

# Park to be nominated as reserve

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Ludington State Park could soon be named Michigan's first State Land Reserve.

The Michigan Natural Resources Commission learned in June that a coalition of Ludington area agencies wanted the designation for the park so no state mineral rights could be leased there. That coalition, represented by the Michigan Land Use Institute of Benzonia, will officially nominate the park as a State Land Reserve when the NRC meets in Lansing today.

## AT ISSUE

Land reserve status would prevent development of oil and gas under Ludington State Park land.

"We're going to make a formal submission and we're hoping the Natural Resources Commission will make a decision within 60 days, with a public comment period in between," said Hans Voss of the Land Use Institute. "We think the commission is ready to receive this." The Ludington State Park is a 5,000-acre blend of sand dunes, forests and wetlands that is sandwiched between Lake Michigan and Hamlin Lake.

The current movement to protect the park from possible impacts of oil drilling came two years after the Michigan Department of Natural Resources proposed selling leases to potential oil and gas beneath the park.

Those leases were later dropped from the DNR's sale list, but department officials said there was no guarantee that the leases would not be added to future lists.

To prevent that possibility, Hamlin Township, Hamlin Lake Association, Hamlin Lake Preservation Society and Hamlin Lake Improvement boards voted in 1999 to work together to stop future lease sales. The group hired the Michigan Land Use Institute to help the cause, and together they worked to prepare the nominating materials they will present to the NRC today.

The State Land Reserve Act was introduced by former State Representative Bill Bobier two years ago. It allows citizens to nominate unique, state-owned lands for designation as reserves. To qualify for the designation the land must include at least 640 acres of fragile natural area such as critical sand dunes, wilderness areas or wetlands. Three areas that could be considered for State Land Reserve status are the Ludington State Park, the Jordan River Valley and the Pigeon River area.

Local coalition members first told the NRC why the Ludington State Park should be named as a land reserve when the commission held its June 1999 meeting in Ludington.

They told the commission they worried that oil and gas drilling in or near the park could damage the sand dunes and that oil spills or releases of hydrogen sulfide could pose health threats and could threaten tourism at the park. Mike Mullen, management unit administrator for Ludington and Orchard Beach state parks, has said that oil and gas wells have pumped minerals from under Manistee County's Orchard Beach State Park, and he has not noticed any decrease in park attendance.

Voss said some DNR employees had concerns about how a State Land Reserve designation might affect other leases in the park, or how it might affect adjoining private properties. He said Attorney General Jennifer Granholm determined that the designation would have no effect on the two issues.

The NRC is scheduled to meet today and Thursday at the Lansing Center.