

# **STATUS OF THE PADDLE SPORT CRAFT PROPOSAL**

**April 25, 2018**

## **BACKGROUND**

The original goal of the Waterways Commission proposal was to enhance safety of the paddle sport enthusiast, improve access to facilities, and address water trails, safety education and create a universal owner vessel identification system for paddle sports. Paddle sport recreation continues to grow, demanding increasing search and/or rescue efforts by emergency responders and placing increasing demands on existing recreational boating access and infrastructure. To assist with the safety of the recreationalist, the vessel would be identified similar to other registered watercraft.

On January 3, 2018 the Michigan State Waterways Commission held two public sessions to secure input to the attached proposal.

Since that date, substantial public input has been received that included support as well as objections to the proposal.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Due to the dynamic input received from the public, the following process is being recommended:

1. Define and communicate effectively the reason “why” this program should be considered and its benefits.
2. Further research and “bench marking” of other states’ paddle sport programs, their results, implementation and evaluation plans.
3. Develop greater opportunity for public input as to the benefits and outcomes, including facilitates, access, public safety, water trails, etc.
4. Develop an overall communication plan in an effort to keep public and elected officials informed.
5. Consider other aspects that have been suggested during the public input process to date.

The process timeline is undefined until there is a more detailed program outlining options and benefits, including the associated costs for various options. Once costs are defined, further review will occur of options for funding the program. Finally, once this process is finalized, clearly defined options will be developed for review and further consideration.

**MICHIGAN STATE WATERWAYS COMMISSION  
RESOLUTION NO. 04-2018-04**

RESOLUTION TO AMEND THE PLANNING FOR PADDLE SPORTS  
RESOLUTION NO: 02-2018-01

**Whereas**, on February 23, 2018, the Michigan State Waterways Commission adopted resolution #02-2018-01 to support legislation establishing a program to address safety, facilities, water trails, and education for paddle sport craft;

**Whereas**, the proposal included a proposed registration fee to fund the program along with law enforcement and other elements (attached);

**Whereas**, since the resolution was adopted by the advisory Waterways Commission, substantial public input was received and as a result, it was advisable to evaluate further the program, its benefits and the options as to how to best accomplish these goals;

**Whereas**, the process will include an extended public input process once the program is more completely developed;

**Whereas**, the program will include best practices employed by other states that have had proven results to accomplish the goals,

**BE IT RESOLVED, That the Michigan State Waterways Commission will follow the attached process and not pursue a paddle sport craft fee at this time.**

Submitted by: Dennis Nickels, Chairman  
Waterways Commission

Date: Wednesday, April 25, 2018

**Voting Record:**

**Motion by: Denny Grinold**

**Yea: 5**

**Motion seconded by: Steve Arwood**

**Nay: 0**



**MICHIGAN STATE WATERWAYS COMMISSION  
RESOLUTION NO. 02-2018-01**

RESOLUTION TO PROPOSE THE MICHIGAN BOATING ACCESS, PUBLIC SAFETY,  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2018

**Whereas**, the Michigan State Waterways Commission provides advice to the Department of Natural Resources (Department) regarding matters related to public recreational boating and related matters;

**Whereas**, the Waterways Program provides funding for the acquisition, design/development, operation, and maintenance of statewide public recreational boating facilities;

**Whereas**, the Waterways Program recommends the following proposed legislation to contain the following elements;

1. Consider a nominal percentage increase in the registration fees for all vessels
2. Establish rates for pontoon boats consistent with traditionally hulled vessels
3. Abolish the carry over provision related to sold or exchanged vessels
4. Register all rigid-hulled kayaks and canoes at a rate not to exceed \$10.00/yr. and provides for a seasonal pass for non-resident craft at \$10.00/yr.
5. Register all paddleboards 8 feet in length and above at a rate not to exceed \$10.00/yr. and provides for a seasonal pass for non-resident craft at \$10.00/yr.
6. Consider a separate surcharge (sticker) for invasive species control for all vessels including nonresident craft
7. Include a 2-3 % annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) provision
8. Consider structured financing (bonding) as a possible option for priority infrastructure
9. Authorize the Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Division to make the exceptions or exemptions for charitable groups providing voluntary river clean-up and paddle sport safety initiatives

**BE IT RESOLVED, That the Michigan State Waterways Commission supports this resolution for proposed legislation to adopt all elements listed above.**

Submitted by: Dennis Nickels, Chairman  
Waterways Commission

Date: Friday, February 23, 2018

**Voting Record:**

Motion by: Steve Arwood

Yea: 6

Motion seconded by: Ward Walstrom

Nay: 0





## MICHIGAN STATE WATERWAYS COMMISSION

January 3, 2018

Dear Paddle Enthusiasts:

Thank you for your interest in Michigan's beautiful waterways! The Michigan State Waterways Commission (MSWC) is a seven-member advisory body responsible for the acquisition, construction and maintenance of public recreational harbors, channels, docking and launching facilities. The seven commission members are appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate, to serve three-year terms. We are committed to preserving, protecting and managing our states' varied water resources for people and clubs, like yours, and your fellow boating enthusiasts.

Surrounded by the Great Lakes and home to countless existing inland lakes and navigable rivers, Michigan is a paddle sports paradise. With over 3,000 miles of water trails, Michigan offers paddle sports enthusiasts of every skill level the opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of Pure Michigan.

This opportunity has fostered a burgeoning rebirth of paddle powered enjoyment of our state's rivers, lakes and streams. The number of paddle craft in Michigan has grown exponentially to an estimated 600,000 vessels, and following national trends, is the fastest growing segment of the boating environment. Paddle sports, in many cases, are the point of entry for our citizens to get on the water and begin a lifelong passion. As this passion evolves many will enlarge their stable of vessels and encourage their families and friends to get outdoors and enjoy our state's water heritage. We are also encouraged by the rapid adoption of kayak fishing which further links Michigan's boating environment to our diversified recreational and tourism assets. The rapid growth of access to liveries and guide services is a testament to the explosion of the paddle sport phenomenon.

Unique to Michigan, the Michigan Trails Initiative is designed to be a comprehensive system providing launch and carry down sites for kayaking, canoeing and integrating them with hiking, biking, snowmobile and ORV trails with access to rest areas and overnight camping facilities in national, state and local parks. This initiative led by Michigan's Department of Natural Resources (DNR), has enjoyed the support of several other state agencies; the Governor's office, the Michigan Legislature and the Michigan State Waterways Commission. Much has been accomplished and further development is in the planning stages. Obviously, all agencies and user groups involved have the desire to implement strategies that encourage this exciting opportunity to expand the recreational experiences of our citizens. Regrettably, there is currently no sustainable funding source available to the DNR Parks and Recreation Division to implement the water trails component of the overall initiative.

The MSWC has begun to respond to the increase of participation in paddle sports with an enhancement program at its more than 1,300 Boating Access Sites (BAS) around the state. These sites were developed and financed partially through registration fees paid by powered, trailerable vessels. The increased demand for paddle sport launch sites is taxing the capacity of parking at existing sites limiting access for all vessels. This issue requires further immediate attention. The Commission would also like to explore an increase in the number of carry down areas or in some cases, alternative launch methods.

The rate of participation in paddle sports is increasing by approximately 7% each year with the U.S. Coast Guard estimating over 600,000 paddle sport vessels currently operating in Michigan. With an increase in participation comes an increase in accidents that occur on the waterways. In the Coast Guard's 2016 Recreational Boating Statistics report, boating accidents in Michigan have increased dramatically over the past four years. A significant proportion of the increase



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and attendant fatalities are attributable to the explosive growth of paddle sport participation.

In the state of Michigan, considerable efforts of the U.S. Coast Guard along the Great Lakes areas, watercraft safety is funded directly by registration fees paid by owners of powered watercraft. Forty-nine percent of every vessel registration dollar is dedicated by statute to watercraft safety and law enforcement. Funds are allocated by formula to the DNR Law Enforcement Division and grants to local governments and County Sheriff's Department Marine Divisions statewide. The economic and societal impact of adding hundreds of thousands of vessels and mariners on our waters borders is reaching a critical point. Countless hours are being expended investigating reports of unmanned or distressed watercraft. First responders must determine whether they are tasked with a search and rescue mission or simply chasing down a watercraft that has blown off the beach or someone's dock. In any case they must respond to each report only to find a vessel that lacks any documentation as to how many persons were onboard or contact information for the owner. These responses most often involve multiagency resources at significant cost and distraction from other mandated duties.

The Michigan State Waterways Commission takes its obligation not only to equitably promote access to the state's water resources, but to ensure the safety of all citizens that enjoy those resources very seriously.

Over the course of the last two years, the MSWC has expended an extensive amount of effort and research into varied approaches to fairly and equitably support the current and significant growth of our exciting paddle sports all while maintaining our efforts in support of the balance of the existing boating community.

We have focused first on desired outcomes:

- Provide for a sustainable funding source for the Water Trails Initiative
- Provide for grants programs to collaborate with local Paddle Sports groups to support and augment the Water Trails Initiative like the successful programs in place with local ORV and snowmobile organizations
- Increase funding for watercraft safety agencies
- Increase funding for boater safety education
- Continue enhancement of current launch sites to better accommodate paddle sport access
- Provide a means for timely identification vessel owners to expedite either search and rescue or provide a means for recovery of lost vessels by the rightful owner

Our recommendations to achieve the desired outcomes are as follows:

- Require the registration of all rigid-hulled kayaks and paddleboards (over 8 feet in length) at a fee rate to be determined after conversations with user groups as to costs involved and fairness to the boating community at large
- Further, require that the registration certificate be affixed to the vessel in a prominent location to facilitate visual inspection by water safety enforcement officers
- Require that the registration process accommodates the name, address, landline and mobile phone number and email address of the registered owner to facilitate the efforts of search and rescue personnel
- Require that personal floatation devices appropriate to the number of persons on board, be carried onboard (or worn) by all vessels regardless of length or source of power
- Rescind the "carryover" provision on current registration rules that allow new owners to utilize the previous owner's registration until it expires, again to support the efforts of search and rescue personnel in their efforts in identifying the current owner



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- Require out of state paddle craft to either register their vessel in Michigan or purchase a "seasonal" permit". This process would not be required of vessels displaying registration from their resident state if that state provides reciprocity to Michigan residents.

The MSWC, if only in the interest of public safety, feels obligated to seek legislative action before the beginning of the 2018 boating season. However, we are confident that neither our list of desirable outcomes, nor our recommendations may be comprehensive enough to address all the issues at hand or in fact may not represent your organization's point of view. To that end, we would like to extend an invitation to your paddle sports group to engage in a statewide conference call discussing our recommendations and solicit your thoughts to improve our approach. Two conference calls will be held to discuss the issues on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 10a.m. and 6p.m. Both sessions will be the same format and you need only attend one of the two sessions. We suggest you chose the session that makes best use of your time and availability. Your organization's feedback during these calls will be most valuable and we highly encourage you to attend and voice your organization's opinion. Please RSVP with what conference call you would like attend. You will have the opportunity to participate by asking questions during the live Q & A session. If you are unable to attend via the conference call, you are encouraged to submit questions in writing via email or US mail in advance of the event. Thank you for your participation and we look forward to hearing your feedback. Please RSVP to [WieberM@michigan.gov](mailto:WieberM@michigan.gov).

Regards,

Michigan State Waterways Commission

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