

Members Present: President Joe Krapohl, Vice President Jim Washington, Secretary Bill Lucas
Commissioners: Gloria Nealy, Mike Keeler, Joe Madore, Jeff Wright, Cloyce Dickerson, Bryant Nolden

Members Absent: Commissioner Mike Lynch,

Staff Present: Amy McMillan, Director; Accounting Aide Cassie Voelker

Others Present: No one signed in.

1) Call to Order. President Krapohl presided and called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

2) Opportunity for members of the public to address the commission. No one addressed the commission.

3) National Water Trails Designation Project. Rebecca Fedewa and Sondra Severn, from the Flint River Watershed Coalition, were introduced and made a presentation to the commission about the National Water Trail Designation project. The Parks have collaborated with them on many projects for many years. One of the most recent collaborations is the National Water Trails Designation for the Flint River watershed. The Watershed Coalition is taking the lead on this project.

The Watershed Coalition is an education and advocacy organization for the Flint River. They are promoting the health, restoration and the use of the Flint River to the broader community and when we have issues like this (Flint River Water Crisis), to the nation and to the world. They are partnering with the County Parks because they are probably the largest landowners along the Flint River. This national designation project will elevate the River locally, to make people aware that we have this fantastic resource for them to use; and we hope, it will draw people that live outside the watershed area to the communities along the river to explore it.

What we need to have is a local managing organization, buy in and support of all the municipalities and landholders along the river, and a minimum level of public access and signage. They are building a website and it is an ever-growing source of how people can get involved. Everything is geared toward improving the trail, improving the experience for the users, and making the trail safe and accessible.

The reasons to why pursue a National Water Trail Designation for the Flint River? Why not! It elevates the status of grant submissions, it builds partnerships, and most importantly we have this beautiful river that has a horrible reputation in a lot of people's minds and this project would showcase all that is great about the river.

Severn: The NWT System is under the National Parks Service, the River Trails Conservation Assistance Program. We would have National recognition, national promotion through print and website of the National Parks Service; also opportunities to receive technical assistance from the National Parks Service. There are many economical benefits to having this designation: bringing people to the area to use our restaurants, hardware stores, boat docks, places to store kayaks, public health (having a healthy waterway means a healthy community) and training opportunities.

There are four criteria for receiving the national designation, some of which we are already doing and we have met much of this criteria. Public access sites; trail is in compliance with laws, trail open to the public for use for a minimum of 10 years and support of landowners and communities along the trail.

The Watershed Coalition is working closely with the Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission to inventory the Flint River access sites, what we have already, where are improvements needed the most, how users would benefit from river improvements. We've gotten feedback from forums held with land managers and individual land owners and listened to what improvements they would like to see and how it would benefit their community and we've asked for their support. We have the opportunity to update maps with mileage/times between launch points, kayak share and storage areas. We have formed an advisory group has been formed and we want all the communities involved and represented throughout this project. We'll end with a management document that will guide our future for the trail and the economic impact to area communities.

Fedewa: The Watershed Coalition, in cooperation with the Drain Commission, have held guided paddling tours on the river. They are becoming extremely popular, starting with 4 paddles scheduled in 2009, and the demand has outpaced the ability to keep up with it and numbers have grown to more than 20 paddling tours this summer. Last year we had about 193 paddlers, and we've already surpassed those numbers with about three tours left. More than half the paddles are held within the Genesee County Parks managed areas. Parks have great water access.

Ms. McMillan added: The Parks Commission's partnership with the FRWC allowed us to cross-promote and gave staff the opportunity to get out on the river for a tour and staff was excited about the experience of being on the river and having a guide and learning about the river from the Water Coalition staff. You cannot appreciate the beauty of the Flint River until you've been on the Flint River. It's great to walk or bike along it, but being on the water is an entirely different experience.

Madore: Where do most people put in at? Where do most of the paddles go? Do you offer rentals?

Fedewa: Flushing is a good wide stretch of the river without a lot of downed trees, lots of put in points within the Parks property, we also started one in the Lapeer area and Irish Road. We have about 21 kayaks, we ask for people to pre-register if they need a kayak. There is also a livery in Flushing we work with if we need more. Some people bring their own. We provide shuttling and snacks.

Keeler: Where do they get out in Flushing?

Fedewa: There are a couple spots in Flushing – Riverview Park in the city, and the Nature Park.

Krapohl: Do you go all the way to North Branch?

Fedewa: We don't go to North Branch. We go to Klam Road.

Nolden: How does the water flow in the River. I've heard it goes differently than other rivers. Is that something unique to the Flint River that would help to obtain the national designation?

Fedewa: It generally flows north. It goes south through the City of Flint, it depends on the topography of the land.

Wright: Regarding rivers connecting communities – the reality is, that is how people moved between communities 120-130 years ago, so it is bringing that back. The Shiawassee and other sub-watersheds: does this designation include those as well, or just the Flint River channel?

Fedewa: Just this river channel itself. There is an effort in the Shiawassee river watershed area to pursue the national water trail designation as well.

Krapohl: If you have downed trees in the river, do you have problems getting those cut up with regulations from the DNR or is it just not enough staffing to do it? Are there restrictions?

Fedewa: Mostly staffing but the DNR leads the effort and are involved with the landowners. It just makes it so much easier to include them.

Keeler: The Flint River is a perfect place to see wildlife because there are not a lot of homes, the river was mostly industrial in the past so, there weren't a lot of majestic homes built on the river like other communities.

Madore: Did you see any marked increase with Amy's cross promotion?

Fedewa: Numbers are through the roof, we have to believe it helped, and weather helped. People are paying attention to the Flint River this year and we thought our programs would tank because of the water issue, but it is just the opposite. The support is really there for the river and that is exciting.

Keeler: We find that our neighborhood has benefited from the River. The river attention brought people to the area, then they see it is a great neighborhood and moved in.

Ms. McMillan showed the commissioners the presentation that she made in front of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board on August 17 to support the Flint Riverfront Restoration grant that the Parks submitted. This presentation will be on various websites.

Krapohl: Noted that there is a packet of colored papers that is supplied for your reading. It is not signed so it cannot be admitted into the meeting minutes.

4) Consent Agenda. President Krapohl asked commissioners if there are any items they wish to remove from the consent agenda for discussion. No items were removed from the consent agenda.

Action Taken:

Motion by Commissioner Keeler
Supported by Commissioner Washington

Motion and support for approval of consent agenda items A through , as listed.

Roll Call

Yeas: Dickerson, Keeler, Krapohl, Lucas, Madore, Nealy, Nolden, Washington, Wright.

Nays: None

Absent: Commissioner Mike Lynch

MOTION CARRIED 9-0

5) Director's Report

A. Treehouse Reveal. If you were at the reveal, but caught in the crowd and not able to experience the treehouse, we have a presentation today. Danielle showed photos of the treehouse project. There will be no photos of the interior of the treehouse posted by us on social media yet. We cannot show that until after the show airs on Animal Planet. It will be open 8-5 daily through September and then we will begin programming inside. The treehouse will be open year round and our curriculum will be developed around winter outdoor programs for kids. We believe it will be available for private rentals as well. Tasty Layers spent 55 hours to build a cake for the event. We had 661 people go through it the first day it opened to the public.

Krapohl: We had a work day with Pete Nelson and his crew last Thursday. Our crew was actually outpacing his crew's ability to keep us supplied with materials to keep us busy. We appreciate the staff helping and the comments he heard from our staff is that it was the best time they'd ever had working in the parks, they wanted to stay past their normal work hours to continue to help. Pete's crew was very complementary about not only how fast, but how well the parks staff worked.

Reminders: This is our last DOWT weekend. Next week is the last week the beaches are open. Wovlerine will close the day after Labor Day. It has been a crazy busy season for us.

6) New Business No new business.

7) Opportunity for Commissioners to address the Commission.

Lucas: Glad to be back.

Other Commissioners commented that it was good to have him back.

Madore: Thanked Danielle for helping his wife come to the reveal at the last minute. He was at the Dam canoe launch, were they working on the road?

Barry: They were doing road work and clearing some dead trees.

Nolden: He was like a kid in a candy store on Monday at the reveal. He wishes he hadn't worn a suit so he could slide down the fire pole.

Keeler: He talked to Pete and asked what happens if one of the trees selected gets diseased? Pete said they come back and replace the tree with an anchor and post, so there is a fix.

Krapohl: It will be fun for kids when the adults get out of the treehouse!

Madore: It might be a nice warming place for skiers.

8) Opportunity for the public to address the commission No addressed the commission.

9) Adjournment. Hearing no objections to adjournment, the meeting was adjourned at 10:47 am.