

Walter J. Hayes State Park General Management Plan Stakeholder Input Workshop Summary

Introduction

The planning team invited 53 stakeholder groups to participate in a facilitated input workshop held on March 16, 2026, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Brooklyn Branch of the Jackson Public Library in Brooklyn, Michigan. The intent of the workshop was to gather targeted input from governmental, non-profit, and business/tourism entities in the early stages of the General Management Plan development. Representatives of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) gave a presentation that included an overview of Walter J. Hayes State Park, the general management plan process, and an explanation of the plan elements that their input would inform: the statements of significance, the management zone map, and a draft list of actions intended to be accomplished over the next ten years.

Following the presentation, stakeholders had an opportunity to ask questions related to the process. Discussions included:

- Why camping was discontinued in the northern part of the park. The park manager explained that at the time, there were no reservations required for camping, and there were issues with theft and staff safety since the campsites were near a major road. The planning team is looking to see if reintroducing camping or lodging in this area is appropriate.
- How costs for proposed actions in the plan are considered. The action plan will have an associated opinion of probable costs to go along with the actions requiring Capital Outlay funds. Projects identified in GMPs are not guaranteed funding: projects are prioritized for first at a District level and then statewide.
- Recent land acquisitions. It was discussed that there have not been any recent land acquisitions and that none, outside of a small parcel on the south side of the park, are being considered for the future.
- If there has been an economic impact study. The economic impact of Hayes State Park on the local community has not been studied, but the DNR is interested in pursuing if partners were available to assist.

The stakeholders then worked in small-table discussion groups to complete a series of exercises describing how the park is today, how they would like it to be in the future, and opportunities for partnerships with external entities. Each table then reported out to the larger group. This summary describes the results of the table exercises.

Table 1: DNR Staff Attendees

Staff Name	Representing
Debbie Jensen	DNR: Management Plan Administrator
Nick VanBloem	Planning Unit Manager
Ben Spiegel	Hayes Unit Supervisor
Shane Morse	District Supervisor
Ray Fahlsing	Stewardship Unit Manager
Matt Lincoln	Land Specialist
Richard Moreau	Hayes Lead Ranger
Audrey Klont	Statewide Accessibility and Design Coordinator
Michelle Lupenski	Waterloo Unit Supervisor (currently assisting at Hayes)
Christy Summers	Beckett & Raeder: Planning Consultant
Caitlin Jackson	Beckett & Raeder: Planning Consultant

Table 2: Stakeholder Attendees

Attendee Name	Representing
Jim Van Doren	Lenawee County Board of Commissioners
Marcy Brainerd	Friends of Walker Tavern
Alicia Crisante	Citizens Protect Irish Hills
Steve Trosin	Experience Jackson
Sylvia Kay	Wamplers Lake Property Owners Association, Friends of Watkins Lake
Autumn Nirsch	Lenawee Intermediate School District
Robert Rosowski	Wamplers Lake Property Owners Association
Pam Van Doren	Property Owner
Laura Koelewijn	Friends of Watkins Lake
Julius Roberts	Wamplers Lake Property Owners Association
Cindy Hubbell	Irish Hills Regional Chamber of Commerce
Samantha Marchand	Senator Sue Shink
Kade Peck	Region 2 Planning Commission
Matt Swartzlander	Village of Brooklyn
Bill Sutherland	Norvell Township
Brett Gatz	Region 2 Planning Commission
Sara Sollars	Friends of Walker Tavern
Spencer Kellum	Friends of Watkins Lake
Don Rudd	Cambridge Township Police Department
Allison Krueger	Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Department
Tracy Oberleiter	Senator Joe Bellino
Joe Crisante	Irish Hills Concerned Citizens
Carley Kratz	Lenawee Intermediate School District/Grand-Raisin Stewardship Network
David Brainerd	Friends of Walker Tavern

Icebreaker Question

When the stakeholders introduced themselves, they were asked to describe what matters most to them about Hayes State Park. Their responses follow in the table below.

Table 1: What matters most to me about Hayes State Park is...

Statement
Space to enjoy the outdoors
Trails, maintaining the environment
A place to connect with nature
Having a place for people to enjoy the outdoors and outdoor activities
Making sure [that the] population has this beautiful nature accessible
Tranquil accessibility
There for future generations, preserving the beauty
Safe entry and exit to the boat launch, better identify where rocks are
Provides an opportunity for man to enjoy the lake environment
Keep it as a nature preserve, as it is. Limit commercial development and housing development
Access for all
A well-maintained, well-managed, thriving multi-purpose park
Quaint nature, keep it natural
That it continues to exist with government funding support. That Hayes be recognized for the jewel it is for Michiganders + out of state visitors.
Nature areas (on Cedar Hill and surrounding campground), boat launch and width/depth of channel, beach areas
Community nature-based asset that provides huge economic boost to area



Figure 1: Stakeholders hear a presentation about the planning process.

Exercise 1: Say one word or phrase that describes the state park right now.

When stakeholders think about Hayes State Park as it is today, one primary theme was the various amenities that the park offers, such as camping, boating, biking, fishing, and swimming. Stakeholders mentioned how beautiful the natural setting of the park is, the family-oriented facilities and activities, and how welcoming and well-maintained it is. They discussed how the park is a destination and community meet-up spot, being a prime location in the Irish Hills.

Table 2: One word or phrase that describes the park today

Word Or Phrase	Table Number
Camping	1,2,3,4
Boating	2,4
Well-maintained	1,4
124 Traffic - scenic drive but hectic & hazardous	3
Beach	4
Beautiful trees	4
Big oaks - veteran forests	3
Bike route & walk route	3
Biking	2
Boat lunch/pontoon	3
Busy	4
Cedar hill (view)	1
Community meet-up spot	3
Destination	1
Family camp/beach	3
Family outings	2
Family-oriented	1
Fishing	2
Geographically accessible	1
Good neighbor	1
Historic destination	4
Historical	1
Irish Hills	4
Lake	2
Lake life	3
Large beach area	1
Natural families	1
Nature	2
Picnicking	2
Prime location - easy access	4
Recreation	2
Relax	3
Running	2
Safety	2
Swimming	2
Up north to Ohio visitors	3
Variety	1
Walking/hiking	2
Welcoming	1
Well-managed	1
Wildlife	1
Wildlife is protected	4

Exercise 2: Say one word or phrase that you want to describe the state park in the future.

When asked to describe the future of the state park in a word or phrase, stakeholders emphasized expanded activities and facilities, such as adding more sites to the campground, expanded nature and non-motorized trails, and education/programming opportunities. Some stakeholders had a desire to increase day-use opportunities throughout the park, through ideas like developing Cedar Hills as a destination, adding pickleball courts and a playground with easy access off M-124. Stakeholders were clear about the importance of maintaining the park's quiet, rustic character and protecting its natural beauty, through suggestions such as maintaining the forest canopy, native plantings, and invasive species control.

Table 3: One word or phrase you would like to describe the park in the future

Word Or Phrase	Table Number
More sites - camping expansion	1,2,3
Biking/Hiking - non-motorized destination	2,3
Education & programming opportunities	2,3
Expanded natural trails	1,4
High water quality	2,3
Interconnected to other parks & cultural amenities - to Watkins Lake, Cambridge Junction, Irish Hills, local community, Walker Tavern	3,4
Maintain canopy & native plantings - keep oaks, forest makes great camping opportunities	3,4
124 + 12 - day-use, trails, camping, etc	1
Accessible	3
Avoid overcrowded	1
Boat safety	2
Control invasive species - Round Lake	4
Day-Use areas off 124 - pickleball/playground	1
Develop Cedar Hill as destination	1
Family-friendly	2
History	2
Kayaking	2
Keep easy access	4
Keep it natural	1
Keep it safe	2
Keep tranquil environment	4
More shade	1
Pristine habitats - resilience	3
Regional destination (tourism)	3
Shoreline preservation	2
Trail connecting Watkins + Hayes	1
Walking	2
Wildlife	2

Exercise 3: What improvements or changes would you like to see at the park? What things should stay the same?

For the third exercise, stakeholders were asked to expand upon their ideas from the previous exercise, listing specific ideas for improvements or changes to the park or things that should stay the same. Within each table, stakeholders then voted for their top three items. Of the things in the park that should stay the same, the top items identified by stakeholders were to preserve the wildlife/nature of the park, to maintain the tranquil environment, and to preserve the camping experience. Of the list of improvements or changes, the top items included a boat wash, more non-motorized trails, additional camping areas, and an improved connection over M-124 between the east and west sides of the park.

Table 4: Things that should stay the same

Items to Stay the Same	Table Number	Total Votes
Preserve wildlife/nature	2	5
Tranquil environment	5	4
Camping experience	2,3,4	3
Canopy - keep forest thriving	3	3
Nature (Dark Sky)	1	2
Lake frontage	1	2
Existing footprint	1	1
Trails	2	1
Keep Round Lake undeveloped	3	1
Seasonal activities	4	1
Cedar Hill	1	0
Beach/picnic areas	2	0
Keep day-use/Wamplers Lake access	3	0

Table 5: Suggested Improvements or Changes

Improvements Or Changes	Table Number	Total Votes
Permanent boat wash	1,2,4	12
More non-motorized trails	3,4	7
Additional camping areas	1	4
Improved connection over 124 between East and West sides of park, pedestrian crossing needed, limit truck/vehicle impacts	3	4
Day-use areas: pickleball, pavilions, playground	1	3
Kayak launch Round Lake	2	3
Educational classes	2	3
Identify rocks at boat launch & entrance to lake	4	3
Bicycle infrastructure	1	2
Playground at campground	2	2
Stewardship of natural resources	3	2
Hazardous rocks in channel	1	1
Dog park at campground	2	1
Full hookup campsites	2	1
Prioritizing safety for visitors on 124, limit truck/vehicle impacts	3	1
More activities	4	1
Pet pooper bags	1	0
Better bathroom facilities	1	0
Parking lot improvements	1	0
Park benches in memory of loved one	2	0
Memorial bricks	2	0
Water quality protection	3	0
More native plants	4	0

Exercise 4: What are some collaboration & partnership opportunities that the state park presents for local communities and stakeholders?

Stakeholders then discussed what collaboration and partnership opportunities they wished for Hayes State Park. Suggested efforts included partnering with the Michigan State University extension, Michigan Lakes and Streams Association, the Watershed Council, and others, to provide educational classes or programs at the park. Several ideas for collaboration opportunities dealt with protecting the park's environment, proposing invasive species removal, native planting efforts, and aquatic and invasive species outreach, partnering with local conservation districts, the Lenawee Intermediate School District, EGLE, and others. At the same time, stakeholders emphasized expanding community events and outreach, enhancing trail connectivity and park cleanup efforts, increasing park camping infrastructure, and formation of a "Friends of Hayes State Park" group to coordinate further collaboration efforts.

Table 6: Collaboration Ideas

Group or Stakeholder Name	Collaboration or Partnership Idea	Table Number
Friends of Hayes State Park	Start a friendship group	1,2,3
Irish Hills Chamber of Commerce, Visit Lenawee	Economic impact study	1
Local schools	Educational opportunities	1
Community or Neighbors	Adopt a park program (like adopt a highway)	1
Jails + prisons	Maintenance	1
Local groups	"Day" at the park (ex. Kiwanis day at the park)	1
Boy/Girl Scouts	Nature preservation	2
MSU/UM	Extension classes	2
EGLE, Wamplers Lake Property Owners Association	Water quality	2
Marine patrol	Boater safety	2
Michigan Lakes and Streams Association	Education	2
MDOT	Improvements to 124	3
Becoming Outdoor Women	Continue to support hunter education	3
Jackson County Department of Transportation	Interconnecting parks with trails & non-motorized pathways	3
Lenawee Intermediate School District	Build park camping infrastructure, volunteer for park stewardship	3
EGLE, MDNR, Jackson Lenawee Washtenaw Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area	Aquatic & invasive species outreach per. boat wash station	3,4
Michigan International Speedway	Sponsorship - collaboration	3
Consumers Energy	Electric vehicle charging, sponsorship	3
League of Michigan Bicyclists	help to advocate for non-motorized trail development	3
Conservation districts	Native plants and trees	4
Lenawee Intermediate School District	Invasive shrub removal, native planting	4
MSU Students	Boat wash	4
Boy/Girl Scouts	Trail projects	4
School Districts, Leadership Organizations	Clean-ups, trails, plantings, seasonal activities	4
Friends of Walker Tavern	Expand seasonal activities	4
Irish Hills Chamber of Commerce	Program collaboration	4
Watershed Council	Expand educational opportunities	4
Wamplers Lake Property Owners Association	Volunteer at boat wash, events in newsletter	4

Final Exercise: Collective Priorities

The top items from each table in exercise three were compiled into a larger list that could be voted on by all participants. Each stakeholder selected their top three items from the collective list. The top two priority items were to add a boat wash and improve trail connectivity in the park. Adding more non-motorized trails, preserving the tranquil environment, and day-use improvements were the next top items.

Table 7: Collective Priorities

Collective Priorities	Votes
Preserve wildlife/nature/thriving forest canopy	11
Boat wash	10
More non-motorized trails	9
Preserve tranquil environment	8
Day-use improvements (pickleball, pavilions, playground)	8
Kayak launch on Round Lake	5
Pedestrian crossing over 124	5
Educational classes	4
Mark rocks in water posing hazards	3
Additional camping areas	3