

CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR MICHIGAN STATE PARKS

Wednesday, March 26, 2008

MSU Pavilion

Lansing, Michigan

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Murdock Jemerson, Chair
Tom Ferguson, Vice Chair
Betsy Clark
Rev. Hurley Coleman, Jr.
Mike Foote
Chris Graham
Jim Hendricks
Robert Hoffmeyer
Mike McDonald
Chuck Nelson
Mary Pitcher
Bill Rose
Todd Scott

MEMBERS ABSENT

James Bradley
Kathy Lewand

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

April Bennett
Mary Brown
Sandra Clark
Michael Bryanton

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Duncan Wyeth

DNR STAFF PRESENT

Ron Olson, Chief, DNR Parks and Recreation (PRD)
Vicki Anthes, PRD
George Cameron, PRD
Tony Herek, PRD
Harold Herta, PRD
Yolanda Taylor, PRD
Other PRD Staff

INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Murdock Jemerson called the meeting to order at 12:30 pm, with introductions and an overview of the meeting agenda. Chair Jemerson introduced the new ex-officio member, Michael Bryanton, who is also a member of the Michigan State Waterways Commission.

PRESENTATION BY RICH BOWMAN

Rich Bowman, Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy, gave an overview of a draft report by The Nature Conservancy and Public Sector Consultants, titled “*The Natural Resources Trust Fund: An Updated Investment Strategy*,” dated January 24, 2008, and their proposals for making changes to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF).

In-depth discussions occurred between the committee and Mr. Bowman regarding the current structure, restrictions, and concerns with making changes to the MNRTF. Currently, the MNRTF may expend up to 1/3 of income derived from oil and gas revenues, plus earnings from the corpus, towards the acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation, and to develop recreational opportunities on state-owned lands. They are proposing to change the constitutional provision to spend up to 2/3 of trust revenue, plus interest and earnings, annually. They are also proposing to allow the issue of revenue bonds with MNRTF funds. Despite the other proposals offered in their draft report, their main focus will be on these two issues ... changing the spending authority to 2/3 and provide an opportunity for bonding.

Their proposals have already been presented to, and discussed, with the Governor’s Office, the Legislature, etc., and they expect a bill to be introduced in the very near future, and their support will depend on the language of the bills once they are introduced.

Some of the committee members asked what the Department’s position is on these proposals. Dennis Fedewa, DNR Chief Deputy, responded that there is nothing official as of yet, so the Department has no formal position. However, once the bills have been introduced, the Department will review them for a position.

Rich closed his presentation by stating that the other items listed will not be pursued at this time. They are only going to focus on the 2 changes mentioned earlier.

The committee asked that they be kept informed of the progress of these proposals, and the Department’s position when bills are introduced. Mr. Bowman responded that he would be more than happy to discuss the progress with any member, and Ron Olson, DNR Parks and Recreation Chief, also committed to keeping the committee informed. Mr. Bowman also mentioned that they can keep an eye on their website for updates at www.nature.org/michigan.

PUBLIC APPEARANCES

Ellen Nitz and Janice Wiegard, both representatives of a citizens group for a quiet community, addressed the committee regarding the noise levels at the Island Lake Shooting Range. After giving an overview of the frustrations of the local residents, and the many avenues and committees they have addressed regarding this issue, including the Natural Resources Commission (NRC), they asked that this committee also look into this matter, if only to consider the future development of shooting ranges within state parks or recreation areas.

Discussions continued, and NRC Commissioners Hurley Coleman, Jr. and Mary Brown, were present, and explained that this issue has been presented to the NRC and alternative solutions are being explored.

Chair Jemerson thanked the ladies for bringing this matter to this committee's attention. He mentioned, however, that this committee would have to consult with DNR staff to consider their concerns, and will ask for a briefing from the Department.

MINUTES

Committee members Todd Scott and Chris Graham requested minor amendments to the November 28, 2007 Minutes.

There was no discussion or opposition to the February 28, 2008 Minutes.

Betsy Clark motioned to approve the November 28, 2007 Minutes, with the amendments offered, and approve the February 28, 2008 Minutes; Chris Graham seconded the motion, and the November 28, 2007 and February 28, 2008 Minutes were approved and adopted by the Committee.

PARKS AND RECREATION REPORTS AND UPDATES

Good Things

Chief Olson announced that he did travel to parks and recreation field offices in January to meet with parks staff. He asked to table this portion of the Agenda to allow time for other agenda items and discussions. The Committee agreed to move on with the agenda.

PRD Strategic Planning Update

Written report provided; no additional questions or comments regarding this report.

Legislative Updates

Harold Herta, PRD Resource Management Section Chief, gave a brief overview of House Bill 5189, which would allow a resident who has been determined by the US Department of Veterans Affairs to be 100% permanently and totally disabled, free access to all state parks and recreation areas. Discussions continued regarding the classification of 100% disabled and the effect this may have on revenues.

A draft resolution was presented in support of this bill; however, requests were made to revise it to include a third classification of unemployable. Tom Ferguson motioned to approve the resolutions once the amendments were made; Mike McDonald seconded the motion; one member abstained, and the resolution was approved and adopted by the Committee.

The committee asked to be kept informed on the status of this bill.

Mary Pitcher asked for an update on the house bill that allows the use of ORVs on the shoulder of roads. Harold Herta explained that the bill has not yet been referred to a legislative committee, but will notify this Committee if a bill is introduced.

Land Issues

Ron Olson mentioned that the last county in the land consolidation process is in its final stages, so the whole land consolidation initiative is coming to a close. Once completed, the department would have added 98,000 acres of land to the state parks system.

PARKS AND RECREATION PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REPORTS

Chief Ron Olson explained that most of the Parks and Recreation performance and financial reports were made available in writing prior to the meeting, he gave a brief overview of the reports regarding revenues, projections and MVP sales, and unless there were any additional questions or need for further discussion or explanation, he would prefer to move forward with the agenda. One of the committee members mentioned that it would be interesting to see a 5-year trend on boating and camping patterns. Chief Olson said they would provide that information for the next meeting.

Tony Herek, PRD Program Services Section Chief, did mention, however, that the Capital Outlay bill is moving through the house, and is not sure what the status of the Bond List is, but will update the committee when new information is received.

There were no additional questions or comments regarding these reports.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Stewardship Subcommittee Vice-Chair, Mary Pitcher, gave a brief overview of the subcommittee's discussions regarding the rezoning of 98 acres within the Fort Custer Recreation Area from Natural Resources Recreation Zone to Developed Recreation Zone. She also commented that the revised dedicated boundary encompasses the potential of adding 98,000 acres to the state park and recreation system. A resolution was presented; Mary Pitcher motioned to approve the resolution; Chris Graham seconded the motion; and the Resolution was unanimously approved and adopted by the Committee.

CLOSING COMMENTS/NEXT MEETING/LOCATION

Chair Jemerson asked the Committee where they would like to hold their next meeting, and the Committee decided to hold their next meeting at P. J. Hoffmaster State Park. Chair Jemerson asked if there were any further comments or updates, none were offered, and the meeting was adjourned.