

MINUTES

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee (MSPAC)

April 7, 2011

Lansing Center, Room 205

PRESENT FOR THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Rev. Hurley Coleman, Jr., Chair
Mary Brown, Vice-Chair

PRESENT FOR THE MSPAC

Mike Foote
Chris Graham
Robert Hoffmeyer
Murdock Jemerson
Mike McDonald
Dave Nyberg
Bill Rose

ABSENT

Mary Pitcher
Jim Bradley
Jim Hendricks
Tom Ferguson
Todd Scott
Marne Smiley
Janet Mansfield, Ex-Officio Member
Duncan Wyeth, Ex-Officio Member

OTHERS PRESENT

Director Rodney Stokes
Mark Hoffman, DNR Marketing and Education Chief
John Cherry, DNR Grants
Other DNR and Parks and Recreation Staff

PUBLIC PRESENT

Dennis Eade, MI Steelhead & Salmon
Lauri Elbing, Nature Conservancy
Chris Klaver, Gongwers

MICHIGAN STATE PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Chair Hurley Coleman, Jr. called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m., with roll call and introductions around the room. Chair Coleman asked if any of the members had anything to add or adjust on the agenda. No alterations to the agenda were offered.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

INTRODUCTION OF BRUCE ROSS, NEW PARKS AND RECREATION CHIEF OF FIELD OPERATIONS

DNR Parks and Recreation **Chief Ron Olson** introduced **Bruce Ross**, the new Chief of Field Operations, who has been with the division for about three weeks. Bruce comes to the DNR with over 13 years' experience as the Director of Parks and Recreation for VanBuren Township, with a bachelor's degree from Wayne State University in Science, Recreation and Park Services. Bruce has been responsible for the operations and personnel in the departments of Parks, Recreation, Public Works, Community Services, Government Access Cable Television, Facilities, and Marketing. Bruce has been very successful in developing partnerships, collaborations and economic development opportunities to enhance the quality of life for the residents of VanBuren Township. Over the past ten years, VanBuren Township's Parks and Recreation Department has won a host of national, state and local innovative programming and park development awards under Bruce's direction. Bruce is heavily involved in the Michigan Recreation and Park Association, and the DNR Parks and Recreation Division is pleased to have him.

MSPAC OPERATIONS AND STEWARDSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE

Chris Graham, Subcommittee Chair, reported that the subcommittee met on a couple of park-related issues, the subcommittee is in support of both issues, and will present them to the full committee for their consideration and support.

Resolution to Support the Waterloo Recreation Area Land Transaction with Aggregate Industries, Inc.

Subcommittee Chair Graham opened the discussion regarding the 324-acre gift of land from Aggregate Industries, Inc. in exchange for a 10-year sand and gravel mining lease on 72.44 acres of adjacent state land within the Waterloo Recreation Area. Subcommittee Chair Graham reminded the committee that this proposal was initially introduced approximately three to four years ago, and gave a brief history and overview of the proposal and the subcommittees report in support of the exchange. Aggregate Industries would be granted a lease to mine the sand and gravel, the state would get the royalties, and the land would revert back to the state once the mining was complete and the site was restored.

Questions were raised regarding the proposal, the history behind the proposal, and the results of public meetings held regarding this proposal. Parks and Recreation staff gave an overview of the events that have occurred, the public comment period, and the steps to be completed with the National Park Service to finalize this exchange. Questions were raised regarding the terms of the agreement. **Ray Fahlsing**, Parks and Recreation Stewardship Unit Manager, explained that restoration requirements are built into the agreement, the agreement also includes township

ordinance for sand and gravel extraction, an \$800,00 performance bond to be held by the township, and a \$10,000 performance bond that will insure planting and restoration. The mining will be phased so restoration will occur almost immediately on the acreage. An annual review will also be conducted to insure Aggregate Industries is making proper progress and following restoration and other requirements of the lease.

Mike McDonald, subcommittee member, also mentioned that efforts have been coordinated with the National Park Service and the DNR Grants Division.

Chair Coleman commented that this is a great benefit to the Waterloo Recreation Area and a good opportunity for Michigan state parks. Subcommittee Chair Graham motioned to approve the Resolution in support of this exchange; Bill Rose seconded the motion; Chair Coleman asked the committee if there were any additional questions or objections to this proposal; no further questions or objections were offered; the motion unanimously carried and was adopted by the full committee.

Committee member **Dave Nyberg** commented that acquisition of state lands is going under more intense scrutiny, and the legislature has introduced a bill to this effect. He asked if gifts, conversions or exchanges of this kind would be affected if legislation were passed placing a cap on the amount of acreage the state could acquire. Chair Coleman suggested that this subcommittee begin reviewing this legislation and the possible impacts to Michigan state parks, local communities, and the impact on future park land acquisitions, gifts or exchanges, including surface and mineral rights. **Vice Chair Brown** commented that the department should continue to move forward and not halt activities as legislation may not always become law. Chair Coleman agreed but asked that this committee keep an eye on this legislation and the possible effects to state park land ownership and future acquisitions or exchanges.

Resolution in Support of the Highland Recreation Area – Phase I – General Management Plan

Subcommittee Chair Graham then gave an overview of the trail plan at Fort Custer Recreation Area. He mentioned that this subcommittee reviewed the plan in depth and, although this has been a controversial issue with some recreational groups, equestrians and field trial groups are in favor and the subcommittee is in full support of this trail plan.

Some questions were raised, but discussion was minimal. Subcommittee Chair Graham motioned to support the Resolution in support of the Fort Custer Recreation Area trail plan; Mike Foote seconded the motion; Chair Coleman asked if any members had additional questions or objections to the plan; no questions or objections were offered; the motion unanimously carried and was adopted by the committee.

MSPAC FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE

Subcommittee Chair Murdock Jemerson reported that the subcommittee met to go over many financial matters related to Michigan state parks and felt the items discussed should be moved forward to the full committee for review and then turned the discussion over to Chief Ron Olson.

Chief Olson gave an overview of the Natural Resources Commission memo to re-designate the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center as the “**Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center at North Higgins Lake State Park.**” Technically, the conference center is located within the

boundary of the park. Re-designating it as such would allow the Parks and Recreation Division to more accurately spend Park Endowment Funds towards renovations, improvements or other needs at the center. The fund balance at the center is around \$100,000 or less, and there is no way the center could earn enough to support infrastructure repairs or improvements. The goal is to have operations stand on its own, which is supported under legislation, and fund infrastructure repairs or improvements out of the Park Endowment Fund. Chief Olson also reported that plans are underway for a new training center. This re-designation would give the Parks and Recreation Division the flexibility to use Park Endowment Funds for capital outlay improvements at the center.

Questions were raised regarding the cost of operations at the center. Chief Olson gave an overview on the cost of meals, lodging, and other center expenses. Chair Coleman asked Chief Olson to come back to this committee at a later date to present the future plans for the center and the vision for the center over the next two to five years. Chair Coleman also asked that a resolution be prepared in support of re-designating the center as part of North Higgins Lake State Park; Murdock Jemerson motioned for a resolution in support of re-designating the center; Chris Graham seconded the motion; Chair Coleman asked if the committee had any additional questions or objections to the motion; no questions or objections were offered; the motion unanimously carried and the resolution will be prepared and adopted by the committee.

Recreation Passport Participation Rate/Secretary of State Update

Chief Olson gave an overview of the Recreation Passport participation rate through February. Chief Olson mentioned the March figures will not be available until mid-April. He also reported that the participation rate is running at slightly over 20% participation each month, with the goal of finishing up the first fiscal year around a 24% participate rate. He also reported that 8,000 Recreation Passports have been sold at the parks, which is not reported in the Secretary of State's figures, for those who missed the opportunity to purchase the Recreation Passport via vehicle registration since it went into effect October 1, 2010.

Chief Olson then gave an overview and report on the Recreation Passport Revenue Projections for Fiscal Year 2011. He reminded the committee, however, that the department first needs to recoup its loss in revenues from no longer selling the \$24 annual motor vehicle and boating access site permits, a loss of \$14 for each annual permit, plus the loss from not selling daily permits, as well as administrative and start up costs.

Chief Olson closed by stating camp nights are up 27% compared to this time last year, which is the highest it's been in six years. Revenues are up, and waterways harbor/slip nights are up 10.2%, which is a lot higher than most years. The gas tax revenue is also up almost 20% and boat registrations are up as well. Indications are that things are on the upswing. Not sure why, except that some people may be making their reservations early, the economy may be on a slow incline, or it may have to do with the Recreation Passport by making outdoor recreation more affordable.

Recreation Passport Grant Program Update

John Cherry with DNR Grants Division gave an overview of the process it took to get the Recreation Passport grants to this point. He reported that the Recreation Passport grant process was put out for public comment twice. The first public comment workshop was held in January, with the second public comment workshop being held in February at the Michigan Recreation and Park Association's annual conference. A session at the conference was also

devoted to the Recreation Passport, to help local communities identify the areas where there was confusion and help clarify the process. During the second round of public comment, the biggest changes to the process were to establish the type of site control, number of applicants, and that land leased from the state would also be eligible to make improvements to those lands under a Recreation Passport Grant to local communities. John further reported that the application deadline for the first round of applications this year ends May 1, the maximum amount for any grant is set at \$30,000, and they are estimating this funding cycle will have approximately \$150,000 to \$160,000 available, based on current participate rates. Grant coordinators are taking a lot of calls, communities are interested, and they recently issued a press release.

Chief Olson commented that this grant cycle/process turn-around time is a lot shorter, the Director approves, and grants do not have to go to the legislature for approval.

John Cherry closed by stating they expect to recommend the first round of grants around mid-October, with recommendations being presented to the Director for approval mid-November.

Chair Coleman wants the Department to have a huge celebration when the first Recreation Passport grant is signed by the Director, and requested DNR staff start planning a celebration.

Chair Coleman further suggested that local communities be tied into the Recreation Passport promotions and asked that the next Secretary of State report highlight every county that has a state park or a boating access site where the Recreation Passport is required. He further suggested that all Recreation Passport grants to local communities should include the Recreation Passport logo and signage, as they do with Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant projects.

Chief Olson commented that the Michigan Recreation and Park Association has also been doing an excellent job in helping us educate the local communities regarding the Recreation Passport and the grants program.

MSPAC RECREATION PROGRAMMING AND MARKETING SUBCOMMITTEE

Subcommittee Chair Mary Pitcher could not attend the meeting, but asked that DNR staff present an update on the Recreation Passport marketing efforts.

Maia Stephens and Kristen Phillips, Recreational Programmers for the DNR and Parks and Recreation, gave an update on the Recreation Passport marketing efforts to date and plans for future marketing efforts, including new brochures, new park maps, site cards, short-term worker t-shirts with the Recreation Passport logo, work signs, banners, vehicle magnets, hospitality training, friends group summit, and the Recreation 101 program, to be kicked off in June at the Holly Recreation Area. The new state park Welcome Kits should also be coming out in May. New posters will be hung in Secretary of State branch offices, and they are in discussion with Travel Michigan for a video spot at remote Secretary of State branch offices. **Harold Herta**, DNR Parks and Recreation Resource Management Section Chief, is also working with, and meeting directly with, Secretary of State regional deputies to gain their support and discuss how we can assist them in getting materials into their branch offices. Discussions have been positive and the new Secretary of State is very supportive of promoting the Recreation Passport.

Chair Coleman requested that staff consider displaying Recreation Passport posters at Welcome Centers, and create a map or poster that identifies where all the state parks are

located. He also suggested we come up with a map that indicates you are this close or only this many miles from a Michigan state park or state forest campground, harbor or marina for the Welcome Centers and rest areas.

Chair Coleman also asked if it was possible to design something to pass out to those that actually purchase the Recreation Passport, i.e. a thank you window sticker, a bumper sticker, or something that shows our appreciation for their support.

Committee member Mike McDonald suggested a new flyer to be inserted in the license plate renewal envelopes, thanking them for supporting the Recreation Passport and looking forward to their continued support again for this current year. He also suggested another flyer to reconsider checking "Yes" to the Recreation Passport, and a web link showing what is possible or can be accomplished with Recreation Passport dollars.

Vice Chair Brown suggested e-mail acknowledgements as a possibility as well.

Committee member **Bill Rose** also supported the idea of a marketing tool (i.e. window cling) that people can buy or as part of one of the passport perks stating "I supported the Recreation Passport." Something to give people a sense of pride for supporting the Recreation Passport and Michigan's natural resources.

Chair Coleman suggested we implement another campaign to show how the Recreation Passport has helped all sources, local communities, state forest recreation, improvements made at 'your' state parks, and so on. Message should be "This is what your support for the Recreation Passport has accomplished," and highlight all of the benefits to state resources, as well as local communities.

Chair Coleman further suggested that the next phase of marketing the Recreation Passport should reflect on the positive effects to the economy, the state parks system, state forests, trails and local units of government --- all the things the Recreation Passport has helped to support and accomplish. He further commented that we should take advantage of the first year to reflect on the good things. This is our sales pitch --- because of the Recreation Passport, these are the things we are now able to do and fund.

Dave Nyberg commented that it is a good thing that Pure Michigan funding was renewed and asked if there were any opportunities to partner with them to market the Recreation Passport. Chief Olson responded that they have had conversations with Pure Michigan; however, staff is still in discussion but ideas are progressing. They are willing to partner but we are in the process of determining what that means and what they can do with/for us. He said staff is currently looking at using some of the Pure Michigan videos and incorporating them into the videos that will be created to run in Secretary of State remote offices to promote the Recreation Passport.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Commissioner Coleman announced that the next meeting is scheduled for June 9 in Lansing. Committee member Chris Graham asked if 1 p.m. would be the regular meeting times as it would help members plan their schedules. Chair Coleman asked the members to get their preferred meeting times to Chief Ron Olson or the committee's assistant for consideration. He thanked the members and the staff for their presentations, comments, ideas and participation, and adjourned the meeting at 2:30 p.m.