

How to manage state parks concerns governor

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Here are Engler's answers from a recent exclusive interview.

More in field

Q. You've been taking a beating from Michigan United Conservation Clubs on the condition of state parks and the number of conservation officers in the field. They say there were 200 conservation officers in the field in the 1980s and 150 now. How far in that direction do you see the state going?

A. "I wasn't even in school in the 1980s, so I don't remember how many were there then. I think in the last two years, while we may have had some early retirements, we've also worked to change the organization of the department to get some desk-bound officers out into the field. In effect, we've tried to offset some of the downsizing caused by the early retirement legislation."

"I think that the deployment of people is a key issue. We've been able, in the Department of State Police, to put troopers out on the road that were originally behind desks. But now with the retirements, we are going to need the trooper school to train the next generation of state police."

"The same decision will be made for conservation officers when it's clear that the (DNR) re-

organization — which should be good for the 21st century — is in place so we can get an accurate measurement of where we are."

'A tough sell'

Q. On state parks, MUCC and other groups are proposing one cent of sales tax for one year — a \$700 million fund — to earn \$15 million a year for state parks without going to the general fund. How does that grab you?

A. "The state parks remain a tremendous bargain for the people who use the state parks. Our user count will be better next summer if we have a hot summer with more weekends. The weather had a lot to do with it."

"We are looking at ways to expand our park usage. We've changed the management structure to go to a core system of parks (one manager serving two or more parks). We've found that has been very helpful. We do believe that through the use of other labor — some of it through the Conservation Corps, some of it maintenance by trustees from the prison system done in the off season at a lesser cost, which frees up more money."

"I think the petition drive for a penny increase in the sales tax will be a tough sell. The signatures might be gathered, but I'm not sure the public is ready to vote it. The sales tax — that's one of the firmly defended limits in the constitution. Even for schools, none of the proposals has been successful."

"Realize it's public land, set aside as parks, not whether it's administered by the state, regional authority or local commission. We ought to figure out how best to serve people."

"I'm proud of the fact that I appointed to the Natural Resources Commission the first person with a parks background: Joey Spano, known first in Ingham and now in

at a more economical cost. There'll be no visible change to the public."

"We've offered some of the state parks that are closed in the winter to county park commissions to be kept open for winter sports. They use the parking lots for snowmobile rigs to be parked."

"So we're trying to be cooperative. It's part of what we have to do with government at all levels — break down these artificial barriers that say, 'Well this is a state park, and no local or regional park commission can ever have anything to do with it.'"

"Michigan's parks are part of Michigan's heritage and legacy. People walk around with a lot of fears not based in any reality whatsoever. Some of 'em are doing so for political purposes, to raise money, get dues collected."

Oakland County parks circles, a graduate in parks and recreation from Michigan State University. It's a first time in memory for anyone with that kind of background."

Unrealistic fears

Q. Some folks fear a hidden agenda — that you simply want to get rid of state parks, or pare down the number, or —

A. "We've got 99. I'd like to open the 100th state park. We've used the natural resources trust fund to set aside some of the most wonderful and environmentally important areas in this state for the enjoyment of future generations."

"Michigan's parks are part of Michigan's heritage and legacy. People walk around with a lot of fears not based in any reality whatsoever. Some of 'em are doing so for political purposes, to raise money, get dues collected."

Auditions solicited for singing scholarship

The Birmingham Music announces auditions for a \$400 Charlotte Ruppel Memorial Vocal Scholarship.

Application deadline Monday, March 8. For application forms, call 378-9534. Auditions will take place at 10 a.m. Saturday, March 13, at the First Baptist Church in Birmingham.

Applicants must be between the ages of 20 and 25 (March 13, 1993, and resident of the state of Michigan. Previous winners of this award cannot apply.

For the audition, one selection from each of these three categories must be performed: aria (opera or oratorio), foreign language art song (German or French), and 20th century art song (American or British) in English.

The total performance shouldn't exceed 10 minutes. All selections, except the oratorio, must be memorized. One copy of each selection must be provided for the adjudication panel. Applicants must provide their own accompanist, and original music must be used by the accompanist.

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