

State Park Plans Threaten Island Way of Life, Defy Common Sense

On July 7, the Cleveland Plain Dealer contained an article with the title “[Middle Bass Island state park already popular](#)”. Unfortunately, the article did not state that it is only popular with visitors. Islanders are unhappy and and more than a little upset with ODNR’s plans for the state park. On July 5, the same day that Dan West, Chief, State Parks, ODNR met with reporters on Middle Bass to say what a great place it is and how islanders have no objections to the park plans, he had earlier met with a few islanders who expressed their concern and dismay.

ODNR plans to shut down the marina for 1-2 years while expanding it, and that may cost some jobs. Some islanders depend on the state park marina for their boat that takes them to work on Put-in-Bay. There is no ferry service that meets their requirements. Can you imagine a private marina that would not find any way to expand its docks without shutting down completely for 2 years? Even rebuilding the enter Middle Bass main dock, a much smaller dock, in the past year, never required it to be completely shut down.

But the shutdown is just a minor inconvenience compared to the long-term plans, which still do not have a firm commitment to seasonal docks for islanders.

How would you feel if the only public road connecting your village to the next largest town were controlled by the state and access was increasingly limited. Well, that’s what the situation will be much of the time on Middle Bass Island if the state does not provide seasonal slips for residents. By taking over Roesch’s marina on the island without replacing the seasonal slips there, the state would be keeping islanders from having a boat in the water to go to jobs on Put-in-Bay, visits friends and relatives on other islands, and even just go grocery shopping or to the hardware store on Put-in-Bay during the off-season. The ability to put a boat in the water for one or two days at a time, using a ramp at the state park, does not meet the needs of islanders who have a greater actual need than most people on the mainland to have a boat in the water.

Except for the State Park marina, there is no other real marina on Middle Bass Island except for the one at Burgundy Bay, and that one is available only to residents of that private community. So Middle Bass Island may become the only significantly inhabited island in the country in which most residents can’t keep boats in the water.

Those of us who come up early in the spring and stay late in the fall need a boat to get to Put-in-Bay, because the inter-island ferry, the Sonny-S, runs only three months a year and very limited hours during those months..

And the granting of seasonal slips to the Middle Bass Island Yacht Club, the vast majority of whose members are not islanders, is fine, but giving the yacht club priority over the real needs of islanders is absolutely astounding and incomprehensible, at least in the eyes of islanders. We have nothing against the yacht club and a good number of islanders including myself are members, but it is totally unreasonable, unfair and unacceptable to assure the yacht club of their future slips and not to give the same assurance to islanders. At this point nothing has been made public by ODNR, but several reliable sources have indicated that ODNR has made a commitment to the yacht club but not to the islanders.

By taking over Roesch’s marina, the state is closing the only significant marina available to islanders for boats they need to have in the water. If the islanders don’t get seasonal slips, the state is essentially taking away a right the islanders have had for over 100 years.

Also, the State Park marina has traditionally been full, for all practical purposes, only during the three holiday weekends each year, i.e., Memorial Day, the 4th of July and Labor Day. During the week the marina is empty, and outside of the three peak summer months the marina is empty. So the only argument against giving islanders seasonal slips is really just to provide extra capacity three weekends a year.

Last but not least, private boats on Middle Bass have frequently and regularly assisted in fire and EMS emergencies (mostly but not exclusively in the off season) when official boats were not available, to get people and equipment from Middle Bass to Put-in-Bay and vice-versa. And just recently, in spring 2005, a private boat

on Middle Bass was the only boat available to take EMS personnel (Middle Bass EMS, because Put-in-Bay EMS was not available), to a serious accident on North Bass Island.

To be fair, Dan West On July 5, Dan West, ODNR's chief of state parks, indicated to us that ODNR does understand that islanders need seasonal slips, and that many other state parks do provide seasonal slips. He also explained that the allocation system for slips does not need to be by lottery. So what's the problem? Well, we got the feeling that the major holdup, as usual, may just be the budget. The full expansion of the new marina, with enough slips for to allocate some to islanders, may be far off. The currently planned first phase of the expansion is being financed to a great extent by a roughly million dollar federal grant to provide more transient slips for boats over 40 feet in length.

So islanders will be losing jobs and boat slips to make more space for the very rich, who will just use the marina as the Put-in-Bay overflow marina that it often is on weekends. The slips will be mostly empty 320-350 days of the year.

Middle Bass islander boat slips are practically all under 25 feet. Islanders need inter-island runabouts and small fishing boats, not weekend cruisers. A handful or less need slightly larger all-weather boats.

Question to Dan West and ODNR: Is it really impossibly difficult to do things right and not hurt the Middle Bass islanders?

“Make a habit of two things—to help, or at least to do no harm.”
– Hippocrates

“I never did give anybody hell. I just told the truth and they thought it was hell.”
– Harry S. Truman