

# Michigan State Waterways Commission Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual meeting

Date: Oct. 2, 2020

## **Roll call**

### **Present for the Waterways Commission:**

- Commissioner, Secretary, Mary Rising
- Commissioner, Barb Brooks
- Commissioner, Pete Beauregard
- Commissioner, Elaine Isely
- Commissioner, Pat Egan

### **Others Present:**

- Ron Olson, DNR
- Vicki McGhee, DNR
- Jordan Byelich, DNR
- Paul Petersen, DNR
- Linnae Dawson, DNR
- Michael Desnoyer, DNR
- Michelle Wieber, DNR, Recorder  
Maia Turek, DNR

### **Guest Speakers:**

- Deanna Apps, Physical Scientist, USACE
- Kerry Wieber, Forest Land Administrator, DNR
- Beth Fults, Marketing Manager, DNR  
Bill Doan, Roscommon District Supervisor, DNR

### **Absent:**

- Jackie Blodgett, DNR

## **Meeting minutes**

### **Opening Comments:**

- Secretary, Mary Rising called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m., October 2, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held virtually.
- The meeting began with reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Public Appearance:**

- Due to the virtual meeting, if there were members of the public dialed in, they did so anonymously.

### **Action Items:**

- MOTION: Secretary Mary Rising asked for a motion for approval of the minutes from the August 26, 2020 Michigan State Waterways Commission meeting. The motion was put into place by Commissioner Elaine Isely and was seconded by Commissioner Pat Egan. Motion carried unanimously, 4-0.

### **Committee Reports:**

#### Marketing

- Maia Turek provided updates for the Marketing Subcommittee. Pure Michigan funding was restored on October 1, 2020. There is a new DNR website in the works. The Photo Ambassador program will choose next year's ambassadors soon, where the program's photos are featured on Instagram. There will be surveys available next year for day-use sites. Winter recreation including winter paddling has been a topic of discussion. Reminders for securing seasonal boat slips and boating registration renewals for next season were brought up.

### **Guest Speakers**

- Deanna Apps, Physical Scientist with the United States Army Corps of Engineers, provided a detailed presentation regarding high-water levels. Key points include water level fluctuations are primarily driven by weather and hydrologic conditions, water levels in 2020 have continued to be near or above record-high levels, except Lake Ontario. Regulations of outflows (St. Mary's and St. Lawrence" cannot prevent extreme high or low water levels, nor fully control water levels, and impacts of high water are expected to be felt throughout 2020, especially as active fall storms move across the region.
- Lake Superior is forecast to be 6-8 inches below record high levels over the next 6 months. Lakes Michigan & Huron - September 2020 level was 3 inches above the September 2019 level. Forecast to be 7-10 inches below record-high levels through December and remain 8-9 inches below provisional 2020 record-high levels January-March. Lake Erie is in a period of seasonal decline. September 2020 level was 2 inches below September 2019 record-high levels. Forecast to be 9-13 inches below record-high levels through January and remain 11-13 inches below provisional 2020 record-high levels in February and March. Lake Ontario's September 2020 level was 15 inches below September 2019 level, and forecast to be 15-21 inches below record-high levels, but 3-11 inches above average over the next 6 months.

Lake St. Clair's September 2020 level was 1 inch above September 2019 record-high level, is forecast to be about 8-9 inches below record-high levels over the next 6 months.

- Kerry Wieber, Forest Land Administrator, Forest Resources Division, DNR, provided the public land strategy update to the Commission. The public land strategy is required under PA 240 of 2012 and requires the DNR to submit an updated public land strategy to the Legislature for review/approval by July 2021, as the current land strategy expires in 2021. The land strategy update is shared with advisory groups and commissions within the DNR. Part of the update process is assessing all components of 2013 strategy for effectiveness, evaluating specific goals, strategies and measurable objectives to determine which to keep, modify, or remove and why, and lastly, forms the foundation for developing the updated strategy for 2021.
- Bill Doan, Roscommon District Manager spoke of his district's challenges brought on by the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic as well as natural disasters such as the dam failures experienced in May around Midland county. Specific areas affected were boating access sites (BAS) ranging from Higgins Lake, Grindstone City, and Wixom Lake. Stopping aquatic invasive species is still a goal of the DNR. Recently, "Stop invasive species; clean, drain, dry" has been stenciled in BAS lots to help remind boaters of what they can do to help stop the spread.

### **General Updates**

- Ron Olson mentioned the FY21 budget has been signed by the Governor. The budget initially submitted last year will be funded. There is a task force in place to continue educational programs for aquatic invasive species (AIS). Harbor slip night reservation are up over 16% compared to this time last year. The state saw an acceleration in boating July-September, a very robust activity.

### **Financial Updates**

- Financial information updates were provided to the Commissioners in the meeting packet. Michael Desnoyer provided further details regarding FY20 projections. Regarding the state waterways fund: gas tax revenue previous projection was \$19.4 million, current projection is \$17 million, a reduction just over \$2 million. Boat registrations saw a reduction of \$550,000 from the previous projection. Marine fuel sales saw a reduction of about \$250,000. The overall original revenue projection of \$29.8 million has been corrected to show a current projection at \$25.5 million. The overall expenditures showed an original projection of \$31.2 million, and a new projection of \$28 million, resulting in \$3.1 million in savings.

### **Operations Updates**

- Linnae Dawson updated the Commission of operational items. Regarding fuel comparison, gas sales are up, and diesel sales are down. COVID-19 and Canadian border closures impacted fuel sales in select areas. Detailing June-August boating nights, there was a

decrease at Milliken state harbor (Canadian border closures, no sporting events/festivals/concerts in Detroit). Port Austin state harbor saw a decrease due to significant damage caused by high water, which reduced the number of available slips. Copper Harbor state harbor saw an increase of 100 nights, and Fayette state harbor had an increase of 248 nights versus last year. Net nights overall, total nights and number of reservations are up. 2020 – 2021 seasonal and transient rates will be sent to grant-in-aid facilities.

### **Project Report**

- The Michigan State Waterways Development Program Project Report was included in each commissioner’s meeting packet for their information. Many projects will have a delayed finish, as the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant delays.
- Jordan Byelich gave a quick high-water update on facilities such as, Lake Macatawa BAS, Harley Ensign Memorial BAS and Port Austin state harbor.

### **Great Lakes Water Level Report**

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District Great Lakes water level outlook was included in each commissioner’s meeting packet for their information.

### **Adjournment**

- The meeting adjourned at 11:26 a.m.
- The next Michigan State Waterways Commission Meeting: December 4, 2020