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## **CLINTON COUNTY PARKS AND GREEN SPACE COMMISSION**

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## **COORDINATOR'S REPORT**

**October 2010**

### **ACTIVITIES:**

#### **Motz County Park Development Project**

The project is completed. Once the General Contractor cashes the final payment check, I will submit for final reimbursement. This will start DNRE Grant Management's final audit procedures. I don't expect any issues to present themselves. The County's Lead Accountant Cindy Moser did an exceptional job with financial recording keeping and project tracking. Building and Grounds Director Blaine Stevens was an outstanding project manager. C2AE designed/engineered an award winning project. Everyone associated with the project did their professional best and deserve a heartfelt "Thank you" for creation of a fine outdoor recreation facility.

#### **Post Labor Day Operation**

On Saturday and Sunday, September 11 and 12, the park hosted the Pheasants Forever Youth Day and two large group picnics. In total, 500 – 600 individuals visited the park that weekend. The youth were provided opportunities to develop their hunting and general outdoor skills and enhance their appreciation of the natural environment.

On Wednesday, September 15, the pavilion was used for the annual St. Johns Area Cub Scout sign-up. Allan Soros, volunteer Scout Leader, reported that the sign-up was well attended with about 100 young people registering for local Cub Scout Packs. The boys and their families were well acquainted



Saturday, September 11 - Pheasants Forever youth participants pose at the park pavilion.

with the park with only a few calling for travel directions. The youngsters enjoyed an evening of games and activities and when the program ended, they left the park in a clean and orderly condition.

The weekend of September 18 and 19 had fewer visitors. This freed up time for the two remaining Park Rangers to "close" up facilities. Picnic tables were stored under the pavilion, swim buoys removed, and a host of other tasks completed. Building and Grounds Department personnel began winterizing the beach house and sewage system on Monday, September 27. The park will remain open without toilet facilities for use during the fall, winter and spring months.



Wednesday, September 15 – Cub Scout sign-up under the Motz County Park pavilion.

### **Say Good-Bye to the Park Ranger Staff**

The summer park staff consisting of Park Manager/MSU Intern Kris Poling and Park Rangers Ben Jackson, Dan Nelson and Luc Sutherland performed their duties in an outstanding manner. Very few problems associated with routine park operations occurred. This had to be the most problem-free summer that I've experienced over my 35 involvement with public park field operations. The credit goes to these four individuals. They have all returned to university studies or other employment. We would be fortunate to have them back again next summer.

### **Michigan Recreation and Park Association Conference & Awards**

C2AE and the Commission will be teaming up to present the Motz County Park development project as an educational session at the Association's Annual Conference in February.

Two components of the project, the beach house and swimming beach development, are being submitted for MRPA Facility Design Award consideration. The application narratives have been completed and will be submitted on October 2nd. Award recipients will be announced at the Conference Awards Banquet.

C2AE Marketing Manager Marcia McCann announced that C2AE is submitting the project for an American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) award.

### **da Vinci Awards for Accessibility and Universal Design**

Clinton County is sending seven individuals to the September 30 Awards event at the Henry Ford Museum. Attending are Eileen Heideman, Jack Enderle, Chuck Nelson, Don Potts, Jerry and Kathie Jaloszynski and DNRE Grants Management Unit Supervisor Deb Apostol.

Award finalists have been asked to exhibit their "product" during the event's "Meet the da Vinci Awards Finalists" activity. An 8' skirted table is being provided for this purpose. The Purple Butterfly, an on-line scrapbook resource business, has volunteered to create a display board using photos taken over the course of the summer. The display will feature the Universal Design elements of the swimming beach, beach house, fishing pier, picnic grounds and pavilion. We have an innovative project to tell others about.

### **Picnic Table Transporter**

A picnic table transporter has been purchased to move picnic tables around the park. Depending on the design, the park's tables weigh from 200 to 235 pounds each. Park visitors like to move them around to accommodate their needs. It can be tiring for a single or even two Park Rangers to wrestle them back into their original locations. The transporter works by using the table's seat planks to lift the table off the ground. Once lifted, the table is well balanced for easy movement on four large wheels over rough ground. On Sunday, September 19, 2 Park Rangers and 2 County Jail Trustees collected and stacked the park's 54 picnic tables under the pavilion in less than 2 hours.



The new picnic table transporter enables one Park Ranger to move 200 pound picnic tables around Motz County Park. (Photo by RJ Thomas Mfg., Inc.)

### **Fishery Management**

In spring of 2008, the Commission stocked the park lake with 20,000 (1.5" – 2") fathead minnows, 1,500 (5' – 7") yellow perch, 500 (4" – 6") channel catfish and 150 (6" – 8") largemouth bass. The lake had a population of large mouth bass prior to county purchase of the park property. This past spring, 100 bluegills were transferred under DNRE permit from Lake Ovid to the park lake.

On the day of the Motz County Park Grand Opening, June 12, two large mouth bass were caught in the 16" to 19" size range. There have been reports of visitors catching fairly large channel cats and perch during the past summer. In August, I personally witnessed a person with a 19" channel cat and a 12" perch in his possession. Based on observations of fairly regular fishing activity, I suspect that the public is experiencing good fishing success.

Is the fishery sustainable? The lake has a large observable minnow population. Whether these are the offspring of game fish or fathead minnows is not known. Both are important to the sustainability of the fishery. Many of the bluegills were caught this summer, but at least a few can still be seen in the area of the fishing pier and elsewhere. Bluegills are prolific breeders and it doesn't take many to colonize a lake. It is more important to have adequate numbers of predatory fish present to keep the bluegill population in check.

I called DNRE Fisheries Biologist Scott Hanshue for advice. Scott said that it was unlikely that the channel catfish were reproducing. He recommended the Commission consider a supplemental commercial stocking of this fish. Perch could be naturally reproducing and the only way to tell is if smaller perch are being caught. He asked about the presence of weeds in the lake. The lake has both bottom weeds and surface weeds. I recently took a sample of the most prominent surface weed to MSUE for identification and was told it was American Pondweed. Scott said American Pondweed is a beneficial plant to have in the lake. Perch will lay their "egg stings" on the plant.

Scott reported that DNRE Fisheries is still working to remedy viral hemorrhagic septicemia, a blood disease that has negatively impacted the state's fish hatchery program. The DNRE is not able to assist with fishery stocking efforts at this time.

The 2011 Capital Improvement Budget does include a request for \$6,000 for general park improvements. If approved, the Commission may wish to consider stocking the lake with additional channel catfish and perch.

### **What Has Been Learned from the First Year of Operation –**

There are always opportunities to better manage the park, enhance visitor safety and provide county residents with exceptional service. Here are a few of those opportunities:

- **Recreational activities:**

**Playground** – The random visitor survey conducted in July and August frequently mentioned the need for a children's playground. From my own experience with other park agencies, a creatively designed playground can be as popular with children and their parents as a swimming beach. A well-designed facility constructed of metal play components need not be a major maintenance drain on county/park personnel. The recent MNRTF grant was insufficient in dollar amount to construct a playground. **Recommendation:** At appropriate time, seek grant funding and/or local donations to construct a playground.

**Horseshoe Courts** – Pavilion users have on at least three occasions installed their own horseshoe pitches in the lawn area east of the pavilion. This not only damaged the lawn, but it created a potential hazard to others who could have been injured by a poorly thrown or errant horseshoe or by tripping/falling on a metal stake. This is a common activity in group picnic events and temporary pitches will continue to be installed. **Recommendation:** Construct a fenced horseshoe court containing four throwing pitches in the area west of the pavilion (between the drainage ditch and earth mound). As resources permit, connect the horseshoe court to the pavilion walkway via a wood foot bridge over the drainage ditch.

**Sand Volleyball Courts** – This is an especially popular activity for young to middle-age adults. Private courts are occasionally set up on the east or west side of the

sun beach; however, they can be a problem when on fair weather days the beach is packed with swimmers. **Recommendation:** Construct one or two courts on the waterfront to the east of the swimming beach. This will require equipment to level the area and provide drainage. Washed sand of the same quality as that found on the sun beach will be needed to cover the clay soils currently found in the area.

- **Vehicle Barriers:** I've noticed on several occasions that motor vehicles have driven across lawn areas to park near the fishing pier or to deliver materials to the pavilion. The *Clinton County Park Rules Ordinance* prohibits vehicles from leaving the entrance drive and parking lot; however, not everybody reads the posted rules and it is impractical to place signs everywhere. It is unfortunate that the "two-track" created by the General Contractor to bring construction materials to the fishing pier is only now beginning to be less evident and inviting. The grass seed planted to eliminate the two-track has been essentially destroyed by vehicles following this unintended path to the interior of the park. **Recommendations:** 1) Between the earth mound and DeWitt Road fence, plant additional pines/spruce – about four or five 3' tall trees should do it - to close the space between the existing rows of trees. Between the earth mound and drainage ditch, construct previously discussed fenced horseshoe courts. 2) Construct a short gravel "service" drive from the parking lot towards the pavilion to accommodate short term delivery of picnic supplies. 3) Install barrier posts with a cable "gate" at the east end of the overflow parking area to prevent vehicles from driving on the park's sanitary sewage absorption field and walking trail around the lake.
- **Motorcycle Parking:** On hot sunny days, the parking lot heats up. Its asphalt surface becomes pliable and unable to support motorcycle kickstands. Kickstands sink into the asphalt, damaging the paved surface, and potentially causing damage to the motorcycle when it falls over. **Recommendation:** Construct a small concrete paved parking area for motorcycle use only.
- **Weed and Algae Control:** The pond has American Pondweed, a surface weed beneficial to fish and other aquatic life. Nevertheless, there are areas in the lake where surface weeds are problematic. On the east and west end of the swimming beach, American Pondweed collects algae. This summer's hot weather warmed the lake water which subsequently contributed to an increased algae presence. Algae collects on American Pondweed and forms a floating mat that has an unpleasant odor. The odor drifted into swimming beach and picnic grounds. Some visitors asked whether the water was safe to swim in. Throughout the summer, Park Rangers raked and removed algae mats along the shoreline and adjacent weed areas. This very labor intensive remedy did much to reduce the odor and make for a more pleasant visitor experience. **Recommendations:** 1) Efficiently pump or vacuum the algae, transferring it from the water to a land collection basket for disposal elsewhere. I am working with Gratiot County to see if a gas-powered trash pump can be used to vacuum surface matter from below the surface (to maintain

the necessary operating siphon). 2) Obtain Commercial Pesticide Applicators license from Michigan Department of Agriculture and then chemically treat weeds in and around the swimming beach.

- **Waterfront Issues:** Children like to play in sand and with the buoys that mark water depth. Sand play was anticipated so the sand depth at the high water shoreline is two feet (50' wide band spanning the shoreline above and below the waterline) rather than the 12" inches found in the balance of the beach development. A reoccurring problem is that children don't leave the sun beach as they found it after they are finished digging. Park Rangers daily take an hour or more to re-level the beach and fill the holes left behind. This is time better spent on other maintenance or development tasks.

Children playing with depth buoys not only damaged anchoring cables but they place themselves and others in danger when buoys are released and quickly return to an upright position. A nearby swimmer struck by the rapidly re-positioning buoy can be knocked unconscious or otherwise injured.

**Recommendations:** Modify the "beach rules" sign to specifically address both issues. Informed parents are more likely to 1) keep their children from playing with safety buoys and 2) assist with cleaning up after their child's sand play. Provide a rake and shovel at the beach rules sign location for use in beach care.

- **Shade:** I noticed only modest use of the picnic area this summer due to a lack of shade. Most visitors picnicked under the pavilion and were disappointed when the pavilion was reserved for use by a group. The random visitor survey identified shade as one consistent improvement that was desired in the future.  
**Recommendations:** Plant trees. The 2011 Capital Improvement Budget includes a request \$8,000 request for trees. If approved, approximately 20 to 30 12' tall hardwood trees will be planted; however, it will take 5 to 10 years before they provide much shade. Shade could be provided in the interim with the construction of small single table shelters with rooflines designed to provide effective shade from mid-June through mid-August during the hours of 11:00 am to 5:00 pm. With a minor reshuffling of existing picnic grills and an expansion of the picnic area towards the east, 7 to 10 shelters could be provided. RESA Construction Trades students could be a source of labor and the materials could be donated by local sponsoring service organizations. Construction of small shelters deserve further consideration.
- **Boat Launch:** Most people are complying with the signs posted at the top of the ramp that prohibit vehicles from backing down the ramp and launching gasoline powered boats on the lake. With park gates now remaining open "24-7" and Park Rangers no longer present, it becomes impossible to ensure compliance. It is important to protect the lake from all sorts of invasive species that could easily be introduced by gasoline powered watercraft. It is also important to provide visitors

with a reasonable distance to carry their canoes, john boats and other small craft between the lake and transport vehicle. **Recommendation:** Position large rocks presently found at the top of the ramp and along the park's south fence line to locations along the shoreline below the ramp. The rocks would be spaced to prevent trailer access to the lake, but provide an adequate opening to carry a small watercraft through. Vehicles could be backed down the ramp so that the carry distance would be minimal. The ramp would need to be graded and road gravel added to make it functional for use by motor vehicles. Searles Construction will be assisting with the movement of rocks this fall. Ramp improvements aren't planned until spring due to a lack of funding in the 2010 budget.

### **Other Assignments/Activities in Progress**

Listed for general information purposes. Items will be removed once completed.

- Other Motz County Park improvements
  - Fish habitat improvements (January/February 2010)
  - Tree maintenance program (on-going through 2012)
- Parkland and Open Space Acquisition Guidelines
- Agricultural Preservation Board – staff liaison (10% time allocation)
- Design, construct and install Maple River access site sign
- Community Development Department – General Management
- Clinton County "Authorized Organization Representative" for federal grants
- Assist w/ creation of Clinton County Trail Advisory Council
- Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block program grant management