

Recreation bills expected to pass

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

A package of state Senate-passed bills to turn idle railroad corridors into recreational trails ran into a bit of trouble in the House of Representatives.

"The bills ignore completely the property rights of adjacent property owners," Eaton County farmer Fred Miller told the House Conservation Committee Tuesday.

"The title histories can be extremely complex. There are clauses that say the title reverts to the previous owners or their heirs" when the land is no longer used as a railroad.

"Thirty-five percent of the original grants (to railroads) were easements. The state would not get clear title. How the Senate passed SB 834 and 835 without challenge is a mystery," said the owner of Thornapple Farms.

The bills are sponsored by Sens. Robert Geake, R-Northville, and

James Barcia, D-Bay City. Both are running for Congress, and passage of their bipartisan package is likely.

The Conservation Committee approved Geake's bill without trouble but gave 11 to 5 approval to Barcia's.

Supporting the Barcia bill was Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills. "These turn out to be very popular once they're in place and managed well," she said.

Opposing it was Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton. He fought unsuccessfully to remove a subsection that he said could give later trouble.

The subsection says that state preservation of the right of way "shall not be treated . . . as an abandonment, discontinuance or cessation of the use of the right of way for railroad purposes." If upheld by the courts, that section would mean the rail beds aren't really abandoned and couldn't revert to the original owners' heirs, as farmer Miller argued.

Kosteva called the idea essential-

ly a fiction.

Geake predicted, correctly, the bills would make it through the House committee and a confident of full House passage before the election break.

"The package creates no new trails. Rather, it provides standards that ensure local input in the creation and operation of trails in Michigan," the western Wayne County senator said.

Geake said the Barcia bill is essential to the package because it contains the tools for Department of Natural Resources to secure title to the land.

The bills set criteria for trailway designation, set criteria for permitted uses, and allow DNR to contract with local trailway management councils to operate them.

A one-time foe of rails-to-trails said he changed his mind entirely and supported the package. "I was wrong," said Rep. Mick Middaugh, R-Paw Paw, "and those farmers in my district now say, 'I was dead wrong.'"

Area reps to be roasted alive

State representatives Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, and Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, will be the butt of many jokes at a "Roast the Reps" event scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 1 at the Kingsley Inn in Bloomfield Hills.

Slated to roast Berman are Eliza-

beth Howe (a Democrat candidate for Oakland County executive), state Rep. Lynn Jondahl, D-Okemos, and J.B. Dizon of Dizon Communications.

Slated to roast Johnson are state representatives Barbara Dobb, R-West Bloomfield, Bill Bobier, R-

Hesperia, and Lynn Weimeler of Beaumont Hospital.

The master of ceremonies will be state Rep. Don Gilmore, R-Augusta.

The roast is sponsored by the Michigan Women's Political Caucus. Tickets are \$60. For more information, call 542-9232.

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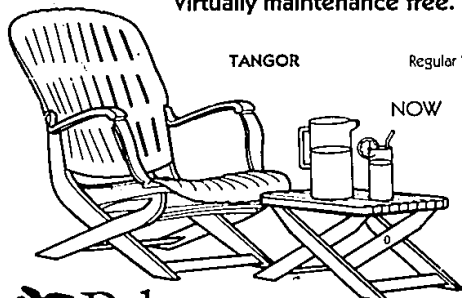
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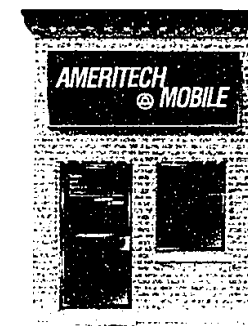
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