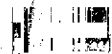


2

CIRCULATING COPY
Sea Grant Depository



• • •

MICHU-G1-72-002

c. 3



GRAND TRAVERSE BAY:
A TIME OF CHOICE
RECREATION

FOREWORD

This series of reports dealing with shorelands management is part of the University of Michigan Sea Grant Program's continuing effort in promoting more logical and effective use of our natural resources.

I hope that documents such as this will help stimulate public understanding and participation in the planning-decision process.

The issue of shorelands management is of special significance to residents of Michigan. We have over 3,000 miles of coastline on the Great Lakes, more than any state in the mainland U.S. Increasing use of this coastal resource will require innovative and imaginative management policies to ensure its continued use in the future.



John M. Armstrong

Director

University of Michigan
Sea Grant Program

CIRCULATING COPY
Sea Grant Depository

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Sea Grant Program wishes to thank numerous local citizens of Grand Traverse Bay and public officials who have contributed so generously of their time and knowledge. Particular gratitude is expressed to the members of the Grand Traverse Bay Shorelands Coordinating Committee and the Michigan Water Resources Commission. Sea Grant also thanks various members of the School of Natural Resources for their help.



INTRODUCTION

In large metropolitan areas such as Detroit, and even in suburban areas, opportunities for water-oriented public recreation are limited or non-existent. Those facilities which are available require careful planning and constant upkeep. There are usually too many people and too little space.

Traverse Bay citizens have benefited from this situation. Much time, money, and effort are spent in telling the world of the abundance of scenic amenities and recreational opportunities within the bay area. Highways designed to increase the incoming flow of urban visitors are proposed. Motels and private camping grounds flourish, along with state and federal parks.

New forms of recreational activity and equipment have made recreation a year-round local industry, and there appears to be a good potential for continued growth.

But as the area becomes increasingly popular, local citizens may gain a false sense of having generated this growth, and feel that somehow they are in control of it. We suggest that it might be more meaningful in this context to say that Grand Traverse Bay has been subjected to increasing recreational pressure, and that local efforts to stimulate demand can only partially account for this pressure.

This paper suggests that there is a need to re-examine the benefits of shorelands-based recreation as a major bay-area industry. **We feel that increasingly, some forms of recreation can become a local financial burden, diminish the quality of the shorelands and water of the area, and result in increasing regional, state, and federal control.**

PART ONE

SOURCES OF RECREATIONAL PRESSURE

4

Many reports have documented the increasing popularity of all forms of recreation, and particularly those forms which are water oriented. Yet few, if any, have spent much time in attempting to explain why this growth is occurring. A fairly typical explanation is that increased leisure time, greater per capita income and more personal mobility are the chief reasons for this continued growth.

Such factors are certainly involved, but they fail to explain why water-based recreation is so popular, as compared to other forms, and implies that there is nothing that can be done about this increased popularity. Indeed, one of the basic assumptions of most recent reports is that since there is a growing demand for recreational facilities, government must continuously meet this demand.

We take exception to such assumptions, and feel that they should be critically reexamined at both the state and local levels. First, to meet the growing demand is but one of several management strategies which the state could adopt. **Regulating the demand so that it fits the tolerance levels of our resources is often a preferable alternative.** Since the coastal resources of the state are limited, increased use eventually leads to deterioration and destruction. Thus to blindly meet increased demand is in the long run irrational. Secondly, increased leisure, income, and mobility may help to explain the increased popularity of recreation, but these elements are not themselves sufficient. Equally important are the activities of several private and public groups which develop and promote various recreational opportunities. We contend that state agencies are major generators of recreational demand and that this demand should be carefully examined before committing unique and fragile public resources and public money to meet it.

Tourist Council

The Tourist Council, located within the state Department of Natural Resources, but with its own policy powers, has been a major element in stimulating the growing recreational demand. While this speaks well of council personnel, it would seem that as our facilities become more crowded and costly to maintain, that perhaps the council's policy of aggressive promotion should be reexamined and coordinated with other public and private recreational and conservation interests.

Private Recreational Facilities

There has been a rapid growth of private camping grounds in recent years. Professor Tocher of Sea Grant is currently studying this trend in greater detail. The long-range importance of this is not clear, but certain problems can be expected. As with tourist facilities, owners of these private campgrounds represented a strong interest group which might be opposed to any attempts at limiting recreational demand.



Highway Programs

Highway systems facilitate increased mobility of downstate and out-of-state visitors. They not only accommodate the growing demand for recreation but also help to stimulate and sustain this growth. As traffic increases to the point of being a problem, the usual solution is to provide even more highway systems. Thus, overcrowding is often dealt with by facilitating even more people. We suggest that highway construction programs should be coordinated with recreational policy so as to direct traffic where it will have minimum environmental impact and greatest benefit. At present highway planners substantially influence recreational policy for the state by creating specific access points.

6

Tourist Facilities

Motels, hotels, marinas, amusement centers, and gift shops are some of the commercial activities which provide necessary supporting facilities for a recreational industry. But as with high-

ways, these "supporting" activities are also a contributing source to the growing recreational demand. They can benefit local growth and high-quality recreation. But they "use" local resources and often lend support to attempts at increasing visitor flow. Since they are primarily oriented towards short-term economic gain, they often fail to realize the importance of a high-quality environment, and can be principal opponents of regulatory attempts.

Equipment Manufacturers

Suppliers of recreational equipment depend upon rural, semiwilderness areas such as Traverse Bay. There is little use for snowmobiles, cross-country skis, outboard motors, or camping vans in urban or suburban areas. These people who directly and indirectly generate considerable pressure upon the social, economic, and natural environment of rural areas are often beyond the control of local citizens.

State Fisheries

The state program creating and maintaining a major recreational fishery in the Great Lakes, and particularly in Traverse Bay, can have considerable benefits to bay residents. But as the state continues to promote this fishery and to further develop it with the introduction of new

species, local citizens will be faced with the problems of public access and the provision of public shoreland facilities. The fisheries program should perhaps be more receptive to local and regional needs, and definitely should be coordinated with the other recreational interest groups.





8

Public Waterways Commission

Through its program of developing marinas and harbors, the Commission is another major element in the increasing growth of recreational demand in the state. Many times the activities and planning of the Commission may have long-term impacts on local communities and on other state programs. The consequences of a continuing marine development program should therefore be more completely integrated into other state and local programs.

State and Federal Parks

The Traverse Bay area already contains a number of public Parks, such as the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, and will probably be designated for even more in the future. These parks can be seen as a major benefit to the local tourist industry. Yet these parks which can generate demands for expensive public services are often located and operated with little or no local input, giving only minor consideration for local problems which such parks tend to generate.

Vacation Home Industry

As more land developers and construction interests move into the bay area, they too will represent a major source of recreational pressure and potentially rising local costs. New concepts such as duplex recreational units and condominium camping van units will greatly increase the density of many shoreland areas.

Past experience indicates that this interest group is strong both economically and politically, and that through advertising campaigns can be a major source of increased recreational pressure.

Summary

We at no point wish to imply that recreation is necessarily bad, or that those who are involved in the recreational industry are against the public interest. But we do wish to emphasize that the "growing demand for recreation" is in large part due to the deliberate actions of identifiable interest groups, which would imply that this demand is controllable. These groups are not coordinated, and often have conflicting values.

As a rule, private citizens and local units of government are partially excluded from decisions which vitally affect the future of their communities.

Each of these groups has its own definition of



“the public interest” and each group sees the water and shorelands of Traverse Bay as being available to meet its interests. The one group most likely to lose in this conflict situation is the local citizens. With little or no control they will be forced to watch as increasing numbers of people and new varieties of recreational activity eventually reduce the quality of the bay.

10

It is clear that the growing demand for outdoor recreation is real, and of serious dimensions. It should also be clear that the very groups that attempt to accommodate this demand also help to generate it. We feel that recreation, if carefully regulated, is perhaps the single best use of Michigan's coastal zone. But it is easily demonstrated that some serious conflicts in shorelands use within the bay area already exist. The tolerance levels of shorelands are limited, and cannot meet the interests of all groups for all time.

PART TWO

PUBLIC ACCESS

Whatever the reason, increasing numbers of people are traveling to rural shoreland areas such as Traverse Bay. When these people arrive at their destination, they may find that there are few public facilities and that access points are unmarked or limited. If they own property, or if they are willing to pay for various commercial facilities, they can enjoy access to the shorelands and the bay. As a result, commercial establishments such as marinas, shoreland motels and private camping grounds flourish, while shorelands property sells at a premium. While this is usually of economic benefit to local shore-

land communities, there is an increasing lag between supply and demand for access to shoreland areas. As more private houses are constructed on the shore, and as more commercial establishments are built, there is not only less open space and wilderness atmosphere; there is also less public access.

This issue is aggravated by the fact that the type of person visiting areas such as Traverse Bay appears to be changing. Most of the past visitors were willing and able to pay for private shoreland property or for commercial accommodations. But many new visitors spend most of their recreational money on the purchase of special equipment, such as camping vans, boats or snowmobiles long before they enter the recreational area. Once they arrive at their destination, they are increasingly interested in **free access** and **minimal expenditures**. This has two major implications for the citizens of Traverse Bay.

1. **It is no longer automatically true that increased numbers of recreational visitors will mean increased income for local citizens. Per capita expenditures may stabilize or drop, while local public service costs could increase rapidly.**
2. **Local citizens should expect that demands for free public access to the shorelands and water of the bay will increase. These demands, increasing throughout the country, are likely to draw strong regional, state, and federal attention. If local citizens do not attempt to deal with this issue, and to some degree meet these demands, they may lose control over the shorelands.**

Future Government Action

Several states have already initiated legislation which provides for considerable access to all shorelands adjoining public waters. Often

such legislation is connected with the creation of a public commission charged with developing more access sites.

On the federal level, there has been continuous interest in establishing some national policy on shoreland access. There is a public access proposal currently before Congress, and it will probably retain many of the proposed elements of the National Open Beaches Bill, which was introduced in 1969. In this earlier proposal major provisions were:

12

- It would be illegal for any party to obstruct the public's passage to beaches or otherwise interfere with the public's use of them.
- Authorization would be given for condemnation necessary to provide sufficient public access where shorelands were in private ownership.
- It is probable that any federal program

would include a new highway construction project within the Department of Transportation to "improve access."

If the interest in outdoor recreation continues to grow, there will be a need for an increase in the public shorelands access. But unless held to a limited increase, as part of a total shorelands management strategy, such a program could do much damage to one of our most fragile, unique resources and place unnecessary social and economic burdens upon local communities and private property owners.

An Example

To demonstrate just how important this issue can be for local communities, it is perhaps instructive to consider a conflict which involves two townships in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and a group of camping van owners known as the Massachusetts Beach Buggy Association (MBBA).

The conflict centers on the use of Nausett Beach, which is under the joint control of two townships. The beach, a fine example of a Atlantic Coast Barrier Beach, is part of the Cape Cod National Seashore, but remains in township control until such time as they wish to turn it over to the Seashore Authority. The beach is narrow, subjected to constant erosion, hurricanes, and

severe winter storms. It is held in place by a thin covering of grass. It provides nesting grounds for birds, acts as a storm barrier for the mainland, and also supports a popular set of summer beach activities such as fishing, surfing, swimming, and walking.

For several years all forms of camping have been prohibited on this beach through township zoning ordinances. Some vehicles were allowed on the beach for fishing. When camping vans became popular, limited numbers were allowed to travel and park on the beach, but only for purposes of fishing. Soon van owners came to see the beach as a very nice, uncrowded camping ground, even though they still represented themselves as fishermen, and the number of vans increased.

As the popularity of the beach increased, the townships tightened up their regulation of the campers, which meant that they came closer to

enforcing existing ordinances. Under new regulations vans could stay only a limited amount of time and then had to leave the beach. After considerable protest from van owners, the regulations were changed, and at the present time vans can return to the beach after leaving for a short period, so as to allow others onto the beach.

As this dialogue was going on, it became increasingly obvious that the vans, as well as other vehicles, were having considerable adverse impact upon the beach. Some of the effects were increased erosion, destruction of vital beach grass and nesting areas, interference with other types of recreation, and aesthetic disruption. It seems probable that the only solu-



tion will be to restrict all vehicles, including vans and local fishermen, if the beach is to be retained in its natural state.

But the van owners, feeling that they were being unfairly discriminated against, in favor of noncamping local groups, organized a political lobby and introduced into the state legislature a proposal to place the beach under state control. To show that they were only interested in equitable allocation of resources, and not seeking any special privileges, the bill proposes that the beach be converted into a major camping ground for all forms of camping. This bill is still pending.

The proposal is to us absurd. One of the finest sand beaches in the world would be destroyed. All traditional forms of beach recreation would be disrupted. To support the activities and densities proposed by MBBA, the state would eventually have to pave sections of the beach, and

perhaps bring in sanitary facilities. There are several camping grounds in the area and many more could be constructed. There are few beaches of this quality, and they are impossible to replace. The townships, concerned over the future quality of the beach, are now discussing with the Seashore Authority the possibility of placing the beach in federal, semiprotected status rather than turning it into a camping site for high-impact, mechanized, camping vans.

15

Concepts

- When dealing with the problems of public access to shoreland areas, it will become increasingly important to distinguish between types of recreational activity and types of access. As a rule of thumb, the more mechanized forms of recreation require more land per person and exclude more alternative types of activity. The greatest number of



people and greatest number of activities can be accommodated within the shorelands if access to the shorelands is restricted to people, excluding all vehicles. If it is desirable to include one or more forms of mechanized activity, then some degree of trade-off must occur. One solution may be to designate specific shoreland areas for specific types of recreation, considering not only the compatibility of activities with natural resource systems but also the compatibility of various recreational activities with each other.

- When planning for public access, care must be taken to allow for new forms of activity which may have special requirements, or local provisions may soon prove inadequate.
- As recreation becomes more popular, free public access to all public waters will be insisted upon. If local communities do not provide for such access as part of a well-thought-

out plan for the shorelands, state or regional groups may impose access requirements which are unnecessarily disruptive.

- State agencies and local communities must attempt to develop criteria for access location, design, and capacity. With increasing national interest in "multiple use" of the shorelands, there is a real danger of multiple **abuse**, at local expense.
- While the public has the right of access to the public waters of the Great Lakes, including Traverse Bay, it is unreasonable that public benefits should be obtained at private or local expense. The state should work in cooperation with local communities to ensure a more equitable distribution of costs.
- People have been led to assume that many forms of recreation should be "free," or nearly so, as in the case of public parks, marinas, and campgrounds. It is time to question this



as a general policy. Perhaps self-sustaining private enterprise could do this job more equitably.

- Recreation is a major source of income for local citizens, and recreation often blocks activities which might be more disruptive to the local economy and environment. But clearly it can no longer be taken for granted that recreation is in all cases a "good thing" for Traverse Bay.



RECOMMENDATIONS

STATE

Recreation is one area in which an overview type of state-level planning and management will be absolutely necessary, if for no other reason than that state activities are currently a major cause of local recreational problems. Considering all of the interest groups involved in Great Lakes recreation, it does not seem likely that local or even bay-wide attempts at planning and study can coordinate the use of the shorelands or waters without state and perhaps even federal assistance. Below are a few points which we feel the state might consider.

- We feel that there is a need to reexamine state recreational policies and to consider possible reformulations of comprehensive recreational policy(ies) particularly for shorelands. While Michigan's recreational programs rank among the best in the nation, it is felt that plans for the future may not adequately or simultaneously recognize local, regional, and state needs, and may need more integration and recognition of some of the factors just discussed.

- Since the state is initiating shorelands and land-use planning, we suggest that these studies emphasize recreational policy, attempting to identify both problems and opportunities which are currently not being effectively dealt with.

- We feel that there should be a strong state-wide recreational policy, formulated with maximum participation from local units of government, who are the most directly affected in many cases.

The state recreational policy might include some of the following provisions:

20

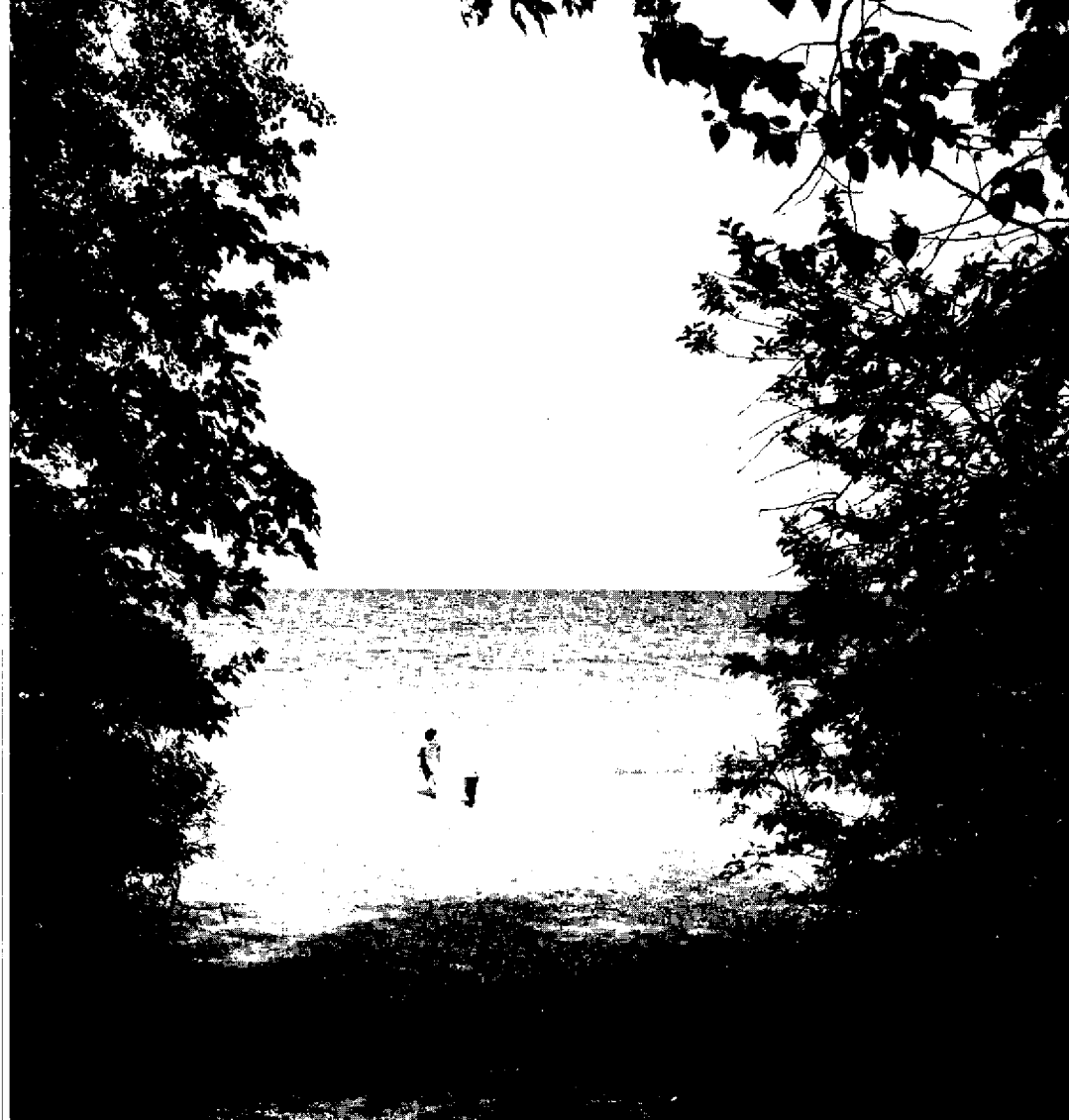
1. **The establishment and enforcement of performance and design standards for all recreational equipment which uses public resources. This could be tied in with a research program in which any new equipment or activity affecting public resources might be given a provisional permit. As the equipment or activity continues, research and testing would identify any modifications which might be needed to protect the public resources from unreasonable damage, or which might protect other desirable public activities which use the same resource area.**
2. **There might be a survey of who is using public and private recreational resources within the state. This could be combined with a consideration of establishing reservation systems, out-of-state user fees, or other methods of curbing the rapidly spiraling demand for limited resources while providing recreational opportunities for the people of Michigan.**
3. **There should be a full review of all state activities which affect public and/or private recreation. The object of this study would be to identify where there are conflicts between agencies, where there is unnecessary duplication or confusion, and where activities are causing undesirable resource pressure. There should be a clear chain of jurisdictional boundaries and more effort should be spent on cooperative systems planning rather than incremental conflicting actions by many groups.**

4. **More thought should be given to strengthening the powers of local units of government, and in developing an institutional situation in which public and private, local and state, federal and regional groups can meet and deal with conflicting interests concerning coastal recreation.**

5. **Perhaps most important of all, and certainly most difficult in terms of politics, the state should establish at least some general guidelines as to how much and what types of recreational pressure will be accommodated in each resource area, and to what extent such accommodation will be met with public property and public funds.**

BAY

Our recommendations for the bay area are similar to those for the state. There should be a total review of recreation in the bay area, and perhaps a series of conferences with the various state, federal, regional, and local units to establish some cooperative guidelines for future recreational policy in the bay area. The bay should be mapped as to tolerance areas for various forms of recreation. Bay citizens should work through their elected representatives to secure a stronger role in decisions dealing with bay-area recreation. In general, local citizens should see recreation as being connected with numerous other bay problems, such as the type and degree of economic growth wanted, the density of shoreland development, how to retain local control in an age of increasing centralization, and how to finance necessary public services.



CONCLUSION

Recreation is a major social and economic factor in the Traverse Bay region. As an alternative to other types of activity such as heavy industry, recreation can have less adverse impact and generate more income. Yet recreation in its modern mechanized form can also lead to rising local costs and a not-so-gradual decline in the quality of the area. If such a decline occurs, tourists and business can perhaps find other recreational areas, but local citizens will be left with an irreparable loss.

The people who will benefit most from a high-quality bay are local citizens. It is critically important that bay citizens realize that if they do not become effective in protecting the quality of the bay, either they will lose much local control as higher levels of government intervene or else the bay will be destroyed. The demand to use the water and shorelands of the bay will increase. Since these are public waters, the state will be forced to ensure more public access and facilities. In the face of such demand it will take careful coordination and cooperative study to protect the quality of the bay.

Sea Grant is willing to help local citizens in developing information and policies to deal with these problems. Various state and federal agencies, if asked, can provide a great deal of help. But such help will be of use only if local citizens express an interest in planning for the future of the bay.

BROCHURE DESIGN: **Margarette Beckwith**

PHOTOGRAPHS: **Blanchard Mills,
Water Resources Commission
Michigan Tourist Council
Peter Ryner**

PRINTING: **The University of Michigan Printing Department**



August 1972
MICHU-SG-72-102

This publication was prepared by the Coastal
Zone and Shorelands Management Project of
the University of Michigan Sea Grant Program.