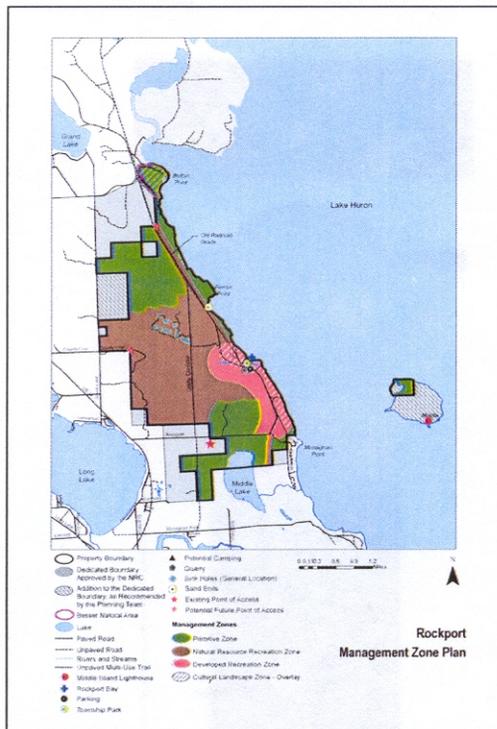


September 2008

# General Management Plan

Long-range management guidance focused on the specific natural resources, historic-cultural resources, recreation opportunities and the education-interpretation opportunities of...

## The Rockport Property



This project was funded, in part, by the Michigan Coastal Management Program, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration U.S. Department of Commerce

The project was directed by Paul N. Curtis, Management Plan Administrator Michigan Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Division with assistance from Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc.



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# PREFACE

Northeast Michigan is home to three properties owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR): Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property, and Thompson's Harbor State Park (see figure below). Together, the sites encompass over 13,000 acres of land and 22 miles of Lake Huron shoreline. Each has significant natural resource value, while exhibiting its own special features as well as many unifying characteristics.



The three sites also have their own unique history. Negwegon was purchased in 1962, and underwent master plan studies in 1970, 1973 and 1989. Negwegon has been managed by the Parks and Recreation Division (PRD). A large portion of the Rockport Property was acquired in 1997, through a settlement with Consumer's Energy. Management of Rockport has been the responsibility of Forest, Minerals and Fire Management Division (FMFMD). Thompson's Harbor State Park was purchased in 1988 from US Steel, and underwent a master plan study that same year. Thompson's Harbor has also been managed by the PRD. Over the years and with each planning effort, there have been opportunities to obtain comments from the public regarding the management and uses of the three properties.

The PRD began a Phase I General Management Plan (GMP) process and Regional Assessment for Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson's Harbor in 2006. This planning effort was made possible with the assistance of a Coastal Zone Management Grant awarded through the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program of the Department of Environmental Quality. This is a Federal grant available through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, US Department of Commerce. Individual Phase I GMPs were prepared for each

site. The GMPs were developed according to a coordinated strategy. This was a logical approach given the location of the three sites in northeast Michigan, and the relative proximity to one another. The GMP development process involved extensive input from the Planning Team, as well as a public outreach program to obtain stakeholder and public comments.

The concept upon which all three GMPs are based would designate Rockport as the central gathering place for visitors. Rockport is the one site that has a developed area already, and it is located between Negwegon and Thompson's Harbor. There is the potential for an interpretive center, or a similar structure, that would serve as a gateway to all three sites. Brochures, maps and other materials would be available at this station. The information would equip visitors with an understanding of the educational, historical, cultural and recreational opportunities at each site. Eco-tourism businesses could also be advertised and/or based at this location.

Creating a developed area at Rockport will alleviate the need to provide similar areas at Negwegon and Thompson's Harbor. This allows for these two parks to remain in a primarily undeveloped, natural state, and accommodate low-intensity uses. Should this unifying concept for the three sites be abandoned, then the Planning Team recommends that the General Management Plan for Thompson's Harbor be revised to provide for a developable area within the park (this is explored in greater detail in the General Management Plan for Thompson's Harbor).

A key outcome of the GMP strategy for the three sites is to transfer management of the Rockport Property from FMFMD to PRD. Implementation of the unifying GMP concept would be facilitated by the management of all sites under one DNR Division. Reflective of actions by the Planning Team and the NRTM Advisory Committee, the recommendation is for the transfer to occur. The following are key differences between FMFMD and PRD regarding specific uses that are of interest to current users of the Rockport property:

### **FMFMD vs. PRD Administration of Rockport**

The following overview focuses on land uses at Rockport including: entry, camping, target shooting, ORV, equestrian, and fossil collecting. It is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all of the administrative differences between the two programs. A narrative discussion of program differences follows each use:

#### **Entry**

FMFMD – no entrance fees are assessed.

PRD - The Director has the authority to designate, by Land Use Order, units or portions of units where a 'Motor Vehicle Permit' (MVP) is required for entry. (MVP

fees for State Park and Recreation Areas are set by the Legislature). Once improvements can be made, vehicle access into Rockport would be subject to the MVP.

Discussion – To protect the resources from damage, FMFMD has blocked off all vehicle access into the property, and will continue that policy into the foreseeable future. The PRD Management Plan for Rockport recommends improving access from the south at the quarry where, within the Developed Recreation Zone, improvements could be made for visitor services. The plan calls for adding additional points of access from County Line Road, at about the midpoint of the property, and from the north at the Besser Natural Area. These would be in the form of defined parking areas, with access to trails. An MVP would be required for vehicle entry into Rockport under PRD at such time as vehicle entry is developed.

### **Camping**

FMFMD – Dispersed camping is allowed on state forest land unless specifically prohibited by Director's Order or within one-mile of a designated campground. It requires the posting of a "Camp Permit" on-site. The free permit form for dispersed camping is available at FMFMD area offices.

Designated FMFMD campgrounds are operated on a permit/fee basis that varies in cost based on type of campground (camper, equestrian, or ORV).

PRD – PRD does not allow 'Dispersed' camping (defined as setting up camp wherever you desire), but does allow 'Backpack Primitive' camping in designated locations. These serve to provide "walk-in" or "canoe/kayak-in" camping in aesthetic locations that are appropriate for this use. In any one area, no more than five single camps can be so designated.

PRD has expanded camping options compared to FMFMD, including Backpack Primitive, Rustic, Semi-modern, Modern, and Equestrian. PRD also has alternative overnight accommodation options including camper cabins, yurts, and lodges.

Discussion – Under PRD administration, the Management Plan for Rockport would allow for 'Backpack Primitive' camping in the Natural Resource Recreation Zone (2,040 acres = 49% of the park) and the Primitive Zone (1,645 acres = 39% of the park), all at carefully selected locations. The Developed Recreation Zone (560 acres = 12% of the park) allows for all other types of PRD overnight accommodations.

Additionally, PRD has identified Rockport as the hub of the NRTH parks, the place where it makes the most sense to develop camping and other visitor service improvements that would benefit visitors for all three locations. It is here that efforts should be made to provide a campground in the Developed Recreation Zone. It would also compliment the boat launch use, particularly to serve recreational divers and the fishing public.

## **Target Shooting**

FMFMD – Target shooting is allowed on state forest land, provided that it is conducted in a safe location (proper backdrop), with appropriate designated target material, safe lines of site and conduct, and appropriate clean-up of target materials, shell cases, and any debris after the shoot.

PRD - Target shooting is only allowed on designated shooting ranges, under the guidance of “Shooting Range Officers” to ensure public safety.

Discussion - The extent of target shooting use at Rockport is thought to be relatively minor, but the opportunity provided in the quarry is fairly unique for this type of activity. It may be of some debate whether or not a rock quarry meets the standard of a “proper backdrop” given the opportunity for ricochet of bullets off of rock.

In Phase 2 planning (long-range action plans) for Rockport, a formal target shooting range could be addressed as one of the recreation opportunities for the Developed Recreation Zone. Under PRD administration, this is the only option for allowing shooting range use (long-range or otherwise). With the focus of the Developed Recreation Zone to attract more people and uses, this type of controlled use is most appropriate.

## **ORV Use**

FMFMD – In the Southern Peninsula, ORV use on State Forest Lands is allowed only on designated ORV Trails or Areas. Rockport has neither of these and ORV use is not allowed on the property. Current ORV use at Rockport is illegal.

PRD – ORV’s that meet the Motor Vehicle Code (licensed for the road) can legally operate on designated park roads and parking areas. Recreational ORV use (non-registered for road use) is only allowed on a permit basis at Silver Lake State Park ORV Area and for those who are mobility impaired and require this form of conveyance to access a park (PRD Policy 8.11). Like FMFMD, no recreational ORV use would be allowed at Rockport.

Discussion – None of the planning recommendations identified ORV use as a compatible activity within Rockport.

## **Equestrian Use**

FMFMD – Equestrian use on State Forest lands is allowed unless specifically prohibited by Land Use Rule and posted as such. Rockport has not been posted against equestrian use and therefore it is currently allowed there.

PRD – Equestrian use on PRD lands is allowed only on designated trails.

Discussion – There were several public comments of interest in seeing equestrian use at Rockport. The proposed management zone plan designations would allow such use on over 50% of the park. Phase 2 planning would determine any recommendations for establishing equestrian trails under PRD administration.

### **Fossil collecting**

FMFMD – ‘Unauthorized’ removal of minerals is prohibited by law. This implies that through permission of FMFMD, some form of authorized removal of fossils for fossil collectors could be established.

PRD – (from Policy 1.8) “Approval decisions to remove/move large or small quantities of non-metallic minerals shall be consistent with the approved general management plan for the park or recreation area. In every instance assurance must be made to not violate statutorily protected resources.”

Discussion – The PRD policy statement is more direct to the point in terms of the Management Plan recommendations for Rockport. These recommendations support geology education, exploration, and fossil collecting as an important recreational and educational use of the park.

### **Plan Recommendations**

The Planning Team reached a consensus on a recommendation in support of an administrative transfer of Rockport. The recommendation was also supported in a motion by the NRTH Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee would assist the DNR as an advocate for the property transfer. The Planning Team and the NRTH Advisory Committee recommended that this occur over a phased timetable to give the PRD time to establish a Land Use Order of the Director, ensuring that current uses at Rockport would continue to be allowed, “as appropriate.”

“...current uses...as appropriate” are the key words in consideration of this recommendation. In its review and recommendation for approval of this Management Plan, PRD and FMFMD Management agrees with the Planning Team and the NRTH Advisory Committee that the most effective administration of the Rockport property lies with PRD. As the planning input has been gathered and incorporated into these (GMP) recommended future conditions of Rockport, the purpose and significance of the property is one clearly focused most on resource protection, recreation, education, and interpretation, all key and primary goals of PRD administration.

The recommendation regarding establishment of Land Use Orders “as appropriate” to allow FMFMD policies on use to continue under PRD is not supported by the Department. Except for target shooting, the primary land uses outlined above are reasonably accommodated under PRD management. While

not free, entry and camping opportunities will be improved under PRD, equestrian use can occur on over 50% of the park (non-wetlands) on designated trails, recreational ORV use is illegal under both PRD and FMFMD and would not be allowed, and fossil collecting is clearly addressed more positively by PRD policy.

Specific consideration of a shooting range would be made in the Phase 2 planning for Rockport. In this Phase 1 Plan, this could be a future use within the Developed Recreation Zone under PRD administration. The Department has real concerns with the idea of unregulated shooting in an area being promoted for more and varied public use and activity.

Based on the above, and reflective of the opportunity to improve overall Department efficiencies, it is the recommendation of this plan that the transfer of Rockport administration from FMFMD to PRD be made as soon as possible. This will allow for implementation of the regional management benefits of managing and marketing Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson's Harbor under one DNR program.

The Regional Assessment uses the GMP results to evaluate the merits of managing and/or marketing the three properties as a "unit". The assessment presents the significance of each property, in terms of natural resource value, historic and cultural resources, and educational and recreational opportunities. Specific features are logged as to their presence, and their local, state and regional significance. Future marketing efforts should be greatly enhanced by the classification of significant features.

Managing the sites as a unit is supported by the Regional Assessment. The recommendation for identifying Rockport as the central hub for the three sites is consistent with this finding. There are challenges associated with unit management. Distance between the management unit and the facility (none of the sites have permanent staff at this time) and physical distance (miles) between the sites makes staffing the parks difficult and daily visits by all personnel impractical. Certainly managing the units under one Division of the DNR is recommended. The GMP recommendation for management of Rockport to be transferred to PRD is appropriate given the proposed management plans.

There is great potential for marketing the sites as a unit. Their shared role in regional networks facilitates this, as does the plan to centralize 'first contact' activity at Rockport. The Regional Assessment explores the many potential partnerships, and opportunities for eco-friendly businesses to create linkages between park use and stewardship.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rockport is a 4,237-acre State-owned property on Lake Huron, located in Alpena and Presque Isle Counties. The Phase I General Management Plan (GMP) process for the Rockport Property was made possible, in part, by funding provided by the Michigan Coastal Management Program, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration U.S. Department of Commerce. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) oversaw the planning process. The endeavor represents a new planning philosophy of the PRD. "Management Planning," a comprehensive, resource-based process, is the PRD's adaptation of National Park Service planning methodology. Rockport is under the jurisdiction of Forest, Minerals and Fire Management Division (FMFMD) at the time of this planning process, such that the GMP focuses on the four principles of the PRD Mission Statement and the mission statement of the FMFMD. Accordingly, a thorough inventory was performed on Rockport's (1) natural resources, to establish its (2) historic/cultural resources, identify the (3) recreational opportunities and develop the (4) educational and interpretation opportunities.

With this base of knowledge and input of the Planning Team (made up of DNR Department staff, government officials, stakeholders and the public), the Core Values for Rockport were developed. Rockport was determined to be significant for the following reasons:

1. Uniqueness among exposed limestone formations in that the entire thickness of the rock formation is exposed at the surface.
2. Significant cultural and historic resources: Native American influences; the limestone quarry and deep water port that played an active role in Michigan's mining history and the location of the construction of the Mackinac Bridge caissons; settlement remnants from the once-active mining operation; fossils within the quarry; and, the quarry's demonstration of a limestone formation.
3. The deep water port is unique to the northeast shoreline, and is a major attraction for visitors and those seeking deep water access for launching boats.
4. Provision of boat access to Lake Huron for the public and the Chippewa tribe fishing fleet.

5. It is located within the Lake Huron Flyway (State and Federal agencies use the bird census data from this area as a litmus test of the health of Lake Huron and the shoreline environment).
6. Several historic shipwrecks lie in and around Rockport (the schooner PORTLAND at Bolton Point, and the steamer PORTSMOUTH at Middle Island, all popular and accessible dive and snorkel sites).
7. Sinkholes, karst features, and dramatic land forms are found in Rockport, which are educational and of interest to geologists, botanists, and recreational divers.
8. Unique natural features, such as old growth white pines, and cobble beach, and the prevalence of fens, which tend to be located in the northern portion of the property.
9. Shoreline and access to Lake Huron is an exceptionally valuable resource in terms of commercial fisheries.
10. Proximity and relationship to the Besser Natural Area that contains a sandy beach, rare along the typically cobbled Lake Huron shoreline, and sensitive natural features.
11. Prevalence of wildflowers, and species of special concern, threatened species and endangered species, such as Houghton's goldenrod, Dwarf lake iris and Pitcher's thistle.
12. Inclusion of land on Middle Island.
13. It is part of several regional networks.

In concert with this analysis of Rockport's identity and significance, the Planning Team, with stakeholder and public input, established appropriate Management Zones and their extent of influence on the property. From a pallet of nine standard zones, four were applied to Rockport. The Management Zone Plan is found on the cover as well as in Section 3.0 of this Plan. A thorough review of each Management Zone is presented on pages 22 through 36. A condensed review of the Management Zones is as follows:

- ❑ Primitive Zone reflects a desired condition that emphasizes the natural resources. It is managed to only allow dispersed and low frequency use for low impact recreational purposes. The Primitive Zone includes approximately 1,645 acres, or 39%, of Rockport land. The zone covers: Land that contains sensitive wetland areas, and sensitive or undisturbed forested land; the northern and southern portions of Rockport; the Besser Natural Area; and, land on Middle Island.
- ❑ Natural Resource Recreation Zone permits active recreation with moderate to high density of use conducted in a natural setting. At 49%, or 2,040 acre, the Natural Resource Recreation (NRR) Zone comprises the greatest amount of Rockport land area. The designation was applied due to the resources contained within the land, and the potential uses for these resources. Access for exploration of the sinkholes, the potential for designated rustic camping, as well as higher-intensity uses of the trails is also facilitated by the NRR designation.
- ❑ Developed Recreation Zone provides for active recreation with high density of use conducted in areas not designated for natural resource significance. Approximately 560 acres, or 13%, of Rockport is zoned Developed Recreation. Land in this zone contains largely that which is currently disturbed, including the quarry and port. The port is shared with many users, including the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the Chippewa Tribe. In a regional context, Rockport is the central hub where development can be encouraged while Negwegon State Park and Thompson's Harbor State Park retain their undeveloped, natural status.
- ❑ Cultural Landscape Zone addresses the overall setting in which is found not only historic structures, but also non-structural evidence of the traditions, beliefs, practices, lifeways, arts, crafts and social institutions of any community. Approximately 288 acres, or 6.8%, of Rockport is covered by the overlay, which applies to the eastern coastline of the Developed Recreation Zone and the Besser Natural Area. During the limestone quarry's operation, approximately 1927 to 1958, the land in this zone was occupied by settlement formed by quarry workers and their families. Remnants of this once vibrant community can be found there today.

In addition, to the Management Zones, the GMP recommends that other aspects of the property be considered:

- ❑ Regional Consideration. As described in the Preface of this document, the planning for the Rockport Property was performed in conjunction with the planning for Thompson's Harbor State Park and Negwegon State Park. The planning effort, supported by a consensus of the Planning Team, resulted in the following concept: Rockport would be established as the

central “hub” of the three sites, allowing Negwegon and Thompson’s Harbor to remain in a relatively undisturbed, natural state.

- ❑ Access and Parking. Current access to the Rockport Property is by Rockport Road, from US-23. This Plan considers two additional points of entry, both would include small parking areas: County Line Road (a central point of access that could facilitate easier access to the sink holes); and access from the north (adjacent to the Besser Natural Area).
- ❑ Signage. Appropriate signage is needed to inform the public of Rockport’s location. Interpretive, directional and education signage within Rockport, Negwegon and Thompson’s Harbor will be developed under Phase 2.
- ❑ Camping. The highly modified quarry area, in general, may offer opportunities for more extensive development with low resource impacts. The quarry also offers other recreational opportunities and any camping development would be respectful of other uses. Designated rustic camping has potential in the Natural Resource Recreation zone.
- ❑ Future Purchases. Part of the DNR’s mission is to acquire lands with unique natural, cultural and historic resources for the purposes of public recreation and education. The Natural Resources Commission approved a dedicated boundary for Rockport in 2004. The Planning Team’s recommendation for expanding the project boundary is included in this GMP (see Section 2.5). The recommendation includes acquiring additional frontage along East Grand Lake Road, and all remaining ownership of Middle Island. Land within the dedicated boundary would be a priority purchase for the DNR, should the opportunity to purchase and funding become available. Major land purchases would prompt an amendment to this GMP.

General Management Plans develop as a result of a series of planning steps. Each step builds upon the previous, and action decisions focus on the mission of the Parks and Recreation Division (PRD), and the specific Purpose and Significance of the park. This Phase I GMP is the first of four phases of planning. This document provides the direction necessary to complete the next step, a Phase 2 GMP, which will identify goals to be obtained over the next ten years.