

Pere Marquette timber harv

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Illinois Department of Conservation Director David Kenney and entourage were in Alton Monday night to hear complaints about the timber harvest proposal for Pere Marquette Park.

The meeting, held in a hot room on the upper floor of the DOC office at 34 W. Broadway, was apparently not planned to be a gripe session, but that's how it progressed as Sierra Club representatives hammered away at Kenney and his staff.

Discussion centered around a Department of Conservation proposal to remove timber from a 345 acre tract in Pere Marquette Park but, Sierra members questioned the entire premise of timber removal from any state parks, or conservation areas.

When the meeting started, Kenney said the first segment would be solely for questions, but it wasn't long until Sierra Club people were advancing opinions and challenging the right of the DOC to remove timber without first holding an official public hearing and even providing an environmental impact statement.

There were also supporters of the state's plan to remove fire damaged trees from an area swept by fire in 1974. By the end of the two and one-half hour meeting, both sides were exchanging heated opinions.

Kenney and people like Al Michelson, state forester, explained the reason for removing the trees was not only a sanitation measure, but also a rehabilitation program for that section of the Pere Marquette forest.

Michelson explained repeatedly that though there seemed to be no problem yet the burn damaged trees were subject to infection by disease and removal of said trees would prevent that.

Rehabilitation of the area to its original state (prior to the fire) was cited as another reason for the proposal. The intrinsic value of improving that area of the woods was also listed by conservation department officials.

Sierra Club people, however, contended that removing timber from state parks could be setting a dangerous precedent. They asked what would prevent the department from next year deciding to harvest the timber from another part of the park.

Kenney said he nor anybody else could say what would happen in the future and

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vest plan starts gripe session

that's when Sierra Club member Ted Woodbury said: "but aren't you and your staff supposed to be the stewards of this natural resource?"

The director, agreeing to that premise, said it was the professional opinion of his staff that the damaged trees should be harvested (salvaged) in state parks where it would mean an improvement.

One Sierra Club member asked if any member of the DOC had any tie with any commercial logging firm. After Kinney replied none did, the discussion drifted back to what legal right the DOC has to remove timber from state parks.

Sierra Clubber Mark Hall asked what empowered the DOC to remove such timber and Michelson explained two statutes provided the legal justification.

Michelson cited authorizations to sell surplus agricultural products grown on land owned by the department when such products cannot be used by the department, and "to sell gravel, sand earth or other material from any State of Illinois owned lands or waters under the jurisdiction of the Department, at a fair market price."

Michelson said forest products could be included in either of those statutes, but the Sierrans didn't agree.

During discussion after the formal part of the meeting, Woodbury and Hall both said "besides being a bad and exploitative practice for state parks, the public was never given the opportunity for public comments and hearings on this alien and antagonistic park management practice."

Woodbury supported this by adding that Monday night's meeting would not even have been held if it hadn't been for Sierra Club seeking the meeting.

Numerous other people at the hearing agreed with Dr. Kenney and his staff.

Edward Kozicky, Conservation Director for Olin Corp., (who is also a member of the Illinois Department of Conservation Advisory Board) and others in attendance said professionals have been hired in the department to do a job and though public input is valuable, it would be impossible for the public to be included in each and every decision. The same point was made by Kenney and others.

This did not deter the Sierra Club. They do not want to see any logging operations in state parks.