

Antrim County Parks and Conservation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

A Study with Recommendations

By

Mark Stone, Antrim County Operator of Dams

Sponsored by

The Antrim County Board of Commissioners

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## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This report was authorized and funded by the Antrim County Board of Commissioners (BOC) in February of 2015. Mark Stone, the Operator of Dams was commissioned to perform the study and report back to the Board when completed. It was estimated to be finished by the end of 2015. Below is the memorandum to the BOC in which the Operator of Dams explains the objectives of the study.

### Memorandum Supporting a Study of the Antrim Parks and Recreation Infrastructure

This memorandum is in response to a request by the Buildings, Land and Infrastructure Committee to outline a proposed study to assess the existing Parks and Recreation infrastructure of the County and make recommendations to improve the system.

Antrim County owns and operates an excellent collection of parks and recreation facilities. In addition, County operations indirectly support a host of township and village facilities and foster private sector recreationally-based businesses. It's safe to say, that our community has had an extraordinary run in terms of acquisitions, and at a time when public monies for such projects have been tight. Over the past 20 years several outstanding properties have been added to our collection of public facilities: including Antrim Creek, Cedar River, Hunt Club (on Lake Bellaire), additional acreage at Grass River, and the most recent Glacial Hills trail system. It's important to note that the County could not have accomplished these acquisitions without the help of an engaged and generous local community with a strong spirit of volunteerism.

The unique nature and circumstances of each one of these acquisitions caused the County to set up a separate management system for each one of these new facilities. While all these facilities fall under the rubric of parks and recreation, there is little formal coordination between these groups, especially for the purposes of budgeting, planning or policy-making. At present, our Parks and Recreation Department is primarily set up to operate just Barnes Park Campground and provide seasonal maintenance to a few other parks.

In addition to our parks, the County also provides several services that, directly or indirectly, support Antrim County's parks and recreation economy. For example, the activities of the Operator of Dams, Soil Erosion Officer, the County Forester, among others, support the waterfront management of riparian properties and healthy forestlands that create the valuable landscape that enables all the other recreational activities to prosper. These services are spread out among several departments and have multiple responsibilities, not all of which relate to parks and recreation, but the people who perform these jobs also act as the County's liaisons to the many community groups that utilize recreation, such as lake associations, sportsmen, and local governments. One of the reasons these staffers are so effective at their jobs, is because they have been around long enough to know firsthand the detailed history of the various acquisitions and County policies. When they retire, the

County does not have the institutional framework in place to create a smooth transition to new, less experienced staff.

The complaint of Commissioners, as expressed to me, concerns the complexity of trying to exercise good decisions concerning the parks and recreation operation when dealing with this fragmented management. It is difficult for Commissioners, especially those newly elected, to decipher the how, what, where, when, who and why.

The proposed study would:

- Evaluate and describe the existing Antrim County Parks and Recreation operation. This would include budget research, charting the organizational structure, and an inventory of all County facilities that fall under the rubric of Parks and Recreation.
- Discuss with key persons inside and outside the County operation and report their concerns and observations.
- Provide the Board with options and recommendations to improve the Parks and Recreation operation.

The study would be performed over the course of a year so that each of the four seasons of activity can be examined as is and provide time to fully develop its content. While the study may seem vague at the outset, regular consultations with the Board of Commissioners would help to focus the progress of the study and tailor it to the requirements of the Board as it sees fit.

It's important to make clear to everyone involved that the premise of the study is non-adversarial. While it seems universally agreed that Antrim County delivers a fine Parks and Recreation operation with a dedicated staff, it is also widely believed, staff included, that the operation is not fully understood or appreciated, and that improvements could be made to the administrative structure—and may be overdue.

The Operator of Dams proposes to perform the study at a cost of \$7,500.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Stone" in a cursive script.

Mark Stone

Antrim County  
Operator of Dams

## **WHY IS THE COUNTY INVOLVED IN CONSERVATION TO BEGIN WITH?**

• *Because residents of Antrim County want the County to be involved.*

- Attitudinal surveys consistently rate natural resource recreation as one of the most desirable qualities of the community.

- Previous Boards of County Commissioners have invested heavily in the parks and conservation infrastructure.

- Antrim County established Barnes Park Campground in 1939.

- Antrim County acquired large tracts of forest lands and continues to accept land donations.

- Antrim County was the hub of federal government restoration efforts starting in the 1930s, partnering with MSU Extension, the Soil Conservation Service and the Conservation District.

- Antrim County acquired the Elk Rapids and Bellaire Dams after they were decommissioned, committing itself to maintaining lake levels.

- Antrim County voters passed a millage to preserve the 1905 Courthouse in 1991.

- Antrim County is required to administer the Soil Erosion program under PA 347.

- Antrim County has acquired several nature preserves in response to grass roots efforts and with substantial help from the community: Grass River, Antrim Creek, Cedar River, Fitzpatrick Forest Addition (Glacial Hills).

- Antrim County chose to relicense the Elk Rapids Hydro Dam, again with substantial help from the community.

• *Because Antrim County's economy is heavily reliant on natural resources recreation.*

- According to the MDNR, State of Michigan tourism industry totals \$22.8 billion annually, and directly provides 214,000 jobs. Different types of recreation break down as follows:

- |                   |               |
|-------------------|---------------|
| • Fishing/boating | \$7 billion   |
| • Hunting         | \$2.3 billion |
| • Snowmobiling    | \$1 billion   |
| • Bicycling       | \$668 million |

- In addition, the State of Michigan's timber industry totals \$16 billion annually, directly providing 31,000 jobs.

• *Because County revenues directly depend on natural resources recreation.*

To see the direct impact of parks and conservation on Antrim's local economy, consider the State Equalized Value (SEV), which is the value of property upon which property taxes are levied. Below are the total area, population and SEV figures for Antrim and two neighboring counties. Note that Kalkaska County has 84 more square miles than Antrim, but the Kalkaska SEV is over a billion dollars less than Antrim County. Kalkaska contains only a fraction of the waterfront property on Antrim's Chain of Lakes. Leelanau County has 129 less square miles than Antrim, yet Leelanau's SEV is \$1.2 billion dollars more in value than Antrim's SEV—thanks to an even larger cache of prime waterfront property. Keep in mind that much of Leelanau's prime waterfront is publicly owned at Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore and not reflected in its SEV figures.

#### Regional County SEVs

	<u>Sq. Mi.</u>	<u>Pop.</u>	<u>Total SEV</u>
Antrim	476	24,463	\$ 2,037,887,950.
Kalkaska	560	17,330	841,418,152.
Leelanau	347	22,112	3,252,066,533.

	<u>Total SEV</u>	<u>SEV per Sq. Mi.</u>	<u>SEV per acre</u>
Antrim	\$ 2,037,887,950.	\$ 4,281,277.	\$ 6639.
Kalkaska	841,418,152.	1,502,532.	2347.
Leelanau	3,252,066,533.	9,371,949.	14,643.

The simple fact is that people are willing to pay a high price for owning land on the water. Leelanau has the most desirable locations of these three counties (at least as expressed by monetary value) and Antrim County has more of it than Kalkaska County. Since property tax revenues are directly proportionate to SEV, Leelanau and Antrim Counties are fortunate to have much higher revenues than a county such as Kalkaska.

It wasn't always this way. Once the timber had been stripped from the land, much of it wasn't worth paying the taxes on, and so, the State came into ownership of huge tracts. Arable land was farmed, but farmers were more than happy to sell off the inland lake frontage, since it offered little usefulness for production. At that time, waterfront wasn't much more valuable than any other type of land, so its value didn't show a special impact on property tax revenues.

Since the 1950s and the adoption of auto transportation, waterfront properties have climbed in value for vacation homes. The Antrim Chain of Lakes, especially Torch Lake and Elk Lake, have national reputations. They are grouped with the premier water recreation areas in North America. However, as beautiful as these lakes are, their value also derives from the community in which they are located. Factors such as the surrounding landscape, availability of services, things to do, safety

and security, good local governance, all contribute to making these homes desirable enough to command high prices. The buyers of these homes have certain expectations—if this community can’t meet them, they’ll look to another. It’s a free market.

Now let’s consider how the SEV is distributed within Antrim County. The table below shows the 15 townships of Antrim County ranked by their SEV value. Note that the three top townships (which happen to border the shorelines of Lake Michigan, Torch Lake and Elk Lake) alone account for over 45% of the County’s total SEV, and despite the fact that they are small in area. In fact, all the townships east of Bellaire combined make up less than one quarter of the County’s SEV.

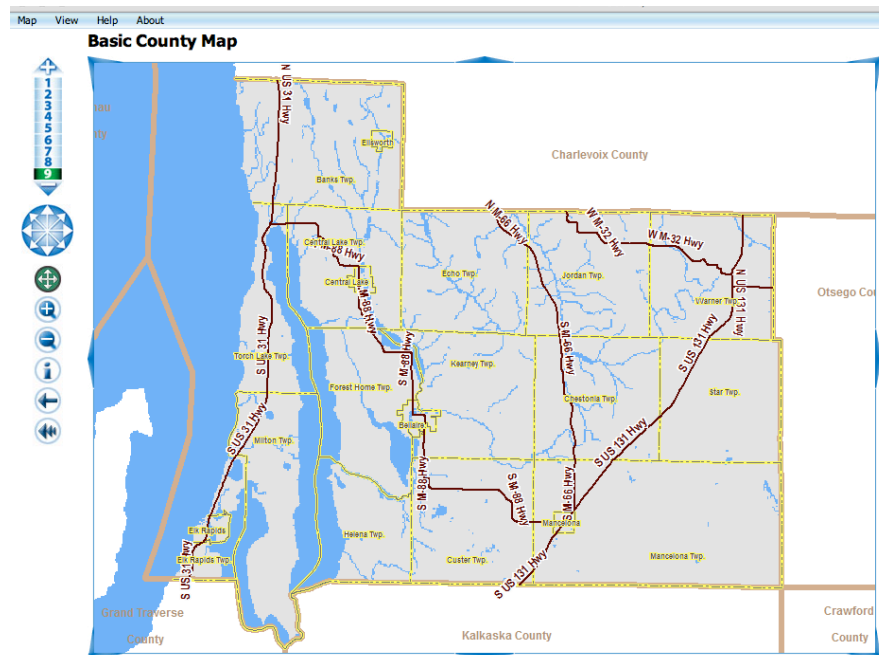
#### Townships of Antrim County Ranked by SEV

Township	2012 SEV	
Milton	\$ 355,605,600.	
Elk Rapids	\$ 284,879,400.	
Torch Lake	\$ 278,821,100.	
Forest Home	\$ 228,409,750.	
Central Lake	\$ 147,555,100.	
Helena	\$ 146,636,800.	
Kearney	\$ 136,114,800.	
Banks	\$ 108,523,200.	
Mancelona	\$ 98,746,400.	
Custer	\$ 92,346,900.	
Star	\$ 42,613,900.	
Echo	\$ 39,582,000.	
Jordan	\$ 30,477,000.	
Warner	\$ 24,318,000.	
Chestonia	\$ 23,258,000.	
Total	\$ 2,037,887,950.	
East Townships	\$ 487,457,000.	23.92%
West Townships	\$ 1,550,430,950.	76.08%

These SEV numbers are probably the best single indicator of how important the recreation economy is to Antrim County. We can talk all day long about how much of the State tourism dollars flow through Antrim County, but this is homegrown recreation business. The owners of these properties require a wide gamut of services, from real estate to construction, from shopping to dining, and every local business owner knows first hand what happens when they arrive in the spring until they leave in the fall. Business owners also know that these customers have somewhat different expectations than “local” customers.

The bottom line is this: the \$2 billion of SEV is the foundation of Antrim County’s property tax revenues. The County expects to collect about \$12.5 million in 2016, most of it in property tax revenues. At least half of that SEV value, a billion dollars (and probably more), is tied directly to waterfront properties—what we call riparian properties.

Antrim County faces a paradox: that the more people live on these lakes, the faster the lakes will degrade, lose their appeal, and eventually their value will suffer. The only remedy is smart and proactive natural resources management. So, the County MUST invest in natural resource management to protect the community's financial interest.



The metaphor is overused, but it's accurate: this expensive property and the related business it generates is "the goose that laid the golden egg." And to continue the metaphor, if we take good care of the goose, it will continue to lay golden eggs; if we neglect the goose, we stand to ruin a good thing. So, it's clearly in the County's interest to sustain or increase property values as a whole, but especially the riparian properties, which are at the core of our recreational economy. The way we do that is to provide the logistical support for land and water stewardship.

Most of the homes that make up the high SEV properties are second, or even third homes. Most of the owners are seasonal and they don't show up in the local population figures. Most of the owners have their permanent residence elsewhere and are weakly represented in local politics because they don't vote here. However, the business community has been quick to offer the kinds of services that these owners demand, and the riparians have been quick and successful at organizing the types of organizations they need. The County needs to do a better job at understanding the riparian community and look for opportunities to collaborate.

By way of example, consider the relicensing of the Elk Rapids Hydro Dam. Faced with imminent decommissioning of the electrical generation in 2000, the dam was costing between \$65,000–\$70,000 per year for the County to own. Estimates to relicense the hydro were \$800,000 to \$1 million. The County decided to attempt licensing anyway. Why? Because we had the resources right here in the local community to pull it off without hiring outside consultants. It was a partnership with the County, the lake associations, environmental groups, the Village of Elk Rapids, and the Township of Elk Rapids. The County's entire out of pocket licensing costs were less than \$30,000, and the hydro now runs in the black about \$30,000 per year. That's what can happen when Antrim County works with the riparian community.



## **AN OVERVIEW OF PARKS AND CONSERVATION IN ANTRIM COUNTY**

The following section lists the various facilities, organizations, and programs that are active in Antrim County's recreational economy today. The list helps to put the County's efforts into perspective as one player in a big and active arena. The County interacts with many organizations and programs—with some more productively than others. The goal is to calibrate the County operation as well as possible to the community as it really is.

### **Parks and Conservation Programs and Facilities in Antrim County**

#### State Recreation Facilities in Antrim County

- 1000s of Acres of Public Land Access
- 1000s of Miles of Trails (hike, ORV, snowmobile)
- Public Boat Ramps on Inland Lakes
- Subsidized Harbor in Elk Rapids
- Public River Access (Jordan, Manistee)
- (No state or national park in Antrim County)

#### State Environmental Programs in Antrim County

- MDNR Fisheries/Biology/Forestry Programs
- DEQ Environmental Programs
- Law enforcement by Conservation Officers

#### County Programs

- Campground • Day Parks • Natural Areas • Forestlands
- Landowner Services • Soil Erosion • Invasive Species
- Dam Infrastructure • Navigation

#### Townships, Village and School Facilities

- Beaches • Marinas • Launches • Parks
- Courts • Ball Fields • Meeting Spaces
- Festivals • Events
- Tourist-friendly Downtown Spaces
- Zoning

#### Private Business Activity

- Chambers of Commerce
- Skiing • Golfing • Marinas • Services
- Accommodations • Eating • Retail • Gaming
- Real Estate-based Businesses • General Services
- Destination Businesses: (i.e. Short's, Dockside, Brownwood, etc.)
- Farm Markets & Farm Stands
- Hunting and Fishing Businesses

#### Non-governmental Organizations

- Libraries • Historical Societies • Museums
- Service Clubs • Sportsmen's Clubs
- Grand Traverse Band
- MSU Extension Service & 4H
- Antrim Conservation District

#### Non-governmental Organizations (formed in recent history)

- Elk River Chain of Lakes Committee (ERCOL)
- Elk River Watershed Plan
- Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
- Watershed Center of Grand Traverse Bay
- Conservation Resource Alliance
- Regional Land Conservancy
- Lake Associations
  - Three Lakes Association
  - Elk Skegemog Lakes Association
  - Friends of Clam Lake
  - Intermediate Lake Association
  - Six Mile Lake Association
  - Antrim Upper Chain of Lakes Association
  - Torch Lake Protection Association (TLPA)
- Torch Conservation Center
- Grass River Natural Area, Inc.
- Friends of Glacial Hills

All of the organizations listed in the last section above have been formed within the last 50 years—many in the last 25 years. They reflect the dynamism and high level of interest in the realm of aquatic biology, water quality, land protection, etc.: the primary interests of riparians. They reflect the riparian community's willingness to fund, and their expertise at operating modern non-profit organizations. The evolution of these efforts corresponds and goes hand in hand with the increase in waterfront property values and the institution of zoning ordinances in the western Antrim County townships over the same period of time. Many local businesses identify closely with these groups, hold joint events and sponsor fundraisers because they know that the people that support these organizations are their customers and it makes good business sense.

During the same period of time that these organizations have bloomed, traditional conservation funding by the federal and state governments has withered. Some government grant monies still exist, but they are increasingly dedicated to funding individual projects, not programs. This is a national trend in which funding for conservation and environmental programs are shifting to the private sector, specifically, the charitable institutions and foundations. The groups above are well-suited to working with the private sector. These organizations are very good at self-promotion, developing a strong base of supporters, and keeping a focused mission.

Antrim County's government structure has been slow to respond to this new reality. The County currently dedicates little effort to the systematic search for grant opportunities to help support programs. While the County staff interacts often with these organizations, we do so peripherally and sporadically. The Antrim Conservation District, upon which the County relies heavily to deliver its programs, does not have the appropriate organizational structure to appeal to riparian involvement, or attract the same scale of volunteer support. So, the County is being left behind, while these groups move ahead to build programs and policy that will affect County operations and residents for many years to come.

These groups could also benefit from working closer with the County—it's a two-way street. The following section shows how Antrim County delivers a lot in terms of parks and conservation, and we do it efficiently.

## **Antrim County Facilities and Programs in More Detail**

### **Parks & Natural Areas**

- Barnes Park (beach, picnic, playground & trails)
- Elk Rapids Day Park (beach, picnic and Art Walk)
- Grass River Natural Area (trails & interpretation)
  - Annual County Support
- Antrim Creek Natural Area (beach & trails)
  - ACNA Trust Fund
- Cedar River Natural Area (trails & river access)
- Glacial Hills Natural Area (Fitzpatrick Forest) (trails & forest land)
- Wetzel Lake Day Park (beach & picnic)
- Mohrmann Natural Area • Other properties

### **Campgrounds**

- Barnes Park Campground
  - 75 Sites
  - Crew Maintains Several Parks

### **Forest Lands & Forestry**

- 3947 Acres of County-owned Forestlands
- 5,300 Total Acres County-owned Property
- Private Land Forestry
- 70% of Private Land Forested

### **Dams**

- Bellaire Dam
- Elk Rapids Dam
  - FERC License Responsibilities
- Waterways and Water Levels
  - Navigation and Large Woody Debris

### **Soil Erosion**

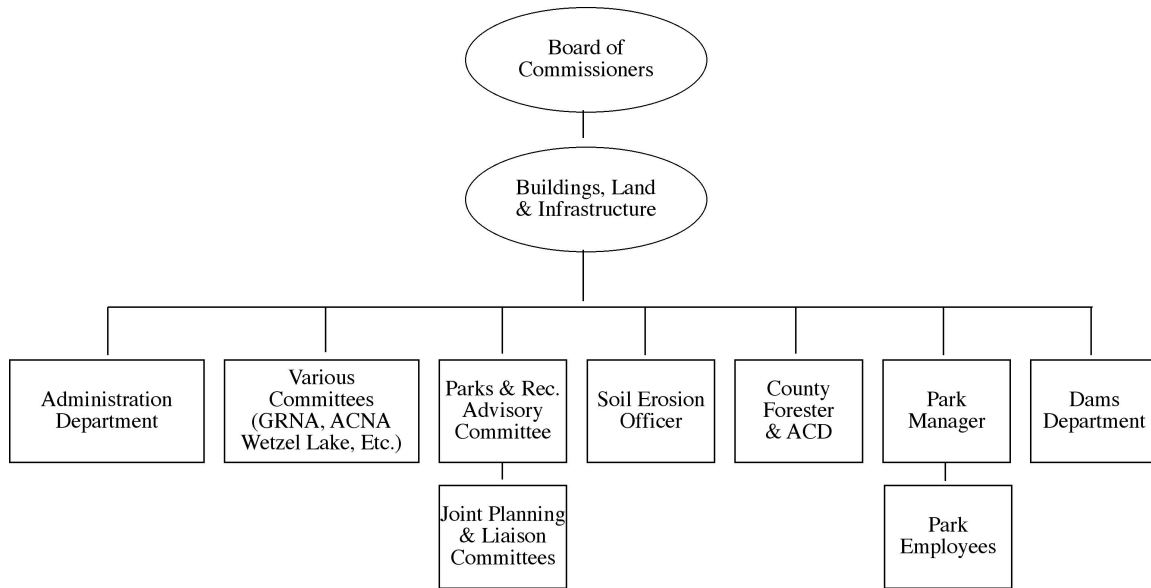
- Act 347
- Soil Erosion Program
- Landowner/Riparian Outreach
- Invasive Species Program

### **Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee**

- *Antrim County Parks, Lands and Recreation Plan*
- Citizen Advisory Component to Parks and Conservation

### **Other County Programs with Parks and Conservation Components**

- County Building Department • County Sheriff
- County Airport • County Road Commission



Current Administration Chart of County’s Parks and Conservation Programs

## CURRENT COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF PARKS AND CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Administration of the various parks and conservation programs is ultimately the responsibility of the Antrim County Board of Commissioners (BOC). The BOC chooses which programs to operate, hires the staff and determines how much money to spend on the programs—and importantly, chooses how to administer the programs.

The BOC has customarily delegated management of these programs by two means: through the Building, Lands and Infrastructure Committee (BLI), and through the County Administration office.

The BLI Committee is a sub-committee of the BOC and is comprised of three County Commissioners, and the BOC Chair often attends BLI meetings as well. Meetings are open to the public, minutes are recorded by the County Administration staff, and the Administration staff often participate in discussions with the Committee. All the parks and conservation program directors customarily appear before the BLI on a monthly basis to deliver reports, updates on activities, and make requests that must be approved by the BOC. BLI also reviews the parks and conservation programs’ annual budget requests for the next fiscal year and makes recommendations to the full BOC.

Representatives of the various satellite Antrim County organizations also attend BLI meetings as necessary, such as Grass River Natural Area, Glacial Hills Pathway, lake associations, etc. Virtually any business under the Parks & Conservation rubric for the BOC to consider, comes first before the BLI Committee, and vice versa, so information moves both directions through the BLI: top-down and bottom-up.

The second way the BOC interfaces with parks and conservation is through the County Administrator office. Administrative staff takes the minutes at the BLI and usually has responsibility to follow up on specific directives requested by the Commissioners. Since time is limited at the BLI meeting, parks and conservation staff regularly consult with the Administrator’s

staff to get guidance on how to handle specific issues that don't require the direct involvement of the Commissioners.

Commissioners have complained that the system is too fragmented: with all the different committees and programs involved, it seems like no one has a handle on the big picture. The Administration staff do a good job of recording minutes and passing on information, but their workload allows for only a minimum of effort. The natural inclination of the BOC is to appoint one person to oversee all the programs and gather them into a single department.

From the staff's point of view, they don't need a new level of management, they need closer coordination. This view is reinforced by the fact that the parks and conservation staff are not necessarily aware of each other's activities, and the BLI meeting is the only regular time most of the staff become aware of each other's activities, or even see each other. Since staff members typically leave the BLI meeting after their agenda appointment, information sharing happens mostly just by coincidence. Given the fact that the everybody is busy with their own work, the current structure offers little incentive to encourage cross-program cooperation between staff. Instead, staff tends to pursue each agenda in isolation.

On the other hand, the parks and conservation staff agree that they could all benefit from a coordinated approach that encouraged staff to work together and integrate their programs to improve efficiencies. Currently, the four program directors in parks and recreation have nearly 100 years of experience between them and have a history of cooperation among themselves. Those personal relationships are what make the current administrative structure manageable. Nevertheless, as the current program directors retire out or seek different employment, the weaknesses in the County's administration will become apparent as it becomes more chaotic and difficult to manage.

The BOC recently voted to dissolve all subcommittees, including the BLI, and move that business to a full BOC meeting agenda. From the staff's perspective, full BOC meetings are a very different type of meeting from subcommittee meetings. Subcommittee meetings are much less formal and allow a consultative atmosphere for a freer sharing of ideas. Over time, as staff and a smaller group of Commissioners get to know each other in this setting, a sense of trust develops and the staff learns how to approach the Commissioners with ideas. Staff tends to approach full BOC meetings much more carefully and conservatively. BOC meetings involve 9 Commissioners as opposed to 3, so from a purely logistical perspective, there is not the same amount of time for in-depth discussion on any given topic. Importantly, Commissioners also behave more formally at BOC meetings as opposed to subcommittee meetings and the opportunity for collegiality will suffer.

Therefore, the following recommendations are all the more pertinent, given the absence of a subcommittee structure.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION OF PARKS & CONSERVATION

### ***\* Form the Parks & Conservation Coordinating Committee (PCCC).***

This would be a staff committee comprised of parks and conservation staff: Barnes Park Manager, County Forester, County Ecologist/Soil Erosion Officer, Operator of Dams, Grass River Natural Area Director, County Administration Office staff, and Grant Specialist (see below). One of these members would be designated as the Parks and Conservation Coordinator (see below). The Parks & Conservation Coordinating Committee (PCCC) would meet on a monthly basis.

Representatives of the various subcommittees, such as the Glacial Hills Pathway or Antrim Creek Natural Area would attend as necessary.

The Committee's job is to coordinate all P & C activities and prepare a unified report for the BOC on a monthly basis (report to be presented by P & C Coordinator); to coordinate P & C budgets and prepare budget requests for the fiscal year; to find efficiencies in delivery of services to the community; to prioritize and strategize programs and identify funding sources; to prepare grant applications; to administer grant-funded programs; to develop employee handbooks on each P & C program; to update the Parks and Recreation Master Plan; and other duties as necessary.

For the first time, all the County's parks and conservation staff would be formally coordinating their programs together. With four senior program managers that have an excellent working relationship with each other, the timing is ideal to create this structure and enable experienced staff to work the bugs out of the system. As staff is replaced, this structure will enable new staff to accommodate quickly to the demands of the job.

This Committee would be an excellent venue for networking with other bodies. For instance, the Antrim County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee could meet jointly with the PCCC on a regular basis.

***\* Establish the new position of "Parks & Conservation Coordinator."***

The Parks & Conservation Coordinator would be recruited from membership of P & C Coordinating Committee and paid on an annual stipend basis, possibly even a position that "rotated" among the Committee members on a regular basis. The Coordinator would chair the PCCC meetings and compile the reports of the various programs into a single report. During budget review, the Coordinator would assemble all the P & C budget requests into a unified presentation.

The P & C Coordinator would be the principle liaison between the various P & C programs and the Board of Commissioners. He or she would attend the various committees and organizations that manage County P & C properties (i.e. Grass River, Antrim Creek, Glacial Hills, Elk Rapids Day Park, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, etc.) and the Board of Commissioners meetings.

It's important to note that the Coordinator is not a supervisory position of the individual programs, but meant to coordinate the business of the PCCC, gather information, and report to the BOC, or from the BOC to the PCCC.

The cost of the Coordinator stipend would probably amount to \$10,000 per year.

***\* Establish the new position of "Grant Specialist" and/or establish an enterprise policy for securing new grants.***

The Grant Specialist would meet with the PCCC, identify possible matches between parks and conservation programming and grant sources, and write and submit the grant applications. Grant ideas would arise out of the PCCC. Once a consensus was established in the PCCC that a grant idea was worth pursuing (in consultation with the BOC), the Grant Specialist would be assigned the task of preparing the grant.

The Grant Specialist would be a part-time position, or could be an outside contractor for services rendered, or be paid by commission on the basis of success. Since other County departments could benefit from pursuing grants, potentially the Grant Specialist could work to locate outside funding for other County departments as well.

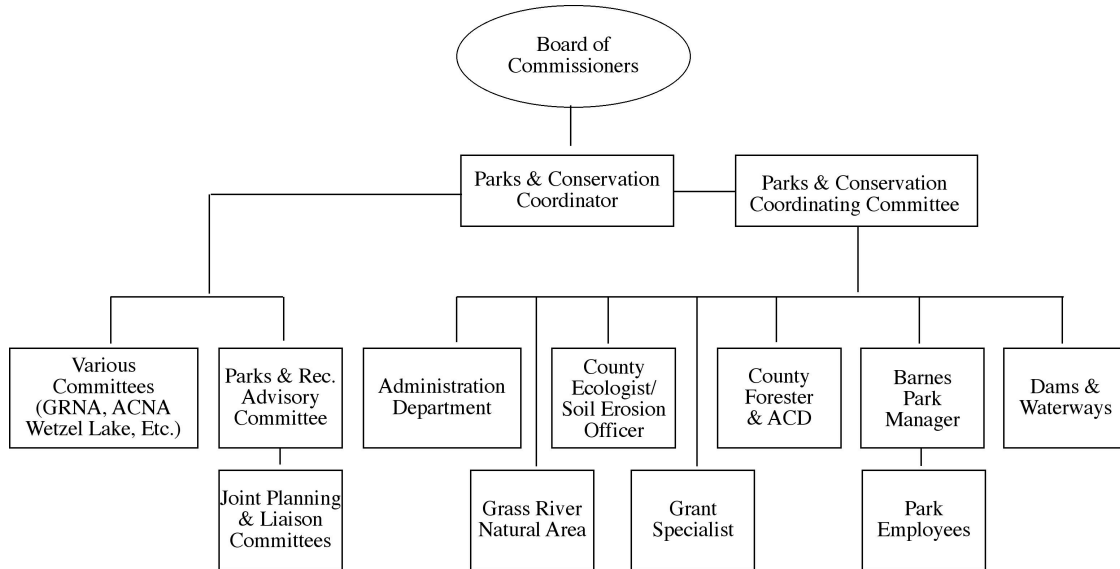
As an alternative to hiring a specific person, the County could institute an Enterprise Policy for pursuing grants. Under this scenario, any individual or employee could identify a grant

opportunity, and once the grant idea is approved by the PCCC, that person would develop the grant application and be paid for the work out of a fund reserved for preparing grant applications.

An enterprise policy has the advantage of opening up the pursuit of grants to the widest possible pool of talent. It also is easy to fund with a simple budget item, and simple to administer through the PCCC. Also, no money is spent until we see some action.

A dedicated grant specialist would be more complicated to administer with either a hiring process or a negotiated contract, but having a specific person delegated the responsibility makes a clear line of responsibility and accountability.

Either option would probably cost about \$10,000 per year.



Administration Chart with Recommendations Adopted

## CURRENT ANTRIM PARKS AND CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

### 1) BARNES PARK MANAGER AND STAFF

Eileen Wallick, Barnes Park Campground Manager

Eileen Wallick started at Barnes Park in 1977. She manages all aspects of the park operation. She is assisted by 4–6 employees during the busy season from March to December. Although the campground opens two weeks prior to Memorial Day and through October of each year, Barnes Park is open to the general public as a day park all year long. In addition to operating the campground, Eileen and her crew also perform routine maintenance at Antrim Creek Natural Area, Elk Rapids Day Park, Noteware’s Landing, Willow Park and Wetzel Lake. Barnes Park appears to be adequately staffed at the present time. Most of the employees are part-time or seasonal employees. Eileen is a full-time hourly employee, however the County routinely lays her off during the mid-winter for three months.

Barnes Park Campground consistently gets high ratings from campers and in the camping community. It offers some amenities that few campgrounds offer, public or private, such as all night

security at the campground entrance. With 38 years of experience on the job and clearly appreciated by her campers, Eileen deserves credit for the consistent success at Barnes Park—2015 was a record year for campsite rentals.

As she nears retirement, Eileen expressed concern about continuity in handing over management to the next park manager. She also believes that rates for campers could be increased in certain areas to improve revenues and still remain competitive with comparable campgrounds.

Eileen attends the BLI subcommittee on a monthly basis and reports on all her activities and receives feedback as necessary. Occasionally, she attends meetings of the full BOC. She also prepares the annual budget requests for the Parks funds.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE COUNTY PARK MANAGEMENT

***\* Assign the Barnes Park Manager to the P & C Coordinating Committee.***

***\* Make the Barnes Park Manager a year around salaried position.***

Currently, the Manager is laid off for three months during the winter at little financial savings to the County. This time could be better used performing off-season administrative tasks, notably the writing of operating handbook for Barnes Park Campground.

***\* Review the usage rates for campers at Barnes Park Campground and adjust as necessary.***

The Park Manager has observed that usage rates at Barnes Park Campground are low in comparison to other comparable campgrounds, public and private. Barnes Park provides amenities not found at other campgrounds in the region and charges too little for services such as filling RV water tanks or waste disposal. Given the record usage in 2015, small increases could generate significant increases in revenue—one additional dollar charged for overnight camping results in about \$5000 additional annual revenue. Any increase in rates at a public facility would be a sensitive issue, however the Coordinating Committee could be of great help to the Campground Manager to develop a proposal to bring Barnes Park rates in line with the camping market.

## 2) OPERATOR OF DAMS AND DEPARTMENT OF DAMS

Mark Stone, Operator of Dams and Antrim County Drain Commissioner

Antrim County owns and operates two dams: the Bellaire Dam and the Elk Rapids Hydroelectric Dam. These dams were constructed to generate electrical power and were decommissioned in the 1950s when the respective owners determined that they were obsolete compared to other sources of power. Acknowledging the importance of the dams to the maintenance of the Antrim Chain of Lakes, the County acquired the dams for \$1 each, and have been operating them to maintain court-ordered lake levels on Intermediate and Elk Lakes ever since.

Mark operates the floodgates at the Bellaire Dam in order to maintain the lake level on Intermediate Lake. He also administers the Bellaire Dam, and supervises the operation of the Elk Rapids Hydroelectric Dam. He is the County representative to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for the Elk Rapids Hydro FERC license. As part of his duties, he fields all



inquiries and complaints about water levels and the dams' operation. He often appears as a speaker or resource person at meetings sponsored by local organizations, especially lake associations.

The Elk Rapids Hydro Dam was refitted to generate power after the oil crisis of the late 1970s and the County is now in the final stages of renewing a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license in order to continue generating power for the next 30–40 years.

The process of applying for and receiving the FERC license required a highly integrated effort between a wide variety of organizations and the County, especially lake associations, that demonstrated the need for a closer formal relationship with these partners. Also, as the owner of the dams, Antrim County finds itself necessarily involved in several related issues, such as sedimentation in the connecting rivers that impedes navigation of watercraft, and, under the terms of the FERC license, to address the threat of invasive species in the Chain of Lakes. For example, the Operator of Dams initiated a demonstration project using Large Woody Debris (LWD) in Grass River to maintain channel depths for watercraft in the narrow waterway. In general, the ecology of the Antrim Chain of Lakes have stabilized around the presence of the dams and they have become an integral part of the aquatic resources.

Mark attends the BLI subcommittee on a monthly basis and reports on all his activities and receives feedback as necessary. Occasionally, he attends meetings of the full BOC. He also prepares the annual budget requests for the Dams funds. The Operator of Dams is the only P & C program director who is also an elected official—County Drain Commissioner.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE DAMS DEPARTMENT

### ***\* Assign the Operator of Dams to the P & C Coordinating Committee.***

Assignment would be the first formal integration of the Dams program with the other P & C programs and would help leverage programs in both directions. If the County chooses to pursue electrification of the Bellaire Dam, the synergies of coordinated programs would facilitate the process of environmental assessment.

### ***\* Rename the Dams Department to become the “Department of Dams and Waterways.”***

The new title would formally acknowledge the current activities of the Operator of Dams and improve the County's ability to seek outside funding for projects to improve navigation (Large Woody Debris, or LWD) and improve aquatic habitat in the Antrim Chain of Lakes.

## 3) COUNTY FORESTER AND COUNTY SOIL EROSION OFFICER

These two programs are closely related due to the fact that both programs are currently contracted to the Antrim Conservation District. Mike and Heidi have developed a close working relationship over the years and, from the standpoint of the public, are virtually synonymous with the District.

Heidi Shaffer, Soil Erosion Officer

As Soil Erosion Officer, Heidi enforces the County's soil erosion ordinance. She processes permit applications, provides advice, does inspections, and monitors each permit for compliance—essentially on her own, since she has no administrative support. She also must deal with

enforcement of non-compliant cases. In 2014, 191 soil erosion permits were issued, most of those permit activities concentrated during the building season. She has been on the job for 15 years.

The position is full-time, but much of the time on the job is spent on related activities.

Since she is the County's main point of contact with riparian landowners, Heidi has become an important source of information for the public. Her success at discussing nature-friendly landscape and design issues with homeowners and contractors has led to ever more demands for her services. Her skills have led to her involvement in projects addressing invasive species and sedimentation problems, including supervision of fieldwork. She has become an indispensable part of the natural resources management efforts in the County. She is called upon regularly by village and township governments, and interacts closely with the riparian organizations.

Although, technically speaking, she holds only the title of Soil Erosion Officer, the public outreach activities required by the job have grown to a level of importance that they deserve a program of their own and formal recognition. Water quality is the number one issue for the riparian community, and protecting water quality is probably the most difficult task to accomplish. Landowners in Antrim County are generally adverse to new regulations, so the solution is focused on education. The public outreach in the Antrim Chain of Lakes by Heidi, in partnership with lake associations, continues to make a real difference by raising the natural resource standards of homeowners up and down the lake and changing people's behavior.

Demands on Heidi will continue to grow as the County is called on to address issues such as invasive species control. As the only practical regional authority that can coordinate remediation of invasive species (townships typically only span portions of the lakes, while the County takes in nearly the entire lake chain), Antrim County will be expected to step up its efforts. It's clear that the County needs to define Heidi's job title and description to represent her actual job activities.

Heidi attends the BLI subcommittee on a monthly basis and reports on all her activities and receives feedback as necessary. Occasionally, she attends meetings of the full BOC. She also prepares the annual budget request for the Soil Erosion program.

The Soil Erosion Program is financially administered by the Antrim Conservation District under a contract with Antrim County (which provides the funding). The arrangement was established years ago, but has become increasingly problematic due to the District's financial problems. Currently, there is no 9-5 secretarial support at the District to receive inquiries about Soil Erosion Permits and help with administrative tasks. So, Heidi also serves as her own receptionist, scheduler and secretary. Since the Soil Erosion Officer answers directly to the BOC through the BLI subcommittee, it's no longer necessary to administer the program through the District and the current arrangement actually increases inefficiency and creates unnecessary work for the officer. It's time to look at an alternative way of doing things.

Mike Meriwether, County Forester

The Antrim Conservation District has housed a District Forester for many decades. In prior years, the position was supported by State grants, but as these monies have become difficult to secure, the District Forester program has increasingly been funded by County funds, and now it is almost entirely funded by Antrim County, hence the title County Forester.

Mike has been County Forester for 25 years and has been a stabilizing influence through the many changes over the years to make sure that Antrim County has had a consistent forestry program. He is probably the one person in the County operation with the widest breadth of knowledge about all the different County-owned parcels and their individual histories.

Antrim County owns about 5,300 acres of land, and almost 4,000 acres of it is managed as sustainable forestland. Mike handles virtually all the forest land business, from the inventory of lands, marking trees for cutting, negotiating contracts, arranging timber sales, negotiating easements and handling encroachment problems, etc. As a result, timber sales on County land provide a significant amount of income into the County's forestry reserve fund—money which has been used for the local match to Natural Resources Trust Fund grants, most recently to purchase additional acreage to enlarge the County property on which the Glacial Hills trail was built.

Antrim County also has leased mineral rights to gas producers on some properties, and Mike monitors these projects. Though income from royalties has not been significant in recent years, this is simply a function of low market prices, and the County will eventually see royalties rise as gas prices rebound.

Mike also provides forestry management services to other local governments, school districts (which own several parcels of forest land) and private landowners. This program puts him into contact with a wide variety of people and organizations, and, since forest ecology does not stop at property lines, the health of Antrim County forests as a whole have benefitted from years of good management advice. The program has also reduced predatory logging practices suffered by uninformed landowners.

As a member of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, Mike was instrumental in authoring the latest update to the Antrim County Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Mike attends the BLI subcommittee on a monthly basis and reports on all his activities and receives feedback as necessary. Occasionally, he attends meetings of the full BOC. He also prepares the annual budget request for the Forestry program, the Antrim Conservation District, and acts as the liaison between the District and the County.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE COUNTY FORESTER AND COUNTY SOIL EROSION OFFICER POSITIONS

### ***\* Move the administration of the Soil Erosion Program to the County Building Department.***

The Soil Erosion Officer would operate within the Building Department with the same administrative support as other building inspectors. Contractors and landowners would benefit from “one stop shopping” to file permits at the Building Department. The Building Department should absorb the additional part-time inspector at little additional cost since the administrative structure is already in place.

### ***\* Review the rate schedule for Soil Erosion permits and adjust as necessary.***

The cost of Soil Erosion permits in Antrim County are, for the most part, comparable to neighboring counties. However, a cursory review of the graduated scale for permits indicates that rates for medium scale projects should probably be increased, based on the amount of field review required by the Soil Erosion Officer.

### ***\* Convert the Soil Erosion Officer position into a split position: the Soil Erosion Officer/County Ecologist.***

According to Heidi, the Soil Erosion Control program takes about 50% of her time. The balance of the time she spends doing landowner outreach and working on special projects such as the invasive species work. Taken as a whole, her job would be best described as two part-time

positions, though in practice the duties are closely interwoven. Giving her a dual title would simply acknowledge what the County is already doing. Adding the County Ecologist title will demonstrate the County's commitment to managing the aquatic resources and improve the County's prospects when it applies for grants for ecological improvements.

The Soil Erosion Officer's duties would have first priority. The County Ecologist would have available whatever time remained in the workweek. The position should be paid as salary to allow the most flexible use of time.

The County Ecologist would continue all the ecology related programs that she currently performs as the Soil Erosion Officer, especially to improve relations and cooperation with the riparian community. The County Ecologist would seek out funding for ecology and aquatic resource related programs—efforts that enhance the value of natural resources in the County, and, when we secure the funding, manage the fieldwork.

This job definition will also make it simpler when the time comes for succession. When Heidi leaves the position, it's unlikely that the County will find someone with the qualifications to hold both the Soil Erosion Officer and County Ecologist positions. At that point, the jobs would simply become two part-time positions held by two different persons.

***\* Make the Soil Erosion Officer and the County Forester County employees.***

The Soil Erosion Officer and the County Forester are, for all practical purposes, already County employees, indirectly paid by the County, and supervised directly by the County BOC. To County residents they are representatives of the County doing the County's bidding. However, technically speaking, they are employees of the District. The District has had declining revenues for several years now. Until the ongoing financial challenges at the District are resolved, these positions will be on shaky ground, and the job insecurity certainly places an unfair amount of stress on two valuable employees. It's time for the County to integrate Heidi and Mike into the County workforce. The goodwill and security that results will boost their productivity and improve their job performance.

***\* Continue to house the County Ecologist and County Forester at the Antrim Conservation District.***

Although this proposal recommends making Mike and Heidi County employees, it also recommends that the District continue to be the main office and "clearing house" for County parks and conservation services. Since the County Ecologist and County Forester do not require the same extent of administrative support as a Soil Erosion Officer, the District can provide adequate secretarial support for these programs once the Soil Erosion program is moved out of the District office. The current budget allocation for the District's logistical support would remain intact under this recommendation.

The District's office building is an inviting log structure with a wood interior that is architecturally compatible with the program's mission. It is well suited for meetings, with a large conference/activity room with kitchen facilities. It's shared with the Bellaire Conservation Club and is located next door to Craven Park and the County Fairground, in a beautiful wooded environment with direct access to the Cedar River. There is also room for additional staff. Perhaps, the Dams and Waterways Department could be housed there, and it could serve as the off-season office for the Campground Manager, thus gathering all the parks and conservation programs into a single location.

#### 4) THE ANTRIM CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The Antrim Conservation District (ACD) has a long and storied history in parks and conservation in this County. The ACD was created in an era of government activism, when plentiful State and Federal funds were dedicated to reforest devastated forests and subsidize efforts to improve soil conservation. Conservation Districts were formed in nearly all counties across the United States, to disperse State and Federal monies that were aimed at improving conservation practices. At one time the District housed the Soil Conservation Service officer (a federally funded position) and it has been the home of the District Forester since that program began.

Districts were formed under State statutes that determine how District boards are elected and the limitations of their activities. The rules were set up to draw board members that were primarily landowners in the agricultural and forestry sectors that owned the land where most of the District activities occurred. A District board was essentially a review board, in that it's primary job was to oversee the expenditures of government monies to make sure they were being efficiently and fairly spent.

In Antrim County, due mainly to an unusual convergence of visionary community leaders, in its heyday the ACD went well beyond its base responsibilities, and was a leader in protecting fragile lands for public use. The County's acquisition of Grass River Natural Area and the State's acquisition of the Skegemog swamp are two excellent examples. The founders of GRNA also saw the need for natural resources education and established the first field classes.

As government funds dwindled over the past three decades (today the ACD receives virtually no operating funds from either the State or Federal governments), ACD has struggled to finance its programs. Today, the ACD relies almost entirely on County funding. At the same time, funding for natural resource work is alive and well—it has just largely shifted to the private sector, through foundations and non-governmental organizations. The ACD has had difficulty adapting its mission and organizational structure to the realities and expectations of the donor base, as its declining revenues indicate.

Therefore the ACD is at a crossroads. The current ACD Board acknowledges that it must change with the times, and is too reliant on County funding, but it also feels responsible to preserve the organization's heritage that it has inherited. With so many unknowns and the lack of a clear path forward, the workplace environment at ACD is difficult for the staff, since they face the very real prospect that the District could dissolve for lack of support.

The following recommendations offer one possible path forward that both preserves the ACD's heritage and positions the District to attract the kind of support it needs. Although the ACD is an independent entity from the County, it is closely entwined with the County's parks and conservation programs, and the BOC have a great deal of influence as its principal funding source.

As outlined in the introduction of this report, what we identify as the "conservation community" in Antrim County has changed greatly since the time of the ACD's founding. Coupled with the decline in government subsidized conservation funding, these changes leave the ACD at a tactical disadvantage to pay for the kinds of programs at which it excels. Other regional organizations are filling the void, and in order to be successful in this new social environment, the ACD needs to adapt.

It's important to note that as a statutory District, ACD does meet special qualifications for some government program funds that still exist. The time may come that State or Federal agencies restore funding to the Conservation Districts, and it behooves us to preserve the institution to avail ourselves of all possible opportunities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE ANTRIM CONSERVATION DISTRICT

***\* Continue to house the County Forester and County Ecologist at the Antrim Conservation District, but make them County employees.***

Making the County Forester and Soil Erosion Officer County employees while leaving the County's administration funding intact, will free up the ACD to redefine itself as an organization with more financial independence and a clearer mission. The County funding for these programs at ACD currently includes monies for administrative support and office space. This proposal recommends leaving the funding for administrative support intact, and possibly housing more County programs at the ACD. As explained above, the District's building offers an ideal location and facility for hosting Antrim County's parks and conservation programs. The District should also continue to receive the County contract for hazardous waste collection.

***\* Continue to utilize the District to provide temporary staff and issue work contracts to perform the work necessary to fulfill grant requirements.***

Each time the County or District secures a grant, there is a need to add additional and usually temporary employees to perform the work for which the grant is paying. The District has a more flexible structure for hiring and bidding out work—and a record of being a cost-effective operation.

***\* The District should play the pivotal role in the creation of a new non-profit corporation we are calling "Antrim Conservation Services, Inc."***

The proposal to form the Antrim Conservation Services, Inc. (ACS) is described below. What the District lacks, ACS will provide. While the District is well suited to delivering services, ACS will be well suited to attract community support and secure funding. With the District already providing a base of operations and some staff support, ACS can more easily be set up under the ACD umbrella.

### 5) GRASS RIVER NATURAL AREA, INC.

Grass River Natural Area, Inc. (GRNA) is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit that was formed to provide educational programs centered around the Grass River Natural Area (a County-owned group of parcels managed as a nature preserve between Lake Bellaire and Clam Lake on the Grass River). GRNA today hosts a variety of environmental education classes and programs (many in partnership with local school districts), maintains the natural area for public use, and performs field inventories for biological studies and water quality testing. It has become a de facto headquarters for education and research in the Antrim Chain of Lakes.

Haley Breniser, the Executive Director for GRNA, regularly attends the BLI subcommittee meetings to provide reports and consult with the BOC about projects at the natural area. She also attends the BOC meetings when necessary, provides an annual report, and submits the GRNA's County budget request. GRNA staff work with the County Forester for forestry management issues at the Natural Area, and the Soil Erosion Officer participates regularly in GRNA outreach programs. GRNA is also the fiduciary agent for and a partner in the LWD study project on Grass River run by the Operator of Dams.

GRNA has had its ups and downs over the years in dealing with the County: the GRNA Board and the BOC have not always shared the same vision and at times that has led to friction. Nevertheless, GRNA's success is undeniable. At one time, Antrim County was the largest funding source for GRNA, but today the annual County funding is at \$40,000 for 2016 and has been reduced by \$5000 per year for several years. The County's support is contractually obligated to only \$10,500 per year. The County does provide in-kind support by providing a suite of offices in the County Building for GRNA's administrative staff.

While the County's contribution to GRNA has declined, GRNA's revenues as a whole have increased. The organization in recent years built a modern "green" interpretive building at the Natural Area entirely with donated funds; it has been very successful at securing grants for its operations; GRNA continues to expand its staff and invest in staff development to improve performance and responsiveness to the community.

The key to GRNA's success clearly lies in the makeup of its Board of Directors. The GRNA Board has close connections to the lake associations, affiliated organizations such as Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, and has actively solicited representation from key local businesses. GRNA has a clearly defined mission and GRNA Board members typically are directly involved in recruiting volunteers, soliciting donations, pursuing new ideas, and themselves volunteer generously to GRNA activities. As such, they score highly with granting foundations that see the organization as deserving of financial support.

Antrim County is fortunate to have GRNA within its orbit and this report has little to recommend in terms of improvements. On the contrary, there is much to learn from GRNA, especially for the Antrim Conservation District, and the proposal for the Antrim Conservation Services borrows heavily from GRNA's organizational model.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE COUNTY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GRNA

***\* Request that GRNA provide a representative to attend and contribute to the Parks and Conservation Coordinating Committee.***

GRNA is already an integral part of the County's parks and conservation programs and should be a part of any new administrative structure.

***\* Open the entire collection of County-owned parks and lands to the GRNA for the purpose of holding outdoor classes and events.***

Thousands of people a year attend GRNA classes and events. These gatherings are an excellent opportunity to showcase some of the more obscure and lesser-known County-owned land and foster an appreciation by the public.

#### RECOMMENDATION TO CREATE ANTRIM CONSERVATION SERVICES, INC.

The last piece in this study is to figure out how to revitalize the Antrim Conservation District and help them fulfill their mission. Ultimately, the focus falls on the structure of the ACD. If we want to involve the most dynamic interest groups working on conservation in Antrim County, we have to give them a seat at the table, and the structure of the ACD doesn't easily offer them a stake in the organization.

The District is at its best when it's doing fieldwork, both design and installation: marking trees, planting trees, building LWD structures, removing invasive species, fixing road-stream crossings, building trails, planting green buffers, etc. The new grants we anticipate with the other recommendations will mostly be this type of fieldwork and we'll need the organization to implement them.

There are two broad groups of people that are stakeholders in the District's work, but underrepresented in the District's organization (or, for that matter, elsewhere in the County operation): waterfront property owners (riparians); and the workers and business owners that rely on tourism (broadly speaking, almost every business). Riparians aren't waiting around for anyone, and are at the core of several kinds of natural resource and environmental organizations that have popped up in recent decades: lake associations, watershed groups, conservancies, etc. The business community likes these organizations, too, because they are dynamic, current and popular, and businesses want to be associated with the movement toward natural resource protection—they know their customers chose to live here for the natural beauty and they want to support that fact. These two groups are the key to breathing new life into the District.

Suppose we created a sister organization to the District—separate, but connected—call it Antrim Conservation Services, Inc., located at the Antrim Conservation District. It's organized as a separate 501(c)(3) non-profit with its own board, but housed and staffed by the District. Professional support is provided by the four County program directors and staff from other affiliated groups, such as GRNA, Three Lakes, etc.

Suppose we wrote the bylaws so that the governing board was nominated from the supporting organizations and the public, deliberately designed to preserve balance, but to encourage nominees with energy and enthusiasm. Antrim Conservation Services has a focused mission, so it can be run lean on staff, and capitalize on volunteers. ACS would be a hit with the Antrim community and definitely attract enough membership to reach that goal.

There are several historical precedents for a District reorganizing into a 501(c)(3) non-profit structure. In our own region, the Conservation Resource Alliance was created when the Northwest Michigan Resource & Development Council dissolved by design. CRA's success has been remarkable. In the absence of direct government funding, CRA has been averaging over \$1 million in projects per year for the last several years, has an influential board, and a strong membership/donor base. In our view, however, there is still a role for the District organization, and we believe that the simpler and safer route is to create a sister organization.

***\* Enable and support the creation of Antrim Conservation Services, Inc.***

The role of the County in this recommendation is to 1) pledge continued financial support to the District for housing and supporting staff, 2) to pledge professional support from the County's parks and conservation program directors, and 3) to become a key participant in the formation of the organization.



## ANTRIM COUNTY PARKS AND CONSERVATION BUDGETS

Listed below are summaries of the revenues received by Antrim County's parks and conservation programs. The County derives revenues from all four of its parks and conservation programs in addition to natural gas royalties. This study recommends modest increases in Barnes Park and Soil Erosion Permit fees for 2016, however the budgeted revenues in those two programs do not include the increases. Historically, County timber revenues and gas royalties have been used to acquire new parklands. The Dam Reserve Fund has been used primarily to perform regular maintenance on dam structures and equipment—a necessity for any dam owner.

### • REVENUES

#### Barnes Park Revenues

2011	\$ 138,237.
2012	138,411.
2013	148,625.
2014	147,620.

#### County Forest Timber Revenues

2011	\$ 32,791.
2012	26,740.
2013	74,968.
2014	6,601.
2015	23,900.

Forestry Reserve Fund: \$ 266,000 (3/1/15)

#### Soil Erosion Permit Fees

2011	\$ 13,525.
2012	14,416.
2013	16,520.
2014	16,445.

#### Elk Rapids Hydroelectric Royalties

2013	\$ 17,028.
2014	30,048.

Dams Reserve Fund: \$ 440,000 (3/1/15)

Natural Gas Royalties Income

2011	\$ 51,064.
2012	39,102.
2013	39,146.
2014	34,658.
2015	33,000. (Projected)

Gas Royalty Reserve: \$ 450,000 (3/1/15)

Parks and Conservation Revenues (2016 Budgeted)

\$ 150,000.	Barnes Park
17,000.	Soil Erosion
33,000.	Gas Royalty
21,500.	Elk Rapids Hydroelectric
<u>44,400.</u>	<u>Forestry</u>
\$ 265,900.	Total

• EXPENSES

The first table shown below is the parks and conservation expenses as anticipated in the 2016 budget. The second table shows the expected parks and conservation expenses if the recommendations are implemented. This study recommends an increase of \$20,000 in spending, primarily to fund the formation of the Parks and Conservation Coordinating Committee and the Grant Specialist. Other costs may be incurred, but they will be offset to some degree by savings.

Parks and Conservation Expenses (2016 Budgeted)

\$ 59,891.	Dams
255,329.	Parks
20,900.	Antrim Conservation District
76,000.	Forestry
66,847.	Soil Erosion
1,978.	Parks & Rec. Advisory
<u>40,250.</u>	<u>Grass River Natural Area</u>
\$ 521,195.	Total

Parks and Conservation Expenses under Recommendations (2016 Budgeted)

\$ 59,891.	Dams
255,329.	Parks
40,400.	Antrim Conservation District
70,000.	Forestry
53,347.	Soil Erosion
10,000.	P & C Coordinator
10,000.	Grant Specialist/Enterprise
1,978.	Parks & Rec. Advisory
<u>40,250.</u>	<u>Grass River Natural Area</u>

\$ 541,195. Total

GENERAL FUND

The table below shows the summary figures for Antrim's general fund in 2016. Antrim County anticipates running a deficit of \$864,916 in 2016. However, the County will enter the budget year with \$7,542,832 in the fund balance due to wise budget restraints in previous years, and even after the deficit, the County anticipates a closing fund balance of \$6,677,916. The decline of revenues is largely tied to the decline in property values from the real estate crisis beginning in 2007, but property values have since rebounded, especially in the waterfront sector, and County revenues are likely to rebound as well over the next few years.

Antrim County General Fund (2016 Budgeted)

\$ 12,464,864. Revenue

\$ 13,329,780. Expenses

\$ - 864,916. Deficit

\$ 6,677,916. Fund Balance (End 2016)

Total parks and conservation spending, at \$521,195, is currently about 3.9% of the County expenses (or \$21.31 per resident). If you offset the spending on parks and conservation by considering the various programs' revenues, the programs represent only 1.9% of the County expenses (about \$255,295.). When over half the County's tax base is derived from riparian property values and recreation is clearly the leading driver for the local economy, we need to ask "is this enough of an investment?"

Below is a list of reserve funds that make up part of the County's Fund Balance, projected to be \$6,677,916 at the end of 2016. Interestingly, over a fifth of the fund balance, \$1,423,772, is made up of monies derived from timber sales, gas sales, and funds set aside for dam maintenance and grant matches.

Parks and Conservation Funds (2016 Budgeted)

\$ 87,772.	Grant Match
266,000.	Forestry Reserve Fund
500,000.	Gas Royalty Fund
<u>570,000.</u>	<u>Dams Reserve Fund</u>
\$1,423,772.	Total

- Total parks and conservation funds make up 21.3% of the fund balance.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

- There is currently no need to create a Parks and Conservation Manager. Simply reorganize the program directors so that they coordinate their activities, and pay one of them a stipend to document and interact with all the programs and the various committees that oversee the County's parks and conservation activities.

- Be more aggressive at securing grant money. Fund efforts to prepare, submit and administer grants for dedicated projects, especially fieldwork, and be prepared to provide matching funds when necessary. Consider raising program fees comparable to the prevailing market to increase revenues.

- The employees who run the County's core programs and are supervised by the BOC should be salaried County employees, not contractors dependent on the financial well-being of a third party. Seasonal and part-time help, especially employees engaged in grant-funded work can continue to be hired through third parties. However, continue to house them at the ACD.

- Move the administration of the Soil Erosion program to the County Building Department.

- A job title or department title should reflect the actual work engaged in by the employee or department. Therefore, the Soil Erosion Control officer should also be titled as the County Ecologist, and the Department of Dams should be titled the Department of Dams and Waterways.

- Create ways to bring the riparian community directly into the County's parks and conservation activities. The County needs to acknowledge how important the riparian community is to the County's economy and future growth.

- Encourage and enable the Antrim Conservation District to adapt its organization to the contemporary realities of natural resources management in Antrim County. The ACD needs to adopt a different organizational structure, either internally or by creating a sister organization, that offers new "seats at the table" to the riparian community and the local business community.