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| American Rescue Plan  **Department of Natural Resources\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Flint State Park**  July 2021 |

Spending time outdoors benefits overall public health. The COVID-19 pandemic put a strain on our collective mental and physical wellbeing, and outdoor public recreation was recognized as a key way to stay healthy, especially in urban areas like Flint. From the recently announced $250 million investment in state parks and recreation areas from federal American Rescue Plan funds, the governor proposes $26.2 million to develop a new state park in Flint, which would become Michigan’s 104th state park. This is a critical use of our federal funds to help a disproportionately impacted urban community rebound from the public health crisis.

**Importance of Parks**

Michigan is home to more than 10 million acres of public lands that are open to the public for outdoor recreation and managed for natural resources and biodiversity conservation. These lands include public access to approximately 4,000 local parks, 103 state parks, thousands of boating access sites, and tens of thousands of miles of trails. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our public spaces provided safe opportunities for residents to recreate and spend time with family and friends. In 2020, state parks and recreation areas hosted over 35 million visitors – a 30% increase in visits over the previous year.

Outdoor recreation advances economic prosperity and supports a high quality of life as well as talent attraction and retention in Michigan communities. Health studies have reinforced the fact that exposure to nature reduces stress, boosts immunities, enhances memory, helps with chronic pain, stimulates creativity and more. On average for every $1 invested in land conservation, $4 is returned in economic benefit. With all these benefits, an investment in public lands in Flint is a good investment in the community’s public and economic health.

**Current Challenges**

Genesee County is the only county in Michigan without DNR-managed public land. Many of Michigan’s urban areas have experienced significant economic decline in recent decades, suffering disproportionate job losses, property value decline, blight, crime, and other social challenges. And the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately worsened these issues. Despite that decline, Michigan’s cities and suburbs remain the centers of our state’s population, the hub of major industries, centers of cultural and entertainment opportunities, and places steeped in Michigan history. The [2012 report of the Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/snyder/ParksPanelFinal_401824_7.pdf) acknowledged these issues and recommended that the state focus on establishing a new signature urban park in Flint. Furthermore, the DNR’s recently updated [Public Land Strategy](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/Land_Strategy_2021_729314_7.pdf) builds off that recommendation, identifying increased access to diverse recreation opportunities in or near urban areas where most of the state’s population resides as a key priority and establishing a new signature urban park with local partners as a key strategic initiative. We have an opportunity to uplift the Flint community’s public health and jumpstart its economy as we emerge from the pandemic.

**Summary of Proposed Investment**

The American Rescue Plan provides an amazing opportunity to invest in developing public recreation facilities in Flint and connecting those spaces to other key local assets as part of a community and downtown revitalization effort. The Governor proposes investing $26.2 million to develop a new state park in Flint, anchored at Chevy Commons and expanded along the Flint River corridor to seamlessly connect the park to local neighborhoods, businesses, and institutions, such as the University of Michigan-Flint, Kettering University, the Flint Farmers’ Market, the Flint Cultural Center Campus, and the Iron Belle Trail. Much has been invested from federal, state, local, and private partners in recent years to transform the Flint River corridor into a vibrant community asset. Examples include the removal of the Hamilton Dam and the redevelopment of Chevy Commons, which included conducting environmental remediation, constructing walking and bike paths, and planting trees and native plants. Additional funds have also been identified to further revitalize the riverfront and improve recreation access to the Flint River. This proposed investment would build off this recent momentum and be used to further leverage additional funding to provide critical resources and support to help Flint mitigate the effects of the pandemic. State officials will engage with local officials, other local community partners, and especially Flint residents to develop a park that reflects the community’s values and desires. These community-based conversations will inform the park’s footprint, services, and amenities. Potential project examples include developing non-motorized trails, unique playscapes, and accessible open spaces, as well as softening the shoreline of the Flint River to accommodate access to canoe/kayak launches and fishing platforms.

**Potential Site Plan Concept**

