

Proposal for two public trails in North Point Land Preserve

By ROD SMITH - H-P Correspondent | Posted: Thursday, November 12, 2015 5:00 am

SOUTH HAVEN - All but two trails would be closed under a proposed land restoration plan for the North Point Land Preserve in South Haven Township.

Marcy Colclough, senior planner of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, unveiled a proposal by engineering firm Abonmarche of Benton Harbor to control the movement of the dune and restore vegetation with fences and plants.

The fence will be similar to a snow fence but with cedar planks.

"It'll blend in and keep people off these restored areas," Colclough told Van Buren County commissioners Tuesday.

A November 2013 study by a Calvin College geology professor recommended closing most of the trails and educating the public to help stop the dune, which has moved 400 feet east since 1938.

There are now more than 30 informal trails. The report suggested reducing that number to two to four. A main trail from Syndicate Park to the north could go over the dune to the beach and be used by all-terrain vehicles.

The dune has already destroyed homes and threatened others.

There will be two trails under the proposal. One to the north begins at Grand Avenue and traverses 675 feet over the sand to Lake Michigan. Off-road vehicles will be allowed access, Colclough said.

The existing path averages 30 percent grades, and in one spot near the beach, 98 percent.

"It (the path) needs to be widened out and graded for safety reasons," Colclough said.

The other trail farther south is 860-feet long and runs from the beach to an overlook 150 feet above the water.

In total, the project calls for restoring more than 200,000 square feet of dune.

The Syndicate Park subdivision borders the land preserve on the preserve's northern boundary. Commission Chairman Richard Godfrey said the proposal has been shown to people living in that subdivision.

"They were very receptive to this plan," Godfrey said.

Colclough said the cost estimates and a management plan should be coming in a few weeks. After that,

she said, she will seek permission to apply for a grant. Colclough said that by spring she hopes to get money from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund for the bulk of the work.

Some of the work could depend on the county getting ownership of three private parcels along the border in Syndicate Park.

County Administrator Douglas Cultra told Colclough he believes the county should own the parcels in coming weeks. The county already owns two, Cultra said, and the third is pending.

The third is a problem because it's owned by nine people scattered around the country and no one person is authorized to sell it. Last month commissioners decided to use the unusual process of eminent domain to get it.

"It looks very positive," Cultra said.

Eminent domain is the procedure where a municipality can take ownership of a private property if the municipality pays a fair price. It's the first time in recent memory Van Buren County has resorted to it.

The North Point Land Preserve is sandwiched between the Van Buren State Park to the south and Syndicate Park subdivision on the north.