

Huron Clinton Metroparks in Huron Township

Huron Township Historical Society

Dr. Henry S. Curtis was nationally noted as an advocate of outdoor leisure activity. As organizer and secretary of the National Recreation Association, he was assigned by the National Youth Administration, in 1936, to conduct a study of recreational opportunities in Washtenaw County. Interviewing a large cross-section of the population, he discovered the public was limited to one small county park. Lakes suitable for recreational use were being rapidly surrounded by private development. At the same time, local residents overwhelmingly favored creation of extensive public recreational facilities.

Paralleling Dr. Curtis' activities, Professor Harlow O. Whittemore, Chairman of Landscape Architecture at the University of Michigan, had investigated the Huron River Valley and had begun to promote its development for public recreation. Joined by their enthusiasm, Dr. Curtis and Professor Whittemore determined recreational development along the Huron River was the most practical solution to Washtenaw county needs. They saw extending the same plan to include the Clinton River would serve all Southeast Michigan. They envisioned development that would include a series of parks along a loop formed by the two rivers.

Representatives of civic groups and interested citizens from the five counties were invited to confer at the University of Michigan. Their meeting in March 1937, led to establishment of a Huron Valley Committee. The committee proceeded to adopt various resolutions calling for recreational development along the waterway.

In August, membership was enlarged to reflect a newly adopted name, the Huron-Clinton Parkway Committee. Working with the National Park Service, the sub-committee surveyed existing recreational facilities throughout Southeastern Michigan.

Armed with the survey facts, maps, and other visual aids, speakers were booked throughout the five-county region to publicize the plan. In February of 1939 Senate Bill 115 was introduced to state legislature. The bill would authorize establishment of the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority. It was passed by the state legislature and signed into law by Governor Lauren D. Dickenson as Public Act 147. A referendum vote was required in the five concerned counties – Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne. Residents were asked to approve an added levy up to one-quarter mill to create, maintain and operate the new park system.

The vote fell in a presidential election year, a heavy turnout and a favorable vote resulted for the Authority by a 2 – 1 margin. On May 15, 1941, the first organization meeting was held. Despite voter approval, the legality of the legislation creating the Authority came into question. On January 5, 1942, the Michigan Supreme Court upheld the validity of the Act and made necessary tax levies mandatory in the five counties.

To help speed land acquisition, the State Legislature appropriated \$1,000,000 in July 1946 to be granted the authority on a matching basis. The new funds helped the purchase of generous acreage along 12 miles of the Huron River between Belleville and Flat Rock (Huron Township) in Wayne County. It is here the development of Lower Huron Metropolitan Park was slated.

In 1958, the Authorities' first swimming pool was built at Lower Huron Metropolitan Park. The park was also expanded by purchase of an additional 960 acres. In 1968 the Authority added two more sites, Willow Metropark and Oakwood Metropark. The new parks would be located along the Huron River in (southern) Wayne County. Willow Metropark contains approximately 1500 acres along the Huron River. It was opened in 1970 as the ninth in the Huron-Clinton Metropark system and the second in Wayne County. The tenth site and Wayne County's third park was Oakwoods Metropark. This park opened in 1975 and eventually grew to encompass some 1700 acres. The park features the Authority's third full-service Nature Center Building.