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GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING



KEITH CREAUGH
DIRECTOR

SUBMITTED: November 12, 2013

MEMORANDUM TO THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Subject: Michigan Comprehensive Trail Network and State Trails Implementation Plan
FOR INFORMATION ONLY

Authority:

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, requires the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish a plan for a statewide trails network. The act also requires the Natural Resources Commission to hold a public hearing on the plan before it is approved by the Director.

Discussion and Background:

Public Act 45 of 2010 required the DNR to establish a plan for a statewide trail network and establish a three step planning process for completion of the plan.

The first step in the process was for the Equine Trail Subcommittee (ETS) of the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC) to prepare a statewide equestrian trail plan and submit it to the MSTAC within one year. The equestrian trail plan was accepted by the MSTAC in July of 2012.

The second step required the MSTAC prepare a “plan for a state trail system that considers all trail users” within one year. The MSTAC adopted the Michigan Comprehensive Trail Plan in May of 2013.

Finally, the DNR had one year following the MSTAC’s adoption of a trail plan to prepare and adopt a comprehensive trail plan. Before the plan is adopted, the act required that the Natural Resources Commission hold a public hearing on the plan.

The attached document meets the requirements of the law by codifying the three plans and sets forth the DNR’s plan of action regarding state trails for the next five years. The Michigan Comprehensive Trail Network and Implementation Plan (MCTNIP) provides a comprehensive view of Michigan’s trail system, priorities for expansion and management, and action steps to ensure continued recognition of Michigan as the Trail State. The implementation portion of the MCTNIP outlines actions that the DNR will take over the next five years to acquire, develop and manage the state trail system. It builds upon the trail priorities and recommendations identified by MSTAC in their 2013 Michigan Comprehensive Trail Plan. The MCTNIP documents the DNR’s commitment to the trail community and Michigan citizens to continue to acquire, develop and maintain our world-class trail system.

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The public has been given extensive opportunity to provide input into the three plans:

- Public input started with an electronic survey of trail users. They were questioned as to their use of trails, preferences, needs and desires. Over 6,000 trail users responded to the survey, which helped to establish priorities and goals for the Comprehensive Trail Plan.
- Over 575 equestrians responded to a more specific survey in preparation for the Equestrian Trail Plan (ETP) and 55 equine associations participated in five focus groups held across the state. The ETP was released for public comment in July of 2011 for a period of 60 days.
- The draft MSTAC Comprehensive Trail Plan (Plan) was released for public comment in March of 2013. Three hundred and eighty-five comments were received. They resulted in significant changes to the Plan including new sections on hiking, cross country skiing and mountain biking, a significant rewrite of the water trails portion of the plan and a new overarching priority that calls for trails to be integrated into other department planning efforts.
- The MSTAC was given the opportunity to provide comment on the draft MCTNIP.

The December 2013 Natural Resources Commission meeting will complete the public review process.

Recommendation

The proposed Michigan Comprehensive Trail Network and Implementation Plan is being submitted as information on the December 12, 2013 Natural Resources Commission agenda to facilitate public review and comment. The plan will appear on the Department's December 2013 calendar and may be eligible for approval on January 9, 2014.



Ronald A. Olson, Chief
Parks and Recreation Division



James Dexter, Chief
Fisheries Division



Bill O'Neill, Chief
Forest Resources Division



Gary Hagler, Chief
Law Enforcement Division



Russ Mason, Ph.D., Chief
Wildlife Division



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

I have analyzed and discussed the recommendations with staff and concur as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Keith Creagh, Director

Date