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In Michigan: Board approves purchase of North Fox Island

State must approve \$2-million deal, making land public

By Sandra Serra Bradshaw



Michigan Islands Research

This is the lighthouse on South Fox Island. In 1986, the state decided not to buy both islands, which were then purchased by a Southfield developer. He halted another developer's plan to build a resort on North Fox Island.

NORTHPORT -- Ecologically unique North Fox Island in Lake Michigan may soon belong to the public.

The Natural Resources Trust Fund Board last week approved the purchase of the 848-acre island for an estimated \$2 million. Now, the Legislature must approve the agreement.

That's good news for Russ Lang of Leland, who used to visit the island years ago before it was owned privately.

"It will be kind of nice to go back," he said. "It was a nice place to spend a day or two and relax."

Making the island accessible is the idea, said K.L. Cool, chief of the state's Department of Natural Resources.

The move is the latest in a series of actions dealing with the island and its neighbor, South Fox. The state considered buying both islands in 1986. Shortly after officials decided not to, David Johnson of Victor International in Southfield, also the developer of Bay Harbor near Petoskey, bought all of North Fox Island and two-thirds of South Fox, with the state owning the rest.

Johnson's move halted a developer's plans to build a resort on North Fox.

"The goal was to stop development," said Johnson, who runs a ranch on South Fox Island, where he manages white-tailed deer and raises Tennessee walking horses. He said he never wanted to own both islands.

North Fox is home to several threatened species, including the Lake Huron locust. Two endangered birds -- the piping plover and peregrine falcon -- may be using the island as a breeding place.

"The state's action of getting North Fox is good news for everybody who loves Michigan's landscape," said Brian Price, executive director for Leelanau Conservancy, which works to preserve valuable undeveloped land. "It is a uniquely beautiful island with very small human imprint."