- Minutes -

PUBLIC INPUT

For Ionia Recreation Area -
General Management Plan

(Notes taken by Daniel Lord and Joe Strach…edit by Paul N. Curtis)

On August 12, 2004, a public information and input meeting was held at the Ionia High School. The purpose of the meeting was to share with attendees, information on the 'Management Planning' process in general, and its application for Ionia RA. specifically. A key element of that planning process is to gather public input on what the park users feel are important considerations for natural and historic/cultural resource values, education and recreation opportunities, management focus, visitor experience and development needs.

The meeting was moderated by Paul N. Curtis, Management Plan Administrator for DNR-Parks and Recreation Bureau (PRB), with assistance from PRB staff. Public attendance at the meeting was counted at sixty-one (61).

Following is an overview of the meeting content and public input:

GENERAL: (PowerPoint presentation)

- Introduction and planning process overview – discussion of where we're at and where we're going.
- Importance of filling out 'Comment Form'.
- Purpose of meeting – to describe the process and most importantly, to gather public input.
- Why is the DNR is doing this?
    - More efficient and effective management of our parks and park system.
    - Establish Purpose & Significance for each park … establish an "Identity".
    - Establish Management Zones to guide future planning and management decisions.
- Description of the informational tools that the DNR utilizes in this planning process (GIS) and the input gained from other DNR program staff.
- Zone descriptions & examples of them
- "Draft" Purpose & Significance Statements for public review and comment – DNR is looking to incorporate the public stakeholders voice or opinion into the Management Plan
- Overview of natural and historic/cultural resources, and recreational and educational opportunities that occur at Ionia

- Review of "Draft" Zone Map that was developed…looking for input from the meeting stakeholders.
- Internet posting on website for 30 days to solicit additional comments @ www.michigan.gov/parkmanagementplans

PUBLIC QUESTIONS / COMMENTS: (Public question and *DNR Response (in Italics), if one was given. The "Comment Form" was used to guide input.)*

- General:
    - What is a stakeholder? – *Described by example in the PowerPoint presentation. Typically thought of as a group (such as MUCC or MMBA), but for our purposes, anyone with an interest in the park.*
    - What are the dog Field Trial Courses? – *Shown on map as "Course 1, 2, & 3", where the Field Trialers train and hold competitions.*
    - Are you going to hand out questionnaires at the campground? – *That is a possibility, but the downside is that we would not be able to explain the overall process. We'll look into it.*
    - Aren't there people out there that aren't computer knowledgeable, what about them? – *That's good rationale for looking at other ways of communication. There is the opportunity for public input at park headquarters.*

- Natural Resource Values and Comments:
    - Western end of equestrian trails is a prime example of natural beech/maple climax forest in pristine state for preservation and education (Course 3).
    - Is that (beech/maple forest) fully sustainable or does it change with time? *This ecosystem will want to naturally stay that way (it is at the end of the changing process) unless impacted by a major event (i.e. wind…fire)*
    - Would we want to re-zone to protect that area? *Not necessarily, but we (with PRB-Stewardship guidance) want to re-establish contiguous blocks of beech/maple forest in our long-range plans. This could include (with mutual concurrence) certain sections of the field trial courses that aren't being utilized.*
    - There seemed to be a fear out there that user groups would find out at this meeting that they would lose their areas and activities, but that doesn't seem to be the case through this presentation. – *There are no pre-conceived ideas for impacting use at this point…our interest is in getting public input so that we can all understand all needs, and make informed decisions based on that knowledge.*
    - Combining multiple uses while protecting the natural resources is difficult to do but the DNR should be commended for the effort.
    - The definition of "Field Trial" at Ionia seems to be based on pointers. Should also include retrievers. We (retriever group) have operated at Ionia under a use permit, but there is potential at Ionia

for (retriever) training areas and more events…would like to see a designation for retriever field trials.

- Retriever vs. trumpeter swan conflict area. *We recognize that there is potential for use conflict (with retriever trials/training activities), depending on whether or not the flooding area is occupied by trumpeter swans, a federally protected bird. We may have to look at the possibility of establishing specific closure dates for retriever activity for protection of the swan.*
- The Sheriff "Posse House" that has been leased out to the sheriff's office – shooting goes on at all hours of the night when no shooting is posted. Disturbs nesting birds & bird watching.
- Spring turkey hunting conflicts with posted signs during time period.

- Historical/Cultural Resource Values and Comments:

  - Can there be a heads up with the trail groups to work together to re-route or avoid areas that may be sensitive? *Yes…we look forward to this kind of cooperation.*
  - Entire flood plain could be home to native American artifacts from farming and settlement.
  - Mastodon up for sale?? Found north of Ionia, and should be purchased for display at Ionia RA.

- Recreation Opportunity Comments: (note…comments have already been received from the Ionia Trail Riders Association and the Ionia Field Trialers)

  (Hunting)

  - Trails (hiking, equestrian, and cross country skiing) used for hunter access within the recreation area.
  - Hunting is popular and partnerships should be strengthened between the different groups (who use the area). We should embrace each others recreation & 'thanks for the past cooperation'.
  - Appreciate the open-all-year feature of Ionia. Like late season hunting.
  - Long history of hunting – understand that there are other uses. ADA issue at Stevens Point Access (barricades)…would like to see Stevens Point opened back up for access to floodplain and river.
  - There is conflict with dog trialing scheduling and hunting – is there a schedule listed? *The following web site is a source of that information…*www.michiganbrittany.com/WMBC/Field%20Trial%20Calendar%202004.pdf – also, there *should be one at the park office.*
  - What happened to the shooting range? Is it because of the dog trialing? Can it be opened and signed? – *It was a safety issue, located within Course #2.*

(Fishing)

- Are there net/creel surveys available for the public to see what kind/numbers of fish are in Sessions Lake? - *see MRBIS - www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mrbis/*

(Trails)

- Therapeutic horse back riding – 300 to 500 participants for a single day event that raises $35,000 (ride-a-thon) Kent Special Riding Foundation.
- Was the mountain bike trail area the "sacrifice zone" for developed recreation zone? *Since the area was mined it has a lower Natural Resource value than other areas, but that doesn't take away from the quality of experience that can take place. Also, this area might allow for more development or re-routing of trails due to these same impacts of its mining history.*
- Is the trail moratorium going to be lifted? *Explanation that the moratorium is in place until the management plan is finalized, and then the DNR would be willing to explore possible new trail development.*
- Can the cross country trails be groomed? Central to western side is utilized. *We don't see that in our future with the current budget and staffing constraints. This type of activity has been done in other parks through volunteer efforts.*
- Only one pedestrian trail in park, but it is utilized by other groups, needs erosion protection and restoration.
- Snowmobiling should stay central to western side of park. 4 to 5 daily.
- *It is preferable to have separate trails for different user groups that do not cross or conflict*
- Are there any currently proposed trail changes? *We recognize that there are several points of conflict between the equestrian trails and the field trial use route. We plan on addressing those issues in the future.*

- Education/Interpretation Opportunity Comments:

  - Expansion of interpretation of old infirmary.
  - Self guided tour for educational experience like the one provided at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.
  - Plant & animal identification and education opportunities that aren't being utilized. Put up signs.
  - Education opportunity of the different (park use) groups and what takes place in Ionia.
  - Good opportunity to learn about field trials.

- <u>'DRAFT' Purpose & Significance Statements:</u>

    - Can a majority of purposes be combined – are multiple statements accepted? – *It may be better to list all of the important purposes instead of trying to group them into one statement.*
    - Add the conservation aspect of retriever trials – family participation – introduction of sport to the youth.

- <u>'DRAFT' Management Zone Map:</u>

    - Are designated areas able to be utilized for other uses? They aren't exclusive are they? – *Specific uses need to stay in their designated areas when it comes to trail use, however no areas are specifically exclusive to certain groups (common sense when events are going on)*
    - Do we need an exception for rail/trail development along railroad corridor through the Ecologically Sensitive Zone? *At this point, we don't know if the rail/trail is reality or not. For now we really can't call it out in our plan as anything other than its current use. Part of this planning process is that we review the 'Management Plan' (zoning) every five years. If there is a change (such as trail development on the railroad bed), we can adjust our plan.*
    - Is the 5-year review something new? – *No, it is part of the management planning process that these be looked at and adjusted over time and not just become "shelf art".*
    - What is the NRC dedicated boundary? – *Those areas are defined as what would be possible for future expansion of park property if they were to become available on a willing seller basis.*
    - Course #1 – exclusive use of eastern portion? – *Can trail riders use the Field Trial road as a bridal trail? No, equestrians must remain on designated trails only. There are no designated trails in Course #1.*
    - *Question asked of audience…"Does this plan make sense?...is it appropriate?…do we need to change anything based on what you have seen and heard this evening?" – No negative responses…looked like overall concurrence and endorsement of the "Draft" Zone Plan by those in attendance.*

- <u>Thoughts on Management Focus:</u>

    - Tuttle/Sprague Rd. development from M-66 moving east – development rights are impacted by dog trialing inhibiting value of residential or commercial property. Could you move the staging are out to Riverside Rd? What about the landowners?
    - Define the difference between the dog trial trails and the equestrian trails, when dog trialing isn't going on why can't trail riders use that raised path? – *park management philosophy to try and separate uses and avoid areas of conflict.*

- With all the news about beaches being closed, is there water quality testing done on a regular basis for the beach at Sessions Lake? How often? – *Yes…annually*

- Is there going to be additional funding or staff? – *Given the current budget situation of the state, we don't anticipate any changes soon.*
- East loop and west loop of the mountain bide trail – both under maintenance from MMBA. We would like to develop the "camper trail" (east loop) to be more advanced (it is too flat…no challenge). Unlikely that mountain bikers would want to be on an equestrian trail.
- Is the Management Zone map the way it is now or is that what we are proposing? – *The trails shown on the map and all the roads and other development (campgrounds, beach, etc.) are actual. The 'Zones' that are shown are proposed in 'DRAFT' form for review and comment.*

- <u>Visitor experience:</u>

  - Good, and enjoyable
  - Will this map be on the website? – *Yes, we are hopeful that it will be posted the week of August 16th, and public comment will be allowed for one month before any alterations will be considered.*

- <u>Development Issues:</u>

  - Would a trail or activity be in jeopardy from an ecologically sensitive zone? - *Yes, the conflict would need to be avoided – reroute*
  - Organizational campground utilized for more groups and multiple use, not just youth – would like to see it available for use by all non profit organizations.
  - Water issue for the retrievers, depends on seasonal rainfall

- <u>Final comments:</u>

  - You need to get historical input from the aging community while you can.
  - Get trial dates out to the public – *possibly posted on Wildlife's section of the DNR's website. Good suggestion…we will investigate*
  - *Final draft proposal will be made available at the park office*
  - Could there be a yearly meeting to carry on progress and a communication session to clarify issues and work out problems?
  - *Send comment forms in….*