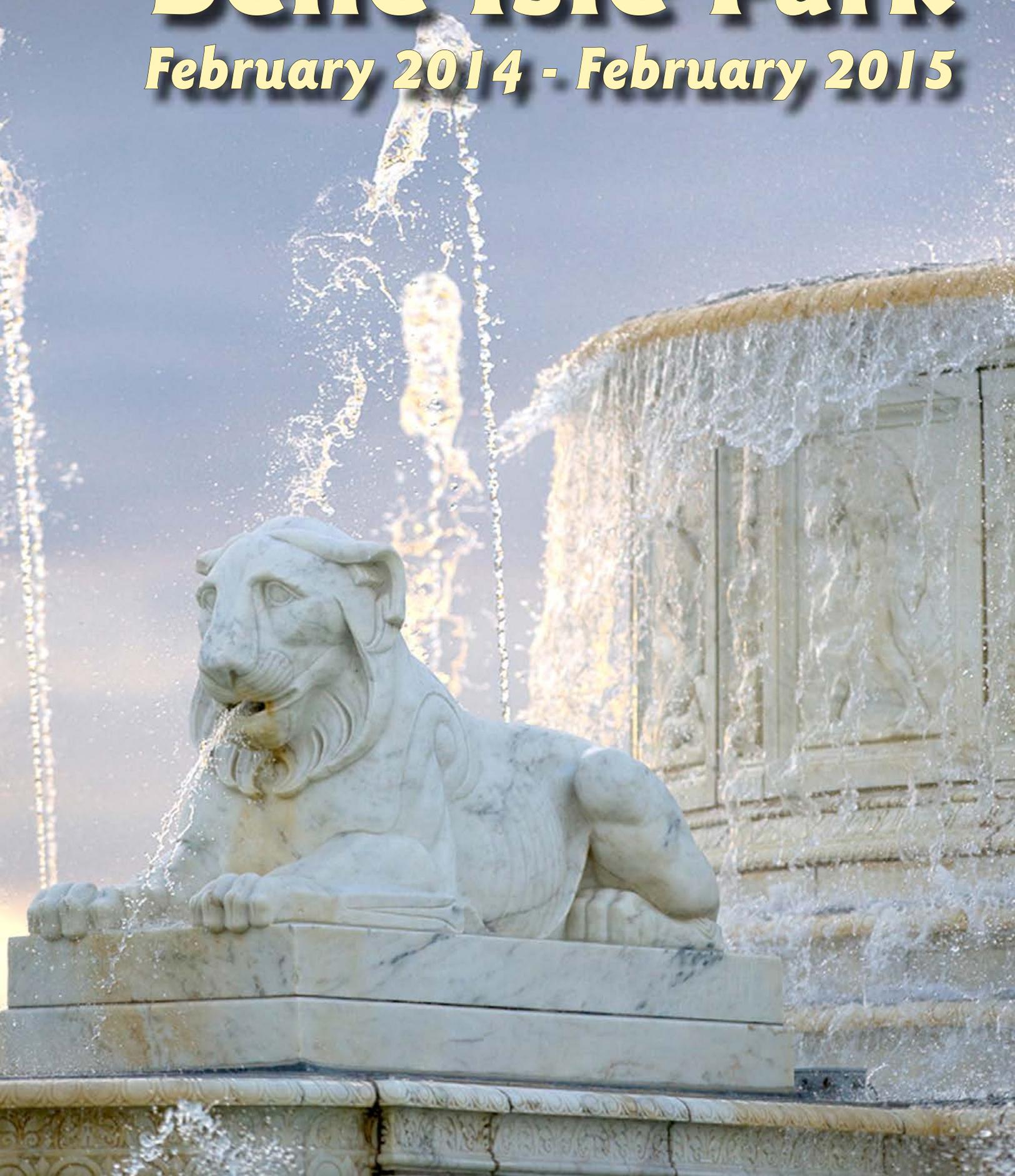


Belle Isle Park

February 2014 - February 2015



**Belle Isle Park
Annual Report
*February 10, 2014 – February 10, 2015***

The first year of accomplishments

Feb. 10, 2015 marked the one-year anniversary of Belle Isle as Michigan's 102nd state park. Just 12 months into operation, Belle Isle saw tangible improvements – from refurbished park shelters and renovated restrooms to universally accessible parking spaces and removal of hazardous trees. Many of these efforts are due to significant investment by state, federal, private and non-profit partners.

Revitalization

Comfort stations

During Belle Isle's first year as a state park, significant revitalization efforts directly benefiting visitors have occurred. By summer 2014, 12 of the island's 17 public restrooms were renovated and reopened. Many of these buildings received new plumbing and paint and some received new fixtures. In addition to significant work by DNR staff, partner efforts by The Youth Connection, Inc. and Healthy Kidz, through youth employment initiatives, resulted in the revitalization of several restrooms.



The Youth Connection, Inc. of Detroit, was instrumental in the revitalization of several restrooms.

Shelters

Eight shelters were renovated by DNR park staff and partners. Shelter No. 2 received new plumbing; Shelter No. 7 received new plumbing and heating; Shelter No. 8 received new plumbing and outlets; Shelter No. 9 received a new roof and was repainted; a universally accessible sidewalk was put in near Shelters No. 10 and No. 11; and Shelters No. 14 and No. 15 received new roofs and stain.

Scott Memorial Fountain

The Scott Memorial Fountain operated daily from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. from Memorial Day through Labor Day. It required several Belle Isle staff members working eight hours per day to keep the fountain clean and operational. Prior to the DNR operating the fountain, two construction management students from Michigan State University's School of Planning, Design and Construction shadowed DTE's Robert Carpenter to transfer his institutional knowledge into an operational manual. This was vital in the operation of the fountain. In addition, the Belle Isle Conservancy purchased and placed 64 chairs around the fountain.

Swim beach

The swim beach received sand restoration and installation of a kids' swim area with a buoy system close to shore. Visitors also benefited from the addition of lifeboat, lifeboat racks and water safety signage. The Belle Isle Conservancy provided \$10,000 from the GM Foundation to support free August water safety lessons on the Belle Isle beach, with 142 Detroit residents benefiting from the lessons. Detroit area swim instructors were hired to teach the lessons.

Revitalization *continued*

Hazardous tree removal

Over 350 hazardous trees – those in poor condition and posing a risk to visitors and structures in maintained areas of the park - were removed. Efforts by the DNR and The Greening of Detroit, along with over 150 volunteers, resulted in the replanting of 120 flowering cherry trees, lost to disease and age, near the Scott Fountain basin in November. The DNR will be replanting additional trees in maintained areas of the park this fall.

Universally accessible sidewalks and parking added

Universally accessible sidewalks and parking spaces were added near shelters No. 10 and 11 by The Youth Connection, Inc. The effort was in partnership with the Michigan Concrete Association – which trained, coordinated materials and oversaw the work by The Youth Connection, Inc.

Kids Row Playscape

A Michigan State University return-to-work veterans' group made repairs to the Kids' Row playscape. The DNR invested \$14,000 for playscape repairs.

General improvements

Over 50 picnic tables were refurbished, more than 50 barrels moved from island canals, and 200 refuse barrels with "Keep Belle Isle Beautiful" wraps set on anchors around the island. Park staff spent considerable time and effort keeping the island – including its restrooms – clean.



Replanting flowering cherry trees near the Scott Fountain basin in November 2014.



The veterans' group repaired the Kids' Row Playscape in fall 2014.



Refuse barrels placed around the island are helping keep Belle Isle beautiful. The barrels were wrapped by Michigan Cares for Tourism volunteers.



The Youth Connection, Inc., with training and guidance from Michigan Concrete Association, poured universally accessible sidewalks in fall 2014.

Connecting with the community

Community involvement has been instrumental to the revitalization of Belle Isle. The DNR and its partners have fostered this through a variety of efforts.

Vendor sessions

In early 2014, the DNR, in partnership with the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget and the D2D Program of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, held several free, half-day seminars in Detroit for businesses that wanted to learn how to contract with the State of Michigan for construction goods and services, including at Belle Isle Park. The DNR also held vendor pre-bid meetings in December 2014 for doing business on the island in 2015. During the meetings, DNR staff presented on the process of submitting bids, bid packages were distributed and bidders had the opportunity to ask questions. Available concession services included food service, toy/souvenir sales, beach chair/umbrella rentals, electric carriage rides, watercraft/bike/snow sport rentals, Porta-Potty and hand wash station rentals, operation of the athletic complex and operation of the golf driving range.

Listening sessions

In early 2014, the DNR held four listening sessions focused on natural resources, recreation, education and historical resources. Key partners and stakeholders were invited to listen and present at each. The intent was to bring active on-island stakeholders together to share efforts. The public was invited to the meetings.

Open house

The DNR held an open house on August 16, 2014 for the public. The Belle Isle Conservancy, Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee, Michigan State Police and island partners participated. Registration cards were completed by 176 families and there were approximately 400 people in attendance.

First annual harvest festival

Harvest festivals are a popular seasonal tradition at Michigan state parks. The first annual Belle Isle Harvest Festival was held on Oct. 18, 2014 with over 500 people attending. The day included face painting, pumpkin painting, fall-themed games, tractor-pulled hayrides, trick-or-treating, a costume contest for children, adults and family pets, roasting marshmallows over a campfire, a straw bale maze, music, warm cider and donuts and a mobile, interactive art trailer courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts.



Children with Smokey the Bear at the Belle Isle Harvest Festival on Oct. 18, 2014.

“Praise on the Isle” event

The “Praise on the Isle” choir event, presented by the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee, was held on Sunday, Aug. 24, 2014. There were an estimated 300-400 people in attendance to hear Detroit-area choirs sing at Sunset Point.

Connecting with the community *continued*

Stepping Stones youth program

Stepping Stones outreach programs have been popular in several southeast Michigan state parks since 2010. The Stepping Stones outreach program was expanded to Belle Isle Park last summer. Local organized youth groups participated in outdoor skills and nature education on the east end of the island, taught by DNR staff. Over 220 youth and nearly 30 chaperones participated throughout the summer. Some of the participating groups included youth from Detroit recreation centers, libraries, The Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA and youth employment initiatives.

Wildlife programs

The DNR Wildlife Division held wildlife programs one Saturday a month throughout the winter and early spring, with the last event held on May 9. Programs include Bird Watch, Animal Tracks and Signs, Predators and Prey, Wild Turkeys and Warbler Hike.

Veterans work program

A Michigan State University-administered return-to-work veterans group worked on the island in fall 2014. The work was funded by the DNR. The group made repairs to the Kids' Row Playscape, built ten trash corrals that were placed in the park, pruned trees and painted the interior and exterior walls of the bath house.



The Stepping Stones program came to Belle Isle in 2014. The program has been successful in southeast Michigan.



Veterans return-to-work program made island improvements in the fall of 2014.

Expanded services

For the 2014 season, the DNR awarded 11 food contracts and 13 service contracts, of which 11 were Detroit businesses.

The 2014 vendors were issued one-season operating agreements with the understanding that after the first season, the DNR would be required to advertise and put out for bid long-term agreements which would provide for “exclusive sale” rights. Vendors included:

- Archie Matthews (doing business as Mr. Sandman) – toy sales
- Bates Hot Dogs, LLC – food
- Big Dog Hot Dogs – food
- Candace Wilson – food
- Chappy Group Investments, LLC – beach umbrella/chair rental
- Chase Tha Dog, Corp. – food
- Clean Street Food/ Fry For The Cure – food
- Event Concessions, Inc. – food
- Glitter-n-Glow – toy sales
- Hot Dog and More – food
- NYC Yogurt – ice cream
- Sweets Retreat – food
- Wanna Hot Dog, LLC – food
- Edible Liz – Ice Cream
- Come Play Detroit – Athletic Complex
- Island Park Golf – Driving Range
- Parkway Services – porta-potty/handwash rental
- Scottie’s Potties – porta-potty/handwash rental
- Andre’s Carriage – electric carriage ride
- Detroit River Sports – kayak rentals

The following services were on Belle Isle during the 2013 season and so continued into 2014 under seasonal operating agreements. These agreements approve commercial use of state land, but do not grant “exclusive sale rights,” such as what DNR concession vendors enjoy. The vendors include:

- Bouncin Off The Wallz – Inflatable rental
- Channel One Productions, LLC – party equipment rental
- Detroit Disc Golf – Disc Golf
- Thomas Frances – Pedicab rides
- OK 2 Play– party equipment rental
- Party Time Rentals, LLC – party equipment rental
- Rickshaw Detroit, LLC – Pedicab rides
- Spectacular Party Rentals – party equipment rental
- The Party Source, Inc. – party equipment rental
- The Ultimate Party Supply & Rental, Inc. – party equipment rental

Youth employment initiatives

Summer youth employment initiatives and private partnership efforts were also central to the installation of universally accessible sidewalks and parking spaces near several shelters. The efforts were in partnership with the Michigan Concrete Association – which trained, coordinated materials and oversaw the work by The Youth Connection, Inc. In addition, last summer, Davey Tree Service, Inc., through partnership, trained nearly a dozen The Youth Connection, Inc. young adults to perform horticultural work at the Belle Isle Conservatory outdoor formal gardens.



Dominic McCormick of the Youth Connections, Inc., cleans debris from the park.

Dominic McCormick worked for The Youth Connections, Inc. on Belle Isle last summer. He and other young adults participated in classroom training conducted by Albanelli Concrete Contractors. Dominic received on-site training on Belle Isle from Albanelli and DNR staff, including learning how to work with concrete and use equipment for pouring and leveling concrete. Belle Isle projects included putting in universally accessible sidewalks, renovating shelters No. 10

and No. 11 (repairing the infrastructure, power washing the structure, preparing and painting the shelters and preparing and painting picnic tables and benches). After the projects, Albanelli Concrete Contractors was so impressed with Dominic that the company hired him in a full-time position.

Youth from the MDOT Youth Corp and Jewish Vocational Services also participated in revitalization efforts during the past year.



The Youth Connection, Inc., with training through Albanelli Concrete Contractors, poured universally accessible sidewalks.

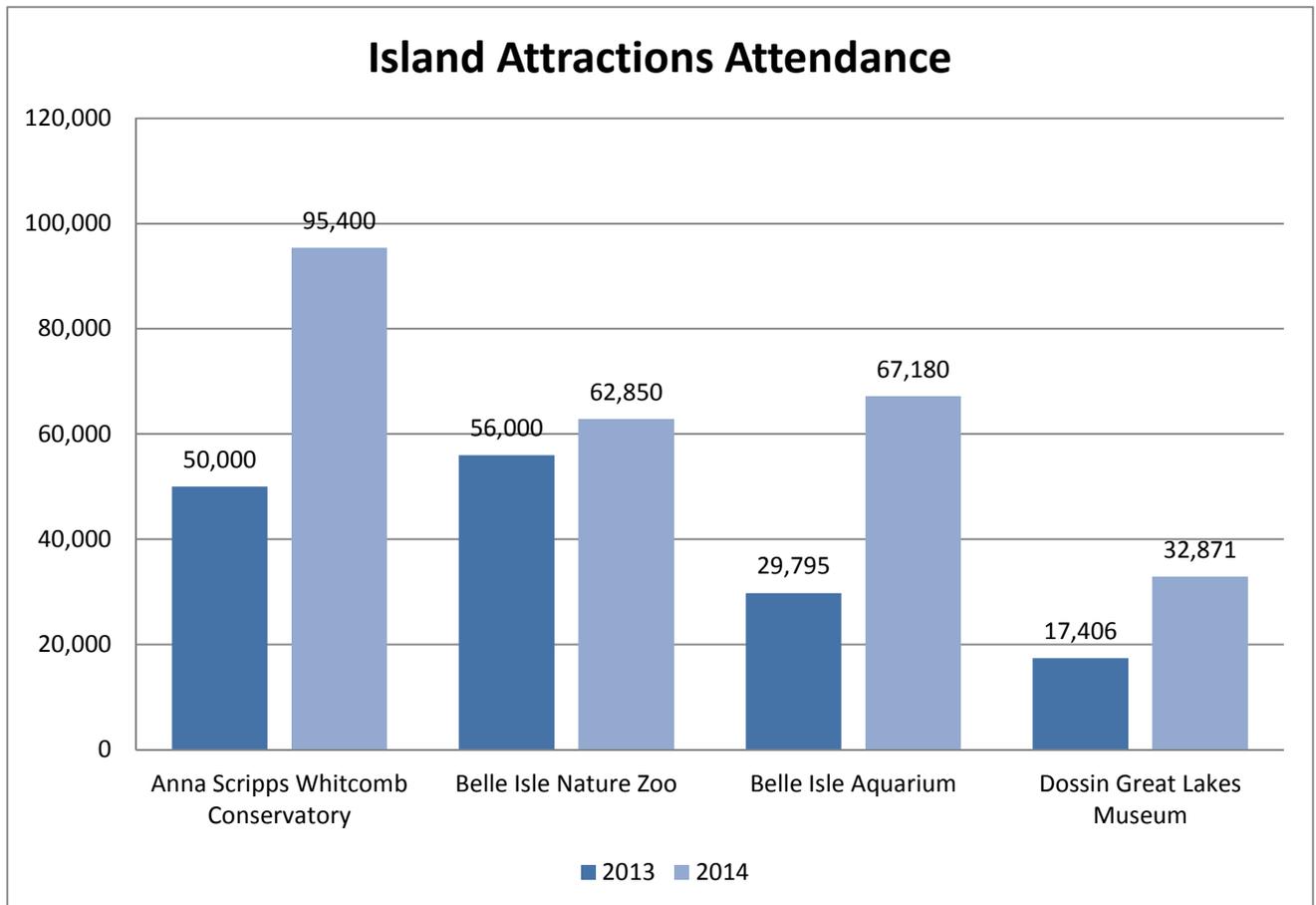
Attendance

With over 2 million visitors to the island since the Michigan Department of Transportation began counting vehicles on June 1 using a traffic monitor on the MacArthur Bridge, the island continues to draw Detroit residents and visitors. Over 540,000 vehicles accessed the island from June 1 to Dec. 31, 2014. The visitor number is generated by a 3.7 multiplier used in many urban Michigan state parks. This multiplier is used for buses, which contain many more than 3.7 visitors, and for cars that may have a single visitor. It does not differentiate. Pedestrians and bicyclists, who frequent Belle Isle during warmer months, are not counted. The DNR is working to devise a tool to accurately count pedestrians and bicyclists in the future.



Visitors enjoy many activities on Belle Isle, including picnicking.

Attendance at major island attractions has increased from previous years, according to attendance statistics from the Belle Isle Aquarium, Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory, Belle Isle Nature Zoo and Dossin Great Lakes Museum. The highest gain in attendance was seen at the Belle Isle Aquarium, which opened an additional day a week in 2014 due to visitor influx. Attendance there was up over 125 percent from the previous year. The conservatory was up 91 percent from 2013, the Dossin Great Lakes Museum up 89 percent, although it was not open a full 12 months in 2013 due to restoration efforts, and the Belle Isle Nature Zoo saw a 12 percent increase in visitors.



Shelter rentals

There are 20 shelters available for rent on the island. From June through August 2014, there was a 79 percent average weekend occupancy rate, serving over 42,000 visitors. June had the lowest rental percentage, with an average weekend rental rate of 48 percent. August had the highest average weekend rental with a rate of 94 percent. Certain shelters, including No. 2, 6 and 8E, had a 100 percent weekend occupancy rate during this timeframe. Shelters 16 and 18 saw the lowest average weekend occupancy rate at 48 percent.

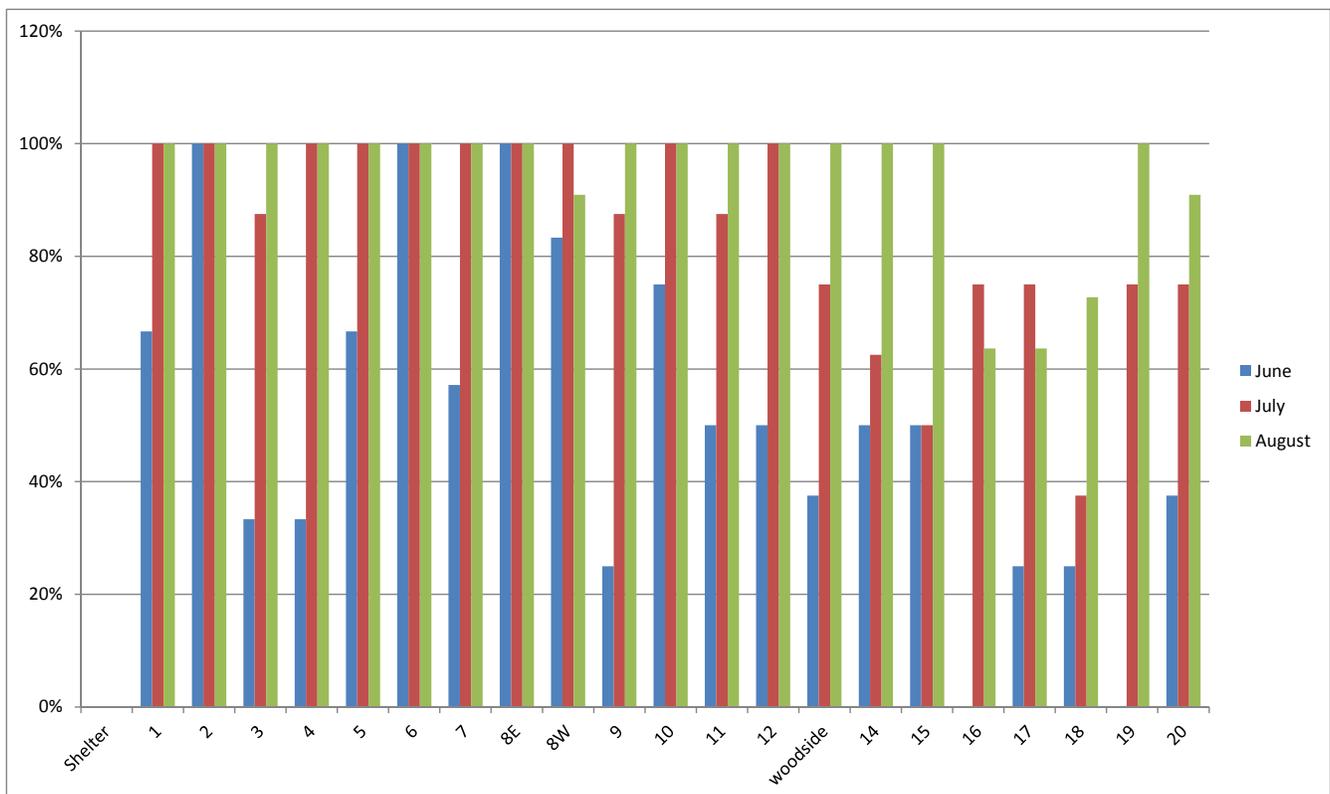


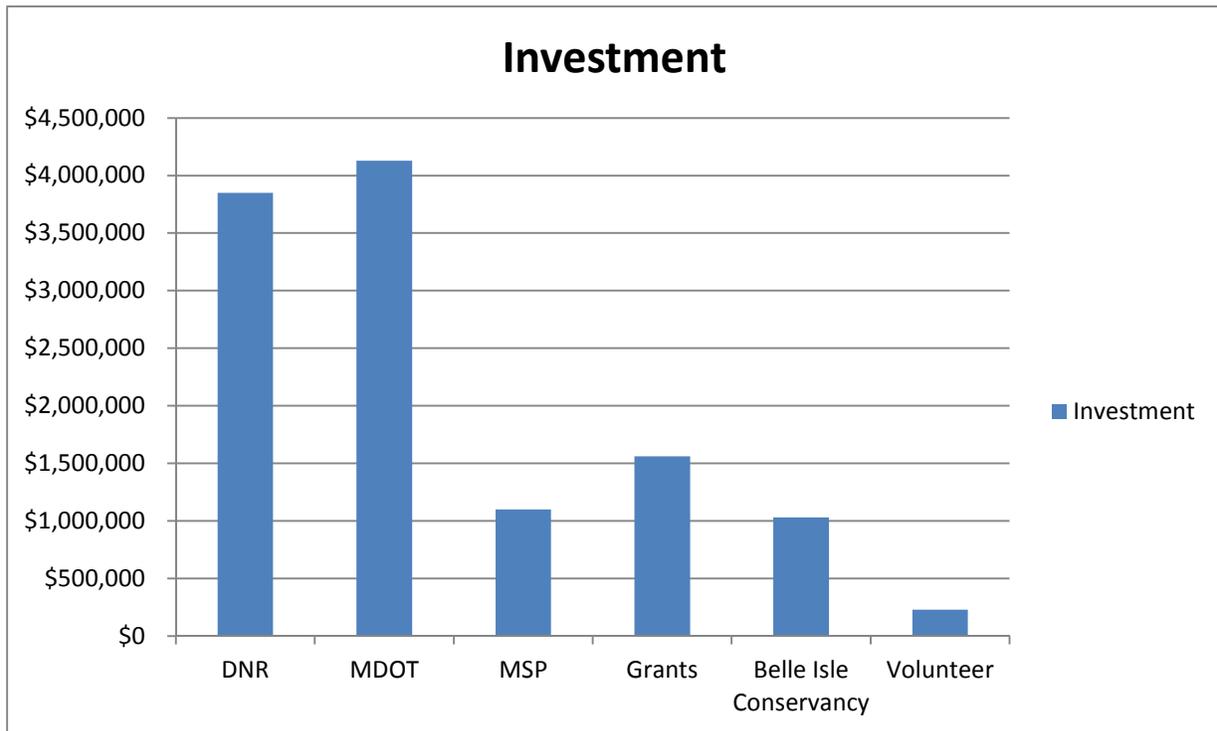
More than 42,000 visitors enjoyed events held at island shelters during the summer of 2014.

Beginning April 2014, all shelter reservations were available to be made online or via phone through the DNR's Central Reservation System. With a 12-month window for reservations, visitors can make reservations far in advance while also doing so from the comforts of their own home rather than waiting in line at the Casino. Reservations through the CRS can be made online at www.midnrreservations.com or through the call center at 1-800-44-PARKS. This is the same system that takes state camping and harbor reservations. Guests can also visit the Belle Isle administrative building (White House), where staff will book their shelter rentals for them online through the CRS. They must be present at the White House for this assistance.

The DNR, in carrying out city of Detroit past policy, held a three-day shelter reservation event at the casino from March 24 to March 26, 2014. Visitors came to the casino, waited in line, and registered for their shelters with DNR representatives. This was done in past years. During this time, guests were given information about the transition to the Central Reservation System to make all future shelter reservations.

Shelter Rental Trends





Facilities use

From June 1 to Sept 30, 2014, there were:

- 78 casino rentals
- 5 Flynn Pavilion rentals
- More than 6,300 riders on the DNR-operated giant slide. (The giant slide was open on weekends from Aug. 15 to Sept. 30, 2014.)

Investment

Between November 2013 - when the lease agreement with the city of Detroit was signed, signaling the start of the 90-day transition to state management of Belle Isle - through Sept. 30, 2014 (the end of the fiscal year), Belle Isle received an investment of \$11.89 million, which includes \$1.56 million in grant funding. The following grants were awarded to the DNR or its partners for Belle Isle:

- \$132,650 AmeriCorps;
- \$150,000 U.S. Forest Service;
- \$470,000 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative; and
- \$54,000 Great Lakes Fisheries Trust Fund.
- \$100,000 Coastal Zone Management
- \$319,692 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- \$332,850 in nine separate grants to the Belle Isle Conservancy

During this timeframe, the DNR applied for \$2.6 million in additional grants for revitalization and rehabilitation of core public-facing infrastructure.

Included in the overall investment was \$225,000 in volunteer work provided by partners, who contributed more than 10,000 volunteer hours to the park.

Revenue

There was \$336,376 in total revenue from Feb. 10, 2014 – when Belle Isle became a state park – to Sept. 30, 2014, the end of the fiscal year. This revenue was gained from use permits for shelters and facilities, event agreements and the giant slide. This includes nearly \$200,000 in facility rentals and just over \$100,000 in use permits and event agreements.

Money generated on Belle Isle, excluding Recreation Passport sales, is placed in a special sub-account in the DNR State Park Improvement Fund to administer, maintain and improve the park.

Recreation Passport

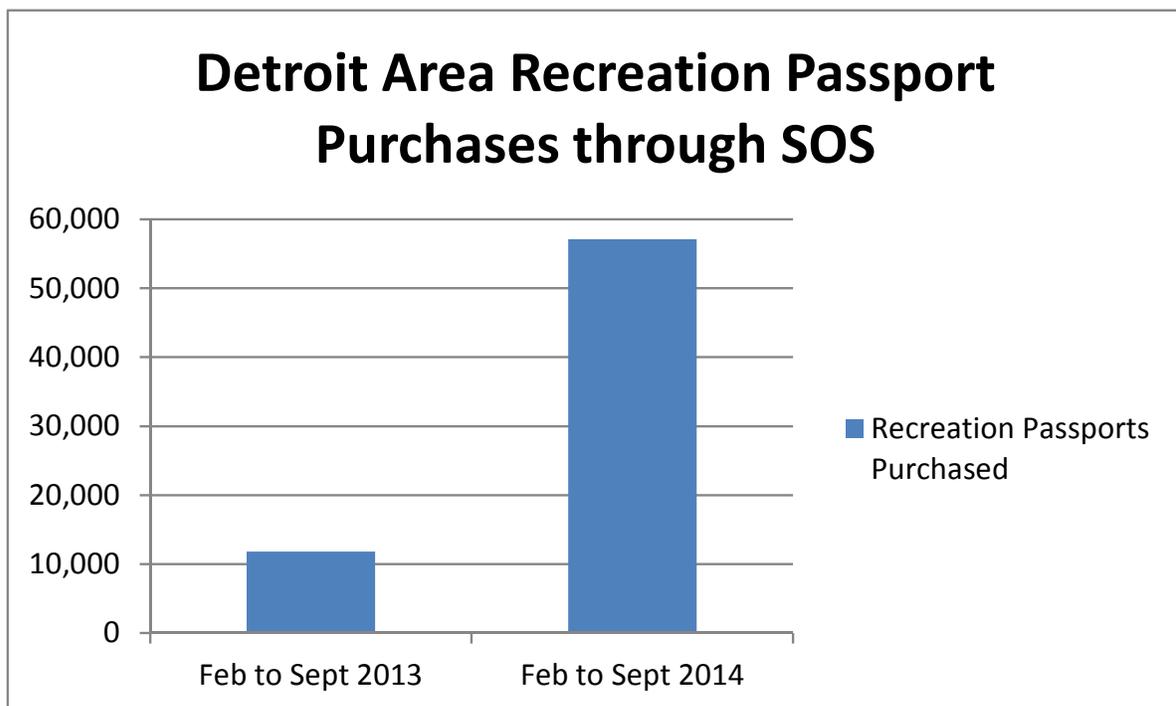
As with all state parks during the initial phase-in of the Recreation Passport, there was also a gradual phase-in at Belle Isle Park. During the gradual phase-in during the first year of transition, which began Feb. 10, 2014, the Recreation Passport was not required on Belle Isle until the vehicle's license registration renewal date. For example, if the renewal date was July 2014, then the Recreation Passport wasn't required until July 2014 for access to the park. Likewise, if the license registration renewal date was January 2015, then the passport wasn't required until January 2015. Once a full-year of state management cycled – February 2015 – all vehicles were required to have a Recreation Passport.



Recreation Passports can be purchased through the Secretary of State during license plate registration renewal or at any state park, including Belle Isle Park at the administrative office (White House) or the contact station. A permanent contact station will be in place to assist visitors in the summer of 2015.

The Recreation Passport costs \$11 for vehicles or \$5 for motorcycles. A daily motor vehicle permit is available for \$9 for non-Michigan registered vehicles. An annual motor vehicle permit is available for non-Michigan registered vehicles for \$31.

There was a 383 percent increase in Recreation Passport sales through the Secretary of State in 2014 over the previous year within the Detroit ZIP codes. This includes only Recreation Passports purchased through the Secretary of State.



2015 efforts

During the second year of state management of the park, efforts will focus on replacing critical heating and ventilation systems in major park facilities, enhancing recreational facilities and structures, strategic tree replantings, key island trail improvements and athletic complex renovation. This is in addition to the continuation of current revitalization efforts such as restroom restorations.

These goals align with the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee strategic plan. The BIPAC, DNR, Belle Isle Conservancy and its partner, along with the public, met Dec. 16, 2014 to collectively define goals for 2015. Joe Wynns, former director of Indiana Parks and Recreation and member of their City Park and Recreation Advisory Board, facilitated this session. The resulting Belle Isle Park Strategic Plan was developed to help guide and focus the efforts to enhance Belle Isle Park. The objective was to establish a framework with goals to create alignment with this committee, the DNR Parks and Recreation Division, other DNR divisions, other state agencies and the Belle Isle Conservancy in 2015. The outcome is to ensure that continuous improvement occurs surrounding the five major areas: Safe and clean park; customer-oriented thinking; stewardship and community spaces; partnership and alliances; and continuous improvement.



Restrooms on Belle Isle received extensive renovation efforts.



Michigan Cares for Tourism volunteers renovate a shelter in May 2014.



Refuse barrels are helping to keep the park clean.