Asylum Lake area saved for public's recreation

The warm sun baked the wide-eyed hikers. A friendly snake poked its head from beneath the leaves. A wading fisherman cast his line. A muskrat paddled atop the water.

The 274-acre Asylum Lake property on 12th Street and Parkview Avenue near Stadium Drive has been in the hands of Western Michigan University since 1976. It is open to the public.

The university received total control of the prime recreational land after a back-and-forth battle between public and private interests.

As the gas shortage spreads gloom and leisurely trips decline, the property should help to keep Kalamazoo residents in touch with nature without having to drive miles to find it.

According to the legislation transferring the Asylum Lake property from the Kalamazoo Regional Psychiatric Hospital to WMU, the university must use it solely for a public park, recreational or open space purposes.

That's exactly what WMU wants, according to William Kowalski, WMU assistant vice president for administration.

"We are using up a great deal of our property with blacktop," Kowalski said. "The thing that is important is that this is open space in the city of Kalamazoo that we hope can be left as open space." Within the 274-acre Asylum Lake is a myriad of recreational and educational possibilities.

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