

Boy Scouts to establish trail at Asylum Lake

TOM HAROLDSON
GAZETTE STAFF WRITER

A new nature trail is planned for Asylum Lake located off Drake Road near Stadium Drive.

And if area Boy Scouts have their way, and Western Michigan University agrees, several other changes could be made to the Asylum Lake Preserve.

The Boy Scouts of America have received permission to establish a nature trail around Asylum Lake as part of their efforts to win a William T. Hornaday Award, given to scouts for their conservation and environmental efforts.

Bernard Wolff, representative of the Hornaday project for the Boy Scouts, said WMU has agreed to permit expansion of the current short footpath into a trail around the lake.

The path will be covered with bark chips provided by WMU, he said, and include wooden benches and stations that will identify plant and wildlife in that

Trail is only first phase of a 5-part proposal

area. A boardwalk-like trail will be developed in wetland areas around the lake.

"We want to bring some natural order to the place," said Wolff, a former Asylum Lake resident. "It's beautiful to be out there."

The lake and preserve, on the city of Kalamazoo's southwest side, is owned by WMU, but the public has access to the lake. Only boats that can be carried through a gate entrance can be used.

While WMU will provide the wood chips, the scouts will provide all the manpower and other materials for the project, said Robert Beam, WMU vice president for budget and finance.

The nature trail is one of five phases of the Hornaday project proposed for the preserve. WMU officials have only approved the first phase.

The proposed projects, in order of phases proposed by Wolff, include:

- Stocking the area with wildlife such as wood ducks and ring-necked pheasants. This phase would be coordinated with the state Department of Natural Resources and area bird groups.

- Building an "orderly access," such as a winding, tree-lined boulevard from Parkview Avenue. The road would "wend its way to a landscaped parking area" and five to six camping areas that would be under "strict control of the university . . ."

During the day the camping area could be used for physical education classes, environmental research and other activities by various groups.

- Terminating growing corn on the property at Drake Road and Parkview and replanting the fields

with wildflowers and endemic grasses to create a Michigan prairie setting.

- Creating a biological research area to the east of the existing southern access similar to Michigan State University's botanical garden.

Landscaping of the projects could be done by university artists and students could be used to do work for academic credit.

Beam said the university is examining the last four proposed phases, but is not ready to make any commitment. The farm land has been leased to an area farmer, Clyde French, to grow corn. The other developments, he said, are rather extensive and would change the nature and use of the property.

"We said we would approve the first phase and see how that goes before making any further decisions," Beam said.

Wolfe said it could take 18 months to complete all five phases of the project, depending on university approval. Cost estimates are being developed.