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# MICHIGAN COASTAL NEWS

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## State Regulators Assess Preparedness for Offshore Wind Energy Proposals

Offshore wind farms are an increasingly familiar sight in the coastal waters of northern Europe, and here in the United States offshore projects in the East Coast and Texas are at various stages of their respective regulatory approval processes. The Great Lakes region may be joining this list, now that the rich wind resources over the open waters of the lakes have captured the attention of wind energy developers. Many wind energy stakeholders in the Midwest believe it is a matter of time before developers unveil offshore project proposals. The question facing Great Lakes state and provincial regulatory agencies, then, is whether they have sufficient authority and capacity to permit these types of projects.

Michigan took a step toward answering that question this spring, when the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) organized a hypothetical, offshore wind project permit application review exercise, or "dry run." Staff of the MEDC and several state and federal agencies reviewed two mock permit applications for wind farm construction in Michigan's Great Lakes, one in Saginaw Bay and the other in southern Lake Michigan. The exercise was designed to test the responsiveness of existing state and federal laws to offshore wind project applications, and help the agencies determine what additional information needs to be developed to support regulatory decision-making processes.

The exercise proved instructive and helped identify options for improving the way offshore wind project developers and regulatory agencies operate prior to and during the permitting phase. A major recommendation is to delineate in advance the portions of the State's Great Lakes waters where wind energy facilities should be encouraged and where they should be off limits, considering critical fisheries habitat, commercial navigation routes, existing transmission infrastructure, and other factors. Mapping of Michigan's lakebed habitats and other resources is already underway, with Coastal Zone Management grant support.

The dry run highlighted other issues that fall squarely within the public policy arena. For example, the lands beneath the Great Lakes are owned by the State and held in trust for the benefit of the public. These lands would be leased to private companies for profit-making wind energy ventures. Possible topics for public debate include compensation for private use of public bottomlands, and mitigation required for damage to Great Lakes resources from wind farm development. A link to the report prepared by the consultant under contract to facilitate the exercise will soon be available at [www.michigan.gov/eorenew](http://www.michigan.gov/eorenew).



Photo Credit: MDEQ



### **Project Spotlight: Coastal Greenway Trails**

"Buy land, they're not making it anymore." Mark Twain's famous quip is as true now as when he said it, of course. What has changed is that today there are many more people taking his advice. In Michigan's coastal areas, the strong demand for residential and vacation properties with frontage on the Great Lakes ensures that these parcels command a premium on the real estate market. Most coastal communities don't have the deep pockets needed to acquire, develop, and maintain extensive public parklands on their own, so making the most with the lands available often involves creative thinking, careful planning, and strategic partnerships. For example, linking existing publicly-owned parcels with recreational greenway trails is a way for communities to combine public access to the shores

and waters of the Great Lakes with the opportunity for pedestrians and cyclists to exercise in a beautiful coastal setting. Developing the trails as part of a regional greenway network delivers an even larger return on the investment.

Hampton Township, in Bay County, is using its own parcels, easements on private property, and partnering with the MDNR to establish segments of a multi-phase greenway trail on Saginaw Bay, with Coastal Zone Management grant support. The trailhead for the greenway is at the Township's Finn Road Park, which has a boat launch popular with local anglers. Long-range plans call for the trail to follow a circuitous route west, taking advantage of existing dikes, easements, and rights-of-way, and eventually connecting to the bike and pedestrian trail systems of neighboring Bay City and Portsmouth Township. More than two miles of the greenway are open to the public, with the grand opening held this past June at the trailhead. Finn Road Park is also adjacent to the site of the large-scale *Phragmites* control demonstration project, the subject of an article on page 3 of this issue. Access to the demonstration project viewing platform is along the walkway paralleling the boat channel.

Substantial portions of the greenway follow the boundary of the Quanicassee State Wildlife Area, and the trail borders Environmental Areas designated pursuant to the Part 323, Shorelands Protection and Management, of Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. These wetland and upland habitat areas are deemed so important to the State's fish and wildlife resources that no form of development - including trail building - is allowed without a permit from MDEQ. Close coordination with MDNR and MDEQ was essential during the planning and construction of these trail segments to avoid harm to the invaluable habitat. Now that the trail is open, the greenway is a prime location for wildlife viewing. By using carefully managed, high quality natural resources as the focus for coastal recreation and tourism, Hampton Township's greenway project exemplifies the main idea behind the Saginaw Bay Coastal Initiative, that is, promoting environmentally sound economic development and resource restoration in the Saginaw Bay coastal area. Using Contact Terry Spegel, Hampton Township Supervisor, at **(989) 893-7541** or [tspegel@charterinternet.com](mailto:tspegel@charterinternet.com) for information on the greenway project.

### **2008 International Submerged Lands Conference in Traverse City, October 26-29**

Management of Great Lakes submerged lands, or lands below the Ordinary High Watermark, is an exercise in balancing protection of public trust resources with accommodation of legitimate private uses. States hold Great Lakes waters and submerged lands in trust for the benefit of the public, and manage them so that the public may use and enjoy them for boating, fishing, swimming, and other purposes. Yet, states may convey proprietary rights to submerged lands to private entities for specific types of water-dependent development such as docks, marinas, and breakwaters. Emerging issues have the potential to shift this traditional balancing act toward a new point of equilibrium, as Great Lakes management agencies face the prospect of lower lake levels and widespread dredging needs, growing demand for offshore wind farms and other energy infrastructure, and heightened interest in coastal community tourism, recreation, and other water-focused economic growth.

These topics will be part of the discussion at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual International Submerged Lands Management Conference to be held October 26-29 at Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City. The conference is organized by the Great Lakes Commission and will have a distinct Great Lakes flavor; however, speakers and sessions will address issues of interest to all coastal managers and stakeholders, including those from tidal "saltwater" states and provinces. On-line registration and additional information are available on the conference website at [www.submergedlands2008.com](http://www.submergedlands2008.com). Participants are encouraged to register by October 17.

Photo Credit: Matt Smar, MDEQ



### ***Phragmites* Control Demonstration Yielding Insights**

A large-scale project designed to demonstrate methods for controlling an invasive, European strain of *Phragmites australis* is bearing valuable information after its first year. *Phragmites*, also known as "common reed," is a tall wetland grass with feathery, plumed seedheads in summer and fall. The roots release a chemical brew containing gallic acid, a toxin that disintegrates the roots of neighboring plant species. Fast-spreading *Phragmites* is apparently unaffected by its own poison, and marshes colonized by the reed can become dense monocultures with poor habitat value for fish and wildlife, blocking waterfront views and impairing the use of boat launches and other public access sites.

In September, 2007, MDEQ, MDNR, Hampton Township, and Ducks Unlimited cooperatively launched a *Phragmites* control demonstration project in Bay County. The U.S. EPA Great Lakes National Program Office, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and BASF provided funding support, and Cygnet Enterprises donated herbicide product. The purpose of the project is to provide landowners who wish to control *Phragmites* on their property with the opportunity to learn about treatment options. Consequently, the project team has been treating well-established stands of *Phragmites* at the site using a variety of methods. Treatments in four of the six plots include application of two different herbicides followed by mowing. A fifth plot involves mowing without herbicide treatment. A small, 12-acre plot at the project site is reserved for developing methods for controlling early-stage *Phragmites* infestations in the presence of valuable native wetland plant species. Finally, the control plot receives no mowing or chemical treatment. The two herbicides used at the site are products registered for use in wetlands, specifically, Rodeo® (a formulation of glyphosate) and Habitat® (a formulation of imazapyr). The herbicides are applied aerially by helicopter, due to the extensive acreage under treatment, with spot treatments by backpack-mounted manual applicator.

Monitoring at the site has provided some interesting information. Early results suggest that using a combination of imazapyr and glyphosate in late summer, followed by mowing may result in the most effective *Phragmites* control. However, this treatment may delay revegetation by desirable, native plants. Treatment with glyphosate followed by mowing appears to result in acceptable *Phragmites* control while allowing many native plants to thrive. However, landowners choosing this method would likely need to conduct additional annual or bi-annual herbicide treatments to ensure *Phragmites* regrowth is kept in check. As predicted, mowing without herbicide treatment appears to be an ineffective control method and may even promote the spread of *Phragmites*. The project team recommends that property owners with *Phragmites* spreading on their coastal wetlands visit the site to learn more about this invasive plant and observe their control options first-hand. Contact Tracy Collin, MDEQ Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Ecologist, at **(517) 241-4506** or [collint@michigan.gov](mailto:collint@michigan.gov) for information on the demonstration project.

### **New Designation, Proposed Expansion for Michigan's Underwater Protected Areas**

Thousands of square miles of submerged lands in Lakes Michigan and Huron, rich in shipwrecks and other historic maritime resources, will potentially benefit from added management through two recent initiatives. On June 6, 2008, the Grand Traverse Bay Underwater Preserve became the 12<sup>th</sup> such preserve designated pursuant to the provisions of Part 761, Aboriginal Records and Antiquities, of Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. The preserve encompasses about 295 square miles of Great Lakes bottomlands, including both arms of Grand Traverse Bay and a narrow, adjacent slice of Lake Michigan. Recreational divers can explore the preserve's wrecks and a variety of other artifacts resting on the bottom, such as old cars, docks, sunken logs and other remnants of the local timber industry. This newest addition brings the combined area within the underwater preserve system to approximately 2,700 square miles. Contact Tom Graf, MDEQ Land and Water Management Division, at **(517) 335-3471** or [graft@michigan.gov](mailto:graft@michigan.gov) for information on the new designation.

On the other side of the Lower Peninsula the 448 square mile Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, off Alpena County, will expand eight-fold if legislation under consideration by Congress is signed into law. Two bills, introduced by Senator Carl Levin and Representative Bart Stupak, would push the current boundary north and south to include the waters off Presque Isle and Alcona Counties, respectively, and east to the International Boundary with Canada to cover an additional 100 shipwreck sites. The proposed expansion is an early recommendation to come out of the Sanctuary's management plan public review process, now entering its final year. The Sanctuary enjoys the enthusiastic support of communities along the northeast Lower Peninsula coast, and the call for an expanded boundary rose from the grassroots level. The bills may be reintroduced in the next session of Congress if they are not signed into law this year. Contact Jeff Gray, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent, at **(989) 356-8805 extension 12** or [jeff.gray@noaa.gov](mailto:jeff.gray@noaa.gov) for information on the proposed expansion or the management plan review.

## Muskegon Ports Set Sights on Strengthening Environmental Stewardship

The managers of ports, marinas, and industries along Muskegon Lake are gaining a detailed picture of their facilities' impacts on the watershed while learning of ways to increase environmental stewardship, thanks to an assessment conducted by the Chicago-based Delta Institute. State and federal law allows industries, businesses, and municipal waste treatment facilities to legally discharge substantial quantities of pollutants. The amounts of toxic compounds and other pollutants released may be within permit limits yet have at least a localized effect on air and waters. The philosophy behind the Muskegon Lake project is that companies and municipal facilities can improve the quality of the local environment, and potentially their bottom lines, by moving beyond a narrow focus on regulatory compliance.

At the request of the Lake Michigan Forum, an advisory group to the U.S. EPA on Lake Michigan environmental issues, the Delta Institute began preparing an *Ecosystem-Based Environmental Management System*, or Eco-EMS, assessment for Muskegon Lake in early 2007. The starting points of the Eco-EMS assessment are two inventories. The first is a profile of specific environmental impairments in the watershed, the pollutants associated with the impairments, and the categories of possible pollutant sources. The second is an accounting of the quantities by weight of specific pollutants released by dischargers in the project area; in this case, facilities within a quarter mile of Muskegon Lake. The pollutant release data was obtained through publicly available reports. All discharges and emissions identified were within permitted levels.

The project team reviewed the local environmental impairment profile alongside the inventory of legally released pollutants. This cross-comparison helped highlight specific pollutant reductions that would likely yield tangible environmental benefits. The resulting draft Eco-EMS assessment report completed this past July contains an extensive list of recommended pollution reduction practices relevant to the industrial and commercial facilities around Muskegon Lake. In this report, the facility managers have the information they need to pursue additional, voluntary pollutant reductions targeted toward specific environmental improvements in the watershed. Contact Todd Parker with the Delta Institute at **(517) 482-8810** or [tparker@delta-institute.org](mailto:tparker@delta-institute.org) for information on the Muskegon Lake Eco-EMS assessment.

Photo Credit: Damon Lange McCormick



## Volunteer for Michigan's Coast!

Fall brings waves of migratory birds winging south over Michigan's coastal areas. Two volunteer opportunities this season relate to research on Great Lakes bird populations:

- **Common Coast Research and Conservation**, a nonprofit organization focused on study and protection of the common loon, is asking for boaters and beachgoers on Lakes Michigan and Huron to report observations of dead loons, waterfowl, and shorebirds during October and November. This information will help develop a better understanding of the extent and scope of a type E-botulism poisoning outbreak that has killed thousands of waterbirds on the Great Lakes over the past decade. The organization would also welcome help from volunteers willing to walk stretches of the shoreline and collect data. Report observations from the Upper Peninsula to Damon McCormick at **(906) 202-0602** or [dlim@commoncoast.org](mailto:dlim@commoncoast.org), and Lower Peninsula observations to Joe Kaplan at **(906) 487-9060** or [commoncoast@gmail.com](mailto:commoncoast@gmail.com).
- **Detroit River Hawk Watch Outreach** - The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge needs volunteers to educate the public and answer questions about the raptor migration surveys underway this fall. The Detroit River and western Lake Erie corridor is one of the best areas in North America to view raptor migration. Also, the Big Sit on October 12 at Humbug Marsh is a fun bird watching event organized to raise public awareness about the importance of this migration corridor. To volunteer or register for the Big Sit, contact Park Ranger Kristi Thiel at (734) 692-7649 or [kristi.thiel@fws.gov](mailto:kristi.thiel@fws.gov).
- **State Park Stewardship Workdays** - The DNR Parks and Recreation Division needs weekend volunteers to help collect native prairie grass and wildflower seeds at Algonac State Park in St. Clair County and Sterling State Park in Monroe County. Workdays at Algonac State Park are October 12 and November 9. The workday at Sterling State Park is on October 18. Contact Laurel Malvitz at (248) 359-9057 or [malvitzl@michigan.gov](mailto:malvitzl@michigan.gov) for more information visit [www.michigan.gov/dnrvolunteers](http://www.michigan.gov/dnrvolunteers) and click on "Calendar of Volunteer Stewardship Workdays."