

The County Press

IN OUR 179TH YEAR

Locally Owned — Locally Connected — Locally Committed

'Destruction all the time'

Mayfield Twp. won't give road to state despite pleas

BY ANDREW DIETDERICH
810-452-2609 • adietderich@
mihomepaper.com

MAYFIELD TWP. — Pleas from the Michigan Dept. of Resources and area residents weren't enough to convince the Mayfield Township Board of Trustees to give up control of a controversial road near the Lapeer Shooting Pit.

After a two-hour discussion on the topic, the board voted 3-2 against abandoning Byers Road — a road to the immediate north of the Lapeer Shooting Pit that cuts through the middle of the Lapeer State Game Area.

The idea was for the township to abandon the road, and effectively give the DNR the go-ahead to put up gates at both ends that would be opened for hunting season. The DNR has even gone so far as to already have purchased the gates.

Area residents turned out for last week's Mayfield Township board meeting as a unified front to express concerns over what they see happening: Byers serves as a "mud bogging" trail (for vehicles that can make it) up to 2 a.m. or later, while also providing opportunities for people to have large fires, and dump mounds of trash. It also gives people a way to shoot up everything from air conditioners to trees at "impromptu shooting ranges."

It marked the first time neighbors have spoken out about what it's like to live in the area.

"When we first moved in, that's how we went to town," said Ralph Osmond, who lives in the area and added that Byers Road is now impassable by most "normal" vehicles. "And now, all the stuff that's happened, there's no regulation...it's a free-for-all."

"We're putting up with a

lot of unusual behavior on the road," he said. "It's just destruction all the time."

Doug Lubahn, a retired Michigan State Police trooper who has lived in Mayfield Township for 30 years, said many "impromptu shooting ranges" create situations where people are "shooting right at me."

"I've had bullets hit the roof of my barn. I've had friends come out of the woods (who were) hunting, because they've had bullets come flying by them," he said. "It's all overflow from the big (Lapeer Shooting Pit). They'll go on Byers Road and they're shooting exactly south and there's no backstops. They're shooting into trees..."

"As a township resident I find it very concerning," Lubahn said.

Area resident John Kyle said he knows of eight people who have had bullets fly near them as a result of what was described as "errant shooting."

Kyle also identified garbage as a big problem, noting he has seen everything dumped along Byers Road, from large TVs and couches to construction refuse such as drywall and shingles. That's in addition to what he said are "thousands" of shell casings at spots along Byers Road.

"This is not the pit, this is the side, improvisational areas," he said, adding that he also has seen open, unattended fires along the road.

Several other residents spoke up, too, including one neighbor who showed a target on a tree in 2014 that is now fallen.

The area around the popular Lapeer Shooting Pit near the intersection of Byers Road and Roods Lake has been the subject of increasing debate.

People familiar with the pit say it has evolved from being a spot where sportsmen could



Area resident John Kyle said he knows of eight people who have had bullets fly near them as a result of what was described as "errant shooting." sight their guns to a situation where "anything goes" with regard to shooting.

Due to complaints from neighbors, local police have been called to the shooting pit at least 70 times in the last two years, according to Lapeer County dispatch.

The DNR has been involved, working to create a situation where all affected parties can be satisfied.

In late April, the DNR reissued a press release reinforcing the rules at the shooting pit. The agency also released a video specific to the Lapeer Shooting Pit that can be viewed at [youtube/2-QZ-BlvCzfw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-QZ-BlvCzfw).

The agency identified some issues as congestion of people, unsafe use of targets, early morning or late-night shooting, and damage to habitat and restoration efforts (tree damage, litter, etc.).

The DNR also has vowed more frequent law enforcement patrols of the area, and said "safe, lawful shooting will be enforced regularly."

The DNR said in its release that "unlawful and unsafe target shooting" at the pit has caused "user conflicts and



Photos by Andrew Dietderich

Doug Lubahn, a retired Michigan State Police trooper who has lived in Mayfield Township for 30 years, said many "impromptu shooting ranges" create situations where people are "shooting right at me."



DNR Conservation Officer Matthew Zultak told the board "There are no other roads in Lapeer County, that I know when I'm on, an ambulance cannot get through to me, or other law enforcement presence cannot get through to me."

management issues."

Further, the DNR has hired a team of acousticians from Gainesville, Florida-based Sieben Associates to conduct sound tests in the area.

A DNR spokesman said information collected by Sieben could lead to changes.

At last week's meeting, sev-

eral who spoke claimed that when the pit gets too busy — or closes — shooters simply find a spot along Byers Road to shoot.

It was noted several times during the meeting that the

ROAD on page 8A

ROAD from page 3A

shooting is allowed per state law, since it is a state game area. No one said they wanted a "no shooting" rule implemented, either.

The overall hope expressed by residents, however, was that giving the DNR the ability to open and close gates at certain times of the year would work toward finding a common ground between those who have a right to shoot and those who live in the area.

Representatives of the DNR also spoke at the meeting, namely the few that are in charge of managing the Lapeer State Game Area.

Jon Curtis, one of the managers of the Lapeer State Game Area, said the gates that the state

wants to erect on Byers Road would go a long way toward what he called reigning in activities like mud-bogging and garbage-dumping without prohibiting people from walking the road to shoot.

"This is part of a big, overall project we have going with the shooting pit," Curtis said. "We need to control the overflow so one way to do that is block off the roads."

Curtis said the gates would be closed in the summer, adding that's when most of the damage is done. He said the

Lapeer County Road Commission has agreed to help get the road back in shape if gates are put up. A sign on Byers Road indicates it is not maintained by the road commission. People would still be able to walk back on the state property and shoot.

DNR Conservation Officer Matthew Zultak told the board that his biggest concern was safety. Zultak's primary duties are law enforcement in the area.

"I have made arrests down that road, of people doing things they shouldn't be doing," Zultak said. "It isn't comforting when you know there's not necessarily going to be help coming to you any time quick."

"There are no other roads in Lapeer County, that I know when I'm on, an ambulance cannot get through to me, or other law enforcement presence cannot get through to me," Zultak said.

Lapeer County Sheriff Scott McKenna was at the Mayfield meeting and confirmed "there is no way" a patrol car or ambulance would be able to get to

most spots along Byers Road. He said there are often calls to the area and raised the point of whether or not action should be taken sooner rather than later.

"Are we sitting here now, before something major happens...instead of after the fact?" he said. "Or will we say we could have stopped it?"

When it came time to vote on a motion to abandon the road, only Township Supervisor Dianna Ireland and Beth Potter-Knowlton, trustee, voted for the action.

Potter-Knowlton had been on the fence in a previous board meeting about whether or not to abandon the road. She said she needed to see the road before making a decision, which she did before last week's meeting.

"I couldn't get all the way through," she said. "I noticed quite a bit of debris in one area, they're shooting at trees that look like they're burnt."

She also acknowledged the fact that residents and the DNR were so concerned about the situation.

However, other board members weren't convinced that abandoning Byers Road was appropriate.

Clerk Julie Schlaud, Treasurer Dan Frisch, and Trustee Dan Engelman voted against abandonment. The general consensus among the three was that other options for handling the problems along Byers Road hadn't been fully explored.

Engelman noted several times that shooters would simply move to another spot within the

county to shoot. He also took issue with the DNR for not getting control of the situation sooner, as the Lapeer Shooting Pit morphed over the years from a gravel pit used by the county road commission into what it is today.

"Now it's an issue," he said. "That Byers Road was never like that. But because the DNR was the one that didn't shut that down when it was going on ... now here we are."

Zultak countered by stating the issues started at a time when less people knew of the pit, and that if it isn't addressed "it's only going to get worse."

"You're right, 20 years ago the DNR didn't take care of the issue," Zultak said. "But it's something that has to be addressed now, though, it just can't go unaddressed."