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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idlewild Resort Receives National Recognition as a Historic Site

Lansing - Michigan State Housing Development Authority interim executive director Gary Heidel and State Historic Preservation Officer Brian Conway announced that the African American resort of Idlewild, in Lake County, has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a nationally significant historic site.

Established in 1915, Idlewild was a major resort for African Americans at a time when segregationist policies prohibited them from vacationing anywhere they might have liked to go. During the early years the resort offered an array of summer recreation opportunities, and later grew as a center for nightlife with nightclubs that featured nationally known black entertainers.

Michigan's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), with the assistance of a federal Preserve America grant, initiated the survey of properties in the resort in order to expand the existing National Register of Historic Places historic district and to erect five Michigan Historical Markers.

The Idlewild Historic District was originally listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. A revised nomination submitted this year expanded the boundaries from a smaller core area around Idlewild and Paradise Lake to encompass the entire historic Idlewild resort. The original nomination lacked an inventory of specific properties in the district and it defined a period of historic significance that ended in 1930, before much of the development and history considered significant today took place. The new nomination placed Idlewild within a national context and demonstrated that the district possessed significance as the largest and most important historic African American resort in the nation.

“The recognition of Idlewild’s significance in American history is an opportunity for the community to attract new visitors and capitalize on the resort’s potential as a heritage tourism destination,” said Heidel.

“Idlewild is a one-of-a-kind community that, from its founding in 1915 into the mid-1960s, played an important role in the lives of middle-class African Americans from Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago and many other cities,” said State Historic Preservation Officer Brian Conway. “Our hope is that the recognition of Idlewild’s national significance by the National Register of Historic Places will raise awareness that the historic character and sense of place Idlewild offers is unique and should be preserved.”

National register designation makes the owners of income-producing properties eligible to apply for federal historic preservation tax credits for the rehabilitation of those properties.

According to the SHPO’s national register coordinator Bob Christensen, “There just isn’t another place like Idlewild – in Michigan or anywhere. The modest buildings and idyllic setting allow you to imagine what Idlewild was like in the past. The fact that luminaries of African American society came together at this spot in northern Michigan is just remarkable.”

Perhaps African American writer and intellectual W.E.B. DuBois described Idlewild best:

For sheer physical beauty—for sheen of water and golden air, for nobleness of tree and flower of shrub, for shining river and song of bird and the low, moving whisper of sun, moon and star, it is the beautifulest stretch I have seen for twenty years; and then to that add fellowship—sweet, strong women and keen-witted men from Canada and Texas, California and New York, Ohio, Missouri and Illinois—all sons and grand-children of Ethiopia, all with the wide leisure of rest and play—can you imagine a more marvelous thing than Idlewild?

– W. E. B DuBois, *The Crisis* 1921

Idlewild is located along US-10 just east of Baldwin.

The State Historic Preservation Office is part of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The Michigan State Housing Development Authority is dedicated to building a thriving and vibrant future for Michigan. MSHDA provides tools and resources to improve people’s lives through programs across the state. These programs assist with housing, build strong neighborhoods, and help create places where people want to live and work. MSHDA’s programs work in four areas: affordable rental housing; supporting homeownership; ending homelessness; and creating vibrant cities and neighborhoods. For further information on this or other MSHDA programs, go to www.michigan.gov/mshda.*

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