

Watkins Lake State Park and County Preserve General Management Plan



Summary of Public Input Workshop

The Planning Team determined that seeking public input to inform the park's preservation and development priorities was advantageous at this stage in the planning process due to the relatively recent acquisition of Watkins Lake State Park and County Preserve (WLP). In order to gather such input, the Planning Team hosted a publicly-advertised input workshop held on September 12, 2017, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Super 8 in Brooklyn, MI. The meeting was advertised via a DNR press release/email bulletin, which went to 17,418 individuals that have expressed an interest in DNR news in the region, and via promotion by Washtenaw County on their website and social media. In addition, over 50 park neighbors with property within 500 feet of the park boundary were notified of the meeting by mail. Of the 34 individuals who attended the public input workshop, 18 of them are considered park neighbors.

Representatives of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission (WCPARC) provided attendees with a brief overview of the park, including its natural and historic resources, its jointly-managed status, and its current recreational offerings. Attendees were also presented the General Management Plan process, timeline, and an explanation of the plan elements that their input would ultimately inform: the Statements of Significance, the Management Zone map, and a list of Action Items intended to be accomplished over the next ten years.

The 34 attendees were divided into small-table discussion groups, which completed a series of exercises describing the park's context, the park itself, the participants' vision for the park's future, as well as the park's potential benefit to the larger community. Some exercises included a voting component. Each table then reported out to the larger group. The results of the table exercises are outlined below.

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PUBLIC INPUT WORKSHOP ATTENDEES	
Name	Name
Andrew Bonkowski	Tamara Denby
Shaun Bonkowski	Sybil Kolon
Gerald Rensi	Bill Searles
Tom Dyer	Charles Baker
Linda Dyer	Erleen Clark
David Lamb	Jerry Clark
Sylvia Kay	Shane Morse
Jeff Darr	Laura Watkins Koelewijn
Kathy Brown	Tim Koelewijn
Tim Mulcahy	Maureen Heslip
Jack Martin	Steven Duvall
Janice Kessler	Tammy West-Brown
Clayton Kessler	Diana Arnold
Len Benfant	Mike Arnold
Ryan Johnson	Cameron Denby
Bill Hubbell	Gary Troz
Scott Engel	Barb

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Exercise 1: Say one word or phrase that describes the Irish Hills area.

When people think about the Irish Hills area today, recreation, lakes and water, rolling hills, greenery, peacefulness, nature, and Native American history come to mind. The words and phrases that were mentioned at two or more tables are listed below.

Items	Times Mentioned
Recreation/Camping	5
Hills	5
Peaceful/Quiet	3
Forgotten/Run down	3
Nature/Wildlife	2
Greenery	2
Lakes/Water	2
Native American History	2
Open space/Rural	2

Exercise 2: Say one word or phrase that describes WLP right now.

The public described WLP right now as peaceful or quiet, historical, and having abundant nature and wildlife. Below are the words and phrases that were mentioned by two or more groups.

Items	Times Mentioned
Peaceful/Quiet	4
Nature/Wildlife	4
Historical	4
Pristine	3
Underutilized/Underdeveloped	3
Beautiful	2
Waterfowl	2
Views/Vistas	2

Exercise 3: Say one word or phrase that you want to describe WLP in the future.

Public participants that attended the input sessions would like to be able to describe WLP as a place for human and animal sanctuary, history, education, and pristine with trail opportunities. The table below shows items mentioned by two or more tables.

Items	Times Mentioned
Trails	5
Sanctuary/Refuge	3
Historical	3
Educational	2
Pristine	2
Farmhouse/Land acquisition	2
Quiet/Peaceful	2

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Exercise 4: What natural or cultural aspects should be prioritized at WLP?

When asked about prioritizing natural or cultural aspects at WLP, attendees thought that WLP's history, including Native American history, lake and waterways, wildlife and habitat preservation, and trails should be prioritized. Once lists of items were created, each group was asked to pick their top three natural/cultural priorities among their own group's items. The list below compiles each group's items and votes, and shows only the items that received at least one vote. The Underground Railroad history and restoration and preservation of native species and habitat received the highest votes in at least three of the groups, with Native American history also of high importance among five groups.

Items	Times Mentioned	Votes
Underground Railroad History/General History	6	19
Restoration/Preservation of Native Species/Habitat (Sensitive Areas)	3	18
Native American History	5	12
Preserve Dark Sky/Dark Park	2	8
Trails/Connectivity	3	7
Lakes/Waterways	4	5
Waterfowl/Bird Viewing	1	5
Additional Parking	1	3
Game Refuge	1	3
History of Watkins Lake	1	3
Get Rid of Coyotes	1	3
No Hunting	1	2
Water Quality Improvement	1	1
Horse Trails	1	1

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Exercise 5: What recreational activities should be prioritized at WLP?

Meeting attendees were asked to prioritize recreational activities that they do and do not desire at WLP. Activities they want incorporated include hiking and biking trails, horseback riding trails, picnic areas, and areas for wildlife viewing. Items they felt were undesirable at WLP include hunting, motorized vehicles, and camping. After “wants” and “do not wants” were listed, each group was asked to pick their top three recreational priorities among their own group’s “wants”; “do not wants” were not voted on. The table below compiles each group’s votes and items, and shows only the items that received at least one vote. Hiking is the highest voted recreational priority mentioned in all six public groups, with picnicking, biking, and horseback trails of somewhat high priority mentioned in at least four groups.

Items	Times Mentioned	Votes
Hiking	6	21
Picnicking	5	12
Biking	4	11
Horseback Trails	5	10
Bird Watching	4	5
Camping	1	5
Dredging of Lake (for more birds)	1	4
Wildlife Education	1	4
Historical Tours	1	4
Portable Restrooms	1	4
No Hunting	1	4
Guided Nature Walks	1	3
No Motorized Vehicles	1	3
No Camping	1	2
Stargazing	1	2
Fishing	2	2
Property Line Identification	1	2

Do Not Want	Times Mentioned
Hunting	6
Motorized Vehicles	6
Camping	3

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Exercise 6: Vote on compiled list of top voted natural/cultural aspects and compiled top list of recreational activities.

As each group presented the highest-voted items for natural/cultural and recreational activities, the planning team transferred those ideas into a separate exercise, combining similar items. As the attendees left the input session, they voted on their top two items from the Natural/Cultural collective priorities list and top two items from the Recreational collective priorities list. This afforded them the opportunity to vote on an item that was not mentioned at their own table. Below are all of the collective priorities. The two Natural / Cultural items receiving the most votes were wildlife diversity / game refuge, and trails / connectivity. The two Recreational items receiving the most votes are hiking and horseback riding.

Natural/ Cultural Items	Votes
Wildlife Diversity/Game Refuge (Protect Sensitive Areas)	18
Trails/ Connectivity	15
Dark Skies/Dark Park	9
Native American History	6
Underground Railroad	4
Railroad History	4
Waterfowl	4
Native Species (Restoration/Protection)	1
Lake (kept natural)	1

Recreational Items	Votes
Hiking	17
Horseback Riding	13
Bird Watching	7
Wildlife Education	7
Property Line Identification	4
Biking	3
Historical Tours	2
Kayak Launch	2
Picnicking	1
Portable Restrooms	1

This input will be considered by the planning team when creating a 10-year action plan.