

MUSKEGON RIVER MEETING FOR CONCERNED RESIDENTS

On Friday, August 9, 2013, a group of over 50 residents, law enforcement officials, county commissioners and members of local township boards gathered to discuss the concerns on the Muskegon River during these past summer months.

The discussion began with the issue of trash. Over 4400 cans and over 40 pounds of glass were cleaned up on the river in the last month. Residents asked if there was some way to monitor what is being taken on the river and make people accountable for what is brought back. Law enforcement officials stated that it is not illegal to take glass on the river and coolers cannot be searched without permission. The canoe liveries have asked customers not to bring glass or other containers that are causing litter problems on the river. One idea was to have signs placed at access points and along the river reminding people not to litter and to work with the local townships to pass ordinance regarding littering. To be ticketed for littering the offense has to be witnessed by law enforcement. There is not much else that can be done and people must be responsible for their behavior.

The next discussion dealt with the behavior of the people going down the river. There has been lewd behavior, harassment and trespassing. One group that was discussed was the organized float trip put on by the Travel Barrell group. A representative was present from that group and stated that they provided their own security and cleanup crew. He also stated that his group was not responsible for people that were on the river the weekend his event was held that were not part of it. This was not the only weekend that there have been issues. Most residents felt that intoxication plays a big part in the behavior.

Sheriff Mike Mercer stated that he and his officers have dealt with this issue for over 25 years. He said that in the past there has been aggressive patrolling of the river by his department and sting operations. He said that this is just a band aid for the problems. He felt that the Muskegon River has gotten a reputation of being a party river. He suggested that there be more patrols and no trespassing signs being placed on property. This would make it easier for officers to issue tickets. He also would like to see some of the access points be limited on their parking. Possibly close them down when they are full. Traffic parked along roadways hinders the officers getting to the access points. The volume of people going down the river on the weekends has increased to a point that it is becoming uncontrollable. Also residents need to take a bigger role in what goes on. Reporting issues and posting property are two of the ways to help.

A representative from Wisner Canoes stated that she felt that sting operations to check people for intoxication worked well and that after they took place the river activity was much more subdued. Mercer stated that this was usually a short term fix.

One resident stated that he has taken pictures of people trespassing on his property and given them to law enforcement officials. This has resulted in tickets being issued and the trespassing on his property has been reduced. The DNR official stated that having the property posted helps tremendously.

