COUNTY OF manistee MICHIGAN

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DRAFT
Monday, May 4, 2026
6:15PM

Manistee Planning Conference Room
395 Third Street,
Manistee, MI 49660
and via Zoom

MANISTEE COUNTY RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Call to Order & Roll Call:
The meeting was called to order by Chair Wayne Beldo at 6:15 pm.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Wayne Beldo, Margaret Batzer, Gary Schwaiger, William Shryer, Glenn Zaring, Paul Petrovich, Linda Cudney, Robert Schuelke

MEMBERS ABSENT: Shayne Machen, Devin Wegner

QUORUM: Confirmed

OTHERS PRESENT: Katie Gruenberg, Planning Director; Jodie Lynch, Planner 1; Jessica Sorensen, Assistant Planning Secretary; Sara Herberger, Manistee County Community Foundation; Tim Knoper, Manistee-Benzie Dirt Birds

DIGITAL MEDIA: Mark Coe, Manistee-Benzie Snow Birds; Sally Trisch, Dickson Township; Scott Slavin, DNR

Approval of the Agenda:
Ms. Cudney motioned, supported by Mr. Zaring, to approve the May 4th, 2026, agenda as presented. Motion passed with a voice vote.

Approval of Minutes:
Ms. Batzer motioned, supported by Mr. Shryer, to approve the April 6th, 2026, meeting minutes as printed. Motion passed with a voice vote.

Conflicts of Interest: None

Public Comment: None

Scott Slavin, DNR – Trail Development Discussion:
The Commission welcomed DNR representative Scott Slavin to discuss future trail development efforts, specifically the Thompsonville to Kaleva/Chief corridor and next steps for planning and engineering. Discussion centered on the DNR-owned railroad grade, forest road classifications, maintenance expectations, and long-term feasibility of developing a non-motorized trail connection.

Mr. Slavin explained the DNR's forest road inventory process and reviewed areas currently classified as open or closed to ORV use. Particular attention was given to sections near Bear Creek where logging access remains a concern due to limited alternate access routes for forestry operations. He noted that while closing portions of the

grade to conventional vehicle traffic appears feasible, the process requires review by multiple DNR divisions and consideration of forestry, hunting, and land access needs.

Discussion points included:

- Potentially pursuing development in smaller segments, such as Thompsonville to Kaleva, rather than the full corridor at once
- The importance of maintenance agreements and long-term management responsibilities
- Use of public comments and Commission resolutions to support future road closure considerations
- Opportunities for collaboration between local governments, Friends of Smart Trails, and the Snowbirds organization
- Balancing trail development with forestry and logging operations
- The value of pursuing comprehensive planning and engineering for the entire corridor rather than piecemeal segments

Mr. Slavin encouraged the Commission and community partners to submit comments through the DNR forest road inventory system. Indicating additional support documentation from local governments and organizations would strengthen future discussions.

Additional discussion focused on the gap between Kaleva and Chief where ownership and roadway limitations remain obstacles. The possibility of future engineering studies evaluating alternatives such as separated trail corridors, widened shoulders, or easement acquisition through private property.

Members also discussed future trail signage standards, maintenance partnerships, and the role nonprofit organizations could play in trail stewardship and upkeep.

Updates:

Friends of SMARTrails: Report by Ms. Linda Cudney

Highlights from the April 13th meeting included:

- Submission of a support letter and $1,000 match contribution for the Snowbirds' mower grant application to the Manistee County Community Foundation
- Ongoing development of organizational steps for future trail expansion efforts, including landowner outreach, route identification, and project timelines
- Friends of SMARTrails purchase of trail counters and usage tracking equipment
- Planning for the June 6 ribbon cutting ceremony for the Thompsonville to Copemish trail segment
- Preparation for trail cleanup efforts scheduled for May 9
- Continued work on updated brochures and promotional materials

The Commission also discussed attendance at the upcoming Friends of SMARTrails May 11th meeting where Mr. Slavin will speak again.

Benzie - Manistee County Dirt Birds: Report by Tim Knoper

- Recent ice storms and flooding created significant trail cleanup and maintenance challenges throughout the region
- Members and volunteers have been actively clearing fallen trees and assessing damaged trail areas
- Adopt a highway cleanup for May 9th
- The upcoming spring ORV ride for MISORVA scheduled for May 15th
- Three Dirtbird members recently completed certification as ORV safety instructors through the DNR

The Recreation Commission also briefly discussed the recently adopted ORV ordinance and the importance of public awareness with updated mapping resources.

Benzie - Manistee County Snowbirds: Report by Mark Coe

- Ongoing trail maintenance and equipment preparation for the upcoming season
- Upcoming Michigan Snowmobile and ORV Association quarterly board meeting hosted at the Snowbirds clubhouse May 16th
- Snowbirds will be investigating options for getting internet into the clubhouse for zoom availably for the regular recreation groups utilizing the clubhouse facility

Mr. Coe also mentioned the upcoming Tight Lines for Troops event May 16th at Seng's Marina is seeking volunteers.

Municipality Updates: none

County-Wide Recreation Plan & Planning Department Staff: Report by Ms. Katie Gruenberg
Katie Gruenberg updated the Commission on continued efforts related to the Village of Kaleva bathroom and trailhead project. Staff are revisiting project scope and design options after previous cost estimates exceeded available funding. Discussion included exploring prefabricated restroom facilities and phased implementation approaches to make the project financially feasible.

Old Business: None

New Business:
Parks & Recreation Plan: Chapter 6 Review
Staff reviewed Chapter 6 of the Recreation Plan for this draft update. Ms. Jodie Lynch explained the approach taken to condense existing material while incorporating updated initiatives and ongoing recreation efforts throughout the county.

Discussion included:

- Incorporating additional information regarding the Complete Streets Policy
- Adding updated language related to the Walkability Action Institute and Safe Routes to School initiatives
- Continuing work on draft formatting, tables, and public engagement materials
- Anticipated timelines
    - Final draft for public review and comment August 2026
    - Public hearings with the local units October - November 2026
    - Final adoption November - December 2026.

Members were encouraged to submit comments and edits for this chapter prior to the next meeting.

Other Items Before the Board:

- Upcoming Onekama Event:
    - Booth sharing with SMARTrails discussed
    - Potential recreation outreach materials and displays
    - Updating recreation maps and promotional materials

- Staff was asked to start obtaining support resolutions from additional organizations and municipalities for future trail initiatives
- Members emphasized the broader economic impact and development value of recreation trails within Manistee County
- Request to include next scheduled meetings on upcoming agendas or meeting minutes

Adjourn:
Mr. Beldo requested a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:38 P.M.

> **Mr. Schuelke motioned, supported by Ms. Batzer, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed with a voice vote.**

Next Meeting:
June 1st, 2026 @ 6:15PM; Manistee County Planning Conference Room

Respectfully submitted,

_____ _____
Gary Schwaiger, Recreation Commission Date