

To stop a dune

By **ROD SMITH - H-P Correspondent** | **Posted: Sunday, March 16, 2014 6:00 am**

SOUTH HAVEN - The Van Buren County Board of Commissioners will host a public hearing Monday, March 24, on plans to establish trails and curb dune erosion at the Syndicate Park subdivision

Marci Colclough, senior planner of the Benton Harbor-based Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, described the plan as consisting of two trails, one pedestrian and one that could accommodate off-road vehicles, to help stop erosion.

The dune straddles the line between the North Point Land Preserve and the subdivision near Van Buren State Park near South Haven.

The 7.4-acre dune has already destroyed two houses and four more are threatened.

In November, the county board received a study by a Calvin College geology professor who recommended closing most of the 30 informal trails and educating the public about the dune. The dune has moved 400 feet eastward since 1938.

The public hearing will be at 3:45 p.m. at the County Courthouse in Paw Paw.

The county is seeking a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant for an amount still being calculated.

"I think this would score really well on this grant opportunity," Colclough told commissioners last week. The grant would be for a Lake Michigan project and a critical dune project.

Notification of success or failure would probably come in December. If successful, work could begin next spring.

The grant would require a 25 percent local match. The deadline to apply is April 1.

The county has already applied for a Michigan Coastal Zone Management grant for money toward an engineering study.

"That was for a \$20,000 grant and \$20,000 local match," Colclough said.

There's been no response to that application.

Colclough estimated the project could cost \$270,600. The most expensive part - \$120,000 - would be for putting in the trails.

"Parts of that may need boardwalk," Colclough said.

The state also has money for off-road vehicle trails, Colclough told commissioners.

County Administrator Douglas Cultra said the 900 feet of beach in the subdivision would be part of Lake Michigan public access stretching from the state park and the preserve, both to the south. That would mean about 2-3 miles of public area, which would be good for tourism.

"That's a very attractive feature," Cultra said.

In other matters, commissioners Prosecutor Michael Bedford permission to bring back former assistant prosecutor Michael Robie.

Robie retired but had been working on a murder case involving defendant Daniel Jermaine Williams of Benton Harbor.

"Robie would be appointed specifically just to work on this case," Bedford told commissioners.

Bedford already has an assistant prosecutor assigned to the case but said it's complicated and needs two. But the rest of his staff is swamped.

There are already two defense attorneys, Bedford said.

Robie has agreed to be paid at defense attorney rates to a maximum of \$10,000. After Robie hits that cap he will still work on the case until it's completed, Bedford said.

Williams was charged in connection with the Feb. 17, 2013, shooting death of Kalamazoo resident Ricardo Parker, 27, at the Antwerp Township Activity Center in Mattawan.