

# Van Buren County OKs Northpoint conservation easement

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**VAN BUREN COUNTY** — With a split vote on Tuesday, Nov. 10, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners approved a conservation easement to protect the Northpoint Conservation Area.

The conservation easement gives the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy the power to enforce rules to protect the property. County commissioners decided last year to contract with the Conservancy for enforcement rather than have the county do it on grounds it would be harder for future commissions to change the rules.

But there was controversy to the end. Resident Dave Foerster was concerned that language allowing a private residence in the park could open the door to sell it for de-



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Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy now will enforce rules to protect the Northpoint Conservation area.

velopment.

“All you have to do is notify the conservancy you’re going

to sell it and you’re out of it,” Foerster said. He said the agreement did not reflect the

spirit of the Friends of Northpoint or sufficiently protect the property. He wanted it to

go back into committee for more discussion.

However, Chairman Christopher Randall disagreed. “It’s my belief that we are meeting the intent by protecting the property and preserving it for public use,” Randall said.

Commissioner Tom Erdmann said the language was such to allow a residence for a park ranger, should one be needed in the future.

Commissioner Sue Hammond also said the residence was called for to allow Boy Scouts to sleep there.

Commissioner Mike Toth shared some of Foerster’s concerns and wanted it to go to committee.

When the vote was taken, the matter passed 5-2, with Toth and Randall dissenting.

Despite his opposition to part of the agreement, Foerster said he was happy it

passed.

“It’s so much better than having sold it to finance the courthouse,” Foerster said.

Foerster was referring to a recommendation made several years ago to sell the property to generate money for a new courthouse. The idea was shot down in the face of public opposition.

“It’s too bad Jim Ray can’t be voting for this, too,” Erdmann said as the topic came up. The late Ray was a commissioner who supported turning the property into a park.

Northpoint is a 17-acre parcel of county-owned land on Lake Michigan with 330 feet of shoreline that includes a sand dune. It’s just north of the Van Buren State Park, south of South Haven.

The Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy had previously approved the easement.