
GENESEE COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

The semi-monthly meeting of the Genesee County Parks & Recreation Commission was held on Thursday, September 11, 2008, in the Conference Room of the Genesee County Parks & Recreation Administration Building, 5045 Stanley Rd., Flint, Michigan.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bob Ranger, Ex-Officio
Joe Krapohl, President
Billy Bradshaw, Ex-Officio
James Washington, Vice President
William Lucas, Secretary
Mike Keeler, Citizen Representative

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jeff Wright, Ex-Officio
Raynetta Speed, Commissioner
Ted Henry, Commissioner
Rose Bogardus, Commissioner

STAFF PRESENT: Amy M. McMillan, Director (arrived late due to budget mtg downtown)
Ron Walker, Deputy Director
Nancy Edwards, Recreation Program Specialist
Hilda McShane, Marketing Specialist
Deborah Wilkes, Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT: Brian Barkey, Legal Counsel
Rich Richardson
Warren Nimcheski
Gus Almasy
Rick Mallory
Bill Lott
Jeff Smith
Daniel Smith
Jennifer Smith
Bentley Bingham
Charles Hardaker
Belinda Esterline
Ed Schmitz

(1) CALL TO ORDER

President Krapohl called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. President Krapohl asked those in attendance to observe a moment of silence to remember all of those who lost their life seven years ago on 9/11 and to remember our men and women in the armed service.

(2) OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE COMMISSION

President Krapohl told the audience that they may address the commission at this time. He will take comments on a first-come, first-served basis. Please stand, state your name and address for the record, and as per commission rules you will have three minutes to make your comments. This is a comment session only, the commission will not discuss your comments. If there are specific questions the commission will try to answer the questions during #6 under Other Business on the agenda.

Warren Nimcheski, of Genesee Rd. in Burton, is here to address the unmanaged deer herd in For-mar. He has lived in that area for 65 yrs and he has had nice gardens. Last year he absolutely got zilch from the garden due to the unruly deer. This year he has fenced it but they jump over the fence or eat the tops off the plants. He stated that something has to be done about the deer. Deer are continually being hit by cars in that construction area, injured deer

are going into neighborhoods. When the fences are up around construction areas they seem to be in the road more. The herds in For-Mar are deer that are in and out of there continuously, probably more than the 20 or so you may count. They roam between areas such as near the railroad tracks, near the bowling alley, all the way over to Belsay Rd. Whether people like to see deer or not, it is sad to see a doe with triplets and one is hit by a car and the doe waits all day for its fawn. He went on to explain how the old Grand Blanc GM plant trapped the deer humanely and relocated them to Metamora-area state land. The herd does need to be reduced because at For-mar, there is food, a creek, it's large enough to breed there, and there is grazing land there.

Gus Almasy, of Genesee Rd. in Clio, stated that there is a problem with trapping and relocating deer at this time. Department of Natural Resources has quarantined deer due to Chronic Wasting Disease. Deer must be hunted from the area, either by a sharpshooter (pay somebody) or open it to hunting and let people in there to take the deer.

Bentley Bingham, II of Teachout Road in Otisville, stated that since hunting has not been allowed the deer population has gone up. He had to install a 6' fence around his garden and he has put in food plots for the deer. He would like hunting in the parks but he would like to see the youth, handicapped and veterans have the first opportunity. We are losing too many hunters because there are no kids hunting, there is no State land in Genesee County. Why not let the kids go in and take the deer and remember it for the rest of their lives.

Charles Hardaker, of Vienna Rd., in Otisville, rides horses in the parks and also hunts. He doesn't think the two activities should be at the same time, there needs to be controls, maybe certain days for hunting and riding. He asks the committee's consideration for horse riders.

Rick Mallory, of W. Second Street, Davison, is not against hunting at all, but does not think recreational hunting will help. Some of the Oakland County areas allow recreational hunting, the deer population in North Oakland County has still boomed. What will work is culling the herd with sharpshooters taking them at night. There is no interruption for the public using the parks during the day. He doesn't think it would bring a lot of hunters into the area, if you are looking for an economic boom to the County. He thinks it would actually cost the County money to have recreational hunting. The Genesee County area isn't as large as other State land areas (in neighboring counties) and those area hotels are not filled with hunters either. People who are opposed to hunting may even vote against revenue for the parks in the future. Maybe it would be cheaper to just hire someone to cull the deer.

Jeff Smith, of Arlene Drive, Flint, agrees that it should be opened to youth (with guardians) and veterans but you (the commission) need to act on this because the problem won't go away.

Richard Richardson, of Ridgemoor Ct. Burton, stated that he came to the commission in January 2007 and asked for open hunting. He accused the commission of not acting on it since that time. He asked the City of Burton to open hunting and they do allow hunting in the City. Not one person objected to hunting in the city limits of Burton. He further stated that he went before the Genesee County Board of Commissioners Tuesday and will repeat what he told them, "hunters in Genesee County outnumber a typical year of voters. If this issue isn't resolved it's going to be a matter to be brought before the public and I will make sure that that happens". He believes politics got involved and you guys (the commission) failed to do your job.

(3) CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

Discussion: There were no items taken off the consent agenda items for further discussion.

Motion and support to approve the items on the consent agenda.

Action Taken:

Motion by Commissioner Lucas
Supported by Commissioner Washington

Roll Call:

Yeas: Keeler, Krapohl, Lucas, Bradshaw, Ranger, Washington
Nays: None

Absent: Commissioners Speed, Henry & Bogardus did not attend due to the BOC meeting downtown. Commissioner Wright is absent and missed this vote as well.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY 6-0

(4) REPORT FROM LEGAL COUNSEL

Last Tuesday the Board of Commissioners agreed to offer the Parks Commission an extension of the 25% allocation of the accommodation tax revenue for two years. Considering the budget this commission approved for one year he believes it is prudent for this commission to ratify the action taken by the Board of Commissioners and authorize the Chair to execute that contract.

Motion and support for ratification of the two year accommodations contract with the Board of Commissioners at 25%.

Action Taken:

Motion by Commissioner Lucas
Supported by Commissioner Washington

Roll Call:

Yeas: Washington, Ranger, Bradshaw, Lucas, Krapohl, Keeler
Nays: None

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY 6-0

(5) DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The director is not here due to her attendance at the Board of Commissioner's meeting at which they are considering budgets for all County departments.

President Krapohl passed out the comments from the Day Out With Thomas surveys for the commissioners' information. Ron Walker stated that it was a great season for the event. When it started out we questioned what our attendance would be due to the economy, but it turned out very good. The sales were good, the ridership was great, we sold out all days except one Friday so we were very happy, it turned out very well and we hope for the same next year.

In Monday's *Flint Journal* the Genesee County Parks Fall and Winter Family Fun Guide was distributed. President Krapohl was at a meeting this week and a woman told him it was just wonderful. He is impressed with the colors.

Wildlife Sub-committee Report.

Discussion: President Krapohl read the entire report to those present. A copy is included with these minutes and a copy is available after this meeting. The commission has not acted on it yet, the sub-committee must present it to the commission.

Commissioner Bradshaw asked when the public meetings would be held. President Krapohl stated that the meetings would probably be scheduled for later this fall or very early next year, January or February, if the commission accepts this report and designates the staff. We would want to have enough time to have those meetings before the May 14, 2009 deadline outlined in the report. Nothing can be set now until the commission decides it wants to go forward with this recommendation. He anticipates that after the first public meeting, there may be some comments, suggestions or questions the staff would like to bring back and have time to explore. Those responses would be presented in the second meeting.

Commissioner Keeler asked if the aerial studies would give us a number of what the capacity for each of these areas are and how many deer we currently have and how many deer we have to cull out or are we going to put a blindfold on and start shooting and hope we reach the right numbers. President Krapohl said the DNR has a certain "deer per square mile" figure. Mr. Walker added that there is a lot of information about how many deer per sq mile an area can support and we have accurate numbers on how many deer we have so we will know how many deer must be culled.

Commissioners Lucas addressed the public that may be misinformed: We (the commission) do take this seriously. He wanted the people who think we are not doing our job that we have been meeting on this.

Commissioner Ranger thanked everyone who came to the meeting today. To the Chair, there were a lot of great things that have been brought to our attention. He wanted everyone in the public to know that everything you asked us to do today we have been discussing, everything. We are looking very seriously at the issue and the decisions we have to make have to be for the entire County, not just the hunters, not just the horse people and we have had some great discussion and he thinks this will be a good plan. He would like to adopt this report.

Commission Keeler asked if the archery and sharpshooters would be in all the parks or just a certain amount of the parks.

President Krapohl stated that preliminary talks are to limit a hunt to specific parks to start the program, and like anything, we prefer to start on a scale where it can be monitored and see how the program goes then expand it as the data comes back on how well the program works and what we need to improve. Our resources are limited to manage a controlled hunt, we have a finite number of rangers and staff so if you open it to the whole parks system we would not be able to manage and control the hunting. Because we do have a diverse group that uses the parks, Elba is a great example of an area where there are a lot of horseback riders in the October timeframe because of the (fall) colors so we have safety concerns, so we want to make sure we can manage it. The consensus was that we start on a smaller scale and learn from that and then consider where we need to expand.

President Krapohl also commented that while it may seem like it has taken quite a while, some of our decisions to do research were made in the wintertime and it is very hard to go out and decide what damage has been done to the natural environment, the plants and trees, in the wintertime. You have to wait until the summertime to do that study. Additionally, we can only do deer counts in the fall and winter. It may seem like we were dragging our feet, but we were not. The studies need to be done at the proper time. Example, the trilliums bloom in the spring and we had to wait to see what type of damage was done to that species by the deer. Any request that comes before this commission is taken very seriously. We do a very thorough investigation, we balance the needs of all of the park users and we try to accommodate all the requests that are reasonable and possible. He thinks we will move forward with this program but we want to make sure we do it right.

Motion and support to accept the report and recommendatinos from the wildlife management sub-committee.

Action Taken:

Motion by Commissioner Ranger
Supported by Commissioner Lucas

No Roll Call:

Yeas: All Ayes
Nays: None

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY 6-0

(6) OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMISSIONERS TO ADDRESS THE COMMISSION

Commissioner Washington echoed the other commissioners in that many times we try to do things haphazardly and after we have some accidents after-the-fact, we try to put a band-aid in place to clean it up. This commission is totally committed to doing the right thing, at the right time, for all the people that are represented here. We do not take what the public gives us lightly, we do not joke with it, we do not play with it. We are residents, just like you so we want to make sure that things get done. We have arrived at that point, he believes we have very good options, we have moved to proceed forward with it, and again, we have to do it when we can get actual numbers and facts. We do not operate off of emotion. Emotion has no place here, we only operate off numbers and facts. We appreciate your comments and he thinks we have a good plan and we will march forward and see what happens.

Commissioner Bradshaw congratulated the sub-committee who put this report together. He can recall last year talking about counting the deer and we had to wait until fall, more specifically, until snow fell to count the deer easily. He thinks the two options are both humane and serve the purpose. He said that this is not something we have rushed into. As the old saying goes: "Fools rush in where wise people fear to tread".

Commissioner Ranger again thanked the public for coming, it does help our decisions and everything we do, and every time we start something new, we learn from it. Wherever this goes and however it ends up, if it is done a second year, he is sure it will be better the next year. This is a test and it will get better. Everything we do gets better.

President Krapohl mentioned that everybody is probably aware of the Chronic Wasting Disease being discovered in Kent County and a case of TB was verified in Shiawassee County. We are staying on top of those things and keeping in communication with the DNR to be aware of those issues and how they impact what we want to do. This whole wildlife management committee goes beyond just the deer hunting aspect. There are other aspects of wildlife in For-Mar, like damage to the natural vegetation in that area that we are charged with preserving as well. We are looking at preserving the entire eco-system. As a commission we are charged to preserve over 11,000 acres. If it is not maintained, we'll never get it back. This is a very serious responsibility for this commission.

Commissioner Keeler said that some of the other things that are causing the problems are urban sprawl. There used to be a lot of open lands around the parks, now it is subdivisions moving in and the deer need to congregate in smaller areas and many are in the parks as the only place they have open space left to breed. Then they go out into the new communities and neighborhoods and cause problems.

(7) OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE COMMISSION

Gus Almasy said that he would like to address the points that have been brought up with regard to the youth hunt or handicap hunt. Where it sounds like a good idea, the main purpose is to reduce the deer herd and that may not be the most effective way to reduce the herd. It is a good idea, but may not be effective. He likes the archery only idea. He thinks archers should be required to wear hunter's orange (apparel) even though it is archery season to help out other people using the parks. He said he has been part of sharpshooting and eliminating deer near Ann Arbor and it is effective, but not a pretty sight. It would not open up any kind of money for the County. Hunting opportunities could bring in a little money, not a lot, but it is very expensive to terminate deer, several hundreds of dollars per deer. That is a big cost for the County to incur.

Warren Nimcheski thinks we are on the right track. It is very hard to count deer because they are in and out of there between parks and other nearby locations. With regard to the Burton hunting you can bow hunt but you have to be 500 feet from a building. That makes it tough, he has 3 ½ acres where there is only one small area in the middle where you are 500 feet from any building. For residents to hunt within the city limits of Burton, it is almost impossible to be 500 feet away from buildings and subdivisions. The hunting would need to be done in For-Mar where there is a vast area of land. He asked if we have sharpshooters come in, could they donate meat to local processors to give to food banks.

Jeff Smith said he thinks it should be only opened for bow hunting because it is obvious there is a deer problem and you can talk about it until eternity but you're going to have to act on it because it sounds like the residents are getting fed up with the deer herd. If you allow it to keep going you will have diseased deer and nobody will benefit. He agrees with archery only and a youth hunt.

Bill Lott of Slyker Rd., in Otisville, said the taking of deer is a personal decision by a hunter to take the life of an animal. If you take out deer, take out mostly does. The bucks will follow the does around and if the does are not there to be bred you won't have so many deer. He thinks to increase revenue it is better to allow kids and other hunters rather than sharpshooters that will cost money. Most of your bow hunters are not guys that go out and shoot at anything, they find their targets, watch it and move in on it, and take it. They are not shooting long distances and bow hunting would be very safe in most of those areas. A lot of people who like to see deer like to see the bucks. By taking does only, you leave the bucks to be enjoyed. He

used to see lots of deer in his area before it was hunted, but believes he sees less deer lately now that hunters use the land in his area.

Charles Hardaker was at a Farm Bureau meeting recently and this deer problem isn't just in the Parks, all the farmers are in favor of the special hunt put into affect this year. The problem is affecting everybody.

Rich Richardson said he might owe this board an apology on his approach to this issue, but in his defense when he first came to this board he was under the impression he would be updated through email on this project. He has never heard anything from this board except through Mr. Ranger. With that, he was assuming that the board might have been looking at it, but he had no idea that the board was moving along with it this far. He does appreciate it, and he was taking a position because of lack of information. He would like a copy of the report.

President Krapohl said there have not been many updates in the last while. He said that all the comments people have made with regard to doe hunting, food bank, the sharpshooter costs, hard to quantify the number of deer, bow hunting only, these are all issues that the committee has discussed and we are aware of, and all of these have, and are, going into our decisions so we appreciate your feedback. We have to maintain and safe, secure park system for everybody.

The Director, Amy McMillan arrived and apologized for missing the majority of the meeting, in the nine years she has been here she has never missed a meeting. She explained that the Board of Commissioners held their budget meeting and the budget has been put on the table so we are one step closer to having an adopted budget along with all the other County departments.

President Krapohl said the meetings for public information that will be scheduled will be posted in the Flint Journal. If you would like to be notified, please make sure your name, address and email are on the sign-in sheet so you may be notified of future meetings. We do like to hear your comments.

(8) ADJOURNMENT

With no objections made, President Krapohl adjourned the meeting at 10:55 a.m.