RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING

KEITH CREAGH
DIRECTOR

SUBMITTED: November 17, 2014
RESUBMITTED: December 15, 2014

TO: Keith Creagh, Director

INFORMATION: Natural Resources Commission

SUBJECT: Silver Lake State Park Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Scramble Area Voucher Reservation System Improvements
FOR IMMEDIATE EFFECT

Authority:

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, authorizes the Director to approve various business systems and user fees within the Department.

324.74114 Fees; Establishment; collection; deposit.
Sec. 74114. The department may establish fees and collect fees for activities in state parks except those activities for which fees are established under this part. All fees collected under this section shall be deposited into the state park improvement account.

Also, under the Department's Land Use Orders of the Director, Chapter V:

5.9 Off-road vehicles, Silver lake state park ORV area, conditions for use, prohibited conduct.
Order 5.9 A person shall not do any of the following on all state lands of Silver Lake State Park posted as the ORV area, Oceana county:

(13) Enter or use the ORV Area without obtaining and displaying a valid ORV area parking lot voucher or dune ready voucher at any time when such requirement is posted.

Discussion and Background:

Silver Lake State Park has four major attractions: the Lake Michigan beachfront, the Little Sable Point Lighthouse, a modern campground, and a 450-acre off-road vehicle (ORV) scramble area, the largest east of the Mississippi River. The ORV scramble area has been operated by Silver Lake State Park as a dedicated ORV area for the past 57 years.

The ORV scramble area is open from April 1 to October 31 each year. Silver Lake State Park hosts 650,000 visitors overall, of which approximately 120,000 to 130,000 vehicles utilize the ORV scramble area. When the ORV scramble area is open, the park must operate and staff a

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voucher center to control the mass crowds that arrive to ride the dunes on holidays and weekends throughout the summer.

People will typically arrive at least four hours prior to the opening of the voucher center, causing lines up to four miles long. This traffic extends throughout the neighborhoods around the Silver Lake ORV area. Operating the voucher center requires extensive staff time, as well as a large number of hours of assistance from the Oceana County Sheriff's Office to maintain order during the extended waiting period for customers.

In 2012, Silver Lake State Park staff started development of a more customer-friendly method to obtain time slots (vouchers) for accessing the ORV scramble area. The opportunity to transition to an on-line reservation system (voucher system) was enabled with the approval of the new central reservation system contractor, CAMIS, in 2014. To gauge customer impact, Silver Lake State Park surveyed over 10,000 ORV scramble area users to gain feedback on the possibility of changing the current voucher system procedures.

Process to Involve Stakeholders:

User Survey:

- Over 10,000 ORV scramble area users were surveyed.
- Of the respondents, over 80% strongly supported an on-line/call-in reservation system similar to the camping reservation system.
- Additionally, the average fee users were willing to pay to reserve a voucher was $11.46.

Local Government Collaboration and Support:

- The Oceana County Sheriff's Department is very supportive of the system that will simplify management of traffic on the county road.

Review and Support from the following Department advisory groups regarding the proposed plan:

- Parks and Recreation Section Chiefs in January 2014.
- Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Workgroup in March 2014;
- Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council in July 2014; and
- Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee in July 2014.

Proposal:

After receiving additional feedback from the public, the original scope of the proposal submitted for the December 11, 2014 Natural Resources Commission meeting has been modified to adjust to a few changes that are represented below.

To provide a smooth transition for dune ready vehicles, Silver Lake State Park would implement the ORV voucher reservation system in 2015 at $3 per reserved voucher. Reservations for ORV users who must trailer their equipment into the park will become available in 2016, after the first year focus on dune ready vouchers is implemented. Approximately 92% of the voucher use is from dune ready vehicles so the new system will address the majority of voucher use in 2015. By 2016, all types of vouchers may be reservable. The Department will review the process after the 2015 season to determine what, if any, adjustments need to be made to the process. The transaction fee should recover costs associated with establishing the on-line reservation system and associated operating costs.

Benefits to having a voucher reservation system include increased customer service with reduced wait times by reserving up to 6 weeks in advance. In turn, this will reduce lines and simplify traffic flow into the park, improve safety and sound testing enforcement while expanding efficiency by redistributing staff, provide quicker emergency response time, and decrease disturbance to local property owners.

The Department will hold a public meeting on January 12, 2015 in Oceana County to present these proposed changes, receive feedback from local citizens and ORV scramble area users, and address any remaining questions or concerns prior to the January 15, 2015 Natural Resources Commission meeting. The time and location of the January 12, 2015 public meeting will be provided in a future press release.

Recommendation:

The DNR Parks and Recreation Division recommends approving a phased approach for a new voucher reservation system in 2015 at $3 per reserved voucher for dune ready vehicles.

In the 2016 season, all vouchers may be available through the reservation system and continue into the future.

This item was submitted at the December 11, 2014 Natural Resources Commission meeting, and is being resubmitted with modifications for the January 15, 2015 Natural Resources Commission meeting to take immediate effect.

This item appeared on the Department's December 2014 calendar, it will appear on the January 2015 calendar, and may be eligible for approval on January 15, 2015.

Ronald A. Olson, Chief for R.O.
Parks and Recreation Division

Kristin Phillips, Chief
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Mark H. Hoffman
Chief Administrative Officer

William E. Moritz, Ph.D.
Natural Resources Deputy

I approve the staff recommendations.

Keith Creagh
Director

Date Approved