

Public Land Belongs to The Citizens of Michigan

An Opinion from the AuSable River Property Owners Association

Camp Grayling in Northern Michigan is the largest National Guard training center (148,000 acres) in America. At public forums hosted primarily by concerned local communities, Camp Grayling's Commander, Col. Scott Meyers, and Department of Natural Resources' spokesperson, Tom Barnes, have been engaged to convince residents Camp Grayling is suddenly undersized for the electromagnetic warfare training that it has been engaged in for years. Col. Meyers is requesting an additional 162,000 acres of public forest for training, which he acknowledged, a number arrived at arbitrarily.

Since Camp Grayling is the largest training center and other Guard installations are conducting similar training on much less land, why does Camp Grayling need to double its size? When asked (CBS news, Cadillac, MI) if the proposed land expansion area would be subleased to private industry as a testing area, Col. Meyers responded, "I won't rule it out." DBusiness Magazine (May-June 2022 edition) reported that in 2019, Adj. Gen. Paul Rogers, a Governor Whitmer's cabinet appointee, began working to develop a plan to turn public land that surrounds Grayling, MI, and the restricted airspace above it into a massive, nationally recognized area to test and develop new products, weapons, and technologies. Subleases would be at inexpensive rates. Col. Meyers has failed to mention this at any public forum.

Because Col. Meyers has been unsuccessful in convincing residents of the need for additional public land, he is questioning the patriotism and support of the communities, and by extension the entire state, for not rolling over and giving the additional land to Camp Grayling. If sacrificing public land to the National Guard is the bar measuring patriotism, then Meyers must be reminded that no other state has sacrificed more of its public land in support of the National Guard than Michigan. No county has sacrificed as much public land as Crawford County, home to the Manistee and Au Sable Rivers. The communities, county, and state have demonstrated patriotism for and support of Camp Grayling for over 100 years.

Public land in Michigan belongs to its citizens, not to the DNR to give away to the National Guard and certainly not to the National Guard to sublease to private industry for testing and weapons development. The proposed expansion is a threat to the Au Sable and Manistee River ecosystems, which are world-class destinations for fishing and four-season recreation. It is also a threat to river property owners' enjoyment and their continued protection of this area of "Pure Michigan." The potential for the land to be used in ways other than proposed is a final reason why military operations must not be allowed on additional Michigan public lands

DNR Director Dan Eichinger, a Governor Whitmer's cabinet appointee, has the final authority to approve the request for the additional state land. Thus, the DNR must be reminded of its responsibility to manage, conserve, and protect our public land for public use and enjoyment. If you oppose the proposed expansion, please e-mail Director Eichinger (DNR-Camp-Grayling@Michigan.gov).