



COUNTY ROAD ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN

417 SEYMOUR - P.O. BOX 12067 - LANSING, MI 48901

TELEPHONE 517.482.1189 - FAX 517.482.1253

TO: Members of the Michigan Senate
FROM: Ed Noyola, Deputy Director
DATE: November 12, 2009
SUBJECT: Senate Bills 388-389 (State Park Passport Fees)

Please be advised that the County Road Association of Michigan (CRAM) strongly opposes Senate Bills 388 and 389, as reported by the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and the Environment.

Although state parks are important, having good roads and bridges is critical to Michigan's economy. If Michigan had the best state park system in the nation, but the roads that lead to them are closed are riddled with potholes, tourists will seek other options. We are at a critical point in Michigan's history. We must determine what the core functions of government are and fund them first. Co-mingling user fees and further reducing scarce transportation funds will have devastating consequences on our economy and jobs.

If you have any questions, I will be outside of chambers and would like to have the opportunity to speak with you.

Talking Points:

- ❖ CRAM understands we need to fund state parks, just as we do our roads and bridges. Parks and roads each have their own unique system of user fees. Co-mingling these fees is bad public policy;
- ❖ If parks need more money, the sticker prices should be increased as Gov. Granholm suggested earlier this year. When road agencies need more money for roads, we advocate increasing our user fees (vehicle registration fees and fuel taxes), not to piggy back on others;
- ❖ CRAM supports increasing vehicle registration fees for roads, and acknowledges that it would be nearly impossible to convince legislators to vote to increase these fees twice in any given period, but CRAM's reasons for opposing this legislation go much further;
- ❖ CRAM believes this legislation violates the Michigan Constitution and opposes any attempts to weaken Article IX, Section 9 of the Michigan Constitution which will lead to diversion of transportation funding;
- ❖ Parks were traditionally funded with general fund revenues. If the goal is to ensure that parks are available for the use of all residents and serve as a tourist attraction they should be funded once again through park permit fees and the general fund;
- ❖ This legislation also establishes a system which would invite illegal access and confusion not present with the current user fee structure. It would be very difficult to police the use of state parks under this system;
- ❖ There would be little to no cost savings as DNR employees would still need to be present at the parks to sell passes to those who do not "opt-in" when they purchase a vehicle or renew a license plate and tourists visiting Michigan;
- ❖ At a time when our state is in financial crisis and unable to secure necessary funding for schools, roads, and many other basic services; why is the legislature increasing funding for state parks before these critical issues are addressed;
- ❖ Several of the state parks that will be assisted under the proposal are not profitable because they are competing against privately owned campgrounds that meet the recreation needs in that community. Privately owned campgrounds pay Michigan taxes and provide jobs for our residents; and
- ❖ Michigan has underfunded transportation for the past four decades which has allowed Michigan to be a leader of polls listing the worst roads in the nation. This is the last message our state should be sending as we seek to encourage business growth!