Detroit, asked for clarification about the increase in numbers mentioned earlier as they pertain to Belle Isle Park. Chief Olson explained the numbers mentioned earlier pertain to the increase in Recreation Passport sales, but from June to December 2014, Belle Isle has had 2.1 million visitors to the park.

2015 PRIORITIES

Discussion ensued regarding this committee's priorities for 2015. One member suggested having conference calls in-between regularly scheduled meetings to address priorities or any immediate action items on an as-needed basis.

Tom Bailey highly recommends that this committee make the protection of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and the state Park Endowment Fund one of their top priorities. Legislation has been reintroduced in this session that all members should be aware of and pay attention to their progress, namely Senate Bill 16, Senate Joint Resolution C, and Senate Bill 39.

Commissioner Klarr asked for a recap at the next meeting on the Michigan state park system's funding sources, focusing mostly on the Park Endowment Fund and how those funds are being used, and then segue into a more in-depth discussion about state park funding issues and the legislation that has recently been introduced. She would like to dive into the whole picture, including the budget process for Fiscal Year 2016 and where the division's budget is currently at for Fiscal Year 2015, including capital outlay.

Chief Olson commented that this committee's role is kind of limited to the Park Endowment Fund. There is not much to do yet except continue to help the department/Director establish priorities. This committee could talk more about programmatic priorities as they relate to the Park Endowment Fund and the state park system, and then get involved with legislation depending on the timing of when this committee should interact.

Ann Conklin strongly encouraged all committee members to reach out and educate their constituencies regarding this legislation, to be proactive, monitor this legislation closely and do whatever they can with their constituencies to encourage them to get in touch with their legislators.

The MNRTF bill should be reported out this week or in the very near future, and will be shared with this committee.

Brad Garmon commented that the value of public land and the department's role in managing public land is extremely important. These particular bills are just one piece that everybody needs to pay attention to. Be proactive versus reactive. We need to get the true story out.

Mike McDonald agreed there are many issues that are important to this committee. Maybe the next meeting could also focus on other priorities and how this committee can get the information out to others (i.e. marketing).

Committee member Amy Trotter commented that the Michigan United Conservation Corp, as well as the MRPA, is keeping a close eye on this legislation. She encourages all committee members to stay apprised on the progression of this legislation.

Chief Olson responded that staff will be ready to make a state park budget presentation at the next meeting.

CLOSING REMARKS

Term Limits

There were four members whose terms expired in February 2015. All four members have expressed their interest in continuing on the committee. Chief Olson will seek the Director's approval to extend their terms on the committee.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for April 9 and will be held in Lansing at the MSU Diagnostic Center.

Chair Klarr asked if there were any additional comments; none were offered.

The Chair called for a motion to adjourn; Tom Bailey motioned; Ann Conklin seconded; and the committee adjourned at 11:45 a.m.