



All Roadside Parks Are Not Created Equal

**Context Sensitive
Solutions for
MDOT's Special
Roadside Facilities
in Houghton and
Keweenaw Counties**

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INTRODUCTION

As roadside facilities are updated in Michigan, recent history has shown a practice of uniform upgrades done as regular maintenance with little or no acknowledgement of a site's unique amenities of history, environment or character. This document is intended to guide how future improvements are planned for special roadside facilities throughout Michigan in order to preserve unique amenities by using Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) as the planning tool.

Today, the practice of Context Sensitive Solutions is changing the way the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) approaches projects. Context Sensitive Solutions as defined by FHWA & MDOT: **“A collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources while maintaining safety and mobility.”** Incorporating the concept of CSS in roadside park projects will result in the preservation and enhancement of these unique destinations for future generations.

MDOT roadside facilities on the Keweenaw Peninsula, north of the Portage Waterway, are featured as part of this plan to reveal how stakeholder input can be used to guide better improvements at any Michigan roadside park.

HISTORY OF THE TRAVELING PUBLIC IN MICHIGAN

Michigan's roadside facilities can be traced back to 1918 when the first roadside table appeared in the Upper Peninsula's Iron County. Herb Larson, a young county highway engineer recognized the need to provide the traveling public with opportunities for rest after a frustrating visit to mostly private northern Wisconsin. Fearing the Upper Peninsula could soon suffer a similar loss of a much-loved pastime, Larson established the first roadside park just east of Iron River along U.S. 2. This site was possibly the first such rest stop anywhere. In the 1920s, his rest stop idea quickly spread all over Michigan and beyond.



Figure 1 - Michigan's first roadside park, Larson Park in Iron County

Today there are 82 modern rest areas (year-round), 84 roadside parks (generally seasonal), 27 scenic turnouts and 39 table sites in Michigan that are maintained by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) for the traveling public. These roadside facilities serve as a convenience to the traveling public providing the opportunity to make short term stops during travel to planned destinations. Facilities are as diverse as their locations and offer varying levels of service. In general, **rest areas (and welcome centers)** are designed to provide and feature year-round modern amenities for travelers and can accommodate semi trucks, campers as well as passenger vehicles; **roadside parks** are facilities with limited parking, vault toilets, water system, picnic tables, grills, trash receptacles, etc. ;

scenic turnouts are located where there is a view or a vista and offer minimal parking (but may offer picnic tables, grills, trash receptacles, vault toilets & water if the scenic turnout is also a roadside park); and **table sites** do not accommodate large vehicles, have no toilet facilities but will have picnic tables, grills and trash receptacles.

The history of each of roadside facility varies as does their setting, amenities and overall character. Throughout the state many of these sites have become destinations themselves where generations of families stop to take in the view, enjoy the natural or historic setting, or simply have a picnic.

PLANNING FOR ROADSIDE FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Roadside facility projects (including modern rest areas, roadside parks, and scenic turnouts and table sites) are often planned and developed before public and stakeholder involvement activities are initiated. Modern rest areas are included in MDOT's 5 year plan so funding is allocated to address deficiencies and capital improvements, however, roadside parks, scenic turnouts and table sites are addressed as funding allows. In recent years, prefabricated vault toilets and modern picnic tables among other standardized improvements have provided consistency, ease of maintenance and cost savings but have both positively and negatively impacted roadside facilities. While the need for a project or improvement may be clear, the value and context of the roadside facility may not have received full consideration. Consequently projects occasionally must be re-scoped causing delays and budget revisions or result in completed projects that don't compliment the facility.

A typical roadside facility will include and feature basic amenities such as: restroom or vault toilet, water pump/fountain, information kiosk/map, picnic tables and trash receptacles. Often these facilities are very simple turnouts conveniently located along a state highway. On the contrary, in some areas the atypical roadside park is one with a long history, a scenic location, special environmental features, or sometimes all of these attributes. These atypical – special parks deserve extra attention when upgrades are proposed to ensure that the “improvements” proposed do not negatively affect the character of the park. At many parks, a restroom is the main reason for the park’s existence but in some locations the restroom is not the foundation for the park nor should it be the focal point.

As park planners or engineers initiate improvement programs or maintenance projects at its roadside facilities, it is critical that the projects are sensitive to the history, environment and character of each park. Understanding that MDOT is often working with limited budgets and other constraints, by engaging user groups throughout the planning process, there can be a more balanced approach that addresses transportation goals and operational needs as well as the value and context of each roadside facility. This is where Context Sensitive Solutions comes into play.

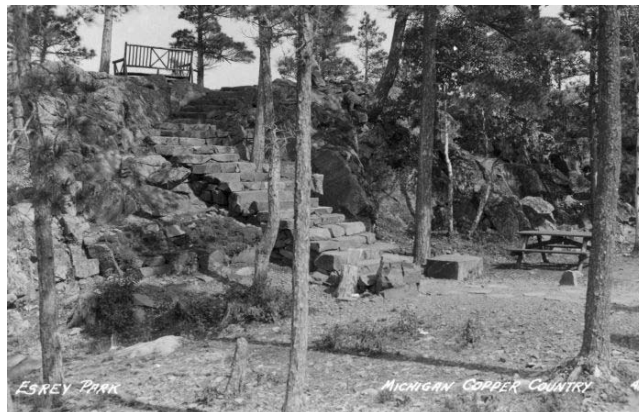


Figure 2 - Not your ordinary park, Esrey Park was established in 1933. Located along Lake Superior, this park has historically featured rustic picnic tables/benches and WPA rock work as well as unique plants and bedrock outcroppings. It has always been a destination point for locals and tourists.



Figure 3 - Typical seasonal roadside park with basic amenities of pit toilet, water source, kiosk and permanent picnic tables. Park is located along U.S. 41 near Houghton Memorial Airport, is not historic, and features no notable unique features. Standard treatments may be appropriate at this site.

CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS TO GUIDE THE FUTURE

Context sensitive solutions (CSS) as defined by FHWA & MDOT: “A collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources while maintaining safety and mobility.”

In 2003 Governor Granholm issued an Executive Order that requires the CSS be incorporated into transportation projects when possible. The fundamentals of Context Sensitive Solutions include: Stakeholder Engagement, Flexibility, Effective Decision Making, Success! CSS is a process and its principles should be applied during all project phases: planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of a facility.

CSS essential principles and practices include:

1. Engages stakeholders
2. Utilizes an interdisciplinary team

3. Embraces a multimodal approach
4. Serves and respects the environmental and social context of the transportation network
5. Provides a safe and efficient transportation system
6. Applies to all of the activities of the transportation agency

APPLYING CSS TO ROADSIDE PARK IMPROVEMENTS

To properly integrate CSS into roadside parks, particularly ‘special’ roadside parks, the following should be considered when developing a project:

- **Does the project fit its physical setting by preserving unique scenic, aesthetic, historic & environmental resources?** In other words, does it fit its context (natural and social environment)? All roadside facilities are not created equal.
- **Is the project functional and does it preserve safety?** Ultimately a safe and efficient facility must be provided.
- **Is the project financially feasible?** Projects to address CSS don’t have to be expensive, often CSS improvements save money.
- **Have stakeholders provided input to the project and been included in decision making process?** Users are a primary stakeholder and should be consulted throughout the process in addition to all other identified interests.

Because roadside parks can be complex sites, it is recommended that a site design plan be prepared prior to implementing any improvement project at

‘special’ roadside parks. With a comprehensive design plan in place, projects can be properly integrated with other improvements and maintenance practices at the park.

While all federally funded projects have to be reviewed under the National Environmental Protection Act of 1969 (NEPA), CSS builds upon NEPA to further guide projects to respect their scenic, aesthetic, historic, economic and environmental character.

INCORPORATING CSS AT KEWEENAW PENINSULA PARKS

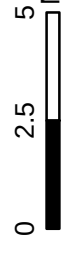
Recognizing the uniqueness of many of the roadside facilities on the Keweenaw Peninsula as functional waysides but also as scenic tourist attractions, they will be used as a context sensitive solution model for MDOT. Because the Keweenaw Peninsula Parks vary in their location, use patterns, and potential for endangered species, each will provide a different perspective on roadside parks and their contribution to the public highway system.



Figure 4 - WPA style pavilion at Hebard Park.

There are 13 MDOT roadside facilities that will be reviewed in this plan, stretching from the Portage Waterway north towards Copper Harbor on the Keweenaw Peninsula. All facilities are located along the Copper Country Trail National Byway or an identified scenic/historic side trip route. See Map 1.

Map 1



BACKGROUND

In Houghton County, there are two roadside facilities provided by MDOT, the Keweenaw Waterway Scenic Turnout overlooking the Portage Canal just outside the City of Hancock and the Memorial Airport Park. Both of these facilities feature modern attributes, and are maintained through a MDOT maintenance contract.

To the north, in Keweenaw County, a number of the roadside parks originated in the 1930's during the Works Project Administration (WPA). Ocha Potter, head of the Keweenaw County Road Commission planned many of the WPA projects including the well known Keweenaw Mountain Lodge and many roadside parks and bridges. The parks have been continually and proudly maintained by the Keweenaw County Road Commission since this time. The Road Commission works to maintain rustic character by building picnic tables and signage that are used throughout the County. The Commission contracts with MDOT to maintain the MDOT owned parks within their jurisdiction.



Figure 5 - Vintage photo of Hebard Park Ferry and benches that are no longer in place.

Keweenaw County possesses some of the most unique parks in the state. All tend to be historic destinations and have been furnished over the years to feature the 'rustic' architecture prevalent in the Keweenaw. The WPA history also makes them sites of interest to the Keweenaw National Historical Park. This

rustic character is what draws people to the Keweenaw and concurrently the roadside parks. In addition, three of the parks: Esrey, Hebard and Great Sand Bay have been identified as potential locations for a number of endangered or threatened plant species. These parks in particular exemplify the need to use CSS when planning improvements and/or maintenance.

INVENTORY OF KEWEENAW PENINSULA PARKS

The following inventory provides information on roadside facilities north of the Portage Lift Bridge. This inventory provides site name, id, and location; ownership; features; use, etc. in order to present an overall picture of how the facilities serve the current system.

MDOT ID: 42011T-56, Veterans Table Site

PARK TYPE: Table Site

LOCATION: Keweenaw County - Intersection of Cliff Drive and US41/M26

ON SCENIC BYWAY: Yes

ADT (Average Daily Traffic) AT NEAREST LOCATION: 2700

MAINTAINED BY: Keweenaw County Road Commission

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP: MDOT

PARK FEATURES: Pit toilets (Men and Women), gravel parking, rustic picnic table and garage

SIGNAGE: None to aware visitors as they approach site

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Poor visibility approaching site

SITE USE: Limited visitors stopping for toilet facilities.

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 42011T-35, Snow Gauge

PARK TYPE: Currently Table Site (Could qualify as Roadside Park.)

LOCATION: South of Phoenix on US41/M26

ON SCENIC BYWAY: Yes

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 2700

MAINTAINED BY: Keweenaw County Road Commission

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP: Partially located on MDOT ROW.

PARK FEATURES: Snow Gauge tourist attraction w/bench, toilets, 2 permanent and 3 rustic picnic tables, 3 grills, bear proof garbage container

SIGNAGE: None to aware visitors as they approach site

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: No direct foot access (across ditch) to 'Snow Gauge' from parking, cars tend to pull off of highway onto shoulder instead of taking access road into park

SITE USE: Popular site, mixed visitors – site seeing, toilets and some picnicking.

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 42012T-36, Lake Medora Park (a.k.a. "Mac Frimodig" Park)

PARK TYPE: Table Site

LOCATION: Keweenaw County – On US41 South of Lake Medora

ON SCENIC BYWAY: Yes

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 1100

MAINTAINED BY: Keweenaw County Road Commission

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: MDOT Right Of Way (ROW)

PARK FEATURES: Small paved turnout, 2 permanent picnic table, 2 grills, bear proof garbage can, stream through site

SIGNAGE: None to aware visitors as they approach site

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Limited parking, poor site distance for reentering highway.

SITE USE: Limited visitors stopping for picnic or to view stream.

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 42021T-37, Hebard Park

PARK TYPE: Roadside Park

LOCATION: M26 – West of Copper Harbor

ON SCENIC BYWAY: No, Scenic Side Trip

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 790

MAINTAINED BY: Keweenaw County Road Commission

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: MDOT Park

PARK FEATURES: Lake side: pullout with small pavilion, 2 grills, 1 permanent picnic table, 1 rustic picnic table, 1 bear proof garbage can. Non-lake side: pit toilets (men and women), small pavilion, 6 rustic picnic tables, 6 permanent picnic tables, 6 grills

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Possible endangered species, high use park, historic, poor vehicle access on south side of road, divided by highway

SITE USE: Moderate use park: site seeing and picnicking.

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 42021T-38, Esrey Park

PARK TYPE: Roadside Park

LOCATION: M26 - East of Eagle Harbor

ON SCENIC BYWAY: No, Scenic Side Trip

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 790

MAINTAINED BY: Keweenaw County Road Commission

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP: MDOT Park

PARK FEATURES: Main site: Small shelter, small pavilion near water, water source, toilet facility, 5 rustic picnic tables, 6 grills, 4 permanent picnic tables (1 handicap accessible), 2 bear proof garbage cans, historic plaque, on Lake Superior. Adjacent pullout to east/north of main site: paved pullout, 2 grills, 1 permanent picnic table, 1 rustic picnic table.

SIGNAGE: MDOT park sign approaching from each direction. Sign on east/north is possibly a little too far away from park.

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Possible endangered species, high use park, historic features

SITE USE: High use park: site seeing, picnicking and bathrooms.

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 42021T-39, Silver River

PARK TYPE: Table Site

LOCATION: M26 – East of Eagle Harbor

ON SCENIC BYWAY: No, Scenic Side Trip

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 540

MAINTAINED BY: Keweenaw County Road Commission

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: MDOT ROW

PARK FEATURES: 1 grill, 1 rustic picnic table, rock walkway to falls, gravel parking/pullout

SIGNAGE: None to aware visitors as they approach site

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Divided by highway, all of park may not be in ROW

SITE USE: Limited visitors stopping for picnic or to view stream.

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 42021T-40 & -41 & -42, Great Sand Bay

PARK TYPE: Scenic Turnout (40), Scenic Turnout(41), Table Site (42)

LOCATION: M26 – Great Sand Bay (West of Eagle Harbor)

ON SCENIC BYWAY: No, Scenic Side Trip

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 540

MAINTAINED BY: Keweenaw County Road Commission

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: MDOT Property

PARK FEATURES: 2 paved turnouts, at the south site there are 3 grills, 3 rustic picnic tables, 1 bear proof garbage can. At the middle site there is interpretive signage.

SIGNAGE: Approach signs from each direction identify scenic turnout.

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Possible endangered species, very high use beach area with no facilities at north end, poor parking, erosion At the middle site there are 3 grills, 3 rustic picnic tables, 1 bear proof garbage can.

SITE USE: Very high use area: beach and site seeing

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 42021T-43, Eagle River Park

PARK TYPE: Table Site

LOCATION: M26 – Eagle River

ON SCENIC BYWAY: No, Scenic Side Trip

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 540

MAINTAINED BY: Keweenaw County

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: Not on MDOT Property

PARK FEATURES: Paved turnout, toilets, 2 bear proof garbage cans, 1 permanent picnic table, 3 rustic picnic tables,

SIGNAGE: None to aware visitors as they approach site

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Low usage at park because it lacks unique features, bathrooms are the main reason for stopping.

SITE USE: Limited visitors stopping mainly to use toilet facilities.

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 31052T-48, Keweenaw Waterway Scenic Turnout

PARK TYPE: Scenic Turnout

LOCATION: US41 – N. of Hancock (overlooks Portage Canal)

ON SCENIC BYWAY: Yes

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 6500

MAINTAINED BY: Vendor under contract with MDOT

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: MDOT Property

PARK FEATURES: Paved turnoff, view of Portage Canal/Keweenaw Waterway, informational kiosk

SIGNAGE: Approach signage from each direction

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Popular overlook, not plowed for winter access

SITE USE: Very high use scenic turnout.

PICTURE:



MDOT ID: 31052T-34, Memorial Airport Park

PARK TYPE: Roadside Park

LOCATION: US41 – N. of Hancock (Airport)

ON SCENIC BYWAY: Yes

ADT AT NEAREST LOCATION: 6500

MAINTAINED BY: Vendor under contract with MDOT

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: MDOT Property

PARK FEATURES: Toilet, water pump, informational kiosk, historic plaque, 5 permanent picnic tables (1 is handicap accessible), 5 grills (1 is handicap accessible)

SIGNAGE: Approach signage from each direction

UNIQUE ISSUES W/SITE: Immediately adjacent to Houghton Airport's chain link perimeter fence

SITE USE: Moderate use: toilet facilities, limited picnicking.

PICTURE:



USING CSS TO GUIDE FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

In order to properly plan for and guide improvements at the roadside facilities, background research was completed, surveys were conducted of roadside park users and comments were solicited from local government officials, Keweenaw Road Commission, and selected MDOT representatives early on in the process. Two key concerns were identified during the process that have impacted and potentially could impact the future planning of the facilities:

1. Stakeholders appreciate the rustic WPA character prevalent in the Keweenaw area and negative impacts had resulted from introducing modern facilities at the roadside facilities. Since MDOT completes many roadside facility ‘improvements’ under regular maintenance they are eliminating input opportunities that could provide better guidance for work to be completed.
2. Although an environmental review showed the high potential for endangered species at the Keweenaw facilities along Lake Superior, MDOT staff did not identify the existence of any potential endangered species while on site. Prevalent vegetation, however, indicates that endangered species may still be present.

The information gathered was provided to a landscape architect at U.P. Engineers & Architects to develop cost effective design alternatives for several of the higher use parks including Snow Gauge, Eagle River, Esrey, Hebard and Great Sand Bay. The Plans included: “Highway M-26 Roadside Parks Design Recommendations” and “Great Sand Bay Restoration Recommendations.” After taking a closer look at these plans and the facilities in place, and reviews by

MDOT officials, it was determined that further guidance was needed to plan the long term future of the parks. Working with MDOT, and guided by previous input and inventories, a number of guidelines and action items were identified with the following goals:

1. Improve the efficiency of services provided for the traveling public in Houghton and Keweenaw Counties while staying within budget constraints.
2. Use Context Sensitive Solutions to identify improvements at the roadside facilities.

Improvement Guidelines for All Keweenaw Roadside Facilities

Portage Lift Bridge and North

Maintain common theme and preserve (restore) historic looks at all parks:

- Use earth tone paint on structures
- Install rustic-looking picnic tables and structures in designated areas
- Use local crushed stone for pathways and table platforms rather than concrete
- Buffer modern facilities with native vegetation

Maintain the vegetation:

- Limit moving and allow more natural un-maintained areas within park for native vegetation to reestablish and prosper
- Establish pathways and move picnic tables during the season to limit damage to vegetation if needed
- Limit formal landscaping and use native plants as feasible

Other considerations:

- Improve signage identifying park entrances and boundaries
- Add interpretive signage to highlight the historic and natural features showcased as part of the Copper Country Trail National Byway

Specific Action Items

Snow Gauge (42011T-35)* - This site has become integral to the roadside system and is a popular site for rest stops and viewing the famous "Snow Gauge". It is important to acquire the property in order to maintain and improve site access. Adding a water system will enhance its use as a Roadside Park (currently a Table Site) and the site should be appropriately designated as such.

Lake Medora (42012T-36) – Limit to small picnic site, re-establish vegetation and improve aesthetics by mowing/maintaining smaller area.

Hebard (42021T-37)* – Remove pit toilets because they cannot be maintained to current health codes and return location to table site. Eliminate parking along lake side and improve flow within site according to plans.

Esrey (42021T-38)* - Maintain rustic character with modern components in place: Diminish current focal point of restroom by narrowing road in front of restroom facilities and using extra space to screen with landscaping. Investigate alternative picnic tables, use stamped concrete to match surrounding stone and restore open areas to natural vegetation by isolating pathways.

Silver River (42021T-39) – Evaluate location to ensure all facilities are on MDOT property. Restore stone walkway and improve access to river.

Enhance Great Sand Bay (42021T-40 & -41 & -42)* – Work with adjacent land owner to acquire additional land for restroom facility & water system at north/east site. Remediate erosion problems and mitigate future impacts by improving visitor access to beach. Upon completion of improvements, review site for change in MDOT designation from scenic turnout to roadside park.

Remove Eagle River (42021T-43) from System – It has been determined that this facility is not a high use park and is also not on MDOT property so abandonment is recommended. The restroom facility would better serve the public to the north at Great Sand Bay.

Veterans Table Site (42011T-56) – This site is not a high use site because of its limited visibility. Since restroom facilities are located a few miles north at the

Snow Gauge Park, it is recommended that the restroom be removed and the site returned to a table site.

*Detailed improvement plans and cost estimates for many of the recommended action items are included in “Highway M-26 Roadside Parks Design Recommendations” and “Great Sand Bay Restoration Recommendations” prepared by U.P. Engineers & Architects, Inc.

Potential Funding Sources

There are a number of financing mechanisms for the proposed action items in this plan. A number of the recommended action items could be pursued with MDOT maintenance funds while other actions will need more extensive resources. Potential funding sources that could be explored for larger projects include: DEQ - Coastal Management Program Grants, National Scenic Byways Discretionary Grants and the MDOT - Transportation Enhancement Program.

In the Long Term

While a number of changes over time have negatively impacted the character of the Keweenaw’s roadside parks, the identified guidelines and action items will help guide future projects so they better compliment the Keweenaw Peninsula. It is important to recognize that the roadside facilities contribute to the historic landscape of the Keweenaw and thus enhance a visitor’s experience to the Keweenaw National Historical Park and the Copper Country Trail National Byway. By using Context Sensitive Solutions, improvements will be value added while the parks continue to fulfill their main purpose of serving the traveling public.