

DNR Considers Changing Fee Structure at State Marinas

By Paul Gingras

"They're finally opening their eyes and listening to us," said Garfield Township Clerk Linda Bennett, regarding a proposal by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to change fee structures at state owned and grant-in-aid marinas to better reflect the needs and services of individual facilities.

Slip rates for seasonal boaters are based on defined "rate areas," regardless of the level of development and services various marinas have to offer.

Garfield Township lies in Rate Area Three, and the board believes, for example, that the cost for a 30-foot slip in Naubinway is too high because the facility offers fewer amenities than other marinas in the same rate area, such as those in St. Ignace and Menominee.

Owing to the rustic nature of its facility, the board is concerned that the Naubinway Marina is being underutilized both by seasonal and transient boaters. This costs the township potential revenue each year, said Duncan MacArthur, a township trustee.

Seasonal boaters rent slips for the summer, and to standardize fees, the DNR has established four rigid "rate

areas" and one "premium rate." The premium rate applies only to Mackinac Island and marinas who apply for temporary variances.

Area One includes the southern Lake Michigan shoreline and a portion of the Lake Huron shoreline. Area Two includes the mid-to northern stretch of the Lake Huron shoreline. Area Three includes marinas along the northern shoreline of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, and Area Four spans the length of Lake Superior.

A seasonal slip for a 30-foot boat, for instance, would be \$1,941 in Area One, \$1,374 in Area Two, \$1,205 in Area Three, \$990 in Area Four, and \$2,310 on Mackinac Island. The geographical districts pose a problem because they don't allow each marina to set rates commensurate with services, say members of the Michigan Waterways Commission, and this problem generates about 15 requests a year from communities that want to change the rates at their marinas.

Usually, they want their rates increased, said Harold Herta, resource management chief for the Parks and Recreation Division of the DNR, which works in association with the Waterways

Commission. At some marinas, the Commission has granted the right to charge the premium rate for a limited amount of time, said Jason Fleming, department analyst for the Parks and Recreation Division, but in December, 2005, the Garfield Township board asked the Waterways Commission to change the Naubinway Marina to Rate Area Four status, which has lower fees. The request was denied.

On one hand, marina costs based on geographical areas has made it easy for boaters, Mr. Herta said. They know how much to expect to pay at each facility. On the other hand, marinas like Naubinway's could, indeed, be bypassed, and Mr. Herta said Garfield Township's request, and others like it, has had a significant impact on the commission's thinking.

Over the past year or so, commissioners and members of the Parks and Recreation Division have been thinking about ways to help anomalies like the marinas at Naubinway and Alpena, which lack facilities or are more difficult to access than others.

"It was partly a realization on our part," Mr. Herta said, "partly a result of requests made

to the Waterways Commission," and partly a change in philosophy based on changes in commission membership.

There are a number of possible solutions, he added. One would be to eliminate having established rate areas with rigid fee structures. Another would be to have more than four rate areas, perhaps eight, each with different fees. Marinas could also be assessed according to specific criteria which could allow them to be exempted from established fees in their rate areas. For example, a facility in Rate Area Three that doesn't offer fuel may automatically be allowed to charge 10 percent less, Mr. Herta said.

The Parks and Recreation Division plans to submit new fee proposals to the Waterways Commission by its Friday, October 13, meeting, but Mr. Herta said he could not speculate on potential fees at this point, "because we don't know where we'll end up yet."

Unlike charges for seasonal boaters, fees for transient boaters are based on daily use and are consistent around the

state, regardless of the district in which a given marina lies. Each marina charges either a standard fee or a premium fee based on whether boaters can reserve slips through the DNR's Central Reservation System (CRS). Premium rates are \$3 higher than standard rates.

Changing transient fee structures to reflect varying levels of services at each marina could help rustic facilities such as Naubinway's from being bypassed by transient boaters, also. The only downside to changing the current system, Mr. Herta speculates, would be the potential to confuse boaters. Now, a Lake Michigan boater traveling along the Upper Peninsula shoreline will not encounter transient rates that vary more than \$3.

At any rate, he noted, the guiding philosophy is to avoid competing with private marinas. Each year, the DNR conducts a survey to discover what local, private facilities are charging, and state prices are set accordingly.

Parks Buy Whistler Collection

The \$60,000 Whistler Collection is being purchased by Mackinac State Historic Parks to secure the painting, pistols, and medallion before they are sold to someone else. Donations are being sought to fund the purchase.

In the interim, the agency will borrow the money from its restricted funds account.

In June, Mackinac Associates, the friends group supporting Mackinac State Historic Parks, said it would match, dollar for dollar, any donations the park receives toward the purchase, up to \$25,000.

The collection includes a portrait of William Whistler, who was a commandant at Fort Mackinac in 1833, a commemorative medallion, and two of Commandant Whistler's pistols. It is owned by a Canadian antique dealer and, once acquired, will be included in the exhibit, "An Island Famous In These Regions," at Fort Mackinac.

Horsemen's Assoc. Show Sunday

The Mackinac Horsemen's Association will hold its 36th annual Mackinac Island Horse Show this Sunday, August 13, at the Great Turtle Park Horse Ring, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. In case of rain, it will be held August 19, same place and time.

At 4 p.m., the raffle drawing for an original Elizabeth Pollic painting, entitled "On the Avenue," will be held. The painting of a tour buggy on Mackinac is valued at \$3,000 and raffle tickets are being sold for \$20, six for \$100. Proceeds benefit the Horsemen's Association.

The tickets are available at the Island Book Store, the Mackinac Island branch of the First National Bank of St. Ignace, the Mackinac Island Public Library, or by calling the Village Blacksmith at (906) 847-3853.

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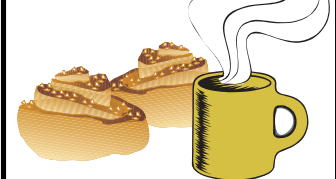
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