



**A Master Plan
Proposal.....**

BAY CITY STATE RECREATION AREA
(FORMER BAY CITY STATE PARK)

BAY COUNTY, MICHIGAN

REPORT PRESENTED BY:

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FALL, 1994

BAY CITY RECREATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The following individuals/groups were selected to participate in the review and planning of the Master Plan for the Bay City State Recreation Area (previously Bay City State Park) and adjacent DNR lands.

Jim Baker	Fisheries Division, DNR
Jim Bredin	Office of the Great Lakes, DNR
Joe Carland	Bangor Township Supervisor, Bay County
Dave Cozad	Environmental Affairs & Community Development, Bay County
Jim De Clerck	Michigan United Conservation Clubs
Sue Fortune	East Central Michigan Planners & Development Region
Diane Gosler	Real Estate Division, DNR
Lucius Greve	Citizen at Large
John Halsey	Bureau of Michigan History, Department of State
Dan Hatton, PhD	Friends of Bay City State Park
Elli Hennessy	Surface Water Quality Division, DNR
Ron McGillivrey	Bay County Growth Alliance
Larry Miller	Parks & Recreation Division, DNR
Terry Miller	Lone Tree Council
Paul Petersen	Parks & Recreation Division, DNR
Doug Reeves	Wildlife Division, DNR
Robert Reszka	Geological Survey Division, DNR
Joseph Rivet	(Chairperson) Bay Area Convention and Visitors Bureau
Peggy Rowley	Jennison Natural Center Advisory Board
Terry Sheehan	Bay City State Park

BAY CITY RECREATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE
continued

Mary Shorkey	Tobico Audubon Society
Gary Stanley	Bay County Planner
Jack Werner	Citizen at Large
Robert Zbiciak	Land & Water Mgmt. Division, DNR
Mike Brandow	City of Bay City



JOHN ENGLER, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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ROLAND HARMES, Director

September 21, 1993

NATURAL RESOURCES
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TO: Natural Resources Commission

SUBJECT: Preparation of a New Master Plan for Bay City
State Park - Bay County
FOR INFORMATION ONLY

Discussion and Background:

At its regular meeting on August 10, 1956, the Natural Resources Commission (then the Department of Conservation) approved the master plan for Bay City State Park. Now, 37 years later, it is time to once again evaluate the existing resources, as well as the recreation needs for the park. The need for a new master plan is evident when analyzing the changing recreation demands, as well as the changing natural resources found in and around Bay City.

At this time, the local community is very supportive of a master planning effort for the park and they will be encouraged to participate throughout the planning process. The master planning process for the park will include using a citizen advisory committee to provide recommendations for the development of the new master plan. This planning process is expected to be completed within the calendar year of 1994.

Based on the existing resources and recreation demands, the park theme is anticipated to focus on natural resource education involving Saginaw Bay and Tobico Marsh, with more traditional types of active recreation facilities, including camping, fishing, picnicking, and swimming supporting this theme.

Recommendation:

This memorandum is being submitted for information only. Following the preparation of the master plan, and based on recommendations of the advisory committee, the Master Plan for Bay City State Park will be submitted to the Director for review and approval.

O. J. Scherschligt, Chief
Parks and Recreation Division

Michael D. Moore
Deputy Director

I approve the staff recommendation.

Roland Harmes
Director

Date Approved

PARK BACKGROUND (As of June 1994)

In late 1922 the City of Bay City donated 76 acres west of the waterworks to the state for use as a public park. This park was named the Bay City State Park and over the next seventy years its size increased several times until it reached the present 258 acres.

Development of the park by the state began in 1923. In that same year a fish hatchery was established for the propagation of walleyed pike, a commercial food fish then of considerable economic importance. This hatchery became a park landmark and was operated until 1945 when it was closed due to obsolescence and a decline in the fish population. The building was razed in 1952.

Park development continued during the 1920's and was accelerated during the 1930's as a result of several federal programs. The most significant of these programs was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Between 1933 and 1936 the CCC excavated a fresh water lagoon at the outlet of Tobico Marsh. The CCC also built and improved park roads and parking lots, constructed park buildings, and planted trees and shrubs.

World War II slowed park development, but in 1947, Mrs. George Birney Jennison offered \$40,000.00 for the construction and operation of a trailside museum "for the study of native and migratory birds". This museum, dedicated to the memory of George Birney Jennison, was constructed in 1949.

During the 1950's and 1960's many improvements were made in park facilities and services. Picnic area parking lots were improved and expanded. The campground was expanded to a capacity of 283 sites with electrical hook-ups installed. Improvements were also made to the campground's buildings and roads. The interpretive program which was instituted at the museum upon completion of that structure, was expanded during this period and in 1969, the permanent position of Park Interpreter was created in order to expand the scope of interpretive service still further.

This permanent position remained at the park until budget crunches of the early 80's caused the state to close the Nature Center early in 1981. It remained closed until the spring of 1984. At that time The Jennison Center was reopened under a unique plan that involved the Department of Natural Resources, Delta College and Saginaw Valley State College. Under a partnership arrangement, the two colleges assumed the responsibility of reopening the center and establishing environmental education programs. This partnership continued until January of 1992, when the Department of Natural Resources once again took over the running of the Jennison Nature Center.

Swimming was always a popular activity along the shores of the beautiful Saginaw Bay. However in the late 1950's a problem began to develop. Muck began to collect along the shoreline at Bay City State Park. This problem fluctuated from year to year depending on the water level. Between the late 50's and the early 80's, the muck levels gradually increased

making it increasingly difficult for park personnel to keep the shoreline free of accumulated muck for the swimmers. In the early 80's, high water level resulted in a relatively clean shoreline and the day use greatly increased. On many weekends the lots were filled to capacity, making it necessary to close the parking lots to incoming vehicles. However, in the later 80's water levels receded, and the muck problem became more than park personnel could handle. It was about this same time that wetland restrictions became very prominent, which also hampered any attempts by park personnel to solve the muck problem. The year 1992 saw the swimming area of Bay City State Park in deplorable condition. Needless to say this caused a great decrease in both camping and day use attendance. Late in 1992, the park received the necessary permits to again begin muck removal on the north swimming beach. During the summer of 1993 the park once more, had a useable swimming area.

The year of 1977 saw the starting of several new buildings within the park. At that time a new bathhouse & concession complex were added in the day use area and two new toilet shower buildings in the campground. In 1982, the park was connected into the county sewer system. In 1984, all park roads which had previously been chip and sealed were resurfaced with bituminous surfacing. What a great new addition to the campground. In 1986, the park added the first of the picnic shelters; a double shelter with fireplace and attached restrooms. This was followed by a single pavilion and another double pavilion between 1987 and 1991, all of which were great additions to the day use area. In 1989, the entire electrical system of the park was revamped, allowing better electrical service to the campers. In 1990 the park office was completely remodelled. During the summer of 1993, two mini-cabins were constructed to again increase the facilities and add to the enjoyment of campers.

In 1985, a 180 foot sluice pipe which extended out into the Bay, was removed. This sluice pipe, a hollow concrete wall, was used to channel discharge from the old water works plant out into the Bay. It was believed that the sluice contributed to the muck build up along the Park shoreline.

Several new land purchases have been made in recent years. In 1989, the small amusement park which had been at the park entrance became part of the park. This added acreage and two new buildings; a residence and storage building to the park inventory. In 1990, the abandoned railroad property from State Park Drive over to the Tobico Marsh Area were added the park. A portion of this property had already been developed into a hiking-biking trail and dedicated to Frank Andersen, the original donor of the Tobico Marsh Property. In 1992, the old roller skating rink and miniature golf course at the west entrance to the park were also added.

The winter of 1993 brought out large numbers of ice fishermen. The parking lots were as full as they usually are on very busy summer days. It wa great seeing everyone out. All of them of course were after the evasive walleyes.

PARK USE PATTERNS

Bay City State Park is among one of the parks that have been designed to be open year round for public use. The park is used on a regular basis all year through. Only on summer holidays could use be considered intense.

The following are recommendations put forth by the Bay City State Park Advisory Committee as a part of the Master Plan Proposal:

- * The entire area (property currently being administered by Wildlife and Parks and Recreation Divisions) shall be administered by Parks and Recreation Division.
- * To enlarge the park from its current size of 258 acres to more than 2,800 acres and broaden the recreational opportunities to include hunting, fishing, camping, swimming, picnicking, hiking and nature study. The project boundary shall be expanded to encompass existing state-owned lands (approximately 2,150 acres) plus other lands determined necessary (approximately 650 acres) to complete the future master plan.
- * The name shall be changed to Bay City State Recreation Area, from Bay City State Park.
- * Parks and Recreation Division will work with the Bay County Road Commission to accomplish the following:
 - Provide a safe pedestrian crossing between the campground and day use area.
 - Reduce vehicular speeds along State Park Drive as it passes through the park.
 - Establish a policy to retain the existing character and function of State Park Drive.
- * Nearly all the coastal area shall be reverted to a swimming beach. The exception being a wetland demonstration area, to be located in an appropriate location, and limited to 15% of coastal area.
- * The DNR (Parks and Recreation Division) shall continue to secure the permits necessary to allow for ongoing maintenance of the majority of the beach north-west of the lagoon outlet, as well as, all other beach areas as they are approved.
- * The completion of the development of the prototype (Muck Machine), including the necessary data required to develop a commercial system be actively pursued by the Parks and Recreation Division in consort with local interested citizens.
- * To dredge a portion of the lagoon to a depth of fifteen feet (15') shall be implemented by the Parks and Recreation Division. In addition to the two fishing piers that will be constructed as a part of this plan, a boardwalk will cross the southeast end of the lagoon.
- * To develop wooden park signs, necessary for visitor information, and similar in character to each other.

STATE PARK DRIVE

A Bay County road named State Park Drive passes through Bay City State Park, dividing the park into two separate parcels, and making it necessary for the park to man and maintain two (2) separate park entrances. It also separates the campground from the remainder of the park, including the beach. This creates safety problems as well as an inconvenience to the campers that travel on foot, back and forth across the road, pursuing a variety of recreation activities.

The Advisory Committee deliberated a considerable amount of time over this issue because of its impact on the future of the park. The committee felt very strongly that State Park Drive should be closed as it passes through the park. This matter of possible road closure was formally submitted to the Bay City Road Commission for their review.

The Bay County Road Commission recently took formal action opposing future closure of State Park Drive as it passes through the park. In addition, several local businesses and individuals objected to the road being abandoned through the park.

The future park development, park operation plan and park user satisfaction and safety rests with the decision made concerning the future of this road.

Based on this concern, the Advisory Committee recommends that Parks and Recreation Division work with the Bay County Road Commission to accomplish the following.

1. Provide for a safe pedestrian crossing between the campground and day use area. Formally request the placement of a full traffic signal near the existing vehicular access drives. If this signal does not meet the required warrants as determined by the Road Commission, then work with the Road Commission to implement other traffic control devices to attain this goal.
2. Reduce vehicular speeds along State Park Drive as it passes through the park. Develop solutions to effectively reduce speeds with a combination of traffic control and selective enforcement methods.
3. Establish a policy to retain the existing character and function of State Park Drive. Improvements to the roadway should only be made for purposes of operations and maintenance. Expansion efforts should be limited to shoulder widening to provide for a safe non-motorized facility.

BEACH FRONTAGE ON SAGINAW BAY

The beach fronting on Saginaw Bay, and currently in State Ownership, consists of approximately 4,700 feet. Of this total, approximately 1,800 feet of beach is located north-west of the Tobico Lagoon outlet and is currently being maintained by permit. The remainder of the beach located south-east of the lagoon outlet has reverted to a wetland condition and now requires a permit from both the DNR and the Corps of Engineers in order to reclaim any part of it for future recreation purposes. The future direction of the day use activities rest with the decisions made concerning the future of this beach.

Because of the importance of the beach to the future of the park, the Advisory Committee has spent a great deal of time and effort deliberating over this issue.

As was previously stated, the beach restoration, including elimination of a "wetland" condition requires a permit from both the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Army Corps of Engineers. This is a very difficult concept to understand when realizing that just a few years ago, the entire stretch of beach consisted of beautiful sand and not wetlands.

In order to convert a portion of this shoreline back to its original sandy condition, it is necessary to select an area located on Saginaw Bay, equal, larger size and create a new wetland. This new area will then be exchanged for the existing area. Several areas were explored as possible mitigation sites before it was finally determined by the Corps of Engineers, that the mitigation area has to be located on Saginaw Bay, just north of the outlet of the Tobico Lagoon. It was the belief of the committee that this area can serve as a part of the nature education program for the park, as it will be in close proximity to the Saginaw Bay Visitor Center.

The committee understands that laws involved and the respective positions maintained by the DNR and the Corps of Engineers on this issue. However, it is the position of the Committee that the Bay City State Park Beach is a critical recreational and economic asset to Bay county and the State Of Michigan. Therefore, in order to maximize its value and effectiveness as an attractive place to visit, it is recommended by the Committee that nearly all the coastal area be reverted to a swimming beach. The exception being a wetland demonstration area to be located in an appropriate location and limited to 15% of coastal area.

It is also recommended that the DNR (Parks and Recreation Division) continue to secure the permits necessary to allow for ongoing maintenance of the majority of the beach north-west of the lagoon outlet, as well as, all other beach areas as they are approved.

PIER ON SAGINAW BAY

The Advisory Committee analyzed the feasibility of a pier which would extend a considerable distance (approximately 1,000 feet) into Saginaw Bay. The purpose of such a pier would attract the public to walk out onto it for viewing the shoreline and Saginaw Bay.

A major concern for such a structure built on pilings, is that it is unprotected and therefore, very vulnerable to storm and ice damage. As a result, this pier concept was rejected by the Committee. However, a structure of lesser magnitude is being proposed in conjunction with the sundeck/pavilion, which will be discussed in greater detail in the "Facility Requirements" section of this report.

WATER QUALITY PROJECT (Muck Machine)

The project consists of developing prototype equipment for the removal of the green algae and small pieces of plants that are being washed ashore on Lake Huron in the Saginaw Bay at the park. This plant material was developing into "mucky" material that was deteriorating on the shore, reducing the quality of the beach for recreational purposes.