



Emmet County News Release

For immediate release – Feb. 14, 2020

Headlands Dark Sky Park, NOMAC Plan Path Forward

Emmet County officials met Tuesday with Northern Michigan Astronomy Club (NOMAC) vice-president Rod Cortright to discuss a path moving forward for the group's continued involvement at the county's Headlands International Dark Sky Park.

County commissioners reached out to Cortright following a story last week on NOMAC's disappointment with the county's allocation of some funds it had received after the dissolution of the Dark Sky Coast Association. NOMAC had engaged in discussions in 2018 and early 2019 with county officials on how those funds should be spent on equipment to improve the night sky viewing experience for the thousands of visitors to the Headlands each year.

When the new parks department director, Ryan Bauman, was hired in July 2019, he was not aware of the extent of the earlier discussions with NOMAC. Having been tasked with finding more ways to generate revenue at the parks, Bauman put a focus on updating the house near the Headlands' entrance. The house had been rented for many years by the park manager until September 2018. Efforts had been ongoing since that time to make repairs and improvements so the house could again bring in revenue as a rental, but from guests rather than a park caretaker.

"It definitely wasn't my intention to upset NOMAC's members. When the winter hit, we got focused on other projects to prepare us for the upcoming busy season and we didn't fully appreciate the earlier plans that had been discussed with NOMAC," Bauman said. "I'm glad we've had the opportunity to sit down with them and find a solution. Their expertise and help on our observing nights at the Headlands have been invaluable and park visitors from around the country have told us, and posted comments on social media, how their experience here inspired them."

County staff reopened communication lines earlier this week with members of NOMAC, who serve as NASA Solar System Ambassadors, and the two sides worked together to decide on and purchase new telescopes and related items. With NOMAC's guidance, over \$7800 was invested from funds left in the Dark Sky Coast Association's dissolution as well as park department funds budgeted for equipment.

"We're happy the communication is flowing again and we can look forward to working together to make the experience visitors have at the Headlands an unforgettable one," said Bryan Shumaker, president of NOMAC. "Our conversations have us excited about what we're going to be able to offer visitors this year."

Acting county administrator Mike Reaves agreed. "Though this situation was brought to my attention in the first week after being appointed to this position, I'm proud of how quickly our staff worked to find a solution that puts everyone back on the same team dedicated to providing a memorable experience at the Headlands."

Those interested in the events and programs at the Headlands are encouraged to follow the park on Facebook for news, photos, and links to information about the importance of protecting our dark skies.

#

For further information, contact Mike Reaves at (231) 348-1701.