



Accessibility Advisory Council

Minutes

May 13, 2025

**Glassen Shooting Education Center, Robertson Room
14500 Peacock Rd., East Lansing MI**

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Yasmina Bouraoui
Tyra Khan
Tina Nowakowski
Will Purves
Jessica Stark
Gary Stout
Billy Vickers
Bryan Wilkinson, Co-Chair (heading meeting)
Robert Winn
Duncan Wyeth

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Ken Buchholtz
Scott Norris, Chair
Cindy Burkhour
Allen Beauchamp

Present for the Department of Natural Resources

Kristin Phillips, deputy director
Brenda Henige, ADA accessibility coordinator/Executive AAC sponsor
Audrey Klont
Stacy Welling Haughey, Upper Peninsula AAC sponsor
Michelle Douglas, Forest Resources Division
Jolene Haines, Public Information Office
Chad Stewert, Wildlife Division

Present for the DNR Accessibility Team (A-Team)

David Haupt, A-Team co-chair, Marketing and Outreach Division
Michelle O'Kelly, A-Team co-chair, Parks and Recreation Division
Charamy Cleary, Finance and Operations Division

Others:

Rebecca Powell, Michigan Department of Civil Rights
Alayna Lail, Michigan Department of Civil Rights

Regular Meeting

Opening remarks – Bryan Wilkinson

Bryan called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the May 13, 2025, Accessibility Advisory Council meeting. Bryan took roll call.

Approval of minutes – Bryan Wilkinson

Bryan asked the council members if they had any additions, corrections or discussion regarding the Feb. 11, 2025, minutes. Bryan requested a motion to approve the minutes as written. Duncan Wyeth motioned to approve. The minutes were approved.

Moment of silence: Michael Harris – Bryan Wilkinson

The council took a moment of silence in memory of former AAC member Michael Harris, who recently passed away.

Department updates

DNR executive updates – Brenda Henige

The DNR recently announced that the new chief of Parks and Recreation Division will be Kristen Kosick. She was chief of staff at Yellowstone National Park. Ice storm cleanup work by most of the divisions is ongoing. Brenda attended the national ADA conference virtually, where she took part in 12 sessions and earned her ADA coordinator credential. She noted that the work on the audits related to accessibility of buildings and programs continues. The NVDA screen reader course will be developed by an outside contractor. Brenda said that some DNR staff will be trained on mental first aid in Grand Rapids. This will help the DNR facilitate training. The goal is to have DNR staff who are trained to recognize and help if there's a mental health emergency when they are with the public or fellow staff.

Effective communications – Alayna Lail, Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Liaison, Michigan Department of Civil Rights

Alayna was born and raised in Chicago and moved to Michigan ten years ago. She is a communication access specialist with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, Division of Deaf DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing. She noted that effective communication is not one size fits all.

The mission is to affirm the indisputable right of Michiganders who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing to secure effective communication. The division receives input and guidance from a 13-member, governor-appointed advisory council. She engages with state government agencies, entities and community stakeholders in addressing the needs and concerns of individuals who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing. She provides technical assistance to entities required to provide interpreters or other communication-related accommodations, training and workshops, and advocates for inclusive effective communication access.

Alayna said that individuals with disabilities constantly confront barriers in daily life. She encourages others to think about how our society and systems are generally designed for able-bodied individuals, and so individuals with disabilities often get trapped into having to both educate and advocate for their needs.

Key terminology, communication modes, accommodations and common barriers in public settings were discussed. Alayna also discussed relevant federal and state laws.

Department updates continued

A-Team Updates – Michelle O'Kelly

Michelle is taking mental health first aid training in Grand Rapids along with 24-25 DNR staff members. This group includes people from the Executive Division, park rangers, park and district supervisors, law enforcement personnel, A-Team members and more.

Upper Peninsula Updates, NRC Meeting – Chad Stewart and Stacy Welling-Haughey

Chad Stewart, Wildlife Division, noted that the hunting and fishing regulations are created through a process involving the Natural Resources Commission. The commission meets once a month and is involved with the decisions for the manner and method of take. They met in April to finalize deer regulations for 2025. Last year, when the commission was going through the process that came out of the deer management initiative, some commissioners created an amendment that limited the deer harvest and what we call our Liberty and our Independence hunts for this coming year to only antlerless deer. That was a very polarizing decision. Historically, it has always been both antler or antlerless. Deer are allowed to be taken by any individual qualified to hunt in those seasons. The DNR recommended the commission reverse that decision and maintain the historical norm. This was agreed upon by the commissioners at last week's meeting, so the hunters eligible to participate in the Liberty and Independence hunts this year will continue to have the ability to take both antlered and antlerless deer during those seasons.

East Crooked Lake – Brenda Henige

Brenda received a phone call last fall from a resident who is a senior and lives near East Crooked Lake access site. The access pad is small and it's an undeveloped site. The man and his wife have issues launching their boat at this location. Parks and Recreation Division and Brighton State Recreation Area staff met with the resident and an assessment of the site was made.

Strategic Plan for Accessibility – Brenda Henige

Work on the strategic plan for accessibility was started in 2019, paused during the pandemic, and now has restarted.

Council updates

Jessica Stark

We are partnering with Interlochen State Park for an adaptive kayak clinic, held from 5-7 p.m., July 29 and Aug 19. We are also working with partners and the DNR to schedule Diversability Days, including July 16 at Interlochen State Park.

Duncan Wyeth

In relation to the devastating storm that hit northern Michigan, the Disability Network of Northern Michigan and others are working to get the word out about any facilities that may be temporarily closed or closed long-term because of this.

In preparation for the August AAC meeting in Newberry, perhaps we can work with others to get the word out that we'll be there. We may need to establish additional parking sites in anticipation of additional members of the public who will benefit from temporary designated parking spots.

Billy Vickers

We have a Disability Veteran's Dirt Day at Holly Oaks Recreation Area this Friday, Disability Dirt Day on June 1, Diversability Day June 1, June 26 and July 27, and additional events.

Will Purves

For the past five years, we've had great partnerships with the DNR and MRS in doing job training at state parks in Monroe County. This year, we've expanded from two to four sites, adding Island Lake (Livingston and Washtenaw counties) and Kensington Metropark (Huron and Clinton counties).

Tina Nowakowski

We're starting our next five-year plan. There will be three town halls in relation to this. This will help determine what our priorities will be for the next five years.

Public Comment

None.

Closing business

The next council meeting is Aug. 12, 2025, at the DNR Newberry Customer Service Center.

Adjourn

Bryan requested a motion to adjourn, Jessica Stark motioned, Robert Winn seconded, and the motion unanimously carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.