

Townships fight DNR campground plans

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Outlying townships batted two-for-three in their efforts to block state-funded campgrounds and hiking trails near metropolitan suburbs.

A committee of SEMCOG (Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) gave weak approval to one state Department of Natural Resources' plan for a new campground on Kensington Road in the Island Lake State Recreation Area.

"We lose tax revenue at the same time they generate a need for more services," objected Ron Niece, supervisor of Green Oak Township in Livingston County.

BUT NORTHVILLE Township was more successful in stirring SEMCOG opposition to a camp-

ground in Maybury State Park on Eight Mile Road in western Wayne County.

Finally, Green Oak and Lyon townships persuaded the SEMCOG panel to oppose a state-funded extension of a hiking/horse trail across Livingston and western Oakland counties.

The two areas are heavily used by residents of the western Wayne and Oakland counties' suburbs, according to license plateholder checks. The debate last week revealed a lot of bad blood between DNR and township governments.

THE COMMITTEE is called "RC2" — Regional Clearinghouse Review Committee. It does a review-and-comment on requests for federal and state grants that have a regional impact.

In each case, townships argued that expanded state land holdings would take property off property tax rolls, and that local police and fire forces would be strained by greater public usage of state parks.

"Our recommendations go to the proposing agency," said SEMCOG Executive Director John Amberger, the non-voting chairman of RC2.

"They have to file these (SEMCOG's negative comments) along with their application to the funding agency."

That left open the prospect RC2's

recommendations could be ignored because the funding agency is DNR itself. The three requests total \$1.6 million.

Money source is Michigan's voter-approved Natural Resources Trust Fund. It's the money that comes from oil and gas leases on state land,

mainly the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

"The state owns the land," Amberger told six RC2 members, all local government officials. "They can supersede us, supersede local zoning, and do whatever they want."

RC2 MEMBER Greg Pitonak, a Taylor council member and Wayne County economic development staffer, summed up the townships' and SEMCOG's biggest single complaint against the state:

"It's absolutely obvious DNR would save itself a lot of trouble if it would start by sitting down with local government first."

Green Oak's Niece agreed. "We got our notification of the purchase (of the Island Lake campground acreage) through the press. We're always notified by other people, not DNR."

In the Island Lake campground case, RC2 gave approval only on the condition that DNR work with the

township on long-range planning.

But one RC2 member, Jack Morris, a township supervisor from Washtenaw County, shook his head and said, "I'm pessimistic anything will be worked out."

IN EACH CASE, townships' objections were similar:

• Expanded state land holdings would take property off township property tax rolls.

• Township police and fire forces are called upon when there's trouble. Greater public usage of state parks will create greater demand for services at a time when townships' revenue sources are shrinking.

• Townships themselves would like some of those land trust fund grants for their own softball diamonds, not for state park campgrounds.

• Much of the townships' land already is in state or institutional ownership — 16 percent for Green Oak, one-third for Northville.

Campground, trail projects outlined

Here are outlines of the three recreation projects reviewed by the RC2 committee of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments:

• **Island Lake Campground and Trail, \$950,000.**

Recommendation: Positive review on condition the state Department of Natural Resources reach agreement with Green Oak Township on land development and uses.

Location: south of Kensington Road, south of I-96 and southwest of Kensington Metropark in Livingston County.

DNR proposes a total of 185 campsites on a former 34-acre gravel pit now known as Trout Lake. A hiking/jogging/biking trail is planned along 6.5 miles of the Huron River. The land was purchased earlier.

Kensington Road traffic could look down on the site, which the township criticizes as "barren" and "aesthetically detrimental" to the township's major entry point.

• **Maybury State Park family campground, \$500,000.**

Recommendation: Negative. Location: Northville Township in northwestern Wayne County.

DNR plans a total of 132 sites "to serve people who have never camped before and do not own their own equipment. In this campground, everything needed to camp — tent, bed, cooking stove, etc. — would be provided to the neophyte camper," according to the grant application.

DNR has owned the land since purchasing the former Maybury TB hospital site from Detroit in the early 1970s.

Currently, Maybury is classified as an "urban" state park for day use — picnicking, bicycling, hiking, horseback riding.

• **Lakeland Trail, \$163,000** for land acquisition of abandoned railroad right-of-way.

Recommendation: Negative, emphatically.

A private group called Friends of the Lakeland Trail is applying for the state grant in order to extend a non-motorized DNR trail. Currently the trail runs from Jackson County

to Hamburg Township near US-23 in Livingston County.

DNR has kept hands off and refrained from comment. DNR's coolness apparently convinced RC2 there was a question whether operating funds would be available.

The city of Wixom fought the proposal, questioning: Who would own the trail? Maintain it and clean litter? Police it to keep out motorized vehicles? Provide parking for horse "staging" areas? Provide farmers access to lands split by the trail? Provide toilets, water, rest areas and fire pits?

Parks group lauds pair

The Oakland Parks Foundation will honor George Googasian, its president, and Kerry Kammer, state Natural Resources Commission member, at the annual dinner Wednesday, May 6.

Site will be the Addison Oaks Conference Center near Oxford.

Googasian, a Bloomfield Hills attorney, raised \$23,000 by soliciting pledges for running in the Boston Marathon April 20.

Kammer, featured speaker, will

discuss the status of the Michigan Land Trust Fund, whose concept he authored while serving in the state Senate.

The foundation in four years has raised more than \$140,000, paying for an outdoor amphitheater, a nature trail for the blind and handicapped, and summer day camp for the disadvantaged. Dinner ticket information is available from Frances Greenbaum at 335-2771.

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