

DATE: May 13, 2005

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Tom Bailey, Executive Director, Little Traverse Conservancy and
President, Heart of the Lakes

SUBJECT: Citizens Advisory Committee for Michigan State Parks

Early this year, I was asked by DNR Director Becky Humphries to serve on the Citizens Advisory Committee for Michigan State Parks. The committee was created by the legislature last year and charged with helping to come up with a solution for the funding crisis which faces our State parks. Those of you who attended the Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy meeting in February may remember Senator Patricia Birkholtz mentioning this committee, which she created through her sponsorship of the bill.

The State Parks funding crisis is not well understood by the public. It has been brought about by a number of factors. Principally, of course, there's the fact that the State Park system no longer receives any funding from the General Fund of the State of Michigan. Not so much as a nickel. There are also issues of falling balances in trust endowments and other factors.

"What about Proposal P for Parks," one might ask, or the Clean Michigan Initiative, or the other programs which have been developed, over the past several years, to help the parks. The answer here is that the key word for these proposals was to "help" the parks. It was never anticipated during those days that the parks would be completely cut off from general fund revenues and left on their own. Thus, the current situation presents us with challenges that were not envisioned even a few years ago.

I will be pleased to serve on this committee, and invite suggestions and input from all of those in the land conservation field in Michigan who have suggestions and recommendations. At this point, my aim is to help develop a solution to the problem that will be 1) rock-solid and long-term; 2) something that will generate sufficient funding to keep us from having to have this fire drill again any time in the intermediate future and 3) comprehensive, in that it will address State recreation and park issues on a broad scale, from Detroit to the western UP and including most all aspects of public recreation as administered by the DNR.

These are my thoughts as I go into this involvement. I look forward to keeping all of you informed as the process unfolds, and I will welcome your input.