

MINUTES

NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION

Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee

December 8, 2016

Lansing Center
333 E. Michigan Avenue
2nd Floor, Rooms 203-205
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

Ann Conklin
Mike McDonald
Mary Pitcher
Bob Hoffmeyer
Tom Bailey
Chris Graham
Brad Garmon

ABSENT

Jim Hendricks
Julie Clark
Mike Foote
Jim Bradley
Amy Trotter

OTHERS PRESENT

DNR Management and Staff	
Marc Miller	Eric Cadeau
Ron Olson	Debbie Jensen
Deb Begalle	Matt Lincoln
Vicki Anthes	Emily Myerson
Jason Fleming	
Anna Sylvester	

MICHIGAN STATES PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MSPAC)

OPENING COMMENTS

The meeting was called to order at 9:11 a.m. by Commissioner Louise Klarr. Commissioner Klarr welcomed everyone, and reminded them to please sign in. Commissioner Klarr introduced the other commissioners in attendance. Commissioner Klarr noted that this is the last meeting of 2016 and how pleased she was to have the members here.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes were approved for the October 13, 2016 meeting. Commissioner Klarr motioned for approval of the minutes with Tom Bailey and Ann Conklin seconding that motion. Motion to accept minutes passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Drew YoungDyke representing MUCC indicated that their organization is in favor of including state parks and recreation areas in the proposed Wildlife Order No. 11. The organization also accepts the caliber addition for varmint hunting at night throughout the state.

Dwight Washington, Great Lakes Action Group, spoke about the development of the water trail policy and hopes that all environmental issues will be considered.

PRESENTATIONS

Review of Partnership with Saginaw County Parks Department:

Marc Miller, Regional Initiative's Deputy, Matt Lincoln, DNR Parks and Recreation and Brian Lechel, Director, Saginaw County Parks and Recreation presented an overview of the partnership progress between the DNR and Saginaw County Parks Department. Marc further spoke about the justification for the partnership and the location. The Managed Public Land Strategy directs the department to collaborate more fully with local communities. Public land strategy also focused on key actions to increase regional focus and access to public lands within a reasonable distance from home. The partnership will assist in increasing the public ability for wildlife viewing and recreational opportunities in Saginaw County.

Brian Lechel reviewed the status of the lease agreement and day to day operations. Most maintenance activities, security and programming would be managed by the Saginaw County Parks Department. They are currently working on funding efforts to assist with developing an endowment fund to help fund the program long into the future. The Saginaw Community Foundation would hold the endowment for this effort. Currently Saginaw County is funded for maintenance until 2020, and the endowment would assist long into the future.

This partnership fits into the county parks 5-year plan to help connect to existing river walks and rail trails, while developing recreation opportunities for Saginaw Counties' water resources. The parcel of property for this park partnership is 332 acres near the Tittabawassee River. Demographics of the community the partnership would serve were also shared; up to 200,000 residents within the area could utilize the park.

Matt Lincoln gave a more in-depth look at site features. These 332 acres has 2,112 feet of river frontage on the Saginaw River, lots of wetlands that provide habitat for water fowl, and a small portion of woodlands. Proposed recreational opportunities are wildlife viewing, hiking/biking trails connected to regional trail system, and scenic overlooks. Phase 1 would develop a .7 mile loop, a parking lot and include trailhead development, vault toilets, an entrance gate and entry signs. DNR will spearhead the project in partnership with the county. No recreation passport will be required for this location. Matt also spoke to questions regarding the restoration of the site, grasslands, and reforestation.

Committee member, Mike McDonald suggested that the county speak with the local faith community in Saginaw County to gather their support. Brian Lechel indicated he has met with Mr. Coleman a local pastor, on a separate issue but does intend to speak with them and other neighborhood associations to talk about programming and supporting the effort. The City of Saginaw does not have a parks department itself so their county partnership has strengthened.

Committee member Tom Bailey spoke to Dwight Washington, who addressed the commission during the public comments, about environmental justice. Tom shared that with this partnership we continue to make great progress in Michigan and this is a great example of that effort.

Several questions were asked regarding the previous contamination on the site. Marc Miller addressed these questions sharing that the site is now safe for recreation. Marc Miller indicated that both Wildlife and Forestry have reviewed the site as well. Marc also shared that the goal is to bring this before the NRC in January as a directors memo and then to move forward on the acquisition; thus closing on the property in late spring or early summer. A Trust Fund grant recommendation was approved for the future development of the Saginaw County park land.

Commissioner Tim Nichols then spoke about the importance of the recreation passport and suggested using this opportunity to inform people of the many benefits to the recreation passport. Marc Miller noted that they will take his comments concerning the recreation passport under advisement.

Public Comment by Mr. Chuck Hoover, Past President, Friends of Shiawassee, shared that a parcel of property has been purchased that abuts the project location and that it is there intent to also develop their site for recreational purposes. Mr. Hoover also noted that this area is heavily used by nesting birds and they are in support of the partnership.

McLain State Park Proposed Master Plan Presentation:

Ron Olson introduced Eric Cadeau, DNR Field Planner, who presented a review of the McLain State Park proposed Masterplan. Ron further pointed out that the extreme erosion taking place at the park is due to the impact of the Lake Superior very damaging weather. When water levels were down for a number of years the rate of erosion was much lower. Water levels have been back up since 2013 and the erosion issue continues. Eric defined the areas of the park for the commissioners, and explained further where the USACOE maintains a break wall here. In 2012 an archeological survey was conducted; this survey turned up 2 Native American burial sites at the Portage ship canal.

A consultant was hired to develop 3 masterplan alternatives for the park. The consultant conducted and reviewed various studies on the rates of erosion for this area by reviewing patterns for the last 100 years. A geophysical analysis was also conducted to gather data regarding the area. Eric briefly reviewed the 3 schemes for the commissioners and what each one offered in benefits and limitations. Eric expressed the need for an internal return road to existing campsites, due to the fact that campers must exit the campground in order to utilize dumpsites, and other park services, return to their site; a return road would provide safety to users. Eric also noted the known high risk areas of erosion. The DEQ projected the rate over the next 60 years, and notes that no costly infrastructure should be located in these areas.

Public comment indicated support for the undeveloped trail areas within the park. Some public comments expressed concern regarding to densely populating the park with campsites. Additional comments from the public indicated support for a return road to allow easy access to the day use area thus providing added safety for users, easier access to the park store, and other services for campers within the park.

Eric expressed the importance of acting now. There is infrastructure that must be addressed and they have begun design of Phase I which includes a new toilet/shower building and will meet the most critical infrastructure needs for our campers.

Commissioner Tim Nichols raised questions regarding access from the road, and expressed his thoughts that we should be discussing the complete removal of the road more with MDOT. The removal of the road would enable more long term development and sustainability of the park.

Committee member Mary Pitcher expressed how impressed she was with the detailed planning process. Mary also questioned the possibility of losing 2 buildings this winter due to the extreme erosion? Eric is currently pursuing demolition permits to remove buildings, and mobilizing equipment to be proactive on this issue.

Ron Olson noted that the last 3 years while meeting with the USACOE, this topic has been brought up and there is the direct belief that the break wall has impacted the erosion. Break walls are altering currents which in turn is believed to be impacting the increase in erosion. The ACOE does have a program to address this however the program is not currently funded.

The DNR will continue to work with the ACOE for federal funding to assist with this due to the impact on a public state park.

ACTION ITEMS

Tahquamenon Falls State Park General Management Plan:

Deb Jensen, DNR Park Plan Administrator, reviewed some of the details of the Tahquamenon Falls State Park General Management Plan. Support for the plan from the MSPAC Stewardship subcommittee was noted.

Significant items at this park are the falls; this park is 75 square miles. Tahquamenon Falls are the largest in Michigan with a drop of 50 feet; with 25 miles of the Tahquamenon River running through the park. The park stretches 4 miles to Lake Superior; there is an old logging site there. Recreation opportunities are available all four seasons; snowshoeing, fall color viewing, camping and hiking, photography and wildlife viewing are some of the activities enjoyed. There is also a year round outdoor interpretive program. The parks draws .5 million visitors each year and is a large contributor to the economy in the area. Public comment sessions were held and local tribes were reached out to. There were also webpage updates regarding the planning process.

The lower falls area island is designated as a natural resource recreation area and it is desired to keep this area in a natural state. There is a current project underway for improvement to the boat concession area.

The DNR will continue working with and supporting the US Forest Service effort for the formulation of a Wild and Scenic River designation. It is desirable to improve access to the river between the lower falls and the river mouth through land acquisition. It is further desired to develop a comprehensive trail management plan for the park. Questions from the commissioners were addressed and the resolution for support of this plan was brought forward for motion.

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

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF: Committee member **Mike McDonald** asked for a motion of support for approval of Resolution 12-2016-1 for the Tahquamenon Falls state park general management plan. The motion was seconded by **Bob Hoffmeyer**. The vote carried unanimously.

Commissioner Klarr asked about additional meetings and recommendation to administration for revitalizing the Natural Rivers Act.

Muskallonge State Park General Management Plan:

Deb Jensen also presented a review of the Muskallonge State Park General Management Plan Support for the plan from the MSPAC Stewardship subcommittee was noted. Muskallonge is a much smaller park than Tahquamenon Falls but the public loves this park.

This park sits between Muskallonge Lake and Lake Superior. Almost totally surrounded by state forest land, it is very remote, quiet and peaceful. The park is 20 miles from nearest village of Grand Marais. The park holds a yearly agate festival and is well known for its fishing. There are many Lake Superior ship wrecks on the coast, and an old lumbering town; with a rich lumbering history. There was much public response to the online survey. Favorite recreation items for the park were camping, hiking, rock collecting, fishing, swimming and boating. There is a small beach area on the lake. In the long term it is desirable to further develop and improve the day use area. The public expressed interest in the development of an interpretive trail.

This park also has some significant erosion areas and buildings have been relocated and there are more that will need to be moved. Action Items for this park include addressing the large scale erosion so moving forward is a priority and a necessity.

The plan includes the promotion of the park as a dark sky destination; it is an ideal location for this. Also planned is the implementation of a campground tree replacement plan due to destruction by storms. The implementation of an improved emergency access route, redevelopment of the day use area, the upgrading of the campground electrical system, and the upgrade of the campground road system are many big needs for this 200 acre park, but all are much needed.

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

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF: Committee member **Chris Graham** asked for a motion of support for approval of Resolution 12-2016-2 for the Muskallonge Lake state park general management plan. The motion was seconded by **Mike McDonald**. The vote carried unanimously.

Water Trail Policy:

Ron Olson introduced Emily Meyerson, DNR Trail Coordinator, who presented the proposed Water Trail Policy for review, requesting a resolution of support for the policy from the MSPAC members. The Waterways Commission (WWC) was also engaged on this policy, and supports it.

Emily shared the background on the policy and why the water trail program is important. Expressing that trails are good for communities and create a great sense of place. They connect communities and community centers, and assist the local economy. We have a great state trails program with over 12,500 miles of trails; we have an additional 5,500 miles of local trails totaling over 20,000 miles of trails in Michigan; thus making Michigan a national leader in trails.

Emily outlined the reasoning behind the Water Trail Policy; it is to provide consistent information to the public, to develop standards and to manage public expectations. The end result will create a state water trails program, supported by broad based community partnerships. We are also seeking to ensure a quality trail experience, clear information for users, broad community support and a sustainable business plan.

There would be 3 distinct trail designations:

1. Inland water trails, non-motorized
2. Intermediate segments
3. Advanced segments

The process for each designation was reviewed and upon completion of the presentation a resolution of support was requested.

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF: **Commissioner Tim Nichols** asked for a motion of support for approval of Resolution 12-2016-3 for the Water Trails Policy. The motion was seconded by **Commissioner Christine Crumbaugh**. The vote carried unanimously.

Committee Member Mike McDonald suggested that this is an opportunity to address our local mid-Michigan area; like Williamston and Portland. Further suggesting outreach to MSU and local townships. Feels locally this would be supported.

Committee Member Tom Bailey spoke about stretches in urban areas that are recovering and cleaning up the pollution; noting that all major metropolitan areas have a river. There is a correlation between reviving our communities and rivers for recreation and the need to reach everyone; this is an excellent way to do this.

Ron Olson spoke about the outreach that has been done to watershed councils and groups regarding the Grand River. The issue for this policy will be funding to do the things such as signage. Currently there is no designated funding stream for this, most of the trail programs are funded with designated fees. WWC has discussed different ways to assist with addressing this issue.

Commissioner Tim Nichols commented on the resolution; that it highlights the blue ribbon panel report. Noting that many people understand the work that has been put into these plans and that they are being used as we move forward on items is good to see.

GENERAL UPDATES

PA288 – Forest Roads:

Deb Begalle, Assistant Chief, Forest Resources Division, reviewed PA288, which was signed by the governor in September of 2016. PA288 is for motorized use including ORV's and is designed to provide consistency between the Upper Peninsula and the Lower Peninsula. This will allow more areas for riding ORV's, more connections to places, and provide a clearer understanding of roads open to ORV and other motorized uses.

Staff is currently conducting a forest road inventory which includes; the location, condition, and development level. The Northern Lower Peninsula will be completed by December 31, 2017. The Upper Peninsula and Southern Lower Peninsula will be completed by December 31, 2018. Maps and mileage will be posted as the project is completed by region.

The next steps will include a road classification system, a complete inventory of the roads and identifying any areas of concern. There will be meetings with several groups; including tribal notification and consultation, public input meetings and outreach via social media and press releases.

Wildlife Conservation Order No. 11:

Commissioner Tim Nichols spoke about the Wildlife Conservation Order No. 11, the centerfire rifle order. Commissioner Nichols suggested a proposed action to the commission to support keeping this change out of the state parks and recreation areas. This would be a safety issue for those that use these parks but would not impact those who own private land. Commissioner Nichols brought forth a motion to support this change; the motion was seconded by Committee Member Mike McDonald. A motion to support a change in the order was passed.

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF: **Commissioner Tim Nichols** asked for a motion of support for the exemption of state parks and recreation areas in Wildlife Conservation Order No 11. The motion was seconded by **Committee Member Mike McDonald**. The resolution was passed by a 6 to 3 vote.

Year in Review:

Vicki McGhee, Chief, PRD Planning Section, shared a slideshow of the many accomplishments achieved throughout 2016. Noting the various partnerships, trails and contributors that have worked with the DNR throughout 2016. Particular interest was Mr. Mike Levine that donated not only land but a significant financial contribution to assist with trails programs and bridges. Also highlighted was the completion of several general management plans this year, the opening of the Northwestern State Trail, the opening of the Big Oaks Equestrian State Campground, stewardship efforts, and emergency work due to several severe storms and the completion of numerous capital projects.

Finance Subcommittee Update:

Commissioner Tim Nichols updated the members on the most recent meeting held by the MSPAC Finance subcommittee. Discussed at the meeting were various short term actions that could be taken to address financial shortfalls due to the drop in the Park Endowment funding. Both short and long term solutions were discussed at length. Some ideas shared were to increase camping fees and expand the areas where the recreation passport is required. Staff is currently inventorying sites for further recommendations to the director on this idea.

Another idea would be to create a \$5.00 fee when the recreation passport is not purchased with the vehicle registration. There is a proposal currently being drafted for this idea. Long term strategies included the possibility of a recreational bond as a way to get long term revenue to address infrastructure needs. Staff is looking into other states and how they have increased revenues. The subcommittee is looking for creative ways to fund the dynamic need for infrastructure dollars and fix and update these long term issues.

Committee Member Ann Conklin assured the group that this is a priority issue for the subcommittee group. Stressing that they are here to partner with the DRN and assist with addressing these issues.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:52 a.m.