

Antrim Creek Natural Area Commission

Dave Heeres, Chairman

Don Miles

Michele Nerone

Carl Veenstra

Jacob Veenstra

Minutes September 28, 2016

Members present: Dave Heeres, Don Miles, Michele Nerone, Jacob Veenstra

Members absent: Carl Veenstra

Staff present: Janet Koch

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

2. Public Comment

New member Don Miles introduced himself.

3. Approval of April 20, 2016 minutes

Motion by Michele Nerone, seconded by Jake Veenstra, to approve the minutes of April 20, 2016 as presented. Motion carried – unanimous.

4. Boat Launch Update

Janet Koch, Associate Planner, said a small modification had been added to the project's permit—adding 6" of crushed stone underneath the concrete planks. This modification needed to be approved by both the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE). DEQ approval had been received; the ACE's approval of the permit modification was still pending.

5. 2017 Budget

Copies of the Antrim Creek Natural Area (ACNA) Commission's budget had been included with the agenda packets. The ACNA Commission agreed to that snowplowing the south entrance road for the upcoming season would be a benefit.

Additional gravel at the entrance roads was discussed. Ms. Koch noted that there was little reason to make any improvement to the north entrance road until the boat launch project was completed. Eileen Wallick, Park Manager, said she would work on getting an estimate for repairs to the south entrance for completion in 2016.

6. Various Matters

Birding Trail

Angie Lucas, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, and Ms. Koch distributed materials regarding birding trails (**see attached pgs. 3-5**). Ms. Lucas, a preserve steward, said she had been working with Darrell Lawson of Petoskey Audubon regarding the birding trail, and was requesting permission to include ACNA as a stop on the new Sunset Coast Birding Trail. There would not be any cost to the County.

Draft

A small 9" x 12" sign would be placed at each of the ACNA's two parking areas and the ACNA would be included on the birding trail's website. Ms. Wallick agreed to work with a representative from the birding trail regarding placement of the signs, which were expected to be funded by a grant award in the spring of 2017. No formal activities are planned, no partnership agreement is necessary, and there are no plans to provide literature about the birding trail at the ACNA.

The ACNA Commission discussed the project and noted that it fit the ACNA's master plan. It was the commission's consensus that the signs should be installed.

Bench

Ms. Koch said the bench project had been awarded to Site Planning Development of Charlevoix. They had expected the bench to be installed in September. The project was not yet complete, but Ms. Koch anticipated that it would be done before the end of the year.

Mr. Miles suggested the installation of additional benches, specifically near the parking areas. Mr. Heeres said he would look into the possibility of new benches as a potential Eagle Scout project.

Schoolhouse

Ms. Koch said a certified letter had been sent to the owner of the schoolhouse property asking if the owner would like to enter into a discussion regarding the County's purchase of the property. There had been no response.

Trail Maintenance

Mr. Miles asked about the installation of boardwalks on the Trillium Ridge trail as a section of the trail was impassable during wet seasons. Rerouting the trail was also discussed. Mr. Miles noted that another section of trail was often wet and muddy to the point of impassibility.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Sunset Coast Birding Trail

Introduction

In 2011, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) conducted a demographic and economic study regarding birding in the United States. The study found that in 2011 there over 47 million individuals in the United States over the age of sixteen who regarded themselves as birders. Of these 47 million, over 2 million were Michigan residents. In addition, the study estimated that birders spend approximately \$41 billion on trips and equipment for the purpose of birding, generating a total economic impact of over \$107 billion!

Over the last few years, many regions in Michigan have developed birding trails with the purpose of attracting birders to their area. The Saginaw Bay Birding Trail, The Superior Birding Trail, The Sleeping Bear Birding Trail, The Beaver Island Birding Trail, The Sunrise Coast Birding Trail, and the North Huron Birding trail have all now been established. Information regarding each of these trails can be found on Michigan Audubon's website at <http://www.michiganaudubon.org/go-birding/birding-trails/>.

Antrim, Charlevoix, and Emmet Counties host a wide variety of protected areas and habitats that attract a large number of Michigan's over 400 bird species. Whether it is a pair of nesting, federally endangered Piping Plovers, a Snowy Owl visiting for the winter, or the many warblers and waterfowl that pass through the area on their way to and from their breeding grounds, the tip of the Northwest Lower Peninsula offers exciting birding opportunities. Local parks, nature preserves, and natural areas make prime birding locations easily accessible and also highlight local conservation efforts.

With this in mind, a group of individuals and conservation related organizations in these counties are developing the Sunset Coast Birding Trail. The trail will provide information about birding in this region and highlight sites that provide prime birding opportunities to encourage birders to visit the area. Primary sites will be highlighted on a website, a printed map, and will also feature signage at the site itself. There will be approximately 30 primary sites on the birding trail – roughly ten per county. Because a printed map has limited space in which to feature sites, additional sites that offer good birding opportunities will be identified that will be featured on the website only.

The trail will also point visitors to other local amenities and attractions such as hotels/campgrounds, restaurants, museums, and other tourism oriented establishments. Birders visiting the area will need a place to eat, place to stay, and may also shop and visit attractions. Given that the prime birding months span from September through May, visiting birders can provide a boost to the local economy during the slower seasons.

Successful birding trails in more than 20 states are demonstrating that trails bolster economies, bring people closer to nature and create support for conserving habitats. The Sunset Coast Birding Trail will offer a unique opportunity to showcase the diverse natural features of Antrim, Charlevoix and Emmet counties and generate an economic benefit to the local communities.

9/9/2016

Dear Antrim Creek Natural Area,

I am writing to you on behalf of The Sunset Coast Birding Trail Development Team. This trail will be based primarily in Antrim, Charlevoix, and Emmet Counties. The purpose of the trail is to attract visitors to this area by highlighting prime birding sites. By doing this, it will both demonstrate the diverse natural features of our area and provide an economic boost, notably during the shoulder seasons. Please see the attached Sunset Coast Birding Trail Introduction for more information.

Sites have been selected based on the quality of habitat, accessibility, and geographic location. They are composed of two categories.

Primary Sites: These are the prime birding sites that will be featured both on the website and on the printed map. In addition, signage in the form of a 9x12 aluminum sign will be placed at the site's parking area(s). Please see the included image for an early draft of the sign.

Secondary Sites: These sites also offer excellent birding opportunities, but are either too close to a primary site, offer less parking availability, or are too far from the central hub of primary sites to be considered a primary site themselves. They will be featured on the website, but not on the printed map. They also will not receive signage.

We are pleased to inform you that we have selected the following sites that belong to Antrim County:

Primary Sites:

1. Antrim Creek Natural Area

We request your permission to include these sites on the Sunset Coast Birding Trail. Granting permission via email is the only thing we required for participation; however, the following items would also be of assistance:

1. Someone from your organization is welcome to accompany our volunteer when the time comes to place signage at the parking areas, to ensure that the signage is located to your organization's approval.
2. We would prefer the signage be attached to an already existing structure. Please suggest a location at your site. If a suitable structure is not available, we can provide and install a post.
3. If your organization already has in place a system for routinely checking the condition of signage, we would appreciate any notice concern damage to our signs. If that is not feasible, we will happily have our own volunteers routinely check the signs.
4. Please provide us with a short description of the site(s) to go on the website and map. Also, it would be helpful to list any other activities that are available at the site. This will allow us to highlight additional activities that may be enjoyed by visitors and also to warn them to be on the lookout for mountain bike traffic, to avoid the site during hunting season, etc.
5. Provide a logo that can be used to highlight your organization's ownership of the site on the website and on the printed map.

Please respond with your answer to our request for permission or with any questions you may have regarding the Sunset Coast Birding Trail. We look forward to working with your organization on this project.

Sincerely,

The Sunset Coast Birding Trail Development Team

