

# Michigan State Waterways Commission

## Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual

Date: October 5, 2022

### Roll Call

#### Present for the Waterways Commission:

- Commissioner, Chair, Barb Brooks
- Commissioner, Secretary, Mary Rising
- Commissioner, Fred Sitkins
- Commissioner, Elaine Isely
- Commissioner, Scott Labonte
- Commissioner, Mark Yonan

#### Others Present:

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

#### Not Present:

- Commissioner, Candace Miller
- Michael Desnoyer, DNR

## Meeting minutes

### Opening Comments:

- Chair, Barb Brooks called for the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m., October 5, 2022.
- The meeting began with reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Chair, Barb Brooks welcomed new Commissioner, Scott Labonte, to the Commission. Scott mentioned he is a lifelong Michigander and spent 22 years with the Sault Ste. Marie Fire Department. Since retiring from the Department, he is now the General Manager of the Famous Soo Locks Boat Tours. Scott is looking forward to working with his fellow Commissioners.

### Public Appearance:

- James Sarna, lifelong boater, brought forth comments on Elk Rapids Marina to the Commission. Mr. Sarna questioned the methodology of the rate schedule, questioned if rates would be increased for the 2023 boating season (no, they will not), concerns of safety and what can be done to prevent injury, and lastly, Mr. Sarna questioned the pump-out fees/regulations. Ron Olson responded that local units of government can charge whatever rates are necessary in order to be sustainable. Furthermore, boater behaviors in a marina are up to the local governing unit. Linnae Dawson added that the Elk Rapids Clean Vessel Act (CVA) Michigan boating pumpout grant program funds are federal and are derived from the DNR Waterways Program.
- Charlene Hansen, Chair, Harbor Commission of Elk Rapids. Ms. Hansen stated she is aware of Mr. Sarna's concerns and is actively looking into resolving the issue and seeking opportunities for improvement. Lastly, Ms. Hansen extended an invite to the Michigan State Waterways Commission to a future Elk Rapids Harbor Commission meeting.
- Mark Breederland, Michigan Sea Grant, informed the Commission of the upcoming deadline of October 31, 2022, for the Michigan Pumpout Grant. The Michigan Boating Pumpout Grant Program helps reduce pollution from vessel sewage discharges by encouraging safe disposal of recreational boater sewage.

### Written Correspondence:

- There was no written correspondence submitted prior to the meeting.

## **Action Items:**

- MOTION: Chair, Barb Brooks asked for a motion for approval for the minutes from the August 24, 2022, Michigan State Waterways Commission meeting. The motion was put into place, by Commissioner Fred Sitkins and seconded by Commissioner Elaine Isely. Motion carried unanimously, 6-0.
- Vicki McGhee informed the Commission of the updated Retreat Action Items to review. The updated document lists the action items' priorities for the next 3-6 months. Commissioner Fred Sitkins stated boating registration should be a priority. Commissioner Sitkins also offered to lead the Commission on this task for the year.

## **Committee Reports:**

- The Subcommittees did not meet, no updates to provide.

## **Informational Business:**

### **General Updates**

- Ron Olson reported to the Commission that FY23 had commenced, with no significant changes. Registration for boats remains strong. Boat sales remain strong as well. Despite higher-than-average fuel prices, it seems boat excursions didn't slow down. Ron also mentioned the annual sailboat races to Mackinac Island went very well with no major issues. With wake boat popularity, PRD is looking to partner with MBIA to explore developing an education piece to address boat operation concerns, while keeping the boat and shoreline landowners concern in the forefront.

### **Financial Updates**

- Financial information updates were provided to the Commissioners in the meeting packet. Alyssa Fisher, Finance Unit Manager, filled in for Michael Desnoyer to provide the financial updates to the Commission.

### **Operations Updates**

- Linnae Dawson provided an Operations update to the Commissioners. Graphs were presented depicting boat slip net nights and reservations. Although down from a record year in 2021, the numbers are still higher than those recorded in 2019 and 2020. Linnae will present a year-end graphic at the December 6 meeting showing how 2022 ended up. The MiGrant transition will likely occur during the 2024 grant season rather than 2023.

Nearly mid-October, the northern locations are closing for the season or will be soon. Those boating communities in southern Michigan will likely follow suit and close in the next few weeks.

## **Marketing Updates**

- Maia Turek pointed the Commission in the direction of the 75<sup>th</sup> boating anniversary website. A boating photo mosaic video is being created in conclusion of the 75<sup>th</sup> boating anniversary celebrations. Maia also informed the Commission of the ongoing efforts regarding the fiberglass boat recycle initiative.

## **Project Repots**

- The Michigan State Waterways Development Program Project Report was included in each Commissioner's meeting packet for their information.
- Jordan Byelich provided an update to the Commission on various State projects. Jordan stated 2022 has been a productive year following a slower time that occurred during the height of COVID. Some project highlights include Clinton River Cutoff Boating Access Site (BAS), which is seeing a launch relocation, dredging, parking expansion, and a carry-down launch construction. Anticipated completion is end of 2022. Eagle Harbor State Harbor is active with work to build new docks, dredging, and building renovations. Anticipated completion is in 2023. The Whitefish Point State Harbor improvement project is currently in design for facility upgrades with permits secured. Construction funding has not yet been budgeted. Lexington State Harbor is in the middle of a multi-phase major redevelopment. The first phase recently wrapped up in 2022 with a new harbormaster building. Next is the design for pier replacement and dredging and then for on-land improvements including parking. Jordan also gave a brief update on US Army Corps of Engineers' endeavors at Little Lake and Lexington federal harbors that also contain state harbor facilities.
- Linnae Dawson provided an update to the Commission on various Grant-in-Aid projects. Emergency repairs, due to record high-water levels in 2020, are starting to see completion. Munising BAS has completed the preliminary engineering phase and will be proceeding with reconstruction of their current BAS site, including new skid piers, reconfiguration of the parking lot, and a new launch area. L'Anse Village Marina is working thorough a multi-phase gameplan. Phase 1 landside improvements are complete, and phase 2 improvements of a floating dock replacement is anticipated to be complete in the spring of 2023. Overall, many projects are in the works, and it will be a busy spring next year.

## **Transmittals**

- A memo to the Commission from Eric Cowing, District Manager, Eastern Upper Peninsula, was submitted regarding the annual Chicago and Bayview to Mackinac yacht races. Eric noted both events went well. Although PRD encountered some minor issues, the plan they had in place will suit future races.

- Locations for 2023 Michigan State Waterways Commission meetings were submitted for discussion. Cadillac, Keweenaw Peninsula, and the southwest area of the lower peninsula were recommended by DNR staff, and the Commissioners were in agreeance.
- Commissioner, Mary Rising submitted an article regarding wake boats.
- An article regarding boating jobs in the state was also submitted for review.

### **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.

### **Non-Agenda Items**

- Commissioner, Mary Rising asked for advice on obtaining signage for the Clean, Drain, Dry initiative, which helps educate boaters on stopping the spread of aquatic invasive species.
- Vicki McGhee suggested an orientation be held to onboard the newly appointed Commissioners, which will also offer a refresher course for existing Commissioners.
- New Commissioner, Scott Labonte thanked all for a warm welcome to the Commission.
- Commissioner, Elaine Isely voiced the disconnect felt when the Commission meets virtually instead of in-person, asking for more in-person meetings in the future.

### **Adjournment**

- The meeting adjourned at 10:44 a.m.

The next Michigan State Waterways Commission Meeting: December 6, 2022.