

## **MINUTES**

### **NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION *Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee***

December 11, 2014  
Lansing Center

#### **PRESENT FOR THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION**

Commissioner Louise Klarr, Chair  
Commissioner Tim Nichols, Co-Chair  
Commissioner Vicki Pontz, Co-Chair

#### **PRESENT FOR THE MSPAC**

Tom Bailey  
Julie Clark  
Ann Conklin  
Mike Foote  
Chris Graham  
Jim Hendricks  
Bob Hoffmeyer  
Mike McDonald  
Mary Pitcher  
Amy Trotter

#### **ABSENT**

Tom Ferguson  
Jefferson Gray

#### **OTHERS PRESENT**

Dr. Grenae Dudley, The Youth Connection  
Larry Huntley and Dominic McCormick, Students, The Youth Connection  
Rhetta Hunyady, Flint/Genesee Chamber of Commerce  
Ashley Johnson and Randy Howell, Students, Flint/Genesee Chamber of Commerce  
Brad Garmon, Michigan Environmental Council  
Jim DeClerk, Saginaw Bay Field & Stream  
Bruce Ross, Ross & Contemporaries  
Chauncey, Nancy and Jeremiah Moran, Observers, Upper Peninsula  
Phyllis & Millard Holton, Observers  
Other DNR Management and Staff

### **MICHIGAN STATE PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MSPAC)**

#### **INTRODUCTIONS**

Commissioner Klarr called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

Commissioner Klarr then took roll call, made introductions around the room and asked if there were any additions or adjustments to the agenda. No adjustments to the agenda were offered.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Commissioner Klarr asked if the committee had any additional edits, changes or discussion regarding the Minutes from the July 9, 2014 meeting that were revised to incorporate public comment, and also asked for approval of the October 9, 2014 Minutes. No additional edits were offered for either set of Minutes.

*Ann Conklin motioned to approve both the July 9 and October 9, 2014 Minutes; Tom Bailey seconded the motion; the motion unanimously carried and the July 9 and October 9, 2014 Minutes were approved and adopted.*

## **OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CENTER**

Vicki Anthes, Planning Section Chief, gave a presentation on the status of the Outdoor Adventure Center in Detroit, showing the exhibits that have been installed to-date and how the facility is starting to take shape. Although the facility has been open for meetings and small groups, a mid-2015 grand opening is planned.

Chief Olson commented that the big vision in 2005, when they first saw the Globe Building, was to create a way to include urban areas in the out-of-doors. Not to drive people indoors but to provide a gateway for people to have those experiences to hopefully launch them into the outdoors. The other symbolic piece is adjacent to the Outdoor Adventure Center where the Governor's Showcase Trail from Belle Isle to Ironwood in the Upper Peninsula begins, or ends depending on how you look at it. All of this falls in line with the Blue Ribbon Report and the goal of linking communities.

Vicki closed by stating there are a lot of visions for the Center; not just to be a showcase place but also a place where educational sessions, meetings and even weddings or family events can be held. Word is already getting out about the Center. Approximately 12 weddings have already been requested for next year and are in the planning, event permitting process.

Commissioner Nichols would like to get more youth involved in the Center and the outdoors. The Natural Resources Commission's Youth Council may be the perfect group to occasionally hold meetings or events at the Center to not only engage other youth, but to also show them how they can get more involved in the future of our natural resources by talking and meeting with members of the Council, other youth that are getting involved.

Amy Trotter commented that they understand funding for the Center did not come in as expected. Chief Olson responded that the economic situation with the City of Detroit had an impact on donors and contributors but they are still working through a fund developer and still making connections. However, some revenues in the park endowment fund may be used towards funding some of the remaining needs at the Center. Also, the increase in Recreation Passport participation in the Metro Detroit areas may also be a source of funding the Center. The business plan for operating the Center is to ultimately make it a self-supporting facility and utilize revenues from entry fees, event fees, etc.

No more comments or discussions were offered regarding the Center. Commissioner Klarr thanked Vicki for her presentation.

## **BRIGHTON RECREATION AREA GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Deb Jensen, Park Management Plan Administrator, gave the committee an overview of the General Management Plan for the Brighton Recreation area. Murdock Jemerson, district supervisor, and Mike Donnelly, park supervisor, were also present to answer questions about the recreation area and the plan.

Discussion ensued regarding the general management plan and future plans for the recreation area. Concerns were raised regarding the loss of 120 acres of hunting land but no members of the public or hunters expressed any concerns. The biggest concern the recreation area deals with right now is illegal access and ORV from the two subdivisions adjacent to the recreation area.

Commissioner Nichols commented that, as we analyze infrastructure needs or improvements, we need to look at what is needed tomorrow and not what we needed yesterday. Need to address future needs and future use.

Amy Trotter agreed but reminded the department that any new land acquisitions or consolidations in conjunction with the planning process should open up these new lands to additional recreational opportunities that may become available through these purchases.

A recommendation was made to take the list of park improvements that are identified through the park planning process, or through other means, and include the cost of those improvements in the list of capital outlay projects and the general management plans themselves.

Mike McDonald also suggested that, as parcels become available or any time we identify a gap, the division should be ready, with a list of land acquisitions or consolidations, to immediately take advantage of any funding opportunities as they become available (i.e. MNRTF).

Tom Bailey further commented that there is a great opportunity for the Parks and Recreation Division to be standing by with a list of land acquisition projects. Any time there is going to be a gap in the amount of money available and the amount of project funding, the Parks and Recreation Division should be ready to stand by and say we can help with the unspent balances. From a policy standpoint, that gap is only getting worse and it is only going to exacerbate the situation. As the unspent balance rises it will continue to give the worse perception that we're not spending enough on development. From a policy standpoint, it would be wise to spend current dollars versus future dollars as the lands become more expensive, and to fill in these priority projects (i.e. showcase trail). Tom would encourage the division to be ready every year to go to the Director as the Trust Fund list is getting filled in and, if there is any gap at all, lay these projects on the table.

Chris Graham, chair of the MSPAC Stewardship Subcommittee, reported that the subcommittee was thoroughly briefed on the plan and the subcommittee fully supported moving the plan forward to the full committee for review and approval.

*Commissioner Klarr asked for a motion on Resolution 12-2014-01 Recommending Approval of the Brighton Recreation Area General Management Plan. Chris Graham motioned to support the Resolution; Tom Bailey seconded the motion; the motion unanimously carried and Resolution 12-2014-01 was approved and adopted.*

## **YOUTH PROGRAM PRESENTATIONS**

### **STEPPING STONES**

Chief Olson introduced Gary Williams, the MSU Extension Educator and Southeast Michigan Urban Natural Resources Outreach Program Coordinator.

Gary came on board in 1999 at the Michigan State Fairgrounds' Pocket Park in Detroit, which was designed to provide outdoor education for urban youth, children and adults. In 2009, the State Fairgrounds was closed and there was a panic as to how they were going to continue these outdoor education programs to the urban youth and families that they served. That's when they came up with the Stepping Stones program in 2010.

The Stepping Stones Program is designed to offer urban youth fun, educational, outdoor experiences in Michigan state parks, provide introductory educational outdoor skills, and build confidence while offering these outdoor experiences in locations close to home. The program started really small, occurring in only 3 to 4 state parks, but has now grown to 10 state parks located in southern Michigan. In 2014 alone, Stepping Stones served 3,796 audiences, 3,178 youth and 618 adults, and included organizations such as The Boys and Girls Clubs in Detroit, Flint and the Bay area, the YMCA in Detroit, Plymouth, Muskegon, and Lansing, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Detroit Public Libraries, West Michigan Hispanic Center, and many more. The programs offered in Stepping Stones include archery, nature exploration, camping 101, fishing, and water studies. The youth and adults complete separate evaluations of all the programs offered. All programs were graded and 90% to 96% of the participants gave the programs an A or B rating, and 92% indicated they want to return to a Michigan state park in the future.

Future goals for the program include providing progressive pathways to offer repeated visits to different park settings, eventually distant destinations to build a comfort level in the great outdoors; offer a secondary level of outdoor experiences requiring additional skills; and offer overnight experiences in Michigan state parks. One of the biggest problems the program faces in advancing these programs and providing them in new locations is the cost of transportation (i.e. buses).

A question was raised as to how the Rec 101 program compares to Gary's program. Chief Olson explained that Gary's programs are more organized and more youth focused, where a group or youth organization will bring the participants to a state park to participate in the day's programs/activities. The Rec 101 programs are more self-motivating and held throughout the state, where individuals can sign up to participate in a program being held at a specific state park.

Tom Bailey commented that one misconception is that there is a huge gap between urban and rural youth, but there really isn't that big of a gap. Even in northern Michigan, there are youth that have never stepped into their backyards (i.e. the woods), have never seen a porcupine, squirrel or went fishing.

The Stepping Stones program runs Monday through Friday, and is currently being held at 10 state park locations. Gary encouraged the audience to send interested groups or organizations his way for the summer programs as he is already starting to fill in the schedule/calendar of events for 2015. Gary also brought attention to the more detailed program report in the committee's meeting packets if they are interested in seeing how diverse the participants are in his programs.

The committee applauded Gary for his efforts, thanked him for his presentation and for what he is doing to further educate and encourage the youth of this state.

### STATE PARK INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

Chief Olson then introduced Jon Spieles, the Department's Education Services Field Manager, who has managed the DNR state park interpretive and explorer programs around the state for the past 25 years. Jon reported there are ten full-time interpreters around the state. They manage interpretive programs in 8 state parks and 2 fish hatcheries. They also help manage the Explorer Program where they employ seasonal interpreters at 45 state park sites around the state.

The programs focus on park interpretation, recreational programming, recruitment and retention and other agency or statewide goals. In 2014, the park interpretive program offered 4,500 programs with 111,000 participants, and had over 300,000 visitors at the interpretive centers. The explorer program in 2014 offered 3,500 programs with 56,000 participants. They also offered 150 outreach programs with 8,350 participants and made 100,000 informal or roving contacts (i.e. campers, park visitors, hikers).

Some of the programs offered include Arrows Away where they not only teach archery but teach people how to teach archery. They held archery programs in 9 of the 10 interpretive sites this past year. Another program offered is Hook, Line and Sinker, which is an introductory fishing program, offered at the 10 interpretive sites. Salmon in the Classroom and Project Wild are set up in classrooms and teach teachers how to educate their class on wildlife habitats and life cycles. Other outdoor programs offered include snowshoeing, geocaching, hiking, and so on. While people are engaging in these outdoor activities, the park interpreters also take advantage of educating participants on identifying various species of animals, trees, invasive or threatened and endangered species, or explaining wildlife habitat such as wolves and wolf management, or other state programs such as timbering, oil and gas extraction, and so on.

The committee thanked Jon for his presentation and applauded the department and department staff for the time and effort they put into bringing these programs to youth and adults in Michigan state parks around the state.

### SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Chief Olson then gave an introduction to the Summer Youth Employment Program. This program was initiated by Governor Rick Snyder in 2010. Legislation required the program to specialize in education and employment of at-risk, urban youth, covering the areas of Flint, Saginaw, Pontiac and Detroit. The program is for 16 to 19 year olds, and includes program partners from the Civil Service Commission, the Quality of Life Human Resources, and others. The department is in their third summer of this program. He then introduced Murdock Jemerson, the Parks and Recreation Division's Rose Lake District supervisor, who manages this program for the state.

Murdock gave a presentation on the Summer Youth Employment Program that impacts hundreds of youth in the State of Michigan, and mentioned the department has been involved in workforce development since 1933, beginning with the Michigan Civilian Conservation Corps. The program was funded for the first two summers; \$2 million the first summer, and \$3 million for the second summer. The first summer, the program included 13 agencies recommended by

the Mayors or emergency managers of those cities. The second summer included some of the original 13 agencies, but increased to 15 agencies. The program teaches youth workforce skills by putting them on work projects in state parks or in the communities. Through this program, the youth learn skills by participating in park or community projects. They learn skills such as refurbishing and repainting facilities, putting up fences, landscaping or cleaning up parks, concrete laying, cleaning trash out of the parks or rivers, and many more. At the same time, they also learn about environmental issues and how to protect the natural resources. The program also offers workshops to educate the participants on job skills, how to write resumes, how to interview for a job, how to look for state jobs and how to navigate the state hiring website.

Murdock mentioned there were two groups and their students that traveled to Lansing to talk about the program and their experiences, so he would like to give them the opportunity to address the audience.

He first introduced Rhetta Hunyady, Vice President of Education and Training for the Flint-Genesee Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Hunyady commented that, for the Flint/Genesee area, they are very fortunate to be able to participate in this program and have this opportunity for the past two years. Her organization offers soft skills employment training, coupled with opportunities such as the Summer Youth Employment Program. She then introduced two of her students that were involved in the Summer Youth Employment Program. Each gave a brief overview of their experiences in the program and the skills they learned, which then led to employment opportunities. Ashley Johnson learned landscaping skills, cleaned up a lot of parks and riverbanks, and helped set up downtown community events. She ended up getting a job with TeamQuest. Randy Howell also got a job with TeamQuest, learned landscaping skills, worked with pre-K kids doing lots of activities, and worked with senior citizen organizations to help seniors mow lawns, etc.

Murdock then introduced Dr. Grenae Dudley, President and CEO of The Youth Connection. Dr. Dudley showed a video that chronicled student's experiences and the skills they learned through the Summer Youth Employment Program. Dr. Dudley then reported that their program hit about 30 different sites across the City of Detroit, with over 120 summer students. Some of the challenges that they are having now is they are getting a number of homeless youth coming into the program but they are really benefiting from the program. The other side is that a lot of the kids that come into the program are becoming gainfully employed or their summer employments were extended. Due to the lack of time, she would like to introduce Dominic McCormick, one of their successes, to give his story about his experiences.

Dominic is 18 years old and just graduated from high school. He grew up with a single mother and no father figure. She struggled to make ends meet and do the best she could, but he is very grateful for her guidance and support. Dominic was involved in the ROTC while he was in high school. He became the highest ranking cadet, Lt. Colonel, in command of 402 cadets. He was also a three-peat in baseball, has the ring to prove it, and was honored at Comerica Park in Detroit. Once he graduated, he didn't know what to do but he couldn't see himself sitting around the house while his mother was working 18 hours a day to make ends meet. He had a friend that introduced him to The Youth Connection as a way to keep him busy during the day. His very first job on Belle Isle was trimming shrubs, pruning, and other landscaping skills, and cleaning up the Conservancy on the island. An elderly lady approached him and told him she had been coming to the park for years and this is the best she has ever seen the island. What he took away from that conversation was how important his work meant to others. The next project that came to the island was a construction job. He picked up some tools and asked

someone to teach him what to do to help, so they did. Long story short, the supervisor of the construction company had been watching him and realized he had a strong work ethic and willingness to work hard and learn. After only two days, he was called down to the construction company, they asked him to fill out an application and they hired him on the spot. After only two months with the company, he is making \$17 and is the youngest person to be employed by that company.

Dr. Dudley thanked the committee for allowing them the time to talk about their experiences and successes. Dominic is one of their biggest success stories and, along with him, two of their homeless students also found full-time employment.

Chief Olson commented that this program is building the groundwork for employing our future generations in hopes of having more success stories like Dominic's. The department has also hired a couple of students that worked under the program. The vision is to also connect some of these kids to colleges or universities or other employment programs. Hopefully, in 3 to 5 years, maybe some of these students will come back to work for the DNR.

There is funding for next summer but the funds are diminishing. The plan is to collaborate and partner with other agencies on how to grow and fund the program into the future.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION UPDATES**

Due to the lack of time, Chief Olson reminded the committee that most of the materials for the topics listed under Parks and Recreation Updates is contained in their meeting packets. We can present them at the next meeting or touch on them if there are any questions or if the committee would like further discussion on any of the topics listed.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Tom Bailey asked for a new business item to be placed on the agenda but, due to lack of time, will just touch on the issue in hopes of discussing it in more detail at a future meeting.

Representative LaFontaine recently introduced legislation to amend the constitution and change the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and the State Park Endowment Fund, both of which are of great concern for this committee and our programs. There has been talk about some, possibly, necessary changes to those programs. However, there were concerns alluded to earlier today that we have not had enough proposals to expend all the funds that have been available for acquisition, yet there is exceeding demand for development, so perhaps a rebalancing is in order. This bill attempts to address that; however, there are great concerns about how they intend to go about it.

As a reminder, both funds were established from non-renewable sources to be used for non-renewable or capital resources. On the development side, this may be acceptable as long as it's for capital and does not get into maintenance or operations. Unfortunately, the fear is the attempt to divert revenue from capital expenditures to operations to alleviate budget loads. This issue goes beyond this committee to everyone in this state who has an interest in recreation and conservation preservation. Tom feels this committee has an important role to play in advising the department on these issues and concerns. Obviously, this is not going to get done during lame duck this year, but it should be at the forefront of this committee's discussions next year. This is the future of our grandkids and, as we heard today, some of the most important things we are doing is not for our forefathers but for our future generations. We have to give

them a chance, not only a chance at jobs but also a chance to inherit the resources we have so they can make the choices, so they can make the decisions. If we are going to burn up all of the oil and natural gas or other non-renewable resources, then we better make sure some of those monies are passed on to them and not squandered.

Chief Olson responded that it will not be taken up during the lame duck session, but it is an important topic to address during our meetings in the upcoming year.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Commissioner Richardson commended all of the youth programs that were presented today, and applauded Dominic and the other young students that appeared before the committee to share their experiences. To hear and witness what a positive influence these types of programs are having on our youth is a beautiful thing. He also agrees with Tom Bailey's comments about preserving our natural resources and funding sources for our youth. This is a very important discussion that needs to take place.

Dr. Dudley closed by commenting that The Youth Connection and the Summer Youth Employment Program also partnered with the National Park Service this year. They took 800 youth down the river and didn't lose one of them.

*Ann Conklin made a motion to adjourn; Julie Clark seconded the motion and the committee adjourned at 12:06 p.m.*