

Dear Friends of Fort Wilkins,

I write today as a member of the Fort Wilkins Natural History Association Board. Some of you are aware that we are facing some important changes, and I want to inform you of the state of affairs. First of all, despite what rumors you might have heard, you can rest assured that we are NOT disbanding, dissolving, or giving up our mission of support to the Park! There are some changes underway, however, and this note is our way of letting you know what is happening, and what else may happen, as we understand the situation today.

One very big change that impacts our future is the retirement of our longtime Store Manager Barb Wachowski. We are very sad to face this reality, but it is a fact. And we haven't found a perfect replacement. Furthermore, the State has generated some new regulations and requirements that would make renewing our contract somewhat difficult. They mostly have to do with mandating healthy foods and such, all good things, but complicating for a concession such as we have been running.

In addition to Barb's retirement, we are facing the facts that our Board is aging, and President Mel Jones is not interested in continuing to serve at the level that is required to run the Store. You may not be aware, but Mel has been writing over 300 checks per year to vendors, our employees, and the various government agencies that regulate our concession, as well as keeping the books and filing tax information. This is more work than he cares to continue, especially with Barb leaving the scene, and frankly none of the other Board members are ready to step in and take over.

The DNR is considering its next steps in this situation, with alternatives including the possibility of the Michigan Historical Museum Store taking over, or another concessionaire that deals with DNR in other locations. Discussions are underway in Lansing to choose a course of action.

Meanwhile, there is also consideration of the possibility that the FWNHA might continue to operate some of its services, such as the very successful laundry service, as a service vendor, not a full concessionaire. This would limit the amount of oversight and employment necessary, but still generate some income that could allow us to continue our contributions to Park events and programs. Mel has determined that he would be willing to continue serving under those conditions. This option is also under consideration in Lansing; the regional DNR officers have stated that they will support this arrangement.

Perhaps more important than the particulars of the future relationships is the fact that your Board is committed to continued support of the Park programs and events. Such unique features as the Role Players, the Battery D visits, geocaching and evening programs are critical parts of what makes Fort Wilkins State Park special. The Natural History Association has generated and husbanded sufficient assets that we should be able to support some or all of these things for the next few years, even if we do not continue any commercial activity in the Park. The Board has determined that we will continue that support.

Thank you for your interest and support. Stay tuned to the website and our social media accounts for further updates. And make sure that you visit Fort Wilkins as soon and as often as possible to take advantage of this very special place!

Sincerely,

Patrick Martin, Fort Wilkins Natural History Association Board Member