

For Immediate Release: April 15, 2008

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Benton Harbor Residents and Supporters Reveal Illegal 1998 Sale of Jean Klock Park Beachfront

Public demands investigation of DNR Complicity

(Benton Harbor, Michigan) – Residents and former residents of Benton Harbor revealed today an illegal sale of the northernmost portion of Jean Klock Park by the City of Benton Harbor in 1998. In a letter to the National Park Service, the federal agency considering a further conversion of the park for the massive Harbor Shores development, residents and Defense of Place, a park advocacy organization, describe how the parkland was sold off without Michigan Department of Natural Resources or National Park Service approval. The sale calls into question the entire sequence of events and motives of the City of Benton Harbor and the State of Michigan for the sale or conversion of now three separate transactions—Marram Shores, Grand Boulevard, and the proposed Harbor Shores golf course holes—all private developments that took or are attempting to take public parkland out of the park.

The more than one-and-one-half acre section now called Marram Shores, including over 300 feet of Lake Michigan lakefront, reportedly was sold for \$400,000 in 1998. Similar lakefront land in other parts of Berrien County, Michigan, recently has sold in the range of \$27,000 per foot. Four large homes were built on the lakefront property.

The land, on which the Higman Park Villa once stood, was added to Jean Klock Park in 1952. The lakefront parcel expanded Jean Klock Park's beach and was included in the Jean Klock Park boundary map when the City received a federal grant in 1975 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for park improvements. Because of the

requirement that parks assisted by LWCF funds be maintained as parks in perpetuity, any conversion of protected land is subject to prior approval by the National Park Service and the City was supposed to replace the parkland with similar or better parkland. Public notice of any proposal to sell or "convert" the land, a publicized public comment period and public hearing on the proposal and replacement parkland must all occur. No matter when the park loss is reported to the federal government, replacement for the lost or sold parkland must occur.

"Funny how prime Klock Park land worth \$425,000 an acre in the 1990's would be appraised at only \$35,000 an acre in 2006," observed Julie Weiss, a Benton Harbor park advocate, commenting on the reported sale price of less than two acres compared with the appraisal being used to calculate the value of 22.11 acres for three holes of the proposed Harbor Shores golf course. "It's manipulations like this that made me understand why the people's legacy from the Klocks should not ever be put up for sale."

The residential development, originally called Jean Klock Beach Club and subsequently Marram Shores, is part of a master plan for the Edgewater district, which called for housing in the "Jean Klock Road area of Benton Harbor."

There is strong evidence that the planned series of conversions were intended to be a one-two-three step removal of the park from public ownership, starting with homes on the lake, then homes where part of the dunes once stood, and finally, a golf course taking most of the remainder of the park. "It appears that Jean Klock Park has been the target for a residential golf course development from the start that simply had three phases," said LuAnne Kozma, Michigan Director of Defense of Place.

The letter writers have asked the National Park Service to halt any further conversion of Jean Klock Park until the illegal loss of the lakefront parkland is fully mitigated. They also requested that the federal agency investigate the State of Michigan covering up the sale in documents pertaining to other conversions of Jean Klock Park. The State is charged with administration of the federal LWCF program.

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