

# Asylum Lake area saved for public's recreation

The warm sun baked the wide-eyed hikers. A friendly snake poked its head from beneath the leaves. A wading fisherman cast his line. A muskrat paddled atop the water.

The 274-acre Asylum Lake property on 12th Street and Parkview Avenue near Stadium Drive has been in the hands of Western Michigan University since 1876. It is open to the public.

The university received total control of the prime recreational land after a back-and-forth battle between public and private interests.

As the gas shortage spreads gloom and leisurely trips decline, the property should help to keep Kalamazoo residents in touch with nature without having to drive miles to find it.

According to the legislation transferring the Asylum Lake property from the Kalamazoo Regional Psychiatric Hospital to WMU, the university must use it "solely for a public park, recreational or open space purposes."

That's exactly what WMU wants, according to William Kowalski, WMU assistant vice president for administration.

"We are using up a great deal of our property with blacktop," Kowalski said. "The thing that is important is that this is open space in the city of Kalamazoo that we hope can be left as open space."

Within the 274 acres around Asylum Lake is a myriad of recreational and educational possibilities.

Open paths, lakes and trails are

all of nature's gifts for those interested in hiking, picnics, fishing or swimming.

"It's an ideal spot for passive recreation and instructional research," said Kowalski.

Educationally, the property gives WMU one of its largest outdoor classrooms. The university uses the

land for biological studies involving birds and aquatic life.

Professor Richard D. Brewer of

the WMU biology department said that the Asylum Lake property is "quite rich for birds" such as rails,

bitterns, bobolinks, meadowlarks and wood ducks.

One might also find Baltimore orioles and gray-horned owls nested in the tall oaks overlooking the former sites of the state hospital buildings that have since been razed.

Brewer estimates that there could be as many as 180 species of birds at Asylum Lake.

A large portion of the property is used for agriculture by WMU. The Asylum Lake planting is in conjunction with the university's farm program south of Parkview Avenue across the road from land immediately surrounding Asylum Lake.

In addition, Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) personnel last year planted and harvested vegetables on the land for elderly Kalamazoo residents.

The land is not for everyone, though. Some rules have had to be made to preserve the natural quali-

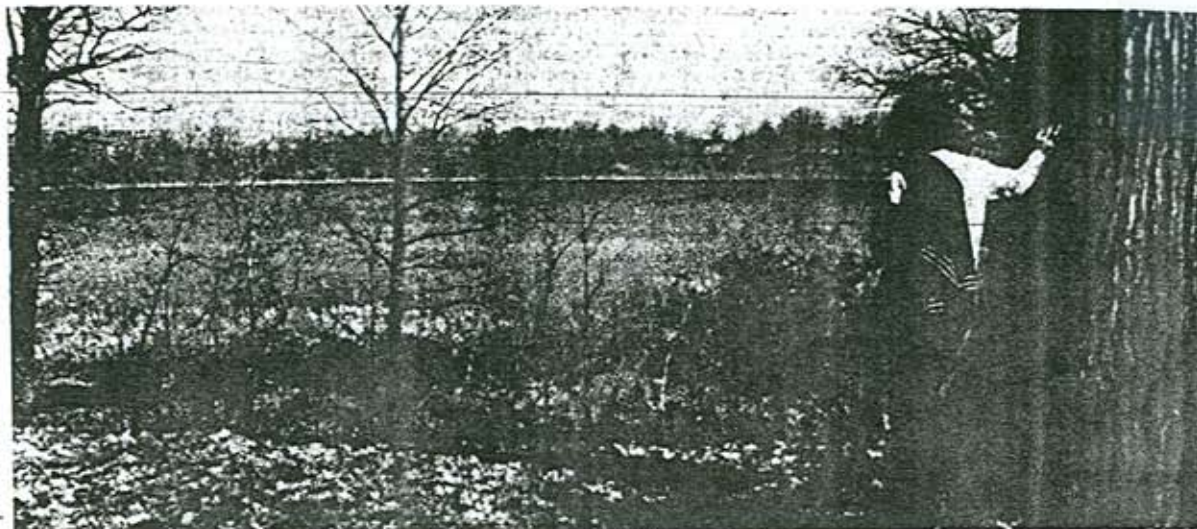
ty. Motorcycles and other motor vehicles are prohibited. Power boats are not allowed. But rowboats, canoes, kayaks and other hand propelled watercrafts are.

WMU also does not recommend any football, soccer, baseball or other athletic events at the site.

During the past year, the university has completed work on two parking lots on Drake Road. Those areas should hold up to 30 cars, depending on how people park and if boat trailers are used.

WMU has also installed additional fencing and repaired existing fences to keep motor vehicles out. The effort has not been entirely successful, judging from the looks of some of the knocked-down fencing and tire tracks.

The Asylum Lake land has four entrances, two on Drake, one on Parkview and one at the end of Winchell Avenue. None allows motor vehicles to enter



Hiker pauses on trail to view north shore of Asylum Lake

