

2008-12 Michigan State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: Executive Summary

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Introduction

Public Law 88-578 established the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in 1964. The law created a federal funding source for both federal acquisition of park and recreation lands and matching grants to states, and through states to local governments, for outdoor recreation planning, land acquisition and development. It also set requirements for state outdoor recreation planning, requiring each participating state to have a state comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP). The state administrator in Michigan for LWCF monies and the SCORP is the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The SCORP addresses:

- the supply of Michigan outdoor recreation resources (local, state and federal)
- the demand/need for outdoor recreation
- existing initiatives to include under the SCORP
- 2008-12 directions/initiatives to meet demand including a wetlands conservation priority
- implementation program

The new SCORP (2008-12) updates and replaces the most recent Michigan SCORP (2003-07). During the period 2003 - 2006, Michigan has received \$12.6 million in LWCF appropriations from the federal government. The state has allocated 56% of these funds to local units and 44% to the state. All LWCF monies were spent on the development of outdoor recreation facilities.

Supply of Outdoor Recreation Resources

Local Resources

A review of the 773 local unit outdoor recreation plans on file with the DNR as of 7/1/07 found that 467 of the plans were currently in-force and 309 had expired. Across all these plans, which include cities, townships, counties, regional recreation entities, villages and a couple school districts, there were 5,289 local parks that encompassed 213,962 acres. These outdoor recreation areas range from small neighborhood venues in cities, villages and townships to major county and regional parks and school forests that encompass thousands of acres. While these parks occupy less than 1% of Michigan's land area, they provide critical recreational opportunities close to

population concentrations that range from land and water trails, outdoor team and individual sport fields and courts, access to surface waters, nature centers and accompanying interpretive programs and just the opportunity to relax and enjoy the outdoors alone or with friends or family. They also provide vital green space that improves air quality, buffers against temperature extremes and enlivens the developed landscape.

State Resources

The state of Michigan has more than 4.5 million acres of state-owned land for public outdoor recreation. This is approximately 12% of Michigan's land area. The majority, the 3.9 million-acre state forest system, is a working forest system of six state forests across the northern 2/3 of Michigan. It provides multiple benefits including wood, environmental quality and fish and wildlife habitat as well as a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities. These opportunities focus on rustic recreation with limited facilities as well as dispersed recreation which is not facility dependent. Activities include hunting, fishing, camping, motorized and non-motorized trail activities, picking wild edibles and nature observation. There are 138 state forest campgrounds (including a dozen equestrian campgrounds) and over 880 miles of non-motorized pathways, with all open to hiking and cross-country skiing and most open to mountain biking. In addition, a major portion of the pathway system is designed with equestrians in mind with the Shore-to-Shore Riding-Hiking trail from Oscoda to Empire that traverses state and federal land as well as some utility corridors.

Michigan's trail programs are also housed in the DNR. While some, such as off-road vehicle (ORV) trails are primarily sited on state forest land, others, such as the snowmobile trails, rely on a combination of leases with willing private owners and cooperation among governmental land managers. Key trail systems include the 6,216-mile snowmobile trail system, the 3,193-mile ORV trail/route system and the 1,145 miles of rail-trails.

Michigan's state park and recreation system has 98 properties covering almost 300,000 acres. Of these, 80 are state parks and 18 are state recreation areas. These range from the 55,000-acre Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park to the smaller venues located on a single lake or encompassing a historic site. State recreation areas differ from state parks in that they are more likely to be open to hunting and provide a wider range of recreation opportunities with less development. The state park and recreation area system provides camping in 70 properties with over 12,000 modern campsites. In addition, other forms of lodging include camper cabins, lodges, tepees and the newest, yurts. There are more than 880 miles of non-motorized trails, all of which serve hikers and cross-country skiers and many of which serve mountain bikers and equestrians. The state park and recreation area system is found across the state, as you are never more than an hour from a unit of the Michigan state park system.

Another part of the state park system is operated outside the DNR by the Department of History, Arts and Libraries. The Mackinac Island State Park Commission operates three major historic/natural resource based parks in the Straits area. Mackinac Island was the nation's (and the world's) second national park, established in 1875. In 1895, it was turned over to Michigan by the US military to be the first Michigan state park.

Michigan state game and wildlife areas encompass more than 340,000 acres and are found primarily in the southern third of the state, where 85% of Michigan's population resides. These areas are managed to provide optimal wildlife habitat and wildlife oriented outdoor recreation opportunity. Outdoor recreation facilities are rustic and facilitate wildlife oriented recreation.

Michigan has 1,024 boating access sites across the state. Of those, 278 are operated through a state grant-in-aid program by local units of government. There are also 80 harbors of refuge on the Great Lakes which provide a safe harbor approximately every 30 miles of Great Lakes coastline. Of these, 16 are operated by the state and the rest by local units through a state grant-in-aid program. All total these access sites and harbors encompass 57,000 acres.

Finally, under Michigan's Great Lakes there are 11 Michigan underwater preserves that encompass 2,450 square miles of Great Lakes bottomland. The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary in Lake Huron near Alpena is the only federal marine sanctuary on the Great Lakes. Within all these areas there are 150 known shipwrecks and another 300 waiting to be located.

Federal Resources

There are slightly more than three million federal acres in Michigan, comprising 8% of Michigan's land area. The four national forests (Huron, Manistee, Hiawatha and Ottawa) make up 2.7 million acres and are similar to Michigan state forests in providing for multiple use and benefits including wood, outdoor recreation, fish and wildlife habitat and environmental quality. There are six National Park Service areas, including Isle Royale National Park in Lake Superior, Pictured Rocks and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lake Shores and Keweenaw National Historic Park. There are also three major national wildlife refuges: Seney, Shiawassee and the newest, the Detroit River International Refuge.

Demand for Outdoor Recreation

Demographic and Economic Factors

Michigan's population grew 6.9% to 9,938,444 from 1990 to 2000. Since then, the rate of growth has leveled off according to interim projections by the US Bureau of the Census prior to the full 2010 census. Michigan's population is aging, with the fastest growing age segments in their late 40s and 50s, as well as those 75 and above. From 1990 to 2000, the age group that declined in proportion of the population the most was those 25-34. Michigan's population is also becoming more diverse, with 80% identifying themselves as white, 14% as Black or African American and 6% as other races in the 2000 census. Between 1990 and 2000, the proportion of the population who identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (of any race) grew by 60%. Michigan's population is spreading out from major urban centers and is also retiring to portions of northern lower Michigan. Livingston County was the fastest growing county from 1990-2000, with a 36% increase in population. Nine counties in the northern lower peninsula had population growth rates of 25% or greater. It has been estimated that the rate of land development is eight times the rate of population growth in Michigan from 1978 to 2000. This sprawl has negatively impacted opportunities for trails, hunting and other outdoor recreation activities in Michigan.

Michigan's travel industry is an important part of the state's economy. It is estimated that in 2004 travelers in Michigan expended \$17.5 billion and that 72% of travel was for leisure/tourism purposes, much of it focused on outdoor recreation. This supported about 210,000 jobs.

Unfortunately in the same year Michiganians spent \$20.3 billion outside the state on travel, providing an annual financial travel deficit of \$2.8 billion. While Michigan greatly benefits from the Great Lakes as attracting visitors to Michigan, the lakes are also a significant deterrent to "pass-through" tourism which many of our neighboring states enjoy. There is an important need to improve Michigan's status as a tourism/outdoor recreation destination for Michiganians and visitors to create a positive balance of trade in regards to Michigan's travel industry.

Michigan Voters

A mail survey of 2,001 randomly selected registered Michigan voters was conducted in late summer 2007 concerning their Michigan outdoor recreation activities and preferences for the

coming five years. After invalid addresses were removed, 460 (26%) responded. The respondents were generally representative of the Michigan population as portrayed in the 2000 census. More than half (51%) cited outdoor recreation as very important to their households, while 35% reported it moderately important and the remaining 14% reported it as slightly important or unimportant. More than half the responding households reported that one or more members walked outdoors, relaxed outdoors, picnicked, bicycled, did sightseeing, drove for pleasure, swam outdoors and fished in the past year. When asked about the three most important activities to their household, walking outdoors, relaxing outdoors, fishing, hunting and camping were the five most commonly cited. In the past year, 75% of respondent households had one or more members that visited a public outdoor recreation venue, with 60% noting a visit to a state property, 53% to a local park and 23% to federal lands. Of those who had one or more visits, 38% said they had more than 10 outdoor recreation visits to public lands in the past year.

Voter respondents were highly supportive of the seven initiatives in the 2003-07 SCORP. Those initiatives are:

- Conservation of natural resources
- Trails (land and water based)
- Universal access
- Community recreation
- Improve state park infrastructure
- Improve state forest recreation infrastructure
- Cooperation and coordination among recreation providers

The strongest support was for conservation of natural resources (93%). All seven initiatives were supported by at least 74% of respondents. When asked about additional capital initiatives they would support, only 37% offered any additional suggestions and most of those were to reiterate support for trails and conservation.

Seventy percent of voter respondents reported they were satisfied with the amount of outdoor recreation resources. However, only 42% were satisfied with the quality of those resources, citing concerns about the need for improved maintenance, security and environmental quality and concerns about rising fees.

Michigan Local Providers

A mail survey of all 773 administrators of local unit outdoor recreation providers with a current or recent outdoor recreation plan Michigan was conducted in late summer 2007. It focused on their priorities for the next five years and their preferences for SCORP initiatives. A total of 250 (32%) responded.

They mirrored Michigan voters in strongly supporting all seven priorities from the 2003-07 SCORP with conservation of natural resources receiving the strongest support (96%) and all initiatives being supported by at least 78% of respondents. Only 24% provided any additional suggestions for initiatives, and as with registered voters, most tended to reiterate the seven existing initiatives, especially trails and cooperation/collaboration.

When asked about their most important capital project in the next 5 years for their unit, trails were most often mentioned with an emphasis on non-motorized land trails and water trails. Over the next five years, the responding agencies, which represent a third of those with community recreation plans over the past decade, noted a capital need of \$471 million, with 2/3 of the money focused on development and 1/3 on land acquisition. This need far exceeds the funds available from local units as well as state and federal grant sources available to local Michigan providers.

Of the different types of local units, cities as a whole reported that they were most likely to be reducing park and recreation staff and struggling to maintain or renovate existing infrastructure. Conversely, townships, especially those in the growing suburban areas around major cities as well as some county and regional entities, reported they were most likely to expand park and recreation staff, acquire land and develop new facilities.

Michigan Initiatives

In addition to the input from Michigan voters and providers of local outdoor recreation venues, a number of Michigan level initiatives were reviewed for the SCORP.

Wetlands

Michigan has a substantial effort to both protect existing wetlands through state regulation by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality as well as public and non-profit conservancy acquisition. In addition, there are a host of public and private sector partners that are actively engaged in restoring Michigan wetlands and adjacent uplands. Using state and federal programs as well as privately raised funds, Michigan has made substantial progress in meeting the 1998-2013 wetland and associated upland habitat goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan in Michigan. Those goals are to protect 100,000 acres of existing wetland and associated upland, to restore or create 30,000 acres of wetlands and to restore or create 60,000 acres of wetland associated upland native plant community dominated grasslands. Combining Michigan accomplishments using North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grants (24 to date for Michigan) with the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program, a total 82,116 acres of wetlands and associated uplands have been conserved either through public acquisition or restoration as of the end of 2006. Additional wetlands and associated uplands in fee simple ownership or conservation easements have been purchased or received as a donation by private sector conservation organizations and governmental entities. Additional initiatives in wetlands acquisition and restoration are or soon will be initiated through a range of public/private partnerships involving Ducks Unlimited, the State of Michigan, the Nature Conservancy, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and a host of other private/public partners.

Universal Access

The Michigan DNR received a \$3 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for a universal access initiative entitled “*Access to Recreation*”. It focuses on providing universal access to public park and recreation opportunities across Michigan. Funds are allocated through the DNR Grants Management program to both state and local public entities.

Trails

The DNR and the Michigan Department of Transportation have teamed with many partners to develop “*Michigan Trails at the Crossroads: A Vision for Connecting Michigan*”. A companion initiative, “*Connecting Michigan – A Statewide Trailways Vision and Action Plan*” was formed through a collaborative effort of many trail related organizations and governmental entities under the umbrella of the Michigan Trails and Greenway Alliance. These trail initiatives tout the economic, health, recreational and transportation benefits of trail systems and the need for connectivity among existing trail segments and entities.

Hunter Recruitment and Retention

DNR Director Humphries identified this as one of the four major priorities of the DNR in her speech to the Michigan Conservation Summit in February 2007. From 1986 – 2005, the number of distinct hunters has declined 14% and the number of distinct anglers 22%. Hunters and anglers are the single greatest source of support for conservation in Michigan, where license/permit sales

combined with federal excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition and fishing equipment provide more than 30% of the DNR's annual operating budget. As general fund support for conservation has declined (in 2006-07 it was less than 9% of the DNR operating budget and half of that was for payments in lieu of taxes to local units of government), the importance of the financial contributions of hunters and anglers to conservation has grown. Based on recommendations from the Hunter Recruitment and Retention Work Group, actions of the subsequent Implementation Work Group and legislative action on statutes lowering the hunting age and beginning an apprentice license program, the number of distinct hunters rose from 2005 – 2006 by more than 25,000. More work is needed and fishing needs to be included as well.

Green Technology

The Parks and Recreation Division, the frontline managers of the Michigan State Park system, instituted a push toward infusing green technology in parks as a way to conserve energy, improve environmental quality and stretch scarce financial resources. This pioneering effort has sparked interest and activity in including green technology in scoring for Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and LWCF grants by DNR Grants Management.

2008-12 SCORP Priorities/Initiatives

Based on the supply of outdoor recreation resources, the demand for additional outdoor recreation opportunity and quality and key existing initiatives, the following are the 2008-12 SCORP priorities/initiatives. The seven initiatives of the 2003-07 SCORP are retained based on the powerful public support, both by registered voters and by local park and recreation providers. In addition, two additional initiatives are added: hunter and angler recruitment and retention and green technology in outdoor recreation provision.

- Conservation of natural resources
 - Including land acquisition for outdoor recreation, wetlands protection and restoration and conservation education
- Trails
 - Including non-motorized and motorized land based trails, water (blue) trails including water access for non-motorized and motorized craft
- Universal access
 - Including development of recreation infrastructure to facilitate universal access
- Community recreation
 - Including outdoor recreation development in support of community initiatives
- State park infrastructure
 - Including infrastructure improvements and renovation to protect environmental quality and benefit visitors
- State forest recreation infrastructure
 - Including infrastructure improvements and renovation to protect environmental quality and benefit visitors
- Cooperation and coordination among providers
 - Including sharing templates for more effective and efficient sharing of information regarding outdoor recreation provision and participation
- Hunter and angler recruitment and retention
 - Including capital improvements coupled with programmatic efforts to introduce and retain anglers and hunters across the range of Michigan's population
- Green technology
 - Including energy saving, environmentally friendly, cost efficient alternatives to past infrastructure construction and maintenance practices

Implementation

The SCORP priorities are implemented by the Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) which will be updated upon approval of the 2008-12 SCORP. In addition, the seven continuing initiatives are already on-going and are reflected in the 2007 Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and LWCF OPSP. Finally, the hunter/angler recruitment and retention initiative already has an active working group and will cooperate in the development of the 2008 OPSP process. Green technology has already begun to be included in the OPSP and will be strengthened when this plan is approved.

Conclusion

Michigan's 2008-12 SCORP builds on the solid foundation Michigan's past record with the LWCF to invest in outdoor recreation in a sustainable manner. It also reflects the DNR's commitment to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the state's natural resources for current and future generations. The full 2008-12 Draft SCORP is available on the DNR Web site at: www.michigan.gov/dnr under "Spotlight."