



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Easement deal near for Northpoint property

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PAW PAW -- A decision could be made next month whether to grant an easement to the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy to protect the Northpoint property near South Haven.

An easement would give the group power to enforce land-management rules on the 17-acre Van Buren County-owned property, which is on Lake Michigan just north of the Van Buren State Park.

County commissioners decided last year to contract with the conservancy for enforcement rather than have the county do it. The theory was that it would be harder for future county boards to change the rules for the parcel.

The land includes 330 feet of shoreline that includes a sand dune. The conservancy has already adopted the easement agreement.

On Tuesday, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners listened to some criticism of the proposed agreement, but they made no changes. The board decided to set adoption of the agreement for the Nov. 10 meeting.

Most of Tuesday's discussion was over language regarding the cutting of trees.

Marcy Colclough, senior planner with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, told commissioners that there had been feedback over the timber-harvesting language, which said it was for growth and harvest, not for ecological health.

But Emily Wilke, director of land protection for the conservancy, said the language is common.

"In Barry County, probably 95 percent of our easements have forest-management language," Wilke said.

Wilke said the conservancy wasn't bothered by the verbiage.

If a significant number of trees were to be cut, it would mean a certified forester would have to write a plan that would have to be reviewed by the conservancy, she said.

The land itself is critical dune area, which means the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality would have to sign off before any trees were cut, Wilke said.

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