

NOTIFICATION OF NEW AND EXPANDED STATE PARKS

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House Bill 4024 (Substitute H-2)

Sponsor: Rep. John Stewart

Committee: Conservation, Forestry, and Outdoor Recreation

First Analysis (5-31-05)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would require Department of Natural Resources officials to notify local units of government if they opened a state park, acquired land within a park, or changed the boundaries of an existing park.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have little, if any, fiscal impact. Since there are no new state parks planned, and park expansions would occur only if funding were available for land purchase, no significant fiscal impact is expected.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

In 1975, the state designated nearly 950-acres of rolling terrain, open meadow, mature forest, abundant wildflowers, and a variety of wildlife that is located in the northwestern quadrant of Wayne County as Maybury State Park. The only state park in Wayne county, it attracts 500,000 visitors annually. The park has a fishing pond, playground equipment, sports fields, picnic tables and grills, shelters, and miles of trails designed specifically for bicycling, hiking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing.

One of the highlights of Maybury State Park is the Living Farm, a 40-acre area of the park that represents a small family farm where general farming practices are demonstrated. The equipment, tools, and practices used to tell the farming story are typical of those used on the farms that dotted Wayne County's landscape in the early 1900s. As was the custom then, this farm produces food for local markets and also supplies most of the milk, eggs, meat, vegetables, herbs, and some of the fruit used by the family living there. Chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, rabbits, dairy cows, beef cattle, goats, sheep, and pigs are all raised on the Living Farm. The Living Farm is visited by many schoolchildren in southeastern Michigan, the youngest of whom interact with many farm creatures in a petting zoo. Others make maple syrup in early spring; observe sheep shearing, wool carding, spinning and weaving, and field plowing with draft horses in late spring; and join the harvest in the fall.

On February 12, 2003, a fire destroyed a 100-year old barn at Maybury Living Farm, killing all the livestock housed there—about 50 creatures. After the fire occurred, state officials announced they would be unable to rebuild and restock the farm, because the state was in the midst of a \$1.5 billion budget deficit with vital state services being cut.

Instead of replacing the portion of the Living Farm that was destroyed, state officials forged a partnership with the Northville Community Foundation, and that nonprofit group, working together with hundreds of community volunteers, was responsible for

rebuilding and maintaining the new facility. Under a 15-year lease agreement with the DNR, the foundation has taken over operation of the Living Farm, raising more than \$1 million (and with a goal of \$3 million to endow the site) to restore buildings and livestock. Rebuilding is now nearly completed, new animals and historic barns have been donated by generous farmers and developers, hundreds of volunteers have worked to refurbish other buildings, and the Maybury Living Farm is once again open to the public.

When state officials announced they could not rebuild the farm after the fire due to lack of funds, there were rumors the state intended to sell the land for future development. Despite reassurances to the contrary, the rumor of a land sale persisted. To ensure that department officials cannot sell state park land without notifying the public, some have argued the law should be amended to require public notice whenever state parks are to be sold or their boundaries (either internal and external) to be altered.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4024 would amend the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (MCL 324.74103a) to require the Department of Natural Resources, before opening or expanding the boundaries of a state park, or transferring or acquiring property within the boundaries of an existing park, to notify, in writing, each affected local unit of government.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

This legislation will ensure that when a state park's boundaries change, the public will be notified. This bill will enable officials at the Department of Natural Resources, all of whom serves as stewards of our state parks, to stay accountable to, and in direct communication with, the members of the public who enjoy the use of the parkland. Closer communication can help to create productive partnerships, such as the one that emerged after the crisis at the Maybury Living Farm in Wayne County.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Association of Counties supports the bill. (5-26-05)

The Michigan Townships Association supports the bill. (5-26-05)

The Department of Natural Resources supports the bill as amended. (5-26-05)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.