

FUTURE PLAN INSERTS

10-Year Action Plan (LONG-RANGE ACTION GOALS TO ATTAIN GMP) - Phase-2 of the Management Planning Process. Includes review and update of General Management Plan.

5-Year Action Plan (SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT) - Phase-3 of the Management Planning Process. Includes review and update of General Management Plan and Phase 2 Plan.

Annual Action Plan and Progress Report - Phase-4 of the Management Planning Process.

Field Trial Grounds Management Plan – With input from the Ionia Field Trial Association, various field trial clubs, and Wildlife Division, PRD-Stewardship is charged with the development of this document. The Field Trial Grounds Management Plan will serve to provide specific direction and guidance for management of the field trial courses.

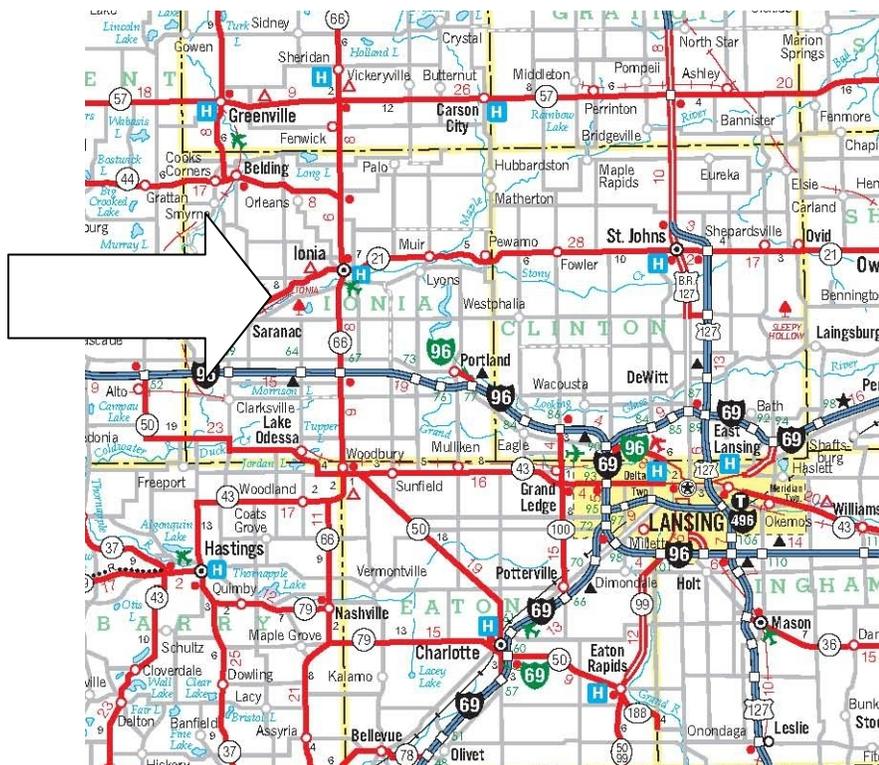
Operational/Management Resources - The following categories are established as a guide for the park manager to use to supplement this working document. Other categories can be added as needed.

- Annual Work Plan (NOTE...this will tie-in with Phase 4 – Annual Report of Management Planning)
- Staffing
- Budget
- Equipment
- Training
- Public Relations / Marketing / Outreach
- Programming (ie. special events, MCCC, volunteers, etc.)
- Public Health, Safety, and Welfare
 - Water system
 - Wastewater system
 - Electrical system
 - Law enforcement
 - Emergency Access Plan
 - Wildfire Management Plan
 - Dam Safety Reports
- CRS
- FOIA
- [Raster Image Index](#)
- [Raster Images of historic park plans](#)
- Park Infrastructure data

SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Park Setting -

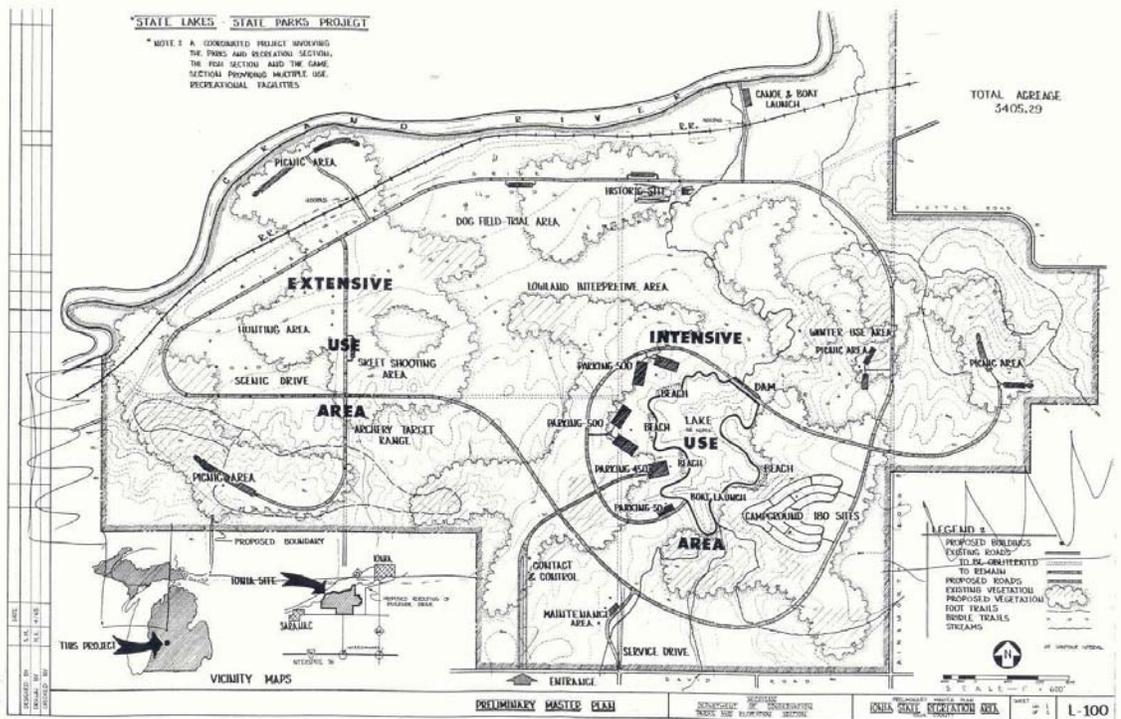
- LOCATION AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITY – Ionia State Recreation Area is located approximately two miles southwest of Ionia and a like distance east of the village of Saranac, in Ionia County. It is bounded by the Grand River to the north and David Highway to the south. The entire park is within Berlin Township. The primary access to the park is from David Highway, with several parking areas found along county roads around its perimeter. The Jordan Lake Road exit from I-96 is approximately 3.5 miles due south of the park entrance, and is a primary route of access to the park. This is a two-lane primary county road. Two other primary county roads provide access to the park. David Highway connects with M-66 to the east of the park and Riverside Drive connects the north end of the park to both Saranac and Ionia. All county road(s) access to the park is subject to seasonal load restrictions and weight limits.



The city of Ionia to the northeast of the park has a 2000 Census population of 10,569. The Village of Saranac, due west of the park has a 2000 Census population of 1,326. The 2000 Census population of Ionia County is 63,573, which reflects a 7.9% increase over the 1990 Census figures. The relative density of the county at 107.3 persons per square mile (p/sm) is significantly less than the state average of 175 p/sm, and is reflective of the agricultural use of land in the county.

- GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PARK** – In the early 1960’s, the Department of Conservation proposed a program to build 50 ‘State Lakes’ in the lower peninsula’s “lakeless” area of the state. The purpose of this initiative was to construct new water bodies in the lakeless area of the state for purposes of providing centers for outdoor recreation. A priority of these lake parks would be given to fishing and high water quality for swimming, with park and outdoor recreation activities to take place on the uplands.

In a 1964 study of the Upper Grand River Basin, nine sites were identified as having potential to meet the needs of the State Lakes program. In 1965, Parks Division conducted a detailed study of the Ionia area which ultimately resulted in development of the final recommendation and proposed ‘Master Plan’ for what would become “Ionia State Recreation Area”. Upon presentation of this recommendation, Ionia State Recreation Area was dedicated in May of 1965 by the Conservation Commission.

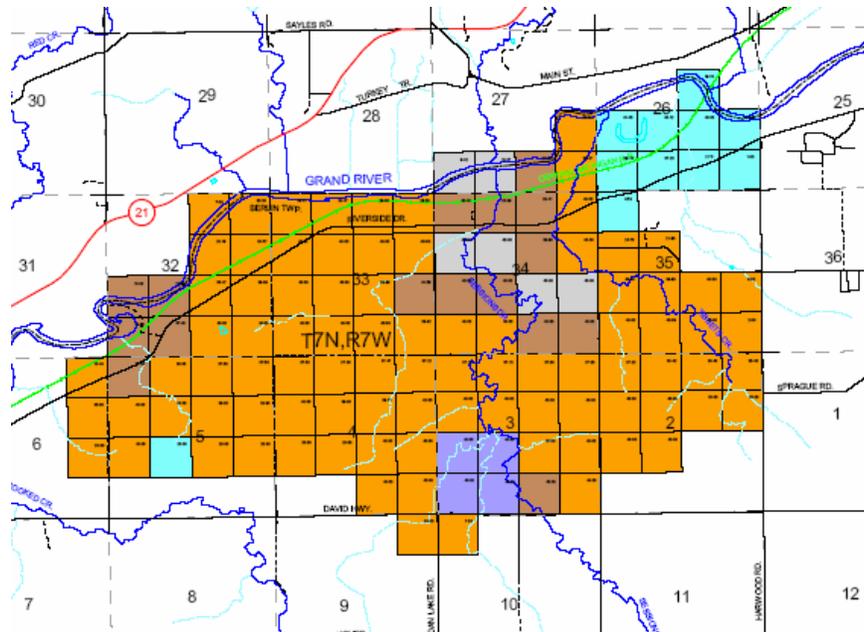


Based on the boundary defined in the 1965 master plan, the Department began to acquire lands needed for development of this new park. The first lands acquired were by gift of a 320 acre parcel from Ionia County of the old Ionia County Home. Through subsequent acquisitions over time, Ionia SRA today represents 4,418 acres of public recreation lands, with five miles of frontage on the Grand River, and a 140 acre man-made lake.

Ionia SRA is within one hour's drive of greater metropolitan Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and Lansing, and 16.4% of the population of Michigan. (1,629,900 people)

- LAND OWNERSHIP AND ISSUES – State ownership of the lands that make up Ionia SRA has been acquired through a variety of funding sources.

LAND PURCHASE FUNDING SOURCES
(from MDNR – Land Information System)



FUND CATEGORY

	Dingell Johnson
	Game And Fish
	Gift
	MNRTF
	Pittman Robertson
	Special Legislation
	State Game Fund
	Other Funds
	Multiple Funds

- Following are descriptions of the impacts of these various sources:
 - Special Legislation – The majority of the total park acreage has been acquired with this source. It is utilized for general program purposes.

- Gift – A portion of the park acreage was acquired by gift. It is utilized for general program purposes.
 - Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) – Is utilized for general program purposes.
 - Multiple Funds and Other Funds – Is utilized for general program purposes.
- One specific acquisition of land is the “Posse House”, an old school house located on Riverside Drive. This 0.4 acre parcel with structure was deeded to the state in 1966 by Ionia County, with a specific requirement “for right of use of the former school house and said land as granted to the Sheriff’s Posse of Ionia County by the County of Ionia

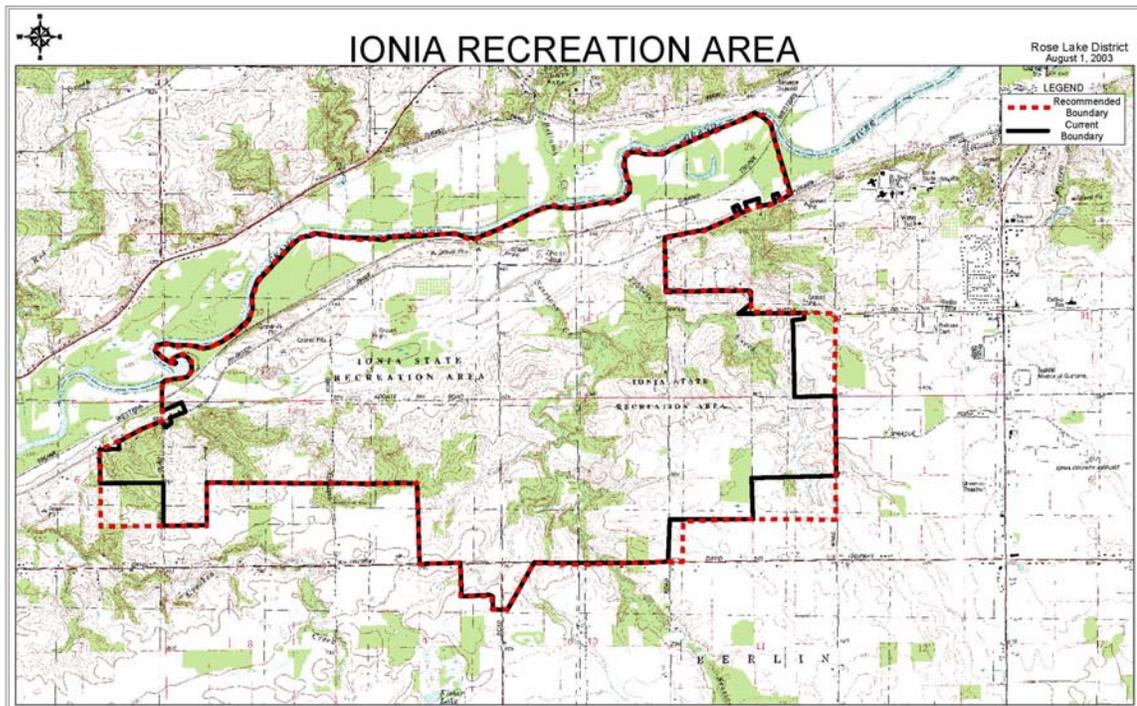


- On 2/25/2005, the Ionia Field Trial Grounds Association (IFTGA) ...entered into a lease with the State of Michigan (DNR) for specific lands, facilities, and uses of Ionia SRA for Field Trial purposes.
- Letter of Understanding with Ionia County that places maintenance responsibility for the Ionia County Infirmary Cemetery with the DNR in perpetuity.
- Letter of Understanding with the John Smith family that they can farm the southeast corner of DNR land south of David Highway.
- Historic designation of the Sessions School House ... maintenance that is historically correct...no alterations...etc.



- NRC dedication of the Championship Courses at Ionia provides specific, legal description of those lands.
- R.O.W.'s....County Road Commission and Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad
- Permit Issues:
 - Lagoon maintenance
 - Dam Safety requirements
 - . Sessions Lake Dam and Sediment Control Dams
 - . Wildlife flooding dams (Goemaere-Anderson Wetland Protection Act of 1979 – PA203)

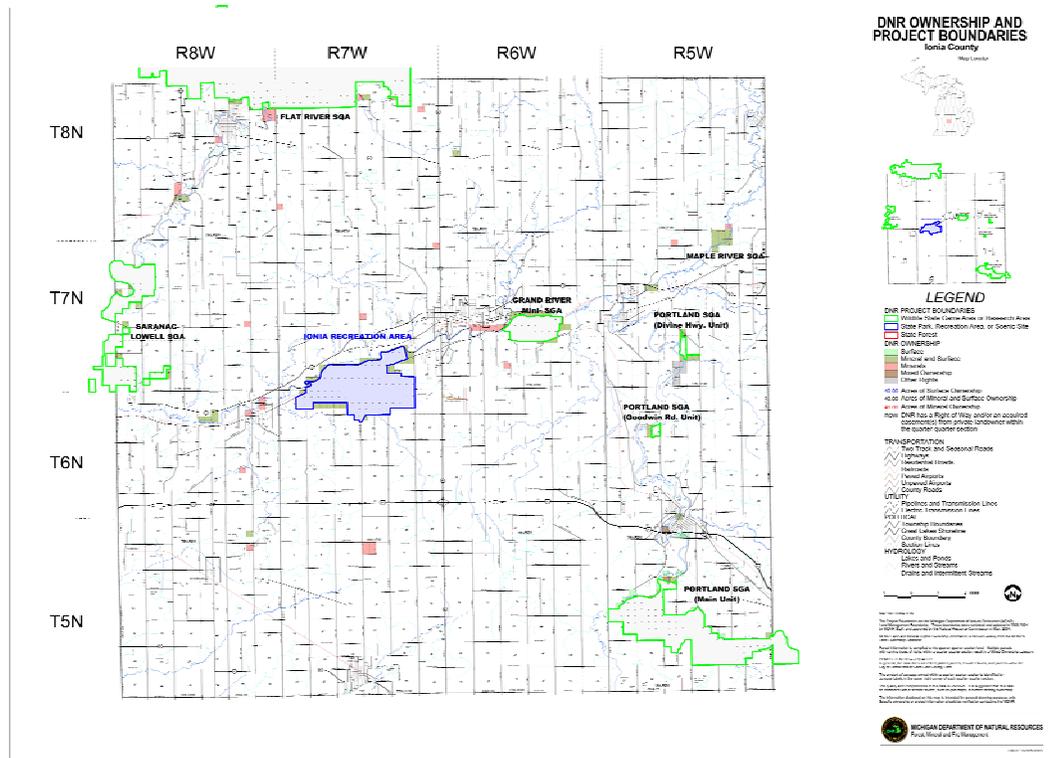
- The Natural Resource Commission has approved a recommended boundary change for the park that includes additional land to the west and east ends of the park.



- RELATIONSHIP OF IONIA SRA TO OTHER RECREATION RESOURCES – In Ionia County, there is one State Park...Ionia State Recreation Area. There are five Wildlife Division administered ‘State Game Areas’ (SGA), one of which has two additional smaller units. They are:
 - Flat River SGA
 - Saranac-Lowell SGA
 - Portland SGA (Main Unit)
 - Divine Highway Unit
 - Goodwin Road Unit
 - Maple River SGA
 - Grand River mini SGA

Additionally, there are nine Department administered “Boating Access Sites” in Ionia County.

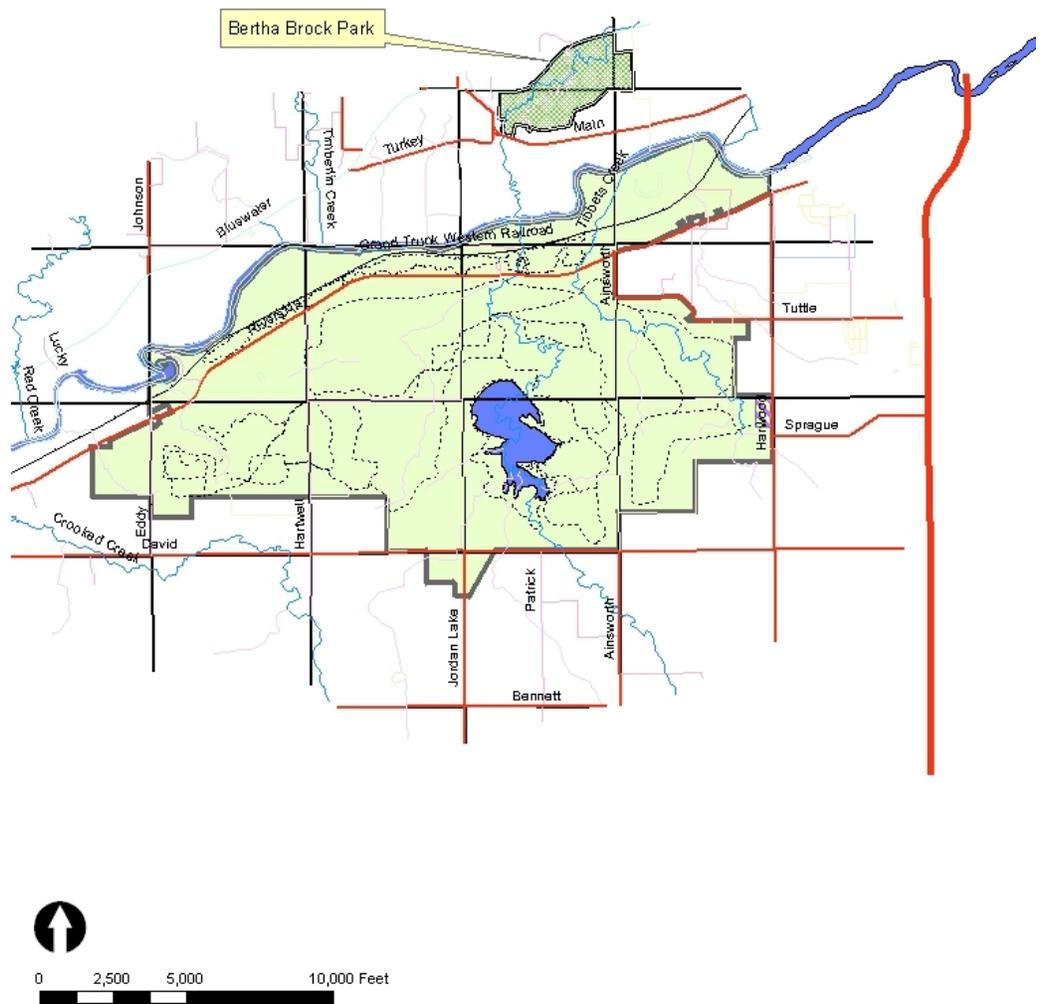
Map of DNR Major Land Holdings in Ionia County



http://www.dnr.state.mi.us/spatialdatalibrary/pdf_maps/project_boundaries/ionia_project_boundaries.pdf Internet site showing DNR land management in each county.

- In the region, the next closest state parks are Yankee Springs RA, west of Hastings in Barry County, approximately 30 miles southwest of Ionia SRA, and Sleepy Hollow SP, north of Lansing in Clinton County, approximately 36 miles east of Ionia SRA.

- The Ionia County Parks and Recreation Department runs Bertha Brock Park, a 208 acre park located less than one mile north of Ionia SRA. This park offers day-use facilities as well as outdoor natural resource based recreation that includes camping and over four miles of hiking/cross-country ski trails.



Green View Point Park is also administered by Ionia County. Located east of the Village of Lyons, this 5-acre park offers stunning views of the Grand River.

- There are local day-use recreation parks found in most communities in Ionia County.
- Sixteen Public Boating Access Sites (BAS) are located in Ionia County. Nine are operated by the DNR and seven by local units of government. Specific information about these sites can be accessed through the DNR. The “Michigan Recreational Boating Information System” (MRBIS) [“http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/MRBIS/”](http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/MRBIS/) is an excellent source of information about all Boating Access Sites and the water bodies they access.
- There are no federally owned or managed recreational areas in the area.

- CURRENT LAND USE – Ionia State Recreation Area is considered a multi-use park with recreational opportunities that include camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, equestrian trails, hiking and cross-country ski trails, mountain bike trails, fishing, hunting, trapping, and conduct of competitive field trials. The most intensive development of the 4,418 acre Park is around and near Sessions Lake, where developed recreation includes a boat launch, picnic facilities, beach, camping and equestrian staging and camping areas.



Sessions Lake, a man-made lake of approximately 140 acres, represents the purpose for establishing a state park here. This high quality water body provides recreation for swimming, boating and fishing, and is an attraction to waterfowl. Bald eagles that nest along the Grand River are known to frequent the lake.

The Grand River forms the northerly boundary of the park and is of significant impact. A large wooded floodplain is defined by the river and the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad grade, which roughly parallels the river and runs in an east/west direction, north of Riverside Drive.

The Michigan Mountain Bike Association (Mid-State Chapter) maintains approximately nine miles of trails in the area between the railroad grade and Riverside Drive.



The Ionia Field Trial Association has its headquarters and primary staging area off of Harwood Road, along the east boundary of the park. Approximately 14.5 acres at this location are under lease to the Association, as well as an additional 1.5 acre parking area along Riverside Drive.



Approximately 1,970 acres of the RA are designated “Field Trial Courses”. The primary use of this acreage is the conduct of field trials and the training of field trial dogs. Public access is not restricted on these courses.

The majority of the Recreation Area is characterized as rolling terrain with intermittent open fields (primarily in the designated Field Trial Courses) and wooded sections. This land is accessed by a variety of trails (no mountain bike use in this area), including equestrian, and is enjoyed by hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Outlying land use is characterized as mixed residential, farmland, and commercial. Residential development is expanding north of Tuttle Road (north of Course #1). East and north of the park are gravel operations. Further east of the park, commercial development is expanding with construction of a new Wal-Mart store within one mile of the park boundary. South of the park, the land is primarily used for agriculture.

Ionia County does not have zoning.

Natural Resources -

- **ECOREGIONAL CONTEXT** – This topic is most effectively discussed in the MNFI Report for the park (“Ionia State Recreation Area – Natural Features Inventory and Management Recommendations – January 2002”). From that report, Ionia SRA is found within the Lansing subsection. This “is characterized by gently sloping moraines that are broken by several outwash channels and numerous end moraine ridges...exposed bedrock is rare, and glacial deposits over bedrock average 350-400 feet thick.”
- **WATER RESOURCES** – Ionia SRA provides approximately five miles of frontage on the Grand River. Within the park, there are two primary streams that outlet into the Grand River. Sessions Creek is the water source for “Sessions Lake”, a 140 acre man-made lake. Tibbets Creek is notable as a “Designated Trout Stream”. Finally, there are a series of wildlife floodings that were created in 1988 with dikes and control structures. These are found in existing lowland areas and are popular for waterfowl, waterfowl hunters and beavers.

Recreational boating opportunities (no-wake) are available on Sessions Lake from a Boating Access Site (BAS) located along the west shore, near the picnic area. A carry down access point to the Grand River is seasonally open. This is accessed from the Riverside Picnic Area.

- **CLIMATE** – The average annual precipitation is 36 inches, with average annual snowfall of 66 inches. Winds are generally out of the southwest. During the primary use season of the park, May through September, the average temperatures range from 57.7 degrees f to 71.0 degrees f. High temperatures range from 68.8 to 82.0 and low temperatures range from 46.6 to 59.9.
- **GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY** – The surface geology of Michigan is made up of glacial deposits. As outlined earlier, Ionia SRA is located in the Lansing subsection, which is “characterized by gently sloping moraines that are broken by several outwash channels and numerous end moraine ridges...exposed bedrock is rare, and glacial deposits over bedrock average 350-400 feet thick.”

The general description of Ionia SRA is that it is rolling terrain, interspersed with glacial ridges, stream valleys, and the Grand River along the north property line of the park.

The elevation change in the park is significant, ranging from 630 feet above sea level at the banks of the Grand River to 830 feet at the highest point in the park.

- **SOILS** – Soils in the park vary considerably. The higher elevations in the park are characterized by well to moderately well drained soils, while any depressions,

flats, or gently sloping areas are characterized by poorly to very-poorly drained soils.

- FLORA – With European settlement, the Circa 1800 landcover was greatly impacted by agricultural practices. What was once Beech-Sugar Maple forests became farmland. A significant amount of this old farmland remains intact today, but instead of being farmed, it is maintained in an open condition for field trial purposes.

Wooded areas that do remain are predominately maple. There are scattered pockets of conifers, planted years ago, and these are vigorous enough to self-generate.

The Grand River floodplain has remained relatively intact, and is characterized as a mixed hardwood swamp. The wildlife floodings south of Riverside Drive still reflect the “Shrub Swamp/Emergent Marsh” land cover of circa 1800.

There were no rare plants identified by MNFI survey work in Ionia SRA. They (MNFI) do acknowledge that the following plants could occur:

- Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) – State threatened
- Large toothwort (*Hybanthus concolor*) – State threatened
- Showy orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*) – State threatened
- Green violet (*Hybanthus concolor*) – State special concern

FAUNA – Mammals commonly found at Ionia SRA (from the 1978 Environmental Impact Statement) include white-tailed deer, fox squirrels, cottontail rabbit, woodchuck, muskrat, mink, and beaver. A variety of birds, include pheasant, ruffed grouse, woodcock, hawks, and owls. Added to this list are turkey, bald eagles, herons, and a variety of waterfowl, and upland non-game species.

Reptiles have not specifically been inventoried at the park.

Aquatic species vary with water body. The Grand River includes warm-water species of fish, including northern pike, black bass, walleye, carp, sucker and panfish. Tibbets Creek is a designated trout stream and supports a naturally reproducing population of brook trout. Sessions Creek is not a designated trout stream, but has occurrences of trout.

Sessions Lake is a warm water fishery, with walleye, bass and panfish.

MNFI identified the following occurrences of rare species at Ionia SRA:

- Blanding’s turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) – State special concern
- Henslow’s sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*) – State threatened

- Elktoe mussel (*Alasmidonta maginata*) - State special concern
- Purple wartyback (*Cyclonaias tuberculata*) - State special concern
- Round pigtoe mussel (*Pleurobema coccineum*) - State special concern
- Snuffbox mussel (*Epioblasma triquetra*) – Endangered

Additionally, MNFI does acknowledge that the following rare plant and animal species could occur in the park:

- Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) – State threatened
- Large toothwort (*Hybanthus concolor*) - State threatened
- Showy orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*) - State threatened
- Green violet (*Hybanthus concolor*) – State special concern
- Long-eared owl (*Asio otus*) - State threatened
- Short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*) – Endangered
- Cooper’s hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*) - State special concern
- Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) - State special concern
- Migrant loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus migrans*) – Endangered
- Least shrew (*Cryptotis parva*) - State threatened
- Woodland vole (*Microtus pinetorum*) - State special concern

Historic/Cultural Resources

- PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT – Located on the Grand River, the historic pathway of both native Americans and European-American settlers, Ionia SRA is comprised of lands from the earliest settlement of Ionia County. Ionia was settled by Samuel Dexter in 1833, and Ionia SRA lands were settled for agricultural purposes by 1835. The evidence of historic/cultural resources reflects this prominent agricultural use of the land.



- CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT** – Historic records show that Native American settlement took place on or near Ionia SRA land along the Grand River and Sessions Creek. The Pottawatomie and Ottawa tribes were active in the area. Chief Cobmoosa was second in command of the Flat River Band of the Ottawa tribe, who had established a settlement in Ionia (city) along the Grand River. On May 28, 1833, the first white settlers came to settle in Ionia, led by Samuel Dexter (Dexter Trail), who bartered with the tribe for their wigwams and crops. After receiving \$25 in gold coins, Chief Cobmoosa moved his group west into what is now Ionia SRA, to a location west and south of the Sessions Schoolhouse, on Sessions Creek.

Early holdings of land in Ionia SRA were secured by Alanzo Sessions, beginning in 1835. There, Mr. Sessions (Sessions Creek, Sessions Schoolhouse) established

a successful farm operation and a prominent life in public service, both in local and state politics. Records make note that Chief Cobmoosa was a frequent guest of Alanzo Sessions. Other historic farmsteads dot the landscape that is Ionia SRA, and of unique distinction are remnants of an old mill operation on Sessions Creek. This is acknowledged to represent one of the earliest efforts of industry in Ionia County.

- ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES – No documented evidence of Archaeological sites of Native American occupation within the park exists, although there are plentiful anecdotal accounts. Documented sites do exist outside the park at Ionia, Lyons-Muir and other locations nearby along the Grand River.

Given the proximity of Ionia SRA to known sites, and to the Grand River, archaeological occurrences are highly likely in the park. **Any land change activities in the park that involve excavation of soil, such as construction of roads, installation of underground utilities, or installation of building foundations (to name a few) must undergo an archaeological review to determine their potential impact on the cultural/historic resources of the park.**

- BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES – Remnants exist of European-American occupation throughout the park. Intact historic structures include the manager’s residence (Haynor House), the Sessions Schoolhouse and the Posse House. The Sessions Schoolhouse, built in 1847, is believed to be the oldest existing schoolhouse in the state. Scattered within the park are old foundations from early farmsteads, and an old mill operation on Sessions Creek. North of Riverside Drive is the Ionia County Infirmary Cemetery (1907-1949). The people buried there are identified on a bronze plaque mounted on a large boulder.



(Haynor House)



(Sessions Schoolhouse)



(Posse House)



(Memorial Plaque)

- HISTORIC LANDSCAPE – Remnants of the farming activities exist today with well defined fields cleared from the beech/maple forest, and scattered fruit orchards.

Education And Interpretation

- ‘KIDS IN PARK’ PROGRAM - This statewide program is available at all state parks in Michigan. It offers 4th grade teachers the park as an outdoor classroom in

support of the Department's popular L.A.P.'s program. Saranac, Lakewood and Ionia school districts have participated in this program at Ionia SRA.

- INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMMING AND DISPLAYS – Ionia SRA is one of 40 parks in Michigan where the “State Park Explorer Program” is an active part of the educational experience. At Ionia SRA, the interpreter conducts outdoor classroom sessions, and has focused on general natural resource education as the key element of those learning experiences. The Department's “Learn to Fish” program is also run by the interpreter, and is a very popular activity for park visitors.

Historic interpretation of the Sessions Schoolhouse is accomplished through interpretive signage and through programming by the Explorer Ranger.

Interpretation of the Field Trial use of Ionia SRA is absent to date from these efforts.

- VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS – Ionia SRA is popular with the ‘Campground Host Program’ whereby volunteers, often retirees, stay at a campground and provide visitor services for the campers. They greet campers, provide information on campground rules and regulations, promote educational and interpretive opportunities in the park, and offer a social gathering (coffee hour) once a week.



The Ionia Horse Trails Association is very active within the park in maintenance of the equestrian trail system, which totals 15.8 miles of trail. They are a part of the “Adopt-a-Park Program”.

Similarly, members of the Michigan Mountain Bike Association (MMBA) provide needed maintenance of approximately nine miles of mountain bike trails located north of Riverside Drive.

The Ionia Field Trial Association is responsible for maintenance of the Field Trial Grounds for trialing purposes, and for maintenance of the leased land and facilities that they utilize for field trial operations. This work is divided among the various dog clubs that benefit from the use of these public lands.

Ionia SRA benefits from volunteer activities for park clean-up days or special projects from Boy Scout troops, interested individuals, and court workers (as a 'Community Service' requirement placed on local offenders by the court system).

Volunteer training exercises conducted by local fire and law enforcement officials have benefited the park in the past with placement of swim buoys at the beach and building demolition.

Recreational Resources

- **DEVELOPED OPPORTUNITIES** – Ionia SRA offers a diverse array of recreational opportunities with both day-use activities and camping. Following are the recreational features of this park:

- **Camping** – There are three campgrounds in the park. The first is a fully modern facility served by a flush-type toilet/shower building. Each of the 100 sites has an electrical pedestal, fire ring and picnic table, and access to water.

The second campground is a designated 'Horseman's Campground'. This 49 site rustic campground has vault-type toilets and water spigots.

An 'Organization' Campground provides needed space for groups, and is served with minimal facilities of water and vault-type toilets.

These campgrounds are served by a Sanitation Station located near the camping registration building.

- **Day-use Picnic Areas and Shelters** – There are several picnic areas available for public use and enjoyment in the park.
 - "Beachwood Picnic Area" is located near the Sessions Lake Boat Launch along the SW shore of the lake. It has a ball field, picnic grills and tables, water supply, a covered shelter, vault toilet, and access to hiking trails.
 - The "Point Picnic Area" is located on the east end of Sessions Lake, and offers picnic tables and grills, water supply, a fishing pier, vault toilet, and access to hiking trails.
 - The "Riverside Picnic Area" is located along Riverside Drive at the location of the old County Home. Amenities at this location include a covered shelter, play equipment, picnic grills and tables, water supply, vault toilet, and access to the mountain bike trails.

- Boating - A rustic boat launch (carry-down) providing limited access to the Grand River is accessed from the Riverside Picnic Area. Otherwise, access to the river is available at a site at the Ionia Fairgrounds upstream, or in the Village of Saranac downstream.

A Boating Access Site is located on Sessions Lake, providing a concrete ramp with a courtesy pier, and parking for 25 car/trailer units. NOTE...Sessions Lake is a “No-Wake Lake”.

- Fishing – Sessions Lake is managed by Fisheries Division as a warm water fishery that supports through a fish stocking program, walleye, bass, and bluegill. Fishing access is from the boat launch on the lake, the fishing pier at the Point Picnic Area, or by random access along the shore.

The Grand River offers fishing opportunities for walleye, pike, bass, sucker, and panfish, with access from the river or dispersed opportunities along the river bank.

- Trails – There are five defined trail systems in the park, serving different uses. Following are descriptions of these trails:

- The “Sessions Lake Trail” is a short (3.3 mile) loop hiking trail that meanders around Sessions Lake, making connections with the modern campground, the “Point Picnic Area”, the day-use beach, and the “Beachwood Picnic Area”.

- The equestrian trails are accessed from both the equestrian campground and the equestrian staging area (used by day-use riders). This trail system is made up of multiple loops that span a great portion of the overall park. Totaling 15.8 miles in length, riders experience the wide range of resources in the park, as the trails meander through woodlots, along high ridges, cross multiple water courses and access one of the identified “Scenic Zone” locations, the “Overlook”. From this high point, stunning views are revealed to the north and northwest.

Note...these trails are also open for hiking and cross-country skiing. No bicycle use is allowed.

- In the winter, nine miles of the equestrian trail to the west of Sessions Lake is designated as cross-country ski trail. Three loops are signed for varying skier capabilities, with a one mile “Beginner” loop, a 2.5 mile “Intermediate” loop and a 5.5 mile “Expert” loop.

- Bracketed by Riverside Drive to the south and the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad grade to the north, a series of three loop trails form

the nine mile “Chief Cob-Moo-Sa Mountain Bike Trail”. In general, these loops increase in difficulty from east to west.

Access to this trail system is primarily from the Riverside Picnic Area and from a connector trail that accesses a mountain biker parking area just west of the beach. Additionally, several small parking pull-offs along Riverside Drive are used for access as well.

- Servicing the Field Trial Courses is a 12.5 mile designated route for use by the event judges, the spectator gallery, and the field trialers ‘Dog Wagon’. This is a single purpose trail.
- Field Trialing – With 45% of the park established as a ‘Field Trial Course’, this is a very popular use of the park land. From April to November, with a lull in the summer months, field trials and/or training takes place nearly every day during this use season.
- DISPERSED RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES
 - Hunting and Trapping – During the fall and winter seasons, from September 14 to April 1, Ionia SRA is open for hunting. Small game hunting is primarily for rabbit and squirrel, and large game for deer. Bird hunting includes turkey, pheasant, and waterfowl. Some trapping activity takes place in the impounded marsh areas south of Riverside Drive, primarily for beaver and muskrat.
 - Birding and Mushrooming – With its diversity of habitats, Ionia SRA is a popular site for these activities. The Fog Quarry Bird Club maintains over 100 bluebird houses in the park.
- AREAS OF CONFLICT – With diverse use for multiple interests comes the potential for conflict between users and/or between users and the natural resource or historic/cultural values of the park. Ionia SRA is no exception. Following are the identified conflict issues for this park:
 - Dissimilar operating rules - with 1,969 acres of the 4,418 acre park designated for field trial courses, this special activity impacts many park visitors who are appreciating the park for other reasons. Not only is there the physical impact of activity, but also vastly different operating rules that apply to field trials vs. other park users. For example, field trialers can ride their horses anywhere on the course (when engaged in a trial or training) when equestrian riders must stay on the designated equestrian trails. In all other areas of the park (except for hunting activity), dogs must be retained on a 6’ max. leash...field trial dogs run free. While public use of the field trial grounds is assured, that assurance carries with

it the caveat that other uses shall not interfere with the primary use of the grounds for field trialing.

- User conflicts – with the impacts cited above come conflicts of use. These are seen primarily between field trialers and hunters (field trial activity disrupts a hunt), campers (issues with dogs/horses that wander off course), mountain bikers (who cross the field trial course to get to their trail system), and equestrians (who share some segments of trail and some stream crossings with the field trialers).

Other user conflicts occur outside of the field trial courses as well, with mountain bike activity on the equestrian and hiking trails, and indiscriminate snowmobile activity.

- Posse House – this is an old school house (part of our Cultural Zone designation) located on the north side of Riverside Drive, immediately west of the Sessions Schoolhouse. It is owned by the State, with a deed requirement that the Ionia Sheriff’s Posse can utilize it for their purposes. They use it for a shooting range, having built a berm behind the structure to shoot into. It is also used by the corrections officers from the nearby Ionia Prison System.

The Chief Cob-Moo-Sa Mountain Bike Trail runs behind this berm (within approximately 100’). In addition to this conflict of proximity to recreational uses, the noise of shooting activity can be disruptive to the otherwise natural setting of the area.

- Trespass Issues – This relates primarily to trespass onto state property by neighbors on horseback or ORV’s who want free access from their property onto the park trails. Additionally, trespass can occur in the other direction, with field trial dogs ‘escaping’ the designated courses and crossing over onto private properties.

Park Use Statistics and Economic Impacts (based on 2003 data)

- PARK USE – Ionia SRA is within one hour’s drive of greater metropolitan Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and Lansing, and 16.4% of the population of Michigan. That proximity helps to account for why more than 327,650 people visited the park in 2003. Of these, 11.8% were campers and 88.2% were day-users. Total revenues (Motor Vehicle Permits and Camping Fees) generated by the park in 2003 exceeded \$285,600.

Characterization of park use is described as follows: (based on 2003 MDNR-Park Attendance Statistics)

- Summer Use Season – This is defined as the three month period of June through August, when schools are not in session. 62% of all camping and 48% of all day-use takes place during these months.
- Fall Use Season – At Ionia SRA, the fall season is defined by the months of September through November. September and October are the highest use months of this season for camping, while day-use activity is consistent for all three months. In this season, 24% of all camping activity and 29% of all day-use activity takes place.
- Winter Use Season – December through February mark a significant decline in park activity, accounting for 0% of all camping use. Day-use activity is fairly active with nearly 8% of all day-use during this time period.
- Spring Use Season – March through May shows increasing park use in both categories. Camping use is at 14% and day-use is at 15%. In this season, use continually increases as the weather warms up in May.

From “MI CRS Statistics 2003“ report by Spherix, the state contractor that administers the Campground Reservation System (CRS), Ionia SRA was the fourth ranking park (out of five) in the Mid-Michigan Region of Michigan with 4,914 campground reservations in 2003. Fort Custer RA was first of the five parks in the region with 7,156 and Newaygo SP was lowest with 2,222.

From the same source, the following statistics (2003 data) are attributable to Ionia SRA:

- Nearly 15% of campground use is from locations within one hour of Ionia SRA. The majority of these come from Grand Rapids, Lansing and Lowell.
- Ionia SRA ranked #53 of all state parks for gross revenue from camping. Of the \$173,708 generated by camping in 2003, \$141,255 came from the Modern Campground, \$25,090 from the Horse Campground, \$3,109 from the Organization Camp, and \$4,254 from the field trailers.
- The average amount paid per reservation at Ionia was \$35.45, well below the state average of \$54.88. The high in the state system was \$100.80 at Grand Haven SP on Lake Michigan, and the low was \$20.77 at Fisherman’s Island SP.
- The average number of people per reservation was 2.71, less than the state average of 3.03.

- The average length of stay was 2.21 days, which is below the state average of 2.46 days. Parks in the system that exceed this number are the Lake Michigan beach parks and very few others.
- ECONOMIC IMPACTS - Michigan State University (Dr. Dan Stynes) developed an economic analysis model known as “MGM2”. This model is an update of the MGM model developed by Dr. Ken Hornback for the National Park System in 1995. The purpose of the updated MGM2 model is to estimate the impact of park visitor spending on the local economy. These economic impacts are reflected in terms of sales, income, employment, and value added.

This analysis tool, like others, relies on three primary factors in the common equation:

Economic Impact of Tourism Spending = Number of Tourists (x) Average Spending per Visitor (x) Multiplier (to estimate extended effects of direct spending).

For our purposes of conducting a very basic review of impacts, we have utilized the “[MGM2-Short Form](#)” version of the program, which simplifies the extent of analysis required for input, and utilizes more generalized multipliers for spending outputs. For the non-economist, this provides an excellent tool for this desired baseline assessment of the economic impacts of our parks.

Economic impacts of Ionia SRA to the local community are significant. Ionia County is a low density county, with 107.3 persons per square mile vs. a statewide density of 175 persons per square mile (2000 data).

Much of the land in the county is farm land, and the area around Ionia SRA is characterized as rural. This characterization is tempered by the fact that development is approaching the park from the direction of Ionia, with a major (Wal-Mart) commercial property being constructed within a mile of the east park boundary. Other commercial development and residential development pressures will likely follow.

Following are the relative economic impacts (based on 2003 data) of Ionia SRA to the economy of Ionia County:

- DIRECT ECONOMIC EFFECTS TO THE COMMUNITY
 - Direct spending attributable to Ionia SRA visitors totaled \$4,067,000, of which \$2,553,000 came from Day-Use, and \$1,514,000 from Camping.
 - Jobs totaled 128, with 80 related to Day-Use activity and 48 to Camping. (Note...jobs are not full-time equivalent. They include part-time and seasonal positions.)

- Personal Income total is \$1,383,000, with \$868,000 associated with Day-Use of the park and \$515,000 associated with Camping.
- Value added (total income plus business taxes) totaled \$2,088,000. Day-Use accounted for \$1,311,000 and Camping accounted for \$777,000.
- TOTAL ECONOMIC EFFECTS TO THE COMMUNITY (NOTE...this reflects 'Direct Effects' plus the 'Secondary Effects' of visitor spending on the local economy. Secondary Effects (sometimes called 'Multiplier Effects') capture economic activity that results from the re-circulation of money spent by the park visitors in the community.
 - Total spending = \$5,377,000 (24% over direct spending)
 - Jobs = 150 (15% over direct job impacts)
 - Personal Income = \$1,820,000 (24% over direct spending)
 - Value added = \$2,896,000 (28% over direct value added)

NOTE...for purposes of updating economic values, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is often used to adjust values over time. Through the following link, [<http://www.bls.gov/home.htm>] a CPI Inflation Calculator is located in the category of "Inflation and Consumer Spending".

Stakeholder Input

- DNR PROGRAMS – Ionia SRA has a long history of cooperative management with other Department programs, the most significant of which is with Wildlife Division and Fisheries Division.

Fisheries Division conducts active management of Sessions Lake for a warm-water fishery that includes; walleye, bass, channel catfish, perch and bluegill. Of significance for southern Michigan is that it has designated Tibbets Creek as a "Designated Trout Stream". Additionally, the Grand River is managed for Walleye, with stocking locations at Saranac, David Highway, M-66, and Portland. It is also managed for anadromous species of salmon and trout, with stocking locations in Grand Haven and Grand Rapids for Chinook Salmon, Lansing and Lyons for Coho Salmon, and Lansing and Prairie Creek (Ionia) for Steelhead Trout.

Wildlife Division has been a partner with PRD in the management of the field trial activities at Ionia SRA. In 1979, Wildlife Division and Parks Division co-signed the "Ionia Recreation Area Field Trial Management Plan", which provided the structure by which field trialing would be conducted on state lands at Ionia SRA, and it also provided specific guidance for the management of the grounds.

Another DNR program with a stake in Ionia SRA is ‘Education and Outreach (EO). Ionia is one of many parks where an “Explorer Guide” is located. This person conducts educational programming for park visitors, tailored to the unique resources of the park. In addition to this hands-on educational approach, EO also contributes to educational opportunities with the development and placement of information kiosks and bulletin boards.

Finally, Law Division provides enforcement of state law and Natural Resource regulations on the park property.

- LOCAL AGENCY PROGRAMS – Ionia SRA is accessed by the county road system, under administration of the Ionia County Road Commission.

Another local agency with an interest in the park is the Ionia County Parks & Recreation Department. Immediately north of Ionia SRA is their premier park, Bertha Brock Park. They are currently exploring the potential for creation of a new rail-trail that would utilize the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad grade that runs through the park.

- PRIVATE SECTOR – All adjoining property owners are categorically a stakeholder. Additionally, local business interests in both Saranac and Ionia are as well. Park users don’t spend their money just at the park...a significant amount of commerce takes place at local stores, restaurants and lodging locations.
- SPORTING CLUBS – MUCC has a long-standing interest at Ionia SRA with its involvement in the field trialing clubs that utilize the park. Additionally, the following clubs or associations are very active in the park:
 - Ionia Field Trialers Association (IFTA) – this group holds the lease on the Field Trialers Headquarters, and is responsible for coordinating overall maintenance of the field trial grounds.
 - Ionia Horse Trails Association (IHTA) – this group was formalized in 1998, but equestrian riding has been an integral component of park use since 1975. Beginning in that year, most of the equestrian trails were developed. The IHTA is responsible for equestrian trail development and maintenance.
 - Michigan Mountain Biking Association (MMBA) – The ‘Mid-State Chapter’ of MMBA is responsible for the development and maintenance of the “Chief Cob-Moo-Sa Trail” in the park.
- SPECIAL INTERESTS – The Ionia County Historical Society has shown interest in the park with the past restoration efforts of the Haynor House (manager’s current residence) and the interpretation of the Sessions Schoolhouse. Additionally, the following groups have an interest in the use of Ionia SRA:

- Beekman Center (Lansing) – therapeutic riding sessions in the park.
 - Kent County Special Riding Program - therapeutic riding sessions in the park.
 - Eaton County Special Riding Program - therapeutic riding sessions in the park.
 - Berlin-Orange Fire Department – first responders for emergencies in the park.
 - Ionia County Sheriff Department Dive Team – set the swim buoys annually.
 - Sheriff's Posse – use the Posse House property for shooting range activities.
- PUBLIC – Many of the 327,000 +/- park visitors who come to Ionia SRA each year are repeat customers. This is true system wide. From the Public Policy Associates 1997 “Michigan State Parks Study”, 80% to 89% of visitors to State Parks in Southern Michigan are “Likely” to return to the park within twelve months. From the same study, the likelihood of a park visitor ‘recommending’ a particular park to others was also high in Southern Michigan, with a range of 85% to 88% saying that they would recommend visiting the park.

APPENDIX

REPORTS

- Stewardship Management Plan ([“Phase II Natural Resource Management Plan”](#))
- [Michigan Natural Features Inventory](#)
- Phase 1 Archaeological Study (access through Stewardship)
- [Economic Impact Analysis](#)
- Field Trial Grounds Management Plan (when complete)
- [“Evaluating Riparian Management Zones on State Lands”](#)
- [“Water Quality Management Practices on Forest Land”](#)
- [Lease Agreement with Ionia Field Trial Association](#)

MEETING MINUTES

- [9/30/2003 Start-up Meeting](#)
- [10/17/2003 Planning Team Meeting](#)
- [1/6/2004 Planning Team Meeting](#)
- [2/6/2004 Planning Team Meeting](#)
- [3/3/2004 Stakeholder Meeting – Ionia Field Trial Association](#)
- [3/4/2004 Stakeholder Meeting – Ionia Trail Riders Association](#)
- [8/12/2004 Public Information Meeting](#)
- [5/12/2005 Planning Team Final Review](#)

RESOLUTIONS

- [12/6/2005 Statewide Council](#)
- [12/7/2005 Citizen’s Committee for Michigan State Parks](#)

