

CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR MICHIGAN STATE PARKS

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

Ionia State Recreation Area

Field Trialers' Clubhouse

Ionia, Michigan

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Murdock Jemerson, 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

Tom Ferguson, Vice Chair
Tom Bailey
James Bradley
Kathy Lewand

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

April Bennett
Mary Brown
Duncan Wyeth
Sandra Clark

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Curtis Hertel

DNR SUPPORT 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
Paul Curtis, PRD
Kevin Frailey, DNR Office of Communications

INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Murdock Jemerson called the meeting to order at 11:45 a.m. with roll call, introductions and an overview of the meeting agenda. Chair Jemerson announced that the Office of Communications' presentation will be moved up on the agenda, to begin the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Jemerson asked if there was anybody present for public appearances. There were no public appearances. Chair Jemerson said he will check back at 1:00 p.m. when public appearances were originally scheduled.

Chair Jemerson addressed the audience at 1:00 p.m. There were no public appearances.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

No discussion or opposition to the Minutes. Betsy Clark motioned to approve the Minutes; Mary Pitcher seconded the motion; the motion unanimously carried and the September 19, 2007 Minutes were approved and adopted by the Committee.

PRESENTATION BY THE DNR OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Kevin Frailey, the Office of Communication's Education and Outreach Manager, gave a presentation regarding conservation education and what their office has been doing in conservation education and outreach initiatives. Kevin credited the Parks and Recreation Division with getting a good start on this initiative with the "GO-Get Outdoors" program.

The Office of Communications is trying to link all divisions within the Department of Natural Resources, with their two main messages being stewardship and getting outdoors. Their Office currently has 10 full time interpreters (8 at state parks; 2 at fish hatcheries), with 1 interpreter being stationed at their 9 Visitor Centers statewide. One interpreter is stationed at the newly created "Fact Shack," which was completed in the Fall of 2007 at Tahquamenon Falls State Park and, in that short span of time, has had over 49,000 visitors.

He gave statistics on the visitor centers, school programs, public programs, campground programs, and outreach programs held and their attendance for the past year. Some of their programs and resources include The State Park Explorer Program, Becoming an Outdoors Woman, Archery in the Schools, Salmon in the Classroom, Hunter Education and Recreational Safety Classes, the Pocket Parks at the Detroit and Escanaba State Fairgrounds, and the "Nature News," the DNR's seasonal publication for kids approximately 9-15 years of age. They also hire interpreters during the summer to work in state parks and recreation areas to connect with campers by setting up displays, holding formal and informal sessions for the campers and the children, or just by walking around and talking to them. They also hold weekday and weekend conservation and educational programs, in an outdoor setting or in classrooms.

In closing, Kevin mentioned that statistics show that children today spend anywhere between 6 to 8 hours each day in front of the television, on computers or computer-generated games, and that the baby boomers (between 35 to 50 years of age) are the last generation to spend a considerable amount of time outdoors. Suggestions were made to start connecting with, not only the future generations, but also the baby boomers, parents and grandparents to get them outdoors,

and encourage them to include their children or grandchildren. Another group that needs to be targeted more is women and young girls to get them more involved in the outdoors.

Chair Jemerson thanked Kevin for his presentation.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE FUNDING ALTERNATIVES

Chuck Nelson, Committee Member, opened the discussion on the license plate proposal. He explained that this proposal has been discussed and researched for more than a year. It was held back, awaiting other potential conservation funding initiatives being considered by the Conservation Summit, but nothing has moved forward. Although they may move forward in the future, it is time to move ahead with a very specific alternative to funding Michigan's state parks and recreation areas. This proposal is now being presented to this committee for consideration and adoption.

This proposal focuses on additional conservation funding for Michigan state parks and recreation areas, capital improvements and terms of operation. It also focuses on providing additional funds for state forest campgrounds and pathways, a source of grant money for local units of government towards development grants, and some money towards historical, cultural resources within state parks.

For the citizens, it eliminates the requirement to purchase a motor vehicle and boating access site permit for each vehicle, and replaces it with one, \$9 charge per annual vehicle license plate/registration, and \$4.50 per every annual motorcycle plate/registration on all Michigan Secretary of State registered passenger vehicles and motorcycles. This fee would be in addition to current vehicle registration costs. This annual fee would allow access to all 98 state parks and recreation areas, including 5 state park trails, all boating access sites managed by the DNR, and the state forest campground and pathway system. There would be a refund provision to allow those who do not want to support Michigan's outdoor recreation system and certified that they would not be visiting or using any of these facilities. The non-resident annual and daily motor vehicle permit requirements, and camping fees, would remain in effect.

Three revenue scenarios were presented, based on the anticipated amount of participation. Considerable time has been spent on the phone discussing this proposal with Montana, the only other state that has a program similar to this proposal. They did caution the DNR to find a way to build in for inflation, which has been incorporated into this proposal. It would allow for an annual fee adjustment for inflation based on the Detroit Consumer Index, with 2008 being the base year.

One area that has not been researched yet is the cost for the Secretary of State to administer this program. Chuck Nelson will be in Montana next week, and will meet with the Secretary of State to determine what it costs them to administer the program. Although this proposal will help to recapitalize the State Park Improvement Fund, it still may not help meet the \$40 million annual infrastructure needs for the state parks and recreation areas (i.e. renovations, repair, and replacements).

Jim Hendricks, committee member, commented that this resolution and proposal is probably the single, most important resolution that this committee could adopt. It could change the future of the state parks system.

Discussions continued regarding suggested language changes, clarifications, and amendments to the resolution and proposal. Chuck Nelson offered to make the changes that the committee agreed upon, and incorporate them into the final product.

Chuck mentioned that other people are very interested in this proposal, including some people in the legislature. It is the intent today to ask this committee to adopt the resolution, and to accept and advance this proposal so that it can move forward, with the understanding that this proposal could metamorphose, especially if it is sponsored by a bill and passed through the legislature.

The committee asked what the next steps are, for this committee and others, to get this resolution and proposal moving forward, if adopted.

Dennis Fox, DNR's Chief of Staff, was in attendance and offered to address that question. Since this body was established as an advisory committee on state parks issues, the DNR and the Natural Resources Commission look to this committee for suggestions and solutions to a long-term funding strategy for Michigan's state parks and recreation areas. If this committee adopts this resolution and proposal, it would then be presented to the newly formed NRC Policy Committee on Parks and Recreation for consideration, and on up to the Director who will transfer it over to the Governor's Office so that they are aware and can start working with the legislature to get something up and moving. However, this committee represents a large number of groups, organizations and constituencies that they could share this with and pass along to others for their information, and gain a strong base of support. For example, two of the members on this committee are also members of the newly formed NRC Policy Committee on Parks and Recreation.

This is not, however, the last stance for this committee. If a bill is introduced, then it will be up to this committee to work directly with the legislature regarding language, gain support, and getting it passed through the legislature and on to the voters.

Chair Jemerson and Chuck Nelson will be presenting this to the NRC at their December meeting. Chair Jemerson will also be attending a meeting on December 4 with the Governor, and will take this opportunity to discuss this proposal at that meeting. Mike McDonald, committee member, will also be attending a Michigan Recreation and Park Association meeting next week, and will present this proposal to that group.

Mary Brown, ex-officio member, suggested that every committee member contact their legislators to discuss this proposal with them, educate them on the status of the state parks and recreation system, and possibly gain their support. Dennis Fox also suggested contacting members of the house and senate appropriations committees and the subcommittees that deal

with DNR issues. He also suggested contacting the Secretary of State and start working with them since they are going to be the agency that will have to administer this proposal.

Talking points will be developed so that members can take this to their organizations, groups, constituencies, legislators, and others.

It was suggested that comments be directed to this committee, the director, or the Parks and Recreation Division.

Betsy Clark, committee secretary, asked about the difference between the Conservation Coalition and the Conservation Summit. Chuck Nelson explained that the Conservation Coalition's main focus is on hunting and fishing, but they are interested in building bridges with the Conservation Summit and the DNR Parks and Recreation Division. He has also talked with representatives from the Michigan United Conservation Clubs and they have indicated that they do plan to move forward with some things, but were not specific as to what they were. They have assured us, however, that they plan to include this committee and the DNR Parks and Recreation Division in future discussions and meetings related to conservation funding. Chair Jemerson is attending the Conservation Coalition's meeting next week to discuss this proposal and to start building bridges.

Chair Jemerson asked if there were any additional comments or amendments to the resolution and proposal; no additional comments or amendments were presented.

Chuck Nelson re-read the amendments out loud to the committee. Betsy Clark motioned to adopt the resolution and proposal, as amended; Chuck Nelson seconded the motion; there were no objections and the resolution and proposal was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR THE DNR

Chris Graham, committee member, also presented a resolution to support adequate funding for the Department of Natural Resources, and read the resolution out loud to the committee. He also presented information from the House Fiscal Agency showing the historical record of total taxes, fees, and license income to the State in relation to the "Headlee" constitutional limit, since the 1970s. The State of Michigan is currently about \$5 billion per year below allowable income levels (including the SBT) -- an all time record and way above the average difference of a few hundred million dollars, and approximately the size of the "revenue problem" of our government. He also showed a chart of the overall personal income of Michigan residents for the last couple of decades, showing positive growth of overall incomes, even during the last several years.

Discussions continued regarding suggested language changes, clarifications, and amendments to the resolution. After a couple of minor questions and discussions regarding this resolution; Chris Graham made a motion to adopt this resolution, as amended; Betsy Clark seconded the motion; there were no objections and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

PARKS AND RECREATION REPORTS AND UPDATES

Good Things

Ron Olson, DNR Parks and Recreation Chief, announced that the Michigan Recreation and Park Association (MRPA) will be presenting an award to the DNR Parks and Recreation Division's Green Initiatives Team (GIT) at their annual conference on January 22, 2008 in Traverse City.

Ron Olson mentioned that the remaining agenda items and reports under this portion of the meeting were made available, in writing, prior to the meeting, and are open for discussion if anybody has any questions.

Tri-Centennial State Park and Harbor Update

Todd Scott commented that it is important for this committee, and the department, to move the funding resolutions forward, especially regarding the Tri-Centennial State Park and Harbor. Being located in the Detroit-Metropolitan area, it will be one of the most visited state parks and will require adequate funding to complete and operate, yet it will not generate revenue through the sale of motor vehicle permits or camping.

There were no additional comments or questions regarding this report.

Porkies Ski Lodge Update

There were no comments or questions regarding this report.

PRD Strategic Planning Update

Paul Curtis, the PRD Strategic Planning Coordinator, commented that additional surveys were distributed to the boating community to obtain more feedback on the strategic plan. The phone surveys with various stakeholders (approximately 170, including members of this committee) have not yet been completed due to a shortage of staff, but it should pick up again in the next week. Paul asked the committee members present if they have been interviewed; none have been contacted yet. He assured them that a staff person will contact them within the next couple of weeks.

There were no additional comments or questions.

Legislative Update

Chief Olson asked the committee if they had any questions or comments about the Legislative report.

Harold Herta, PRD Resource Management Chief, gave a brief update on the status of the gift certificate bill and the updates that they are working on to upgrade the central reservation system and retail sales system to accommodate the sale of gift certificates on-line.

Hurley Coleman, committee member, asked about the status of Representative Sheltroun's funding proposal as he mentioned in a MIRS report. Ron Olson responded that we have not seen a bill introduced and have not received any additional information or feedback. He stated that this committee will be notified if anything is introduced.

There were no additional comments or questions regarding legislative matters.

Land Issues Report

Further explanation was requested regarding the Axion Land Proposal. Paul Yauk commented that Axion is a group that is interested in purchasing state forest lands near Grayling to build a large, outdoor amusement park. A briefing was provided to the Natural Resources Commission at their October, 2007 meeting. Staff will provide this committee with additional details and updates as they arise.

There were no further discussions or questions regarding this report.

Summary of Fall Events/New Event

Ron Olson commented that this report is a summary of events that were held in state parks and recreation areas in 2007. As mentioned in Kevin Frailey's earlier presentation, park staff are being encouraged to create events that will encourage and attract more visitors to our state parks and recreation areas. Over 400 events were held in 2007.

There were no further discussions or questions regarding this report.

PARKS AND RECREATION PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REPORTS

Ron Olson mentioned again that the agenda items and reports under this portion of the meeting were made available, in writing, prior to the meeting, and are open for discussion if anybody has any questions.

Harold Herta, PRD Resource Management Section Chief, reminded the committee that any state parks that did not raise their camping fees in 2006, raised their camping fees \$2 this camping season, effective October 1, 2007. Campers are already making reservations through May, 2008 and, to-date, no complaints have been received regarding the increase in fees.

Ron Olson made a closing comment that a decision was made by the department not to staff outdoor shows this year due to funding issues to allow staff to attend, including the Governor's moratorium on travel.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Joint Report of the Fee/Short-Term and Long-Term Finance Subcommittees

Chuck Nelson reported that the Fee/Short-Term and Long-Term Finance Subcommittees will now be joined into one "Finance Subcommittee," and all committee members will participate in any Finance Subcommittee meetings that are scheduled. Since all committee members were involved in the earlier discussions regarding long-term sustainable funding, and resolutions were adopted, there is nothing further to report.

Marketing and Interpretation

This subcommittee did not meet due to the joint subcommittee meeting that was held to address long-term sustainable funding. Nothing to report.

Programming and Operations

This subcommittee did not meet due to the joint subcommittee meeting that was held to address long-term sustainable funding. Nothing to report.

Stewardship

Mike McDonald, Subcommittee Chair, reported that the Stewardship Subcommittee met regarding the General Management Plans for Wetzel and Fort Custer Recreation Areas, and asks for this committee's adoption of the two resolutions to approve the General Management Plans for these two recreation areas.

Chris Graham moved to adopt the resolutions; Mary Pitcher seconded the motion with a request to include greater emphasis in the Executive Summary text and boundary maps for future, desired acquisitions in these, or any other, state park and recreation areas. There were no objections; the motion carried; and the two resolutions approving the General Management Plans for Wetzel and Fort Custer Recreation Areas were approved and adopted by the committee.

Mary Pitcher commented that Fort Custer is a 3,000 acre recreation area outside Battle Creek. There is a desire to expand Fort Custer to 4,200 acres. Therefore, her earlier point being that, if there is a strong need or desire for future acquisitions, then emphasis should be added to the Executive Summaries for General Management Plans, and boundary or other maps showing the boundaries for future, desired acquisitions. She also suggested that the maps may be more legible if they were created in black and white.

NEW BUSINESS

Mike Foote has agreed to join the stewardship subcommittee.

Chuck Nelson reminded the committee that, with the recent passing of Sam Washington, the former Executive Director of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) and former committee member), this committee needs a permanent replacement from MUCC to be a voting member on this committee.

NEXT MEETING/LOCATION

Chair Jemerson announced the list of proposed 2008 meeting dates and asked if there were any conflicts or objections to the dates. Todd Scott motioned to approve the 2008 meeting dates; Mike McDonald seconded the motion; there were no objections and the 2008 meeting dates were adopted and approved.

Chair Jemerson asked if we should try to identify meeting locations. Betsy Clark commented that she prefers it when staff identify meeting locations, based on events or issues that are being addressed at or near that time. It is important for this committee to actually be able to visit a site, or see what the issues are, that the Parks and Recreation Division are dealing with.

Chuck Nelson asked the committee if they would be interested in holding a joint meeting with representatives from various organizations and partners to present and address the license plate proposal, such as the Michigan Recreation and Park Association, the Forest Management Advisory Council, the Michigan State Waterways Commission, and others. After brief discussion, it was suggested that we identify a future meeting date where we could invite various representatives to a meeting to present and discuss this proposal. Ron Olson suggested reconsidering this at an early spring meeting to determine what the status is on travel restrictions, and to avoid having to travel in bad weather conditions.

Chair Jemerson thanked Park Supervisor, Ted Kessler, for his hospitality and to relay to the Dog Trialers' the committee's thanks for allowing them to use their clubhouse. He thanked Chuck Nelson and PRD staff for all their hard work on the license plate resolution and proposal; and thanked Chris Graham for his funding resolution.

Chair Jemerson asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Todd Scott made a motion to adjourn; Betsy Clark seconded the motion; and the meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.