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MICHIGAN COASTAL NEWS

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Budget Shortfall Prompts Regulatory Streamlining in Coastal Areas

The Department of Environmental Quality's Land and Water Management Division (LWMD) will temporarily scale back its approach toward protection of certain coastal waterways, with the concurrence of the agency's citizen advisory group. This action, one of several recommendations for aligning the LWMD workload with current, reduced staffing levels, will reduce oversight of certain regulated activities in Great Lakes connecting channels and waterways where the Army Corps of Engineers and MDEQ share permitting responsibilities. The Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) concurred with these recommendations in a report released in April. The EAC membership represents the range of interests affected by MDEQ activities, including the regulated community, local government, citizen organizations, and academia.

As noted in the EAC report, the Legislature's general fund appropriations for the LWMD have shrunk by more than 25% since 2002. The Division now faces a significant structural imbalance between the funding level required to meet its legislatively-mandated responsibilities and appropriations received from the State Capitol. With a declining number of permitting staff responsible for an unchanging overall workload, the Division must find increasingly economical ways to meet its core obligations.

The LWMD targeted coastal water-related projects for cost-saving measures because of a parallel federal-state regulatory system operating in Michigan's coastal areas. A person planning to dredge or place fill material in a Michigan coastal waterway must obtain two permits for the same project, a federal permit from the Army Corps of Engineers and a state permit from the MDEQ. The state and federal regulations are broadly similar and both agencies conduct independent permit application reviews and site inspections as part of the permitting process. Consequently, federally-permitted projects in Great Lakes connecting channels, and certain designated navigable lakes and rivers were targeted as candidates for reduced LWMD staff effort. Projects in wetlands and waters of the Great Lakes are excluded from the measure.

The Department will implement the LWMD recommendation through a temporary, two-year term general permit (GP). Placement of docks, rip-rap, and certain other projects permitted by the Corps in the coverage area will be authorized under the GP. A draft GP was released for a 30-day public comment period on April 28. Two comments were received. LWMD staff expect to finalize and issue the GP this summer. Contact Peg Bostwick at (517) 335-3470, or bostwickp@michigan.gov for information on the GP. The EAC report is available at: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-whm-eac-Final-LWMD-EAC-Rpt_232766_7.pdf





Photo Credit: NREL

Project Spotlight: Land Use Planning for Wind Energy

Wind energy has been in the news of late, and readers may be familiar with its reported advantages, such as its use of a free, inexhaustible resource – the wind - and the non-polluting nature of power generation. For states importing coal and other fossil fuels, in-state wind power projects also promise job creation and an improved ability to meet their citizens' energy needs with completely "home-grown" power. In Michigan, most coastal areas have significant wind resources, making them prime locations for wind turbines, and many coastal communities are aware of the economic benefits of allowing a wind farm to set up operation. Yet local boards and commissions must carefully weigh a complex set of factors in deciding whether and where to permit utility-scale wind power projects - a steep challenge for most small communities. Recently, a renewable energy advocacy group used a Coastal Zone Management grant to pilot an approach for supporting local government wind energy decisions.

At the invitation of the Manistee County Board of Commissioners, the Great Lakes Renewable Energy Association (GLREA) coordinated an effort to identify areas of the county appropriate for locating wind farms, and areas less suitable due to one or more constraints. The evaluation process considered wind farm construction and operation in relation to a wide range of factors including existing land use and zoning, migratory birds and other wildlife, sensitive habitats, topography, public safety, aviation, viewsheds and aesthetics, transmission infrastructure, and property values. The involvement of a stakeholder group with broad and diverse expertise was critical to the success of the process, with members drawn from local and tribal governments, state and federal wildlife agencies, MDEQ, Michigan Department of Transportation, environmental groups, utilities, wind industry representatives, academia, and other interests. The public was also encouraged to provide input. The resulting document, the *Manistee County Wind Energy Plan*, presents maps and a common base of information to help the county's communities address wind power development in their individual land use plans. The GLREA also developed a wind energy facility model ordinance for area townships to consider.

Public education and outreach were important components of the project, helping to build support for the plan while it was under development, as well as obtain input to feed into the planning process. Consequently, GLREA sought out opportunities for presenting information on wind energy in general and the planning project in particular. Two events unique to Manistee County proved notably effective in this regard; a "Wind Town Meeting" session at the 2007 Michigan Energy Fair in Onkama, and a semi-annual summit convened for the benefit of all of the county's local governments. For additional information on the *Manistee County Wind Energy Plan* contact Jeremy Wittrock, GLREA Wind Program Manager at (517) 646-6269 or Jeremy.Wittrock@glrea.org.

Coastal Communities, Businesses Encouraged to Update Material on Michigan.org

In May, America's most popular state tourism website, Michigan.org, re-launched with a new look and new features designed to reflect the award-winning Pure MichiganSM brand. For example, visitors to the website may now view videos, filmstrips, and RSS feeds with the latest travel news to help them shape their Michigan travel plans. Also new is Travel Michigan's "One Tank Trips" marketing campaign. A response to climbing gasoline prices, the campaign promotes travel destinations and experiences within an easy drive for Michigan residents. The Great Lakes are less than a tank away from virtually every part of the state, so port cities, beach towns, and other coastal communities figure prominently in the promotion.

Summer vacation and travel season is hitting full stride, and Travel Michigan urges communities and tourism businesses that have not yet provided property and event information for the website to do so. Those that have previously provided content can maximize their benefit from the free promotion by ensuring their on-line information is up to date. Michigan.org also has the ability to feature filmstrips and images for each property, destination and attraction. This allows website visitors to view multiple images of a tourism property, along with a short caption explaining the photo. Communities and businesses can take advantage of this option by providing Travel Michigan with four to eight images of each property, plus a short one- or two-sentence caption for each image.

Contact Trudy Atwood at (800) 676-1743 for information on providing or updating property and event content, and Carol Royse at (517) 373-3848 for information on submitting images.

Photo Credit: Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary



Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Unveils New Shipwreck Exhibit

A new exhibit at NOAA's Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary transports visitors to a time when the Great Lakes were among the world's busiest waterways, and many ships came to tragic ends in their cold depths. *Exploring the Shipwreck Century* offers a fascinating glimpse into the Great Lakes building and shipping boom that ran from 1825 to 1925. Most of the thousands of ships navigating the shoals, fog, and crowded shipping lanes of northern Lake Huron made safe passage, delivering cargoes and passengers to their destination ports. Hundreds did not, and their wrecks bear waterlogged witness to a culture and way of life long gone.

The exhibit at the Sanctuary's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center in Alpena features a number of innovative, interactive displays along with traditional museum elements such as a shipwreck gallery and documentary films. For example, visitors board a replica of a 1870s Great Lakes schooner racing to port through a harrowing storm. Lightning flashes, thunder claps, and with a little imagination the deck heaves and rolls underfoot, begging the question, will the ship reach safety or founder? Visitors may then explore a life-size replica of a wreck inspired by the *Cornelia B. Windiate*, which sank with a cargo of grain in 1875, just outside the Marine Sanctuary boundary. Featured on the investigative documentary "Deep Sea Detectives," experts determined that ill-fated *Cornelia* took on water during a November storm, and sank slowly. Today, she rests on the bottom completely upright with her masts still up. Information on the exhibit is available from Mary Beth Stutzman at **(989) 356-8805 extension 39**, or marybeth@nmsfocean.org.

NOAA manages the 448 square mile Marine Sanctuary jointly with the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries. The Sanctuary shelters more than 50 shipwrecks lying at depths ranging from a few inches to 200 feet. The number, accessibility, and state of preservation of the wrecks in Thunder Bay make it one of the best places in the world for divers and kayakers to view a wide variety of sunken vessels. Sanctuary information is available at www.thunderbay.noaa.gov.

New Protocols for Measuring, Tracking Condition of Coastal Wetlands

The health of Great Lakes coastal wetlands influences the region's well-being in various ways. Coastal wetlands help maintain the quality of near-shore waters used for recreation, industry, and public water supplies. They buffer shorelines from erosion damage, and retain sediments that otherwise reduce depth for navigation in harbors and boating channels. By providing breeding and feeding habitat for many sport fish, waterfowl, and non-game wildlife species, the wetlands also help fuel the tourism-based economic engines of many coastal communities. Despite their importance, no basin-wide mechanism had been established for assessing the condition of coastal wetlands and monitoring year-to-year changes – until this spring.

In March, the Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Consortium finalized the *Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands Monitoring Plan*. The document's release caps almost seven years of research and development efforts by the Consortium's scientific and policy experts, drawn from key U.S. and Canadian federal, state, and provincial agencies, nonprofit organizations, universities, and other stakeholder groups, including the MDEQ and Michigan Natural Features Inventory. The Consortium completed this complex task under the aegis of the Great Lakes Commission, with major funding from the U.S. EPA Great Lakes National Program Office.

The building blocks of the monitoring plan are five sets of indicators addressing major components of coastal wetland condition, specifically, vegetation, invertebrates, fish, amphibians and birds, and landscape context. The plan prescribes a suite of standard measurements and data collection protocols for assessing each set of indicators. An overall sampling design details the selection, number, type, and location of the wetland sites monitored for indicator condition. Adherence to the sampling design ensures that the indicator monitoring results from one coastal area will be readily comparable to results from a different part of the Great Lakes, and that same-site indicator results will be comparable from year to year – a prerequisite for discerning trends in wetland health.

Wetland management agencies and organizations operating in the Great Lakes are invited to adopt the coastal wetland monitoring plan, or adapt it to existing monitoring programs. In Michigan, the MDEQ is encouraging the use of the protocols in Areas of Concern. The plan is available at www.glc.org/wetlands. For information on application of the plan in Michigan, contact Tracy Collin, MDEQ Coastal Wetland Ecologist, at **(517) 241-4506**, or collint@michigan.gov.

Tawas Point State Park Offers Lighthouse Keeper "Working Vacations"

Great Lakes lighthouse buffs have the chance to share their passion for these historic beacons while living in the home of their dreams, thanks to a program debuting this summer at Tawas Point State Park in East Tawas. Members of the public may apply to serve as the keeper of the Tawas Point Light for one- or two-week stays, acting as the lighthouse ambassador to park visitors and living in the newly renovated lighthouse keeper's quarters.

Tawas Point Light has guided mariners on Lake Huron since 1876. At one time, it was an offshore light. Drifting sands borne on near-shore currents settled in the vicinity of the crib structure, and today the light is located on land near the tip of Tawas Point, a mile-long finger of sand curling around the northeast edge of Tawas Bay. The Point's appearance and popularity with vacationers have earned it the nickname "Cape Cod of the Midwest."

The MDNR took ownership of the 70-foot light in 2001 when the U.S. Coast Guard determined it was surplus to their needs. Several years of restoration work – supported in part by Coastal Zone Management grants – have returned the areas of the lighthouse on exhibit to their early 1900s appearance. However, the second-floor lighthouse keeper's quarters are fully equipped with a modern kitchen and bath, and two bedrooms that sleep a total of three people.

All individuals who stay in the lighthouse must be 18 years of age or older. The program costs \$275 per person, per week. Off-duty lighthouse keepers can take advantage of the park's miles of sandy beaches, two-mile nature trail, warm water swimming in Tawas Bay, fishing, and boating. Tawas Point is one of the Midwest's birding hotspots during migration, and attracts birders from around the globe. For more information or to receive a Tawas Point Lighthouse Keeper Program application, contact the Tawas Point Lighthouse Museum Store at **(989) 362-5658** or the Tawas Point State Park office at **(989) 362-5041**.



Photo Credit: Matt Smar, MDEQ

Imagine living here

Volunteer for Michigan's Coast!

Summer is a great season for kayaking and canoeing, walking the beach, and taking in the beauty of the natural, coastal landscape. Read on to find out how you can enjoy all of these wonderful outdoor activities, while contributing your time and energy to good causes:

- **Beach Clean-ups.** On Saturday, September 20, think globally, but clean up locally by participating in an international beach stewardship event. The Alliance for the Great Lakes is organizing Michigan's Adopt-a-Beach™ clean-ups, part of the International Coastal Clean-up coordinated by The Ocean Conservancy in Washington, DC. Last year, 1,950 Michigan volunteers removed more than 9,000 pounds of trash from 181 miles of shoreline. Let's top those numbers this year! To register, contact Jamie Cross, Outreach Programs Manager for the Alliance, at **(866) 850-0745 extension 12**, or jcross@greatlakes.org.
- **State Park Stewardship Workdays.** The MDNR Parks and Recreation Division needs weekend volunteers to remove invasive shrubs at Algonac State Park in St. Clair County, and plant native seedlings at Sterling State Park, Monroe County. Workdays at Algonac are August 3 and September 7. A special workday at Sterling on September 27 will celebrate National Public Lands Day. Contact Laurel Malvitz for information at **(248) 359-9057**, or malvitzl@michigan.gov. Additional volunteer opportunities are posted at www.michigan.gov/dnrvolunteers.
- **Huron Blueways Water Trail.** The Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG) invites kayakers and canoeists to help lay the groundwork for the region's first coastal water trail, which will ultimately extend from south of Harrisville to Mackinaw City. Volunteers are needed to paddle stretches of the Lake Huron shoreline and report on launch conditions, degree of difficulty, points of interest, and other information helpful to the Blueway planning process. NEMCOG would also welcome input from people who have previous experience paddling this coast. Contact Richard Deuell, Blueway project manager, at **(989) 732-3551 extension 14**, or rldeuell@nemcog.org.

Photo Credit: Matt Smar, MDEQ

