Public Input

Public input and participation from the Manistee County community is always welcome. With a broad array of world class recreational assets, the residents, elected officials, Steering Committee members, and Planning Commission take pride in the recreational offerings available in the county. As with any community asset, such as parks and related recreational lands, there is always the potential for improvement and expansion due to an ever-changing county and its needs. The county’s interest in maintaining and improving recreational assets is evident by the dedicated Steering Committee, Planning Commission and elected leaders that have worked on the development of this recreation plan. As part of this planning process, the Steering Committee and Planning Commission was determined to ensure its efforts to obtain input from the residents and stakeholders was thorough. At a minimum, the DNR requires two opportunities for public participation, with the first to take place during the preparation of the plan – such as a community
workshop – and the second taking place as an advertised public hearing at the time when the plan is presented for adoption.

In Manistee County, the Steering Committee exceeded the minimum requirements for providing public input. They provided a total of four opportunities for input and participation during the development of this plan. First, an open house was held for three hours at Faith Covenant Church in Manistee on January 31, 2008, to hear thoughts and ideas about the future of recreation in Manistee County. Then, a second open house for community input was held, on Tuesday, February 19, for three hours at Brethren High School in Dickson Township. Each open house had the same format. Third, at the outset of the planning process, a website was developed, located online at http://manistecorecreation.wordpress.com/, to provide news, meeting announcements, recreational information, maps, photos, and document drafts to be shared with the general public. The website also had interactive features, allowing people to provide online comments. Also throughout the planning process, a number of letters and e-mails were submitted, many with suggestions and input about improvements at favorite sites. And finally, after the draft of this plan was developed, it was available for public review at the **County Building in Manistee**, the **District Library**, and **online at manisteecounty.net**. The 30 day Notice of Review was published in the **Local News** on _______, 2008. The public hearing was held with the Planning Commission on _______, 2008.
Approximately 35 people attended the first community input open house in January, and about 13 people attended the second open house in February. Each open house was publicized via an announcement in the newspaper, through press releases, a posting on the project website, flyers posted throughout many of public buildings in Manistee, Steering Committee members contacting recreation stakeholders, and a direct mailing to each of the local municipal Clerks requesting that an enclosed flyer be posted at their office and that a local representative be present. Copies of the flyers announcing the open houses and the letter to local Clerks are in Appendix A, including a screenshot of the project website.

Attendees to the community input open houses provided valuable input about recreation in Manistee County. Inventory maps of lakes, rivers, and state and federal property was available for review along with another display board about general recreational amenities and planning for community recreation. All of the suggestions were written on flip chart sheets that were posted around the room. After the open houses, all of the suggestions were compiled and categorized. The comments are summarized below, organized by common themes heard throughout each of the three hour open house sessions.

**Improvements to Existing Facilities**

(a) Beaches
(b) Hiking trails
(c) Improve accessibility at existing facilities
(d) Need to make parks more handicapped accessible and need more accessible restrooms
(e) Promote federal properties (Big M for example) for activities such as mountain biking, etc.
(f) Improve access to water resources (lakes, rivers)
(g) Improve parking at existing facilities
(h) Improve signage for the North Country Trail
(i) Create connections from the North County Trail to historic sites along the river
(j) Need more interpretive signs along trails (nature/ecological)
(k) Improve interpretive signs for historical sites on federal property
Expand Existing Non-Motorized Pathway System
(a) New connections to the existing system need to be paved
(b) Needs to be safe for people of all ages and abilities
(c) Consider off-road pathways
(d) Pathways need more opportunities for nature viewing (birding, wildflowers)

Create New Recreation Opportunities
(a) Would like an indoor recreation center
(b) Need more indoor spaces to play games, etc, such as a small community center
(c) Create additional accessible park amenities
(d) Use county roads that end at lakes and rivers
(e) Disc golf course
(f) Work with Manistee National Forest (U. S. Forest Service)
(g) Work with Little River Band of Ottawa Indians
(h) Work with West Shore Community College
(i) Mountain bike skills area
(j) Indoor tennis facility

Provide More Opportunities for Youth
(a) Need more recreational opportunities for youth and children, to be achieved through partnerships with schools via field trips to outdoor venues
(b) Need more baseball diamonds
(c) BMX track
(d) Volleyball
(e) Tennis
(f) Basketball

Programming
(a) Work with the Manistee Recreation Association to improve programming
(b) The Manistee Recreation Association needs better funding
(c) Use parks as the public spaces to be venues for the arts and culture
(d) Promote environmental education programs at Lake Bluff Audubon Center
Other
(a) Would like to see more county-operated facilities
(b) Promote and provide a diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities, many already available in Manistee County, such as snowmobiling, hiking, bicycling, canoeing, and kayaking
(c) Identify trailheads, link existing trails, and show access points
(d) Identify areas to launch a canoe/kayak
(e) Highlight historical sites such as old Indian mounds and lumbering areas
(f) Improve fisheries in Manistee County and focus on Portage Lake, Bear Lake, Tippy Backwaters, and Big Bear Creek and its tributaries
(g) Increase awareness of the many recreational opportunities available in Manistee County; need better promotion and involvement with media