

# WMU removes Asylum Lake signs – for now

*Floyd wants to make clear that property's future is still up for discussion.*

BY ED FINNERTY  
KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

The big brown and gold signs declaring Asylum Lake and surrounding properties reserved for Western Michigan University's sports and

recreation use are coming down – at least for now.

President Elson Floyd has ordered signs on WMU's 600 acres of holdings along Drake Road and Parkview Avenue removed until the university holds public discussions on how the property should be used.

"That is fantastic," declared Asylum Lake Preservation Association President Amy Deshon, when told by the Kalamazoo Gazette of Floyd's order.

"I think this is a really good sign. I think he has listened to the community ..."

Floyd said that since he was appointed president in April, he has received far more letters from the community over use of Western's largely undeveloped property in Kalamazoo's southwest corner than on anything else. WMU in 1993 shelved a controversial plan to develop a research and business park on portions of the properties and later declared the area would be

developed for university sports and recreation activities.

Former President Dieter Haenicke never shut the door to resurrecting a research and business park proposal, but in April announced WMU had plans drawn up for a potential 18-hole golf course on the Asylum Lake and Colony Farm Orchard tracts. It had already built soccer fields on a small portion of the Lee Baker Farm south of Parkview and Haenicke said an

indoor football practice facility also was being considered there.

ALPA and other groups and environmentalists proposed a prairie preserve for the Asylum Lake-area property. They want to reintroduce native plant life and create historical references to former occupants of the Lee Baker Farm who were among the region's first black settlers.



Elson Floyd

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## SIGNS

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Haenicke, though professing to understand concerns by those who want the properties preserved, grew increasingly frustrated with the sometimes bitter battles over use of Western's land.

After signs were erected this spring, he told the Kalamazoo Gazette Editorial Board: "We put signs up so that it sinks in and people move away from the concept it's their front yard..."

Floyd told the Kalamazoo Gazette Editorial Board recently, however, that he will invite public discussion on use of the properties as part of wider discussions on development of a university land-use plan. He plans to recommend that approach to the WMU Board of Trustees during its Sept. 18 meeting.

WMU's new president apparently wanted to make his sign removal decision very public. Western sent out a press release noting that the signs would be removed beginning at 10 a.m. today.

"There has been a lot of confusion about where we are with respect to the future of those properties," said Matt Kurz, WMU's public relations director. "Many people have felt we have already made decisions. This is our way of saying these properties and their future uses are yet to be decided upon."



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Western Michigan University landscape services worker Ed Britten removes one of three WMU signs that had marked the university's property along Drake Road and Parkview Avenue.