



Friends of the State Park

Lookkit



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Introduction: Friends of the State Parks Groups

Chances are you've spent some quality time in Michigan state parks, recreation areas and forest campgrounds. Maybe you've camped in one or more of our 103 state parks or perhaps you've spent time hiking, biking, swimming, skiing, snowshoeing or participating in some of the many outdoor educational opportunities the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) offers. Naturally, you want more people to know about your favorite parks and experience similar adventures.

Maybe you just appreciate being able to get away from it all by getting out in Michigan's beautiful woods and waters. Just an afternoon of breathing in the clean air, the scent of fresh pine and a picnic or good book is enough to reconnect with nature, lift your spirits and set the world right again. The mini-escapes refresh and invigorate you, motivating you to keep trails cleared and the picnic tables in good repair for your next visit.

Perhaps the thought has crossed your mind that preserving Michigan's vast open space for future generations is a paramount responsibility of your own generation.

If any of these thoughts have occurred to you, you're already a friend of the parks, and we invite and encourage you to take your interest a step further.

Friends groups are nonprofit organizations that play an invaluable role in helping to preserve Michigan state parks and recreation areas by helping provide fundraising, recruiting volunteers, leading restoration projects and providing educational programming for the public.

Currently, less than 50 percent of Michigan state parks have active Friends of the Park groups. Some of these groups operate as official 501c3 nonprofit organizations. Some are very informal groups that gather for a common cause such as cleanup days or invasive species control.

Starting a group of your own may sound overwhelming - and we at the DNR understand that. The following pages contain lists of suggestions and ideas that can help you make some decisions about forming a Friends of the Park group. This guide is not intended as a list of requirements, but rather ideas and information to consider.

What Friends Groups Do: Networking, Education and Stewardship

Friends of the State Parks groups are vital leaders in these three areas:

Networking

- Coalitions and partnerships
- Conferences
- Fundraising
- Advocate for specific issues of the park or recreation area

Education

- Informational booths and activities at park or local events
- Social events to build awareness
- Form partnerships with schools, congregations and neighborhood groups
- Contribute to the interpretive and educational programs at the park through interpretive signage and programs including environmental education activities, seminars, lectures and more.

Stewardship

- Invasive species removal
- Native planting
- Stormwater projects
- Erosion control
- Litter patrol
- Habitat enhancement
- Providing financial support to the park for furtherance of its interpretive programs, facilities and resources by raising funds through membership fees, donations, sales special events and more

Something to think about:

Agree on realistic projects and time frames. Park staff articulates the park's needs. The friends group uses its creativity and connections to help meet those needs. A good idea is to test some of these needs out on prospective board members and see which ones generate strong interest.

Friends groups get recognized:

The Friends of Michigan State Parks work hard to make state parks and recreation areas the places where local residents and visitors can find the maximum opportunity to enjoy the outdoors. Friends groups' efforts are appreciated and recognized, just as yours may be some day. The following are highlights from efforts done by our Friends Groups at their various parks.

The Friends of Grand Haven State Park

The group worked on many successful projects this year including securing two ADA walkways using the State Partnership Match Program, expanding the campground playground by purchasing two new items and adding vending machines and a drinking fountain to the park. The group raised \$1,700 at the 2015 Beach Volleyball Tournament. Other events and projects included the Kite Festival, Soccer in the Sand, Coast Guard Festival and work on the group's brochure and website design. Additional fundraising initiatives include wood and fire pit sales, can return program and tree planting program.



The Friends of Van Riper and Craig Lake State Parks

The group received a \$90,000 grant for playground equipment from Rio Tinto/Lundin and a Michigan Partnership Match of \$35,000 from The Department of Natural Resources. The main play structure was ordered and construction of the new playground will begin in the spring of 2016. The group is registered in the Schwan's Cares Program through February 2016 and is also registered in the Amazon Smiles Program. The group also partnered with a local Boy Scout Troop to take care of returnables on a 50/50 basis.

The Ortonville Recreation Equestrian Association Friends Group

The group held a Spring Work Bee day in May during which volunteers contributed to trail and campground projects. Some of these projects included clearing a blocked pond drainage culvert, opening a beaver dam, trimming tail overgrowth, removal of low hanging tree branches/dead trees and righting of several picket poles. Donation of equipment use and operation for this project included a tractor with bucket, 4-wheel utility vehicle, gas-powered and manual brush cutting tools. Volunteer hours totaled 290 hours between the work bee and time spent organizing and running special events at the Ortonville horse campground and equestrian trails. Lastly, the group completed funding of raising its match requirement (\$5,000) for the Michigan Partnership Match program awarded in 2014. They fully implemented a sponsorship program under which funds continue to be raised for current and future project work at the park.

Note:

Those interested in learning more about how to join an active friends group can contact that state park office for information. Those interested in starting a friends of the park group in their area can contact Promotional Agent, Michelle Coss, at cossm@michigan.gov or at 517-881-5884 for information.

The how-to's of forming a friends group:

Friends Groups are generally defined as organizations established primarily to support a specific park area. While these groups vary in size, structure and priorities, they all operate in partnership with parks under a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Friends groups benefit parks in various ways such as conducting fundraising efforts, providing volunteer services, assisting with resource management and preservation and publicizing important issues.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

While there may be a multitude of organizations named "Friends of ..." a state park, to be considered a bona fide park friends group, a friends group Memorandum of Understanding, or, at minimum, a project-specific relationship agreement must be in place between a state park and the friends organization. This agreement is the tool used to authorize the public association of the group with the park it supports in a way that assures donors, members and the public that their support of the organization supports the work of the park.

Determining factors in the success of a relationship between parks and friends groups are clarity of need, leadership, alignment and mutual respect and support. The park staff and the friends group board need to be prepared to invest in creating and sustaining a productive relationship.

Start of a friends group:

Friends groups can grow out of a community perception of a need or their creations can be triggered by conversations between a park supervisor and community leaders. In either case, the community champion and the park liaison must answer three questions in this order:

- "What do we want the friends group to do to support the park?"
- "Who should be on the friends board to make the right things happen, and how can we enlist their participation?"
- "Is the park leadership and staff willing to invest the time up-front and for the duration that it will take to ensure success in getting the friends group up and running and working with the park?"

Once a decision has been made to pursue the idea of a friends group, the community champion and the park liaison will need to:

1. Decide what they want the friends group to be and do. Put it in writing as an initial draft and then involve park and potential friends in refining the vision, mission, goals and work plan and in taking ownership. Friends groups serve in a variety of roles. It is a good idea to start with the highest priority roles. You may want to concentrate on roles that provide opportunities to develop roots and credibility in the community. Most friends groups assume additional roles as they mature and have more capacity to take on additional challenges.
2. Decide on the name for the friends' group that communicates a place or program that people would be motivated to support. A good rule of thumb is to include the park or park cluster's name. You are establishing an identity and a brand that you want people to remember and make a positive association. The name should convey that it is an organization that people will give to versus one that suggests that it makes grants. Choices include Friends of ..., Conservancy, Trust, Fund, etc.
3. Recruit a founding board of three or four people. You need "doers" who will pitch in and help share the workload. Personalities are crucial. You need people you can work with and who can work together and with others. Try to get a lawyer and financial/accounting person on the founding board to assist with legal matters and fiduciary responsibilities. This founding board must be willing to be named as board officers - president/ chairperson, vice-president, secretary and treasurer.

Writing Bylaws

Bylaws are rules adopted by an organization in order to regulate its own affairs and the behavior of its members. Below is a sample of a bylaws document that can be used as a guide or reference.

Sample Bylaws Document

Bylaws for the Friends of (Your park or Recreation Area)

ARTICLE I

Your group's name

ARTICLE II

Purposes

Said Corporation is organized exclusively for educational purposes and the making of distributions to Corporations that qualify as exempt corporations under section 501 (c)(3) of the federal tax code. Included in the purposes stated above shall be the promotion of recreational, natural and interpretive activities of the state parks and recreation areas in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, principally (your park or recreation area).

ARTICLE III

Membership

Membership shall be open to anyone subscribing to the purposes of the organization who pays the dues fixed by the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE IV

Board of Directors

Section 1

The Board of Directors shall be composed of up to 15 voting members plus the (park or recreation area) park manager and park interpreter or naturalist who shall be ex-officio members of the Board of Directors but shall not vote.

Section 2

Directors shall be elected by the Board of Directors at the regular or a special Section 3. At the first meeting of the appropriate year, the Board of Directors shall elect a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer from among its number. Each officer shall be elected for a term of two (2) years.

ARTICLE V

Duties of the Board of Directors

Section 1

The Board of Directors shall:

- Have general supervision of the affairs of the organization
- Make recommendations for action on such items as budget, projects and proposed non-budget expenditures over \$100
- In the event of a vacancy on the Board of Directors or in any office, fill the vacancy for the unexpired term
- Where the secretary or treasurer has failed to provide timely reports as deemed necessary by the Board of Directors, to name a replacement

- Establish the purposes of all committees
- Direct the audit of the treasurer's records at least once annually
- Perform such other duties as may be prescribed by the bylaws or by law.

ARTICLE VI

Duties of Officers: See a list of duties of officers in this booklet on page 13.

ARTICLE VII

Meetings

Section 1

Regular meetings of the Board of Directors shall be held as fixed by the Board. At least one annual membership meeting shall be held. Special meetings of the Board of Directors or of the organization may be called by the president or at the request of two directors.

Section 2

A quorum at any meeting of the Board of Directors shall consist of a majority of directors. Except where otherwise prescribed in the bylaws, decisions shall be made at meetings, or via email, by majority vote.

Section 3

Notice for any special meeting of the Board of Directors must be provided to the directors at least three days prior to the meeting.

Section 4

Notice for any special membership meeting of the organization must be provided in writing to the membership at least 10 days in advance of the meeting.

ARTICLE VIII

Removal from office or Board of Directors

Any officer may be removed from office by a 2/3 vote of the Board of Directors. Any director who is absent from three consecutive meetings of the board without excuse may be replaced by a majority vote of the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE IX

Dues

The annual dues of the members shall be determined from year to year, the amount to be fixed by the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE X

Fiscal year

The fiscal year of this organization shall be from January 1 to December 31.

ARTICLE XI

Fiscal policy

Section 1

The Board of Directors must approve all expenses of the organization as outlined below prior to the treasurer making disbursements:

- All new ventures in the activities of the organization, such as:
- A major publication
- Handling of a possible controversial sales item

- The purchase of costly objects for the museums
- The development of interpretive facilities in any other locations
- The purchase of land

Section 2

Whenever the cash balances of the organization are deemed to be in excess of actual needs for the immediate future, the Board of Directors may authorize the investment of any surpluses in United States government bonds and/or in savings accounts in bank where deposits are guaranteed by the Federal Government. Such deposits shall be made in the name of the organization with authority for the making of deposits and withdrawals vested in the President and Treasurer of the organization. The Board of Directors is further empowered to authorize loan or donations to other cooperating organizations for the purpose of furthering their educational work therein, when deemed advisable.

Section 3

There shall be no cash disbursements except from petty cash funds which are authorized for this use. The amount of the petty cash shall be established by the Board of Directors. Reimbursement to the petty cash fund shall be made by check at any time by request to the Treasurer. Such reimbursements must be supported by valid receipts to cover all expenditures made from the fund.

Section 4

Since this friends organization has been established to benefit the (your park or recreation area) and operates using property owned by the state, the Parks and Recreation Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources shall be duly authorized to examine the records and review the internal controls of the business operation of the organization and to evaluate the benefits occurring from this cooperative effort.

Section 5

The organization's operation in (your park or recreation area) is dependent upon a formal agreement as a cooperating education society with the Parks and Recreation Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

ARTICLE XII

Dissolution

Upon the dissolution of the Corporation, assets shall be distributed to the State Of Michigan, Department of Natural Resources, Parks & Recreation Division, for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, after proper payment of any claims against the Corporation for proper purposes. Any such assets not disposed of shall be disposed of by the Circuit Court of the county in which the principle office of the Corporation is then located, exclusively for such purposes or to such Corporation or Corporations, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes.

ARTICLE XIII

Amendments

These bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the Directors at a regular or special meeting of the Board of Directors, provided that the proposed amendments shall have been submitted in writing to each Director at least five (5) days before the meeting.

(DATE)

How to fund a friends group

Plan how the friends group is going to pay its expenses from the beginning.

The group may decide to use a combination of contributed and earned income. The park may provide some support services until the friends group can attract startup and operating funds. Most successful boards have staff supported by annual contributed funds and earned income. A good rule of thumb is that you want to generate earned income sufficient to cover staff costs.

Startup friends groups can often attract capacity building grants that can be used to fledge a startup. The investment philosophy behind this kind of grant is that a new organization worth its salt should be able to become financially viable in three years. Most fundraising requires some up front funds.

Likewise, the friends' group startup may have appeal to corporations or businesses willing to donate pro bono expertise, professional services and in-kind donations of supplies and equipment based on their product lines. Examples include legal, publicity, marketing, accounting and publishing services.

In conceiving earned income possibilities, the park and friends group should discuss the development of marketable products that help communicate the park's themes. There may be opportunities for on-site sales working in partnership with the park's concessionaire or cooperating association. Local, national and regional distributors can be an excellent wholesale source and outside-the-park retail operations and the Internet can provide alternative sales venues. It should be noted that there are startup, inventory, management and marketing costs associated with product development but the rewards are often great.

Michigan Community Foundations: <http://www.forgoodforever.org/>. There is usually a Community Foundation located in each county that could be approached for start-up funds project support. Meeting with representatives of these organizations is a good way to start your efforts in searching out funding to not only start up your friends group, but to also support your efforts later.

Non-profit organization requirements

Friends of Michigan State Parks groups can be organized as 501c3 nonprofit groups or can be less formal groups who gather together to help a park with a project or cause.

Becoming a 501c3 organization is not the first step in organizing a friends group. Each park, or state parks in general, needs to first put together its group of board members. The group works on bylaws, goals, objectives, etc. and files for state incorporation.

Nonprofit incorporation requirements

- Establish a name of corporation
- Elect a board of directors
- Create a mission statement
- Get a legal mailing address
- Develop bylaws
- File for Michigan incorporation
- File for Federal 501c3 status

Resources available to help in starting a nonprofit organization can be found at www.mnaonline.org/startinganonprofit.aspx.

Such resources include the opportunity to purchase the Guide for Nonprofit Startup, learn about upcoming trainings on this subject and link to IRS information related to starting a nonprofit.

Meetings

Find a location for meetings that is visible and convenient. The more you can consistently meet at the same place, the more likely a new volunteer will be able to remember it and participate in the group. Park offices, picnic shelters or even park cabins are a logical choice for locations.

Getting the Word Out

Once you've set up a meeting date and time, it's time to get the word out that you're seeking like-minded individuals who are interested in the park.

- Post fliers about the meeting at parks, local libraries, coffee shops and community centers.
- Write a short press release announcing the upcoming meeting. Be sure to include the basic information: who, what, when, where and why as well as a name and phone number of someone who can be contacted in case there are questions. Send your press release to Ami Van Antwerp at vanantwerpa@michigan.gov to help you get started. Below is a sample of an announcement press release template.

Sample Press Release:

Friends of (Your Name) State Park information

A Friends of (Your Name) State Park is in the process of being organized for the charitable and educational purpose of supporting, assisting and promoting interpretive, scientific, historic, educational and related visitor services at (your park). Those interested in supporting this valuable tourism resource, meeting new people and having fun should plan to attend the organizational meeting to be held at (time, date and place).

For details, contact... (provide a contact name, phone number and/or email address).

- Set up a table at community events
- Networking
 - Phone calls
 - Create a website
 - Social networking
- Mailings
 - Postcards or door hangers in neighborhoods

Something to think about:

Ultimately, 80 percent of volunteers come to a meeting or event because someone personally invited them.

Functioning Roles for Officers

Elect a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. Be sure to include the park supervisor or other park staffer as a liaison member to the group.

Sample ideas of the roles of elected officers:

The president shall:

- Preside at all meetings of the organization and the board of directors.
- Exercise general supervision over the interests and welfare of the organization.
- Appoint all committee chairs as needed.
- Be an ex-officio member of all committees.
- Call all meetings of the organization and the board of directors.
- Perform such duties as are required by the board of directors.

The vice president shall:

- Act in the absence of or during the incapacity of the president.
- Accept at least one other responsibility as may be agreed upon by the vice-president and president.

The secretary shall:

- Write and maintain minutes of all meetings of the organization and of the board of directors.
- Provide minutes in a timely fashion to the board of directors as determined by the president.
- Appoint a substitute secretary when the secretary cannot perform these duties.
- Perform other such duties as may normally be a part of the office of the secretary as assigned by the president of the board of directors.

The treasurer shall:

- Receive, account for and deposit in a bank all funds of the organization as directed by the board of directors.
- Make authorized disbursement by the issuance of checks which shall be countersigned by one other designated person.
- Keep an accurate record of the names and addresses of all members and dues paid.
- Help prepare and send annual statements encouraging members to renew their membership.
- Maintain appropriate financial records which shall be subject to inspection and audit as directed by the board of directors.
- Prepare and submit such financial statements or reports as may be required by laws or regulations and/or as requested by the president or board of directors.
- Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the president or the board of directors.

Other board members might consist of an outreach coordinator, grant writer, documenter, photographer and historian.

Event Checklist

Once you have determined a project for the park, use the sample checklist to make sure you're ready to go.

Preparation

- Do a site walk-through to determine areas and tasks for volunteers
- Establish date and time of event
- Reserve any tools or items available from park staff
- Ask for business donations of beverages, refreshments or giveaways
- Publish event information on DNR website, local paper or other media
- Post flyers in libraries, coffee shops, community centers or other public places

Obtaining special permits

Often special permits must be obtained to stay in compliance with other state agencies' rules and regulations for things such as alcohol consumption, food preparation and raffles. Be sure to check the rules and obtain the proper permits well in advance of your event.

Alcohol permits

- The special license takes 10 days to process
- Must submit proof of nonprofit status
- Charter, bylaws, articles of incorporation
- Maximum of twelve (12) one-day licenses per year
- Must provide a detailed diagram of area to be licensed
- Include actual dimensions, fencing and security provisions

Fees

- Organizations that have been registered for less than one year: \$50/day (additional \$7.50 for Sunday service of spirits)
- Organizations that have been registered for more than one year: \$75/day (additional \$3.75 for Sunday service of spirits)

Something to think about:

Keep things light, keep a read on how the group is functioning. Make sure people are having fun and not burning out and that the group's process is facilitating equitable involvement by all members.

Obtaining Special Permits

Food service permits

The guidelines for obtaining a temporary food service permit can be found at

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/MDA_FS_Temp_FS_App_ElectronicForm_84673_7.pdf

If all guidelines are met, the application for obtaining a permit can be found at

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/MDA_FoodEstablishmentLicenseApplicationForm_41243_7.pdf

The Michigan Food Law, food code and other regulations can be found at

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdard/MI_Modified_2009_Food_Code_396675_7.pdf

Gambling Permits

Qualification requirements:

Allow eight weeks for process of application. The full list of requirements can be found at

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/BSL-CG-1516_1359_7.pdf.

Raffle license information:

Allow six weeks for application process. The application can be found at

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/BSL-CG-1516_1359_7.pdf.

For a list of rules for all charitable gaming, visit http://www.michigan.gov/cg/0,1607,7-111-34702_34704---.00.html.

Something to think about:

Before your event, be sure to contact your county health office to determine if it requires any changes from the Michigan Food Law.

Help when needed: Active friends of the parks groups

Many people donate their valuable time to ensure visitors to Michigan state parks not only have a great time but also come away with a better understanding and appreciation of the great outdoors. Experience is a wonderful tool and there are many experienced people available to answer questions and offer support during every step of the startup. Contacts for the friends of Michigan state park groups already in operation are a great source for answers to questions or provide input on how their groups got started. Groups designated as 501c3 nonprofits can help provide information on that as well.

The information is constantly changing. For the most up to date information, please contact Michelle Coss at cossm@michigan.gov.