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**Benton Harbor Residents:
"We Demand Environmental Justice"**

Residents charge Michigan DNR and DEQ of Violating Federal Law in Continued Attempt to Privatize Jean Klock Park

(Benton Harbor, Michigan) –January 30, 2008

Benton Harbor residents today are demanding that the State of Michigan order a full Environmental Impact Statement for the Harbor Shores development. In a seven page letter detailing numerous violations of federal law, residents implored the State to adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Presidential Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice.

"Up to now most of the decision-making has been invisible to the public," said Juanita Henry, Benton Harbor City Commissioner. "The Granholm administration has aligned with those who want to use public land for private profit. Local, State, and Federal government must immediately allow full and open disclosure of all planned use of public lands."

The Harbor Shores proposed development would transfer public lands to private hands. Privatizing Jean Klock Park, a regionally-significant public recreational and a environmental asset on the Lake Michigan shore, would threaten public water resources, public utilities, dunes, wetlands and community health.

In June, 2007, the City of Benton Harbor and State of Michigan proposed to convert 22 acres of Jean Klock Park, including most of the 90-year old park's sand dunes, into a golf course, taking it out of public hands. Jean Klock Park is protected by the Land and Water Conservation Act, which conveys authority to the National Park Service over conversion or privatization decisions concerning public lands. Any transfer of public parkland to private use must mitigate the land loss with equally high-grade, new parkland. This means additional lakefront land would have to be made available for public park use.

In October, 2007, the National Park Service rejected a proposal by the City of Benton Harbor and the State of Michigan to take the park's dunes for three holes on a privately owned golf course. The Park Service cited utility, water and access easements which transfer the public ownership of Jean Klock Park and all proposed replacement land to private entities, including Cornerstone Alliance, a Harbor Shores Community Redevelopment, Inc. partner, and others.

"The Governor refuses to hear the people of Benton Harbor or hear the facts," said Clellen Bury,

one of six plaintiffs who sued the City in 2003 to protect the park from another development. The City and State failed to provide any public review of the conversion proposal documents or environmental reports, although the National Environmental Policy Act requires public disclosure.

"The environmental assessment's maps plainly show they would destroy the dunes for golf course holes. Other than that, the report is worthless," said Bury.

Additionally, residents said, a 30-day public comment period on a series of fragmented documents would not be meeting NEPA guidelines.

Residents allege that the State provided false statements to the federal agency regarding the potential impacts on the minority community and surrounding area. The conversion proposal shows that DNR staff relied exclusively on Harbor Shores personnel and consultants to answer questions regarding compliance with Presidential Executive Order 12898, which addresses Environmental Justice for minority and low-income populations.

"We have been bombarded with a propaganda campaign that the golf course would not be in the park's dunes," said former city commissioner Etta Harper. "Harbor Shores must think people can't tell the difference between beautiful sand dunes and a parking lot—elite golf for the rich, or a park with dunes for our kids."

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Neither the City nor the State has released any updated conversion proposal documents to the public

A coalition composed of 1500 plus individual citizens residing in the City of Benton Harbor and citizen residents of metropolitan (49022) Benton Harbor have signed and voiced their opposition to the Harbor Shores Development in the City of Benton Harbor. The Benton Harbor Coalition submitted a notarized petition to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund hearing in 2006.

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Documents in the Media Kit include:

1. Letter from Benton Harbor residents to State of Michigan
2. Environmental Assessment Report of Conversion Parcel (excerpt)
3. Environmental Screening Form