



Scio Info

Township of Scio • Established 1833 • Winter 2004 Edition

Natural Rivers Act Protects the Huron

An article by Susan Wooley which first appeared in the Huron River Report, the newsletter of the Huron River Watershed Council.

A large portion of the Huron River and three of its tributaries have such good quality and natural beauty that in 1977 they were designated a Natural River under the Michigan Natural Rivers Act (231 P.A. 1970). The Huron is the only river with this status in southeastern Michigan. The designated area extends from the Kent Lake Dam in Kensington Metropark downstream to the Scio-Ann Arbor Township line (excluding lakeshore in the Chain-of-Lakes and the Village of Dexter) and includes portions of Davis, Arms, and Mill creeks.

For the Huron, this designation establishes special zoning restrictions within a Natural River District Zone that extends 400 feet on each side of the river. In that zone new construction only can include single-family housing, and building construction must take place outside of the floodplain and be set back 125 feet from a river or creek. In addition a 50-foot natural vegeta-



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tion buffer strip must be maintained along the riverbank and filling and dredging activities are strictly regulated. Variances to the requirements can be obtained under special circumstances. Details of the administrative rules for the Huron River zone can be found at the DNR website www.michigan.gov/dnr by going to the "Forests, Land and Water" page.

WHY HAVE NATURAL RIVER ZONES?

The goal of Natural River designation is to preserve, protect and enhance the river environment in a natural state for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Not only does it preserve the river for recreational use and enjoyment of its beauty, it also protects our drinking water. The act "states that the local zoning ordinances or state zoning rules 'shall protect the interest of the people of the state as a whole' and shall bear in mind the unique characteristics of the land and water, surrounding development, and existing use, and provide for the consideration of soil, water, stream beds and banks, flood plains, and adjoining uplands." Natural River zoning involves land use planning across political boundaries, a concept endorsed by the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council.

SCIO INFO

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E. Spaulding Clark, Editor

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Some opponents of Natural River designation are concerned that it unfairly restricts the right of riparian property owners to build on or modify their property resulting in a reduction in the value of their property by limiting their opportunity to develop the land. Local governments are concerned about what they view as a lack of local control. However, without this protection, uncontrolled development inevitably will lead to the loss of the natural beauty that is the chief source of the value of riverfront property. One look at the urban rivers in southeast Michigan foreshadows the fate of the Huron if we do not uphold and enforce the Natural River zoning requirements.

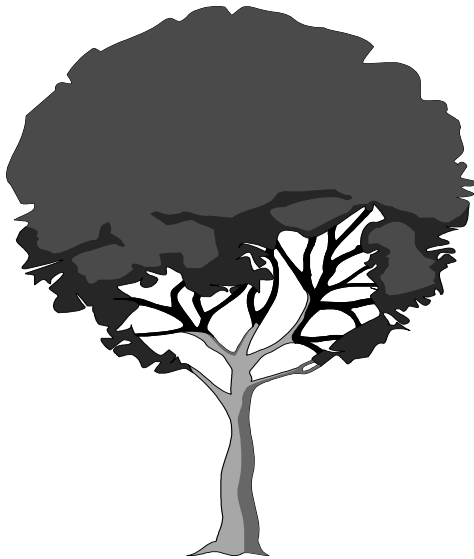
CURRENT LEGISLATION

Following the recent designation of two rivers in northern Michigan as Natural Rivers, two bills that will modify the Natural Rivers Act have been passed by the Michigan House of Representatives and referred to Senate Committee. The general intent of H.B. 4641 and H.B. 4642 is to alter the process by which a natural river area is designated. In addition, H.B. 4641 includes provisions for periodic review of a Natural River designation with the possibility of the designation being rescinded following resolution by the governing bodies of the majority of the counties and townships within the area. These two bills apply only to recent and future designations. Additional information about these bills is located at www.michiganlegislature.org.

WHAT WE HAVE TO PROTECT

Today the Huron's Natural River Zone is the longest stretch of free-running, un-dammed water on the river. The HRWC Adopt-A-Stream river-monitoring program has identified four study sites in the entire watershed that have exceptionally good conditions. Two of these are in the Natural River Zone and the remaining two are upstream of the Zone on creeks too small to qualify for Natural River status. Thanks to the Michigan Natural Rivers Act, we can still walk or canoe along this portion of the river and see fish and wildlife and experience the river as it has always been.

However, increasing development is occurring throughout this area, bringing with it the impervious surfaces and human pollutants that degrade the River. If we are to maintain this natural resource for future generations, as mandated by the Natural Rivers Act, we must ensure that the Huron River Natural River Zoning requirements are retained and enforced not only to the letter but also in the spirit of the law.



Land Development Issues

Planning for Open Space Preservation: Over the past 20 years, Scio Township has seen a steady increase in land development and population growth, and continued growth in the future is anticipated. An uncontrolled pattern of continued land development threatens to reduce the size and connectivity of the Township's natural areas and scenic open spaces. The possible repercussions of such landscape fragmentation are many, such as water quality degradation, wildlife habitat and species loss, and impacts to scenic features in the landscape. In response to these concerns, the Township has begun to plan for the preservation of its natural, scenic and recreational resources, which will result in a Scio Township Open Space and Greenway Plan.

To begin the process of developing such a plan, Scio Township wants to hear from you. In order

to prepare a plan that reflects the vision and opinions of Township residents, a public visioning session has been scheduled for February 10, 2004, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the Scio Township Hall. Input from Township residents gathered at the visioning session will be used to develop goals and policies meant to guide the development of the Scio Township Open Space and Greenway Plan. Despite the extent of land development that has occurred thus far, Scio Township continues to offer a wealth of undeveloped natural and scenic areas. Therefore, the opportunity remains for the Township to proactively plan for open space preservation and the development of a greenway system. Please attend this very important event and help shape the future of Scio Township! RSVP's appreciated - please call the Township Hall.

Washtenaw County Greenways: The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission has unveiled plans for a Border-to-Border Trail. This will be a multi-agency effort to implement a nonmotorized multi-use trail through the scenic Huron River Valley. The trail will generally follow the Huron River from Livingston County to Wayne County. When completed, the 35-mile trail will accommodate nonmotorized travel along linked open spaces and urban areas within the Huron River corridor. The vision of such a trail has been in the minds of many since 1984, when the *Huron River Bikeway Study, Ann Arbor-Dexter* was undertaken. Recent surveys have suggested that trails are the top priority of county residents, closely followed by environmental conservation. The current trail plan hopes to address both priorities. The good news for Scio area residents is that the first segment planned for 2004 is the construction of 1.42 miles of trail from the Village of Dexter to Dexter Huron Metro Park. As Huron River Drive has served as a shared vehicular and bicycle transportation/recreation corridor, this phase will attempt to locate as much of the nonmotorized trail as is possible off-road. The second phase will be another 5.5 miles of trail from Dexter Huron Metro Park to Delhi Park.

Purchase of Development Rights initiative: By the time this issue is in your hands, it is expected that the Scio Township Board of Trustees will have approved a ballot initiative for the August primary, giving Township voters the opportunity to determine whether they wish to tax themselves to provide for the preservation of farmland and open space. With the success of recent ballot initiatives in the City of Ann Arbor and Ann Arbor Township, the Board felt that Township voters should have the chance to express their interest in this subject. Tentatively, the Board has suggested a .5 mill tax increase for ten years. The receipts from this millage would be dedicated to farmland and open space preservation, and after ten years, would automatically expire. The Township already established a Purchase of Development Rights ordinance, which would govern the selection of properties and the legal arrangements for their preservation. This would be complimentary to, but not tied to, the Ann Arbor greenbelt initiative. That is, while receipts from the proposed millage could be used in conjunction with and to assist Ann Arbor's greenbelt program, it would be entirely independent of Ann Arbor's program and any other state or local program. Ultimately, the success of many of these programs will be dependent upon the ability of communities to join together, both economically and procedurally, in order to achieve the best overall result for everyone. What will be the effect of this millage? .5 mills translates into 50 cents per each \$1000 of assessed valuation. Thus for example, if your house is valued at \$200,000, it is assessed at one-half or \$100,000. The .5 mills would then represent an additional \$50 per year, for whatever the term of the millage is. It is worth noting that the total current Township millage is .9677. It is expected that .5 mills would result in about \$575,000 per year being available for the preservation of farmland and open space in the Township.

Cooperative Planning Effort: Recently, a developer approached the Village of Dexter with a plan for residential and commercial development of several hundred acres immediately

south of the Village along Baker Road. This development proposal contemplates the need for water and sewer, currently unavailable and unplanned, and otherwise could not occur in that area of the Township. While the Village of course has no master (development) plan for this area of the Township (it being outside Village boundaries), and while the Township's development plan for this area contemplates only low density residential and agricultural uses, both communities have agreed to meet together in an attempt to mutually and cohesively come up with a development plan for this area that will address the needs and concerns of both communities. This initial effort will involve a joint meeting of the Planning Commissions of both communities, and will focus not on the development proposal, but rather, upon a shared vision of what the Baker corridor could be. Only then would a discussion of the specifics of the development proposal be appropriate. It is hoped that this true communal effort will result in a shared vision that will only benefit both of our communities. More to follow.



Scio Briefs and more...

Sidewalks and snow: In November the Township passed a sidewalk ordinance, primarily to deal with issues involving sidewalk maintenance and repair. With the construction of several miles of sidewalks along Jackson and Zeeb Roads, the need for regulation was evident. This ordinance requires the owner(s) of all lots and parcels along the public streets within the Township to maintain, repair and keep safe the sidewalks adjacent to or upon their property. This includes keeping sidewalks free from ice, snow, or other dangerous obstructions and conditions. Any

owner who allows a sidewalk to remain in disrepair or in a dangerous condition through the owner's negligence shall be responsible and liable for injuries and damages resulting from the disrepair or unsafe condition. Snow that has accumulated during the nighttime shall be removed by 6:00 p.m. of the following day. Snow falling or drifting during the day shall be removed before 12:00 noon of the following day. Building material, dirt, sand, excavated material, wood, rubbish, any article or other substance or merchandise shall not be allowed to be placed on sidewalks, and shall be removed. Summaries of the requirements of this ordinance, or the ordinance itself, may be obtained at the Township hall. The ordinance is also published on the Township's website at www.twp.scio.mi.us.



Alarming problems: Once again an alarming problem has risen its' ugly head, and that is the recurring problem of false alarms. Nearly 20% of all police runs are as a result of false (burglar) alarms, and the fire department is dealing with similar numbers with regard to false (fire) alarms. The Sheriff has speculated that the false alarms could keep a deputy busy full time just responding. Sadly, there has seemed little incentive for property owners to repair the faulty alarms, absent an ordinance dealing with the issue. Thus, and in the near future, it is expected that the Township will enact a false alarm ordinance, which will fine repeat offenders for faulty alarm systems. Considering the significant cost of responding to these false alarms in terms of personnel and equipment, the issue needs to be addressed in some fashion. I guess that you can call this an advance alarm warning.

Cable television reminder: On the cable television front, the Township has joined with other communities to begin the process of reviewing and negotiating an extension of the current cable franchise with Comcast. The current franchise runs to 2005, but the process is somewhat long and laborious. As an initial step, the Township continues to solicit comments with regard to (1) identifying future cable-related community needs and interests and (2) to review the cable operator's past performance. Thus, if you have any comments to offer in these regards, you are again asked to make those comments in writing, if possible, and send them on the Township Board. Please note, this is not about Comcast's rate structure, which the Township does not have the ability to regulate. Nor does it deal with high-speed internet access, which the Township similarly does not have the ability to regulate.

The history question for new residents is: How did Scio get its' name? Well, we're not quite sure. Apparently the early Township records containing the answer were destroyed in a fire. The best current guess seems to be that the Township is named after a small island in the Aegean Sea off the west coast of Turkey. In 1822, during the Greek war of independence, many of the inhabitants of the island of Chios (Italian for Scio) were massacred by the Turks. That the Township is named Scio is probably reflective of a strong pro-Greek sentiment that prevailed in the U.S. at that time. Daniel Webster is reputed to have given a moving speech about the massacre, shortly before both Scio and Webster Townships were named. Coincidence? In the event you plan on traveling to Paris in the near future and will be visiting the Louvre, be certain to view the large painting by Eugene Delacroix entitled "Scenes of the Massacre at Scio."



Mark your calendar!

Regional Planning

February Meetings

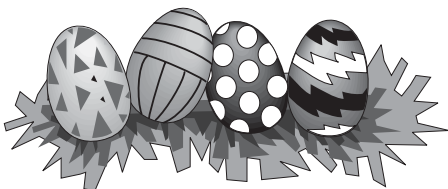
9 - noon	DDA
9 - 7:30 pm	Planning Commission
11 - 7:00 pm	Board of Trustees
16 - closed	Presidents Day
17 - 7:00 pm	Board of Trustees
19 - 7:00 pm	Zoning Board of Appeals
23 - 7:00 pm	Planning Commission
26 - 9:00 am	DDA Roads

March Meetings

8 - noon	DDA
8 - 7:30 pm	Planning Commission
10 - 7:00 pm	Board of Trustees
16 - 7:00 pm	Board of Trustees
18 - 7:00 pm	Zoning Board of Appeals
22 - 7:30 pm	Planning Commission
25 - 9:00 am	DDA Roads

April Meetings

12 - noon	DDA
12 - 7:30 pm	Planning Commission
14 - 7:00 pm	Board of Trustees
15 - 7:00 pm	Zoning Board of Appeals
20 - 7:00 pm	Board of Trustees
26 - 7:00 pm	Planning Commission
29 - 9:00 am	DDA Roads

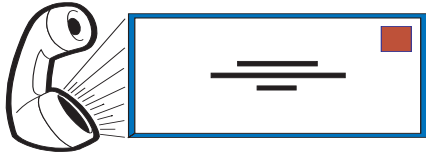


Regional planning efforts are underway on several fronts. Scio representatives have been participating in what is now called the Washtenaw Metro Alliance. This is a group of communities which includes the Townships of Scio, Ann Arbor, Superior, Ypsilanti and Pittsfield, Washtenaw County, and the Cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. This coalition has embraced the concept that a collective regional effort is necessary to protect and enhance our quality of life by anticipating issues before they become problems, and by proactively identifying and seizing opportunities which will enhance our quality of life, striving to maintain the sense of place of the Washtenaw area. An initial goal is to ensure that the regions comprehensive (development) plans work to maintain and enhance the quality of life. A correlated goal is a vision for a coordinated, connected parks and open space system. Other potential issues of discussion involve the promotion of concepts that would benefit all areas; insurance pooling; promoting the area's image; and fire and police coordination. Cooperation at the highest levels of these participating communities should provide both a forum and an opportunity for regional discussion and advancement.

In a similar vein, the Scio representatives are participating with Washtenaw County, the Village of Dexter, and the Townships of Scio, Dexter, Lodi, Lima and Webster (Dexter Area Regional Team). This gives us another venue in which to exchange information and focus on issues of regional importance. Cooperative relationships provide the opportunity to develop a shared vision for our area, as well as providing continuity to plans and visions despite changes that may occur as elected officials and planning commissions come and go. Discussing issues that touch all communities such as schools, traffic, open space corridors and development, provides another forum for regional cooperation and advancement.

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Who's who... ...and where

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OFFICE COORDIN: Melinda Hart
UTILITIES SUPT: Ray Striz

Utilities Offices: 665-2606

Utilities Emergency 651-4770

Fire Department Offices: 665-6001

Sheriff's Zeeb Offices: 994-8105

Washtenaw Co Road Commission:
761-1500

Correspondence for Township officials and staff, Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Economic Development Commission and Downtown Development Authority should be sent to 827 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

SCIO INFO NEWSLETTER
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