**Showcasing the DNR: Celebrating 100 years of Michigan state parks**

**By CASEY WARNER  
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From iconic destinations like Tahquamenon Falls State Park in the eastern Upper Peninsula to lesser-known gems like Hayes State Park in southeastern Michigan’s Irish Hills, the Great Lakes State offers 103 state parks to enjoy.

Within these parks, there’s hunting and fishing along with campgrounds, boat launches, swimming beaches, trails and lighthouses.

Whether it's city destinations like [Belle Isle Park](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rmTUAoTFkA&feature=youtu.be) and the [Outdoor Adventure Center](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDkiW_GxvMM&feature=youtu.be) or wilderness areas like Craig Lake State Park, Michigan has plenty to offer.

But before 1917, our state parks numbered only one – Mackinac Island State Park, which was established in 1895 as a gift from the federal government. It had been the country’s second national park.

Interlochen State Park is considered Michigan’s first official state park, having been purchased by the state Legislature in 1917.

At the beginning of the 20th century, when Michigan’s population rapidly expanded as the automobile industry grew, cars became affordable and people could drive from their urban homes to the country or the lakeshore. But with few places available for the public to enjoy these scenic outdoor settings, it became clear that a statewide system of recreational areas open to everyone was needed.

According to P. J. Hoffmaster, Michigan’s first superintendent of state parks: “The appearance of ‘No Trespassing’ and ‘Private Property, Keep Out’ signs has been a growing one, all tending toward an approaching era of exclusion of the great mass of our residents and visitors from wonderful recreational advantages offered by the state. Through this, if nothing else, has come the setting aside of tracts of land and water by the people for the use and enjoyment of all.”

On May 12, 1919, the Michigan Legislature established the Michigan State Park Commission to oversee, acquire and maintain public lands for state parks.

To commemorate this historic milestone, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources will celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Michigan state parks throughout 2019.

“A hundred years ago, people in Michigan were rallying to protect the state’s most beautiful outdoor destinations,” Ron Olson, chief of the DNR Parks and Recreation Division, said. “Fast forward through time and you’ll find that generations of residents and visitors have fallen in love with these treasured natural places.”

The centennial celebration will encourage the public to get involved by sharing their stories and photos, attending events taking place throughout the year, exploring a new or favorite park, learning more about the history of state parks and much more.

“We think about the centennial as a nod to our rich history and an energizing look forward,” Olson said. “We’re celebrating by marking this milestone year with special events, podcasts, historical stories, videos, geocaching and lots more.”

Learn more about how to get involved in commemorating the 100-year legacy of Michigan state parks – and about the parks and their history – at [michigan.gov/stateparks100](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79205_85747---,00.html).

An average of 28 million people each year visit Michigan state parks ranging from Milliken State Park and Harbor in Detroit – Michigan’s first urban state park providing a green oasis in the heart of the city – to Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, offering one of the few remaining large wild areas in the Midwest.

**See a** [**Michigan state parks fact sheet**](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/MiStateParkFactSheet_637706_7.pdf)**.**

“State parks play a role in helping visitors connect physically and emotionally to all of Michigan’s natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities, including inland lakes, miles and miles of shoreline, lush forests and a variety of fish and wildlife species,” Olson said.

One way people can share their connection to state parks is by contributing photos and memories to the digital [Michigan State Parks Memory Map](https://midnr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/StoryMapCrowdsource/index.html?appid=ab30d92b09af4fa08eb9622d47b1dc71).

“We launched the memory map to capture the special memories – camping trips, family traditions, fish tales, Scouting excursions, day hikes and more – that people have made over the years,” Maia Turek, a recreation programmer with the DNR Parks and Recreation Division, said.

“It’s a virtual guest book of sorts where visitors and staff – the heart of Michigan state parks – can share stories and photos.”

A few examples of the reminiscences people have contributed:

*As a child my family and I would go for walks on the trails around the marshes. This remains such a special memory of mine; one that has truly sculpted who I am today.* (Sterling State Park, Monroe County)

*Campsite #29 was the BEST lakefront site I’ve ever camped at! Great view, bald eagle hanging out and it was so quiet and beautiful, loved it sooo much. We will be returning to this site yearly to continue making memories.* (Leelanau State Park, Leelanau County)

*A local suggested we hit the Lake of the Clouds overlook for sunrise. It. Was. Stunning!!! I will never forget how magical that morning was.* (Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, Ontonagon and Gogebic counties)

More state park memories will be offered as part of the centennial’s [Campfire Storytelling Project](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79205_85747_86991_88873---,00.html), launching in May.

“There is something special about stories around a campfire. The stories always seem authentic, honest and, often, heartfelt,” Turek said. “With this in mind, we are introducing the Campfire Storytelling Project, where seasoned storytellers will share their favorite state park stories and memories.”

Turek said that campfire attendees will also be invited to share their anecdotes. Each event will be recorded and distilled down into a podcast that will be posted on the centennial webpage and shared via DNR social media.

Under the Radar Michigan, a PBS television series featuring the people, places and things that make Michigan great, will help share state parks’ stories with five new segments showcasing parks across the state and a collection of state park feature segments from years past.

[Check out the Under the Radar videos](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79205_85747_86991_88874---,00.html) on the centennial webpage.

The 100-year anniversary celebration includes a series of [centennial events](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79205_85747_86992_87092---,00.html) across the state. More events will be added throughout the year, so check back often.

State park enthusiasts can also [follow centennial activities on social media](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79205_85747_86992_89138---,00.html) all year long.

The [Michigan State Parks Centennial Geotour](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79205_85747_86992_88875---,00.html), kicking off May 23, will offer an opportunity to join a worldwide scavenger hunt and explore state parks while seeking out 100 new geocaches created in honor of the 100-year anniversary.

Those who want to camp at state parks during the official anniversary weekend, May 10-12, can book their favorite spots at the DNR’s updated campground and harbor reservations website, [midnrreservations.com](https://midnrreservations.com/home). All camping parties that weekend will get a complimentary commemorative bumper sticker upon arrival.

Check out a [story and video from our Showcasing archive on destination weddings](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIDNR/bulletins/1f73738) at Upper Peninsula state parks.

In addition to looking back on the history of Michigan state parks and encouraging people to explore the outdoor recreation opportunities available in state parks today, the centennial celebration also focuses on the concept of giving forward – ensuring that state parks continue to thrive into the future.

Giving forward might include [buying gear](http://www.michigandnr.com/Publications/PDFS/TheseGoods/) that supports Michigan state parks, trails and waterways, [volunteering time](https://www.michigan.gov/dnrvolunteers) to help with park stewardship and other DNR efforts, or simply purchasing a [Recreation Passport](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79134_79210---,00.html) and visiting a state park.

Get more information about Michigan state parks at [michigan.gov/stateparks](https://www.michigan.gov/stateparks).

Look for a series of upcoming Showcasing the DNR stories about the people, places and events that shaped the development of Michigan’s state park system.

Check out previous Showcasing the DNR stories in our archive at [michigan.gov/dnrstories](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.michigan.gov%2Fdnrstories&data=02%7C01%7C%7C903cfdbaa7ba487394b408d6141d788c%7Cd5fb7087377742ad966a892ef47225d1%7C0%7C0%7C636718514130661496&sdata=U20ao62kbV%2Fedj3rgGgTm3EA2rfO8hjmbjT4bkWKjqs%3D&reserved=0). To subscribe to upcoming Showcasing articles, sign up for free email delivery at [michigan.gov/dnr](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.michigan.gov%2Fdnr&data=02%7C01%7C%7C903cfdbaa7ba487394b408d6141d788c%7Cd5fb7087377742ad966a892ef47225d1%7C0%7C0%7C636718514130661496&sdata=TMCcnU%2FKDgJ3wtETsavS02wg5uONhGtA9r5za9kGouA%3D&reserved=0).

/**Note to editors:** Contact: [John Pepin](mailto:PepinJ@michigan.gov), Showcasing the DNR series editor, at 906-226-1352. Accompanying photos and a state parks centennial toolkit are available below for download and media use. Suggested captions follow. Credit: Michigan Department of Natural Resources, unless otherwise noted.

[**Toolkit**](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79205_85747_89179_86979---,00.html): The DNR has kicked off its yearlong Michigan state parks celebration of programs and opportunities for park fans. Information can be found at michigan.gov/stateparks100, including a media toolkit (logos, high-resolution photos, staff contacts) information on state park history, a calendar of events, links to special programs and more. Looking for stories to cover? We’ve got them at Michigan state parks.

[**Beach**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2019/01/16/file_attachments/1138662/Beach.jpg): Swimming beaches are popular attractions at many Michigan state parks. Here, a family enjoys playing volleyball on the beach at Van Riper State Park in Marquette County.

[**Bench**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2019/01/16/file_attachments/1138663/Bench.jpg): Fayette Historic State Park, located in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, surrounds Snail Shell Harbor. Visitors can immerse themselves in history, experience cliff-side hikes, camp and enjoy the unique tranquility of the Garden Peninsula.

[**Hayes**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2019/01/16/file_attachments/1138664/Hayes.jpg): Hayes State Park, in the heart of southeast Michigan’s Irish Hills region, offers a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, from picnicking to camping, fishing and swimming.

[**Paddle**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2019/01/16/file_attachments/1138665/Paddle.jpg): According to a recent outdoor industry report, 63 percent of Michigan residents participate in outdoor recreation each year. State parks provide abundant locations for popular outdoor activities like paddling.

[**Rec101**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2019/01/16/file_attachments/1138668/Rec101.jpg): Hundreds of state park events throughout the year offer opportunities for outdoor education, fitness and recreation.

[**Winter**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2019/01/16/file_attachments/1138669/Winter.jpg): There are more than 300,000 acres of land in Michigan’s state parks. A snowy view of Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park in the western Upper Peninsula – our largest state park and one of the few remaining large wild areas in the Midwest – is shown.

[**Yankee**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2019/01/16/file_attachments/1138673/Yankee.jpg): Michigan’s state parks system includes 103 state parks – including Yankee Springs Recreation Area in southwestern Michigan, pictured here – and draws more than 28 million visitors every year./