



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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**RESTRICT USE OF MACMULLEN**

**House Bill 4426 with committee  
amendments  
First Analysis (3-17-93)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Allen Lowe  
Committee: Conservation, Environment,  
and Great Lakes Affairs**

***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

The Ralph A. MacMullen Conference Center, located in North Higgins State Park in the northern Lower Peninsula, is used primarily by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and other state, federal, and local agencies. It also is used by nonprofit groups with a conservation or natural resources orientation. Reportedly, however, the center also has been rented to social and recreational groups -- including for weddings and high school proms -- to the concern of some of the local businesses who might otherwise have obtained the business of these same groups. As a result of this concern, boilerplate language was added to the DNR's fiscal year 1991-92 appropriations language that restricted the kinds of groups that could use the center. Legislation has been introduced that would put into statute restrictions on the kinds of groups that could use the center.

***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

The bill would amend Public Act 17 of 1921, the Department of Natural Resources act, to restrict the use of the MacMullen Conference Center at Roscommon to the following state and federal agencies and groups:

- \* The Department of Natural Resources,
- \* federal, state, and local government agencies,
- \* educational institutions,
- \* nonprofit groups that had a natural resource or environmental agenda,
- \* community service clubs, and
- \* handicapper groups.

MCL 299.8a

***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

Fiscal information is not available at present.

***ARGUMENTS:***

***For:***

Until 1992, boilerplate language in the Department of Natural Resources appropriations legislation said that the Ralph A. MacMullen Conference Center in Roscommon should "be uniformly available to any group or organization dedicated to the utilization, protection, and economic development of the state's natural resources." Despite this seemingly clear language, the center was allowed to be used for such social occasions as weddings and high school proms. Not only do these uses appear to be at odds with the center's mission, as stated in budget legislation, they also constitute unfair competition to the private sector by allowing state-subsidized facilities to be rented out to social groups. As a result of the concern by a number of private businesses in the area, the boilerplate language in the DNR's appropriations bill for fiscal year 1991-92 was changed to restrict the use of the center to public agencies and nonprofit groups. An interoffice communication from the director of the DNR to the MacMullen facilities manager appears to reinforce this view of the center's mission, saying, in part, that "the primary focus of the RAM [Ralph A. MacMullen] Center is to serve the DNR as a meeting and training facility. As an ancillary function, the RAM Center will serve non-DNR adult groups in a meeting capacity. At all times the RAM Center shall maintain the objective of exposing groups to natural resource management and environmental education programs . . . through the employment of interpretive trails and exhibits on the RAM Center grounds, as well as making available DNR literature and multi-media presentations." The bill would, in effect, put this "boilerplate" language into statute, thereby giving local businesses some assurance that the center's mission would not be subject to the yearly uncertainty of the appropriations process.

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***Against:***

The bill could be even more specific about the groups that have access to the center, thereby ensuring that the spirit, as well as the letter, of the proposed law would be observed. Reportedly, even since last year's boilerplate language took effect, the center has hosted a number of groups that would appear to only technically meet the definition of "eligible group" (such as, for example, church retreat groups and professional purchasing agents). In addition, the bill has no penalty provisions. What would happen if the center doesn't follow these guidelines? Given the DNR's questionable judgement in the past, what is to prevent the department from departing from its mission statement in the future?

***POSITIONS:***

Representatives of the following groups testified in support of the bill (3-16-93):

- \* The Department of Natural Resources
- \* The Michigan Municipal League
- \* The Michigan Association of Counties