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Oakland County Parks and Recreation gets approval for 14th park – an off-road vehicle park in Groveland and Holly townships

OAKLAND COUNTY -- An Oakland County off-road vehicle (ORV) park that has been on the drawing board for years, finally received its official green light from the Oakland County Board of Commissioners at its meeting Tuesday, April 2.

Commissioners unanimously approved a 20-year operating agreement, with a 10-year additional option, with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Under the agreement, the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission (OCPRC) will operate the ORV Park, located in Groveland and Holly townships, in partnership with the MDNR. The park, consisting of former (and currently active) sand and gravel mines, is across Dixie Highway from Groveland Oaks County Park and Campground and will have easy access off I-75 (at Grange Hall) and Dixie Highway.

“This park has been a long time in the making,” OCPR’s Executive Officer Dan Stencil said. “We’ve been talking with the MDNR about this for 20+ years and working hard on this particular property for the past seven. The stars finally aligned, and we have a location with easy access, very few neighbors and the property is surrounded by recreation land.”

ORV enthusiasts have been following the park’s progression since OCPR hosted Dixie Gully Run test events near the current site in 2014.

“The Dixie Gully Run events were a critical component for us in determining whether or not this type of recreation could work here at this location,” Stencil said. “We wanted to test the market, as well as test the noise, dust, and general operation of an ORV park.”

“The Dixie Gully Run events were attended by more than 400 vehicles, went off without a hitch and the enthusiasm from the ORV community was through the roof,” he said. “What was so eye-opening is how family oriented this activity is; you have several generations of families enjoying ORVs together and car seats for babies and toddlers in the back of Jeeps so the whole family can participate.”

A Partnership with the MDNR

An ORV Master Plan completed by the MDNR in 2008 recommended the state partner with a local municipality to provide ORV recreation in southeast Michigan.

The MDNR was awarded a \$2.9 million grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund to purchase property in Oakland County for OCPR to operate an ORV park. In 2017 the MDNR purchased 235 acres that will become the park. Approximately 113 acres are expected to be open next

summer, with additional acres coming online as mining is completed on the remaining property. The full 235 acres is expected to be operational by 2023.

There are currently no legal ORV riding areas in southeast Michigan, with the closest available riding at The Mounds in Genesee County. Because of this, Stencil said, there is a lot of illegal riding in Oakland County.

“People will find places to ride, such as private property, park land, railroad and utility corridors, etc.,” he said. “We want to provide a safe, legal area for people so there are options close to home for after work and on the weekends.”

The park will be open to all types of ORVs, including full-size vehicles, side-by-sides, all-terrain vehicles or ATVs, and motorcycles. Staff from both MDNR and OCPR have been working for the past few years on a plan for how to incorporate something for everyone at the park. The 113 acres set to open next year were previously owned by Steve Stolaruk of Star Batt Industries. Stolaruk, who passed away in 2018 at the age of 91, was an avid supporter of the ORV park and left the site in a condition conducive to off-road recreation.

“Steve was so excited about this park,” OCPR Principal Planner Jon Noyes said. “He was out here having rocks piled up and hills formed and creating this really awesome landscape that we can fine-tune into an ORV park. His imagination and thumbprint are all over the site.”

Test events at the site

Since 2018, several test events have been held at the site. While not open to the public at this time, the MDNR is working with OCPR to make the site available for “rental” via special use permits issued by the MDNR.

This process allows clubs or organizations and businesses with insurance to utilize the park site for customer appreciation events, demos, and commercial shoots. It also allows for much-needed testing and use of the site so the MDNR and OCPR see how people use it, what they like and don’t like, and what’s missing.

“This has been tremendously helpful for our planning efforts,” Melissa Prowse, OCPR Supervisor of Planning, said. “We’re out there at every event, talking with people, asking them to complete surveys and giving us feedback, which is invaluable.”

As a design for the park is finalized later this summer, OCPR will be asking for additional public comment and posting information on its website, oaklandcountyparks.com, and Facebook pages for people who want to provide feedback.

The current plan is to finalize design by this fall, complete any construction in the spring of 2020 and have the park open by July 2020.

“We know people are chomping at the bit,” Stencil said. “We are too – we can’t wait to open the gates and invite people in. It’s going to be a tremendous asset for the county parks system, as well as the local economy here in Groveland and Holly townships.”

Stencil noted that both Groveland and Holly townships are supportive of the project and have been working with state and county staff every step of the way.

Groveland Township Supervisor Bob DePalma said his township can’t wait for the park to open.

“We are just so excited to see this finally come to fruition. We’ve been working hard for many years with the County and State on this project and they’ve been very responsive to every concern or question we’ve had along the way – they’ve been great partners and we’re looking forward to welcoming the ORV community to Groveland Township,” DePalma said.

The MDNR is also working on an agreement with Mt. Holly Ski and Snowboard Resort to enable the ORV park to use Mt. Holly’s parking lot, restrooms and ticketing area, as the two have opposite prime seasons. This is anticipated to save the project hundreds of thousands of dollars in construction costs.

The park has yet to be formally named, although the agreement at this time refers to it as Holly Oaks ORV Park. OCPR staff indicated that a new name will likely be selected later this year.

ORV park partners needed

The county is also seeking involvement from the business community in southeast Michigan. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was recently released requesting proposals from businesses looking to be a part of the new park.

“We wanted to find a way to be fair and transparent about anyone we might work with at the park, since we know there is a significant amount of interest from the business community,” Stencil said. “This RFP invites proposals all the way from building features or tracks at the site that would be open to the public but also available for business use for research and development or customer events, to washing stations or repair services, or even branded vehicles for security and park staff use.”

Businesses interested in this opportunity should visit the [Oakland County Purchasing Web site](#).

The park will have a per-vehicle entry fee and will require MDNR ORV stickers. A Recreation Passport or OCPR Vehicle Permit will not be required.

For additional information, contact Dan Stencil, Executive Officer at Oakland County Parks and Recreation – 248-858-4944 or stencild@oakgov.com.

Visit OaklandCountyParks.com for more information. Join the conversation on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).