

General History

This section presents a sequential overview of events that led to the current status of Wetzel State Recreation Area. The overview was compiled based on historic records. Figure A-2, located at the end of the section, illustrates the initial land area purchased, and sources of subsequent land acquisitions.

- ◆ August 1966: Regional Lands Plan developed by the Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission identified the Northeast Sector of the area (including Macomb County) as area of greatest need for recreational resources. At that time, the existing population demanded 15,000 acres for park land, but only 6,334 acres were in public ownership.
- ◆ January 1967: A joint report issued by County Drain and Planning Departments and Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, titled *Clinton River Recreation Potentials*, was considered the most important report regarding the selection of a state park site. Based on the area targeted by the legislature - between 24 and 28 Mile Roads - the report did not identify any sites that were of State significance for their recreational potential. The area held greater potential for local or regional park development. Issues with the sites included the presence of various utility lines, including Detroit Edison lines, which reduced the desirability of the area for park usage.
- ◆ 1967-68: Recommendations to request funds for the Rochester-Utica Recreation Area, and provide a future focus on the Belle River site in the northeast corner of the County. These sites were planned to be the State's extent of park land in Macomb County, not including the potential Grants-In-Aid available to local governments. At this time, the State owned only 675 acres of parkland within Macomb County.
- ◆ 1968-69: The Department of Conservation appropriated \$250,000 for the acquisition of a new state park site on the Coon Creek (North Branch of Clinton River) in Macomb County, between 24 and 28 Mile Roads. A report was written to determine the recreation potential of the entire North Branch of the Clinton River (24 to 31 Mile Roads, including the north and east branches of the Clinton River and Tupper Creek). While this covered an area greater than what was specified in the appropriations bill, the resources available in the whole area made it necessary to expand the base. Reports indicate the northern portions of the study area contain the best areas to preserve, and the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority proposed a regional park between 24 and 31 Mile Roads for the north Clinton River using the corridor concept, but these areas are limited in their recreation potential due to the utility corridors in the area and the sale of some land by Macomb County Community College between 28 and 29 Mile Roads. The Macomb County Planning Commission did not give the HCMA approval for the park, and the community college land purchase reduced its feasibility. The area with the greatest potential for recreation corridor development was the Clinton and Belle River valleys.
- ◆ 1968: Recommendations to divert legislative appropriation of \$250,000 to new or existing park sites. Future development and acquisition for the northeastern sector of the metro area was to be used in the Rochester-Utica Recreation Area and the Belle River corridor, as originally proposed by the Parks Division of the MDNR.

Who was Walter C. Wetzel?

Pfc. Wetzel, an acting squad leader with the Antitank Company of the 13th Infantry, was guarding his platoon's command post in a house at Birken, Germany, during the early morning hours of 3 April 1945, when he detected strong enemy forces moving in to attack. He ran into the house, alerted the occupants and immediately began defending the post against heavy automatic weapons fire coming from the hostile troops. Under cover of darkness the Germans forced their way close to the building where they hurled grenades, 2 of which landed in the room where Pfc. Wetzel and the others had taken up firing positions. Shouting a warning to his fellow soldiers, Pfc. Wetzel threw himself on the grenades and, as they exploded, absorbed their entire blast, suffering wounds from which he died. The supreme gallantry of Pfc. Wetzel saved his comrades from death or serious injury and made it possible for them to continue the defense of the command post and break the power of a dangerous local counter-thrust by the enemy. His unhesitating sacrifice of his life was in keeping with the U.S. Army's highest traditions of bravery and heroism.

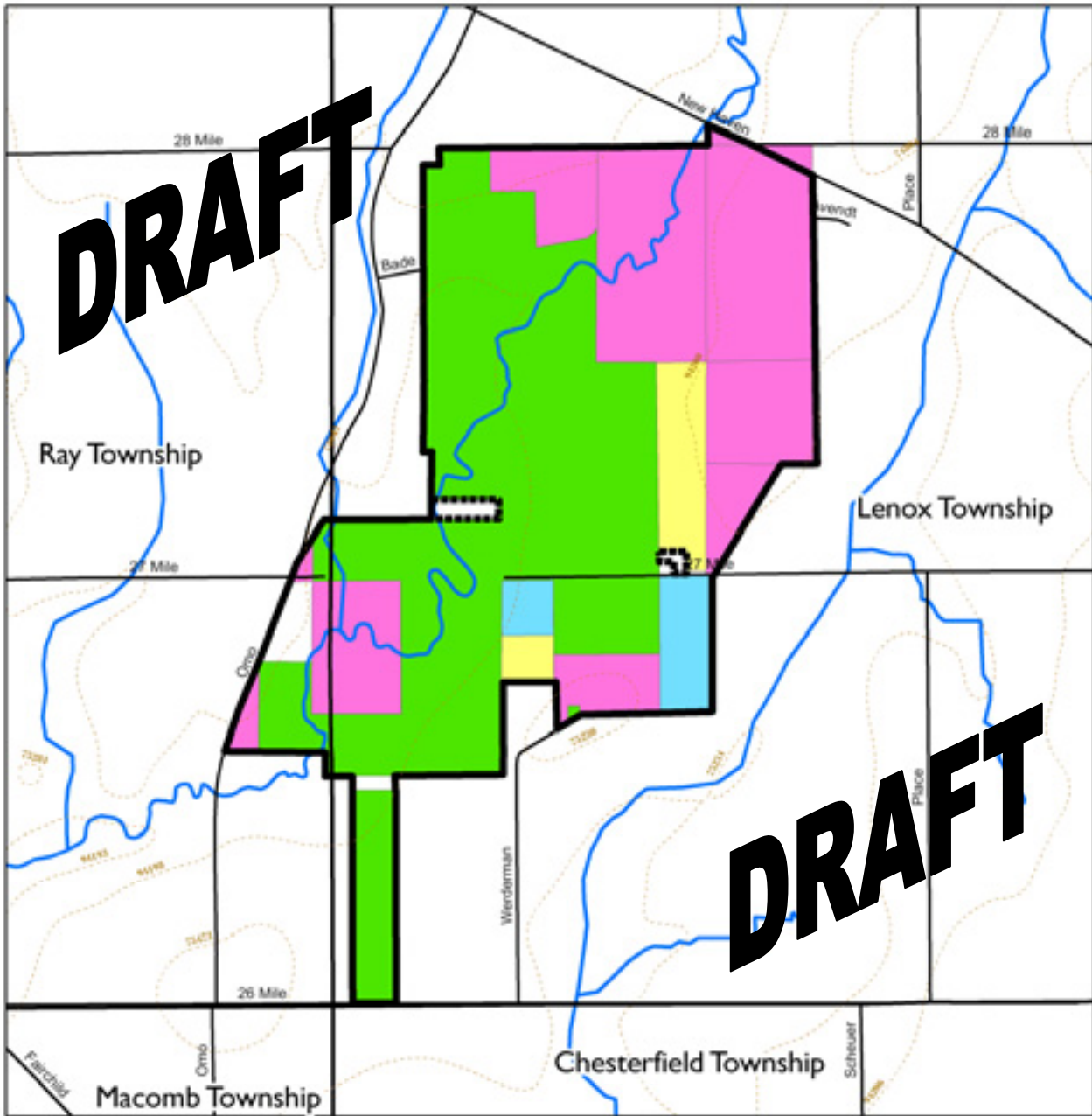
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- ◆ November 6, 1968: Memo regarding a new State Park. The recommendation was that the Coon Creek study site most appropriate for future development, if appropriations could be diverted north of the legislative limits. (Site #1, area between 30 and 31 Mile Roads, with request for Parks Division of MDNR to purchase lands outside of “legislative limits”. Site #2, 26 to 28 Mile, access from New Haven, Phases II and III were possible future extensions, to be added by other governmental entities). Other memo highlights:
 - Preparation of a Master Plan for the northern sector of the Coon Creek study site (Site #1) and present to the Macomb County Planning Commission for review.
 - Presentation of the final Master Plan to the Conservation Commission for approval.
 - Discussion of available funds for site selected.
 - Discussion over future development and acquisition funds to be used for the Rochester-Utica Recreation Area and the Belle River valleys as originally proposed by Park Division of the MDNR.
- ◆ May 1969: Master Plan for Wetzel State Park was approved, and facilities included a day camp area, swimming pool, passive games area, picnic area, and field sports area (football, baseball, softball). The Plan had a twenty year timetable. The Master Plan never received NRC approval, but the MDNR intended to prepare a new map in future. Meanwhile, the park could be used for hunting, hiking and other passive activities.
- ◆ May 1969: Prepared a study to determine which parcels to purchase with the \$250,000 legislative appropriation for new park between 24 and 28 Mile Roads on the Coon Creek. The proposed park location was between 26 and 28 Mile Roads, and included 913 acres for both passive and active uses. The MDNR plan for the park was to go beyond the traditional approach, by accommodating more “urban” uses in this growing area of Macomb County. The goal was to develop a park that would serve local residents more than providing a regional draw. It was hoped that the planned park would correct the scarcity of park land in the area.
- ◆ May 1969: The NRC approved the project boundary, and the land acquisition program was initiated.
- ◆ October 1969: The site was officially named Walter Cline Wetzel State Park.
- ◆ June 1970: The MDNR considered the development potential of a Macomb County State Park Site, between 30 and 32 Mile Roads, off Romeo Plank. This was one of the highest rated areas for recreation potential, based on a 1967 report.
- ◆ September 1978: MDNR report explored recreational opportunities in the north and east branches of the Clinton River, and Tupper and Coon Creeks. None of these sites were considered to be of State significance. It was estimated the need for park land in Macomb County would be 30,000 acres by 1980, and the Parks Division of the MDNR understood the need for additional park land in this sector of the community.
- ◆ Date Unknown: The Macomb County Planning Commission was concerned with provision of adequate open space in northern and more rural portion of County as the population expands northward. This was planned to be State’s full involvement in Macomb County, not including the potential Grants In Aid to local governments to provide additional state assistance.
- ◆ September 1987: Sale of 102 acres in Armada directed urgency to Wetzel SRA. The acquisition was complete, with approximately 800 to 913 acres. The DNR stated they would begin the master plan in next month or two, after receiving resolution from commissioners. The master plan would need approval by the NRC, after a three year process involving master plan development, presentation to the state legislature and funding appropriations, and designing & obtaining approval of a budget for development. Local officials would also be consulted.
- ◆ May 1988: The Macomb County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution for a time frame and appropriation of state funds to develop Wetzel State Park. The resolution was submitted to the MDNR. If not developed, the Commissioners want the State to give the land to the County.

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- ◆ September 1989: Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), established to assist the MDNR with the preparation of the Master Plan for Wetzel, held its first meeting. The boundary of Wetzel was finalized by this time, and included 935 acres, 889 of which was in public ownership.
- ◆ November 13, 1989 Article: Macomb County was behind on all recreational offerings except golf, per the “Building Michigan’s Recreation Needs” report by the MDNR.
- ◆ January 1990 Article: The CAC made a proposal to develop the 889-acre Wetzel Park, which had been ignored for twenty years. Wetzel was the only State Park in Macomb County. The only State Recreation Area in the County is the Rochester-Utica Recreation Area. Despite receiving taxes from the County, Macomb officials believe the MDNR’s commitment to providing parks in Macomb was weak, and the County is not getting its fair share of recreation resources from the state.
- ◆ April 1990 Articles: The Natural Resources Commission denied the master plan, and asked for changes to the document, including the provision of an outdoor gun range. The range was not considered a priority by the CAC. Macomb County officials believed the NRC wanted to delay park development, and that it was more interested in developing facilities outside of the metropolitan Detroit area. The MDNR had little involvement in the nearly twenty-five years that a Macomb County state park had been discussed.
- ◆ 1999: The MDNR and MDEQ created wetlands within Wetzel, which significantly impacted the landscape.
- ◆ February 2003: A conceptual plan was developed for a wetland, nesting habitat, and flying field in Wetzel State Recreation Area.



Source: Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Figure A-2: Land Acquisition

Wetzel State Recreation Area
Lenox Township, Michigan

-  Wetzel SRA Boundary
-  Inholding Parcel
- Acquisition Sources
 -  Original Purchase (Legislative Appropriation)
 -  Land & Water Conservation Fund
 -  Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund
 -  Other: Tax Reverted & Park Improvement Fund



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