

MINUTES

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION *Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee (MSPAC)*

October 9, 2014
McGuire's Resort
Cadillac, MI

PRESENT FOR THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Commissioner Louise Klarr, Chair
Commissioner Tim Nichols, Co-Chair

PRESENT FOR THE MSPAC

Tom Bailey
Julie Clark
Ann Conklin
Brad Garmon, for Chris Graham
Jefferson Gray
Jim Hendricks
Bob Hoffmeyer
Mike McDonald
Amy Trotter

ABSENT

Commissioner Vicki Pontz, Co-Chair
Tom Bailey
Tom Ferguson
Mike Foote
Mary Pitcher

OTHERS PRESENT

Other DNR Management and Staff

MICHIGAN STATE PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MSPAC)

INTRODUCTIONS

Commissioner Klarr called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Commissioner Klarr then took roll call, made introductions around the room and asked if there were any additions or adjustments to the agenda. No adjustments to the agenda were offered.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Klarr asked if the committee had any edits, changes or discussion regarding the draft Minutes from the July 9, 2014 meeting. No comments were offered; however,

Commissioner Klarr mentioned there was public comment that should be incorporated into the Minutes. The regular assistant to the committee, Yolanda Taylor, was not present for the July meeting but will listen to the recording and incorporate the public comments.

The committee agreed that the July Minutes would be amended to include the public comment and will be presented at the next meeting for action.

Mike McDonald motioned to amend the Minutes to incorporate the public comment; Tim Nichols seconded the motion; the motion was approved and the July 9, 2014 Minutes will be amended and presented for approval/adoption at the December meeting.

OVERVIEW OF MITCHELL STATE PARK

Josh Pellow, Park Supervisor, gave the committee an overview of Mitchell State Park and the surrounding facilities, state forest campgrounds, boating access sites and trails they manage in the area. He also gave the committee an overview of the numerous infrastructure needs plus the improvements that have been accomplished, many that included partnerships they have developed locally to accomplish a lot of improvements to the area and to introduce new programs.

Ed Shaw, park interpreter for the Carl T. Johnson Center at Mitchell State Park, also gave an overview of the educational programs that are offered at the Center, which include archery, fishing, trail hikes, shooting, and school group programs. They are one of ten interpretive sites around the state, built in 1992 and named after the founder and a former commissioner.

Chief Ron Olson commented that a lot of the things mentioned illustrate a systems approach to what the state park system is doing to accomplish outreach programs and integrate more communities into the state parks' programs. The mind frame is no more "us" and "them," but we are moving more towards partnerships and collaborations, which is in line with one of the goals of the Blue Ribbon report.

Brad Garmon asked if there is a way to track these specific, tangible accomplishments moving forward. Benchmarks, partnerships, collaborations, and even matters such as staff sitting on city-wide planning committees should be documented.

Olson responded that we can and will start tracking and reporting these accomplishments moving forward.

Jim Hendricks applauded state parks for their efforts, partnerships and collaborations.

The committee also thanked the District Supervisor, Tim Schreiner, Josh and Ed for hosting them to a tour of the Tippy Dam Recreation Area the evening before.

UPDATE ON CAMPING FEE STRUCTURE

Chief Olson reminded the committee that in August 2013 they supported a camping fee increase for Fiscal Year 2015, which was ultimately approved by the Natural Resources Commission and the Director in December 2013. The new rates will now go into effect with reservations being made November 1, 2014 moving forward. The rate increases will be \$4, \$2 or \$1, based on an 82% occupancy rate. Parks that have an 82% or greater occupancy rate will

increase their camping fees by \$4; those at or slightly less than 82% will increase by \$2; and parks with significantly less than an 82% occupancy rate will increase by \$1.

The committee asked for a list showing which parks fell within each occupancy category and the new rates that will be applied to each park.

Chief Olson reminded the committee that they also approved rate increases for the Ralph A. MacMullan (RAM) Conference Center that went into immediate effect last year.

Commissioner Klarr requested a report showing use at the RAM Center and the revenue they generated over the past year to reflect if the fee increases have been effective for their operations.

Chief Olson reminded the committee that, according to legislation, the RAM Center is required to at least break even, and will have a revenue report prepared for the committee.

A comment was made that the Blue Ribbon report suggested looking into developing more conference centers like the RAM if they are successfully breaking even and/or generating revenue.

Mike McDonald asked if we are getting a handle on the types of things we are going to consider to increase marketing the Recreation Passport and the participation rate.

Chief Olson responded that the department has been working on a new marketing plan for the Recreation Passport, with some ideas of involving the National Park Service, partners, etc. to get the word out. Past marketing efforts (i.e. billboards) didn't do much to increase rates.

Discussions continued and ideas were shared on marketing the Recreation Passport, to include sponsorships from large organizations (i.e. NASCAR, Detroit Tigers), more educational materials, etc.

Chief Olson commented that we lost approximately 15,000 participants between 2013 and 2014.

Commissioner Nichols asked for a report from the Secretary of State or staff that shows where we have been gaining and/or losing in Recreation Passport sales (i.e. by county or zip code). He would like this committee to focus on that report at a future meeting to determine where and why people are dropping out or simply not participating.

Tom Bailey **also recommended conducting a market research to determine if a different, clearer title would be useful** (i.e. Michigan State Parks Passport). There may be some confusion as to what a Recreation Passport is and/or confusion with the National Park Service, Metro Parks or local parks.

Brad Garmon made mention of a bill that was recently introduced to convert to a soft opt-out on the Recreation Passport.

Chief Olson responded that Senate Bill 1041 proposes a soft opt-out option, and Senate Bill 1042 proposes issuing a window cling to those that purchase the Recreation Passport so they can show their support of the Michigan state parks system. Both were just recently introduced and have not moved through the legislature.

Brad Garmon further commented that both bills are being supported by Senator Meekhof, which means there is a real possibility of the bills moving forward so, if we like the bills and support them wholeheartedly, then the ball is in play and this committee should get involved and assist wherever and however possible (i.e. call their legislators, attend hearings, etc.).

UPDATE ON ISLAND LAKE RECREATION AREA

Ray Fahlsing, Stewardship Unit Manager, gave the committee an update on the former Aggregate mining site, Spring Mill Mine, which is located within the Island Lake Recreation Area. The former 540-acre sand and gravel mining site has giant sand spoil piles on each side of the lake and many other artifacts of the mining operation were left behind (i.e. railroad ties, huge concrete slabs). The area was divided up into quadrants and sent to a contractor to develop a concept where the maximum amount of materials would leave the site. Director Creagh approved the plan, staff has met with local officials and it has been agreed to move forward with a non-metallic lease. Bids are due back on October 21, and the plan is to enter into a lease with a company that will remove the sand and leftover materials, and reclaim the site to a more natural setting to improve habitat and the landscape.

Ray further reported that this invitation to bid is unique in the way we have handled bids in the past. This point system or criteria is solely based on the overall quality of the reclamation they are proposing, how many years it will take to remove the materials and reclaim the site and habitat to a natural setting, with the least amount of disruption to other park users and neighbors. The area is already open to bird hunting.

PARK INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL OUTLAY

Vicki Anthes, Planning Section Chief, gave the committee some visuals of park infrastructure that is failing or what had to be address in the past fiscal year, which included storm water flooding and erosion, road improvement and paving projects, toilet/shower building replacements, reopening of some equestrian campgrounds and making improvements to those campgrounds, and installing a new contact station at Grand Haven Sate Park.

Vicki then gave the committee a brief overview of Fiscal Year 2015 capital outlay projects that includes buildings, utilities, major development, operational and historical structures, totaling slightly less than \$5 million.

Chief Olson commented that some state parks are classified as major development, but we need to address all problems statewide instead of piece mealing each problem or failure.

Tom Bailey asked that **we consider including dark sky preserve as part of all future state park development plans.** The State of Texas is trying to get all parks dark sky compliant and is including it in all of their future park designs and improvements.

2015 BUDGET AND INITIATIVES

Chief Olson and Jacklin Blodgett reiterated the Fiscal Year 2015 budget report that was presented at the July 2014 meeting; however, this time it has been signed by the Governor.

The biggest discussion came back to capital outlay and park improvement dollars versus operational dollars, and what happened to the Park Endowment Fund and the Trust Fund

Corpus that was supposed to be used to leverage park improvements. Chief Olson commented that the theory was to use Park Improvement Funds for operations, while Park Endowment Funds would fund capital improvements. However, the choice was made to use Park Endowment Funds towards operations.

The committee asked that more detailed reports be provided as to what happened to the park endowment fund (capital dollars) and where operational dollars are being spent.

Bob Hoffmeyer commented that the former Parks Committee put a lot of time and effort into new funding models and getting the Recreation Passport through the legislature. The Recreation Passport was the funding source that was supposed to help raise capital dollars towards park improvements but it appears those dollars are still dwindling. This shows that more importance needs to be placed on marketing the Recreation Passport or finding a new funding model for park improvements/infrastructure.

Commissioner Nichols asked that this committee start opening discussions about new, conceptual models or forms of financing. This opens the door to further discussions about new funding models.

SUMMARY OF FRIENDS GROUP INITIATIVES STATEWIDE

Commissioner Klarr reminded the committee that there is information in their packets regarding Friends Groups; however, due to timing, a **more in-depth report will be presented at the next meeting**, to include a report of 2014 Friends Group Initiatives.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Commissioner Klarr asked if anyone present or from the general public would like to address the committee at this time. No comments were offered

CLOSING REMARKS

A request was made to reactivate the Marketing subcommittee and the Finance subcommittee to address marketing of the Recreation Passport and state park funding, to include legislation, respectively. These two subcommittees have been inactive for some time and, based on the discussions regarding capital outlay dollars, state park infrastructure needs, marketing of the Recreation Passport, and other legislative or funding issues, it may be the perfect time to reactive these groups. A separate discussion will be held regarding reactivating the subcommittees, to include when and how the meetings will be conducted.

Ann Conklin reminded the committee that the annual Michigan Recreation and Park Association conference is being held in February 2015 at the Lansing Center. If the committee and the Natural Resources Commission would be willing to move the location of their February meeting, she would be willing to host both meetings during the conference. She also mentioned that the day of the meetings coincides with the Legislative luncheon. Commissioner Klarr will talk to the NRC Chair and the Director to determine if they would be willing to move the February meeting and report back.

Tom Bailey mentioned that the October 2015 meeting is being hosted by Les Cheneaux Islands (via him).

Tom also mentioned that the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service is hosting a campaign, "Find Your Park." This committee should **discuss how to get our park system involved in their marketing campaign for 2016.**

Commissioner Nichols commented that if any member knows of associations that are having conferences that we can tie into future meetings to notify the membership and the Chair so we can consider combining meetings.

The committee asked that we start posting the Recreation Passport and budget reports on the web site. Yolanda will take care of getting them posted on a monthly basis.

No further discussions or comments were made. Commissioner Klarr asked for a motion to adjourn.

Ann Conklin made a motion to adjourn; Julie Clark seconded the motion and the committee adjourned at 12:06 p.m.