



STATE OF MICHIGAN
RICK SNYDER, Governor



MACKINAC BRIDGE AUTHORITY

N415 I-75 ST. IGNACE, MICHIGAN 49781 PH: 906-643-7600 FAX: 906-643-7668

WILLIAM H. GNODTKE, CHAIRMAN
BARBARA J. BROWN, VICE CHAIR
BARBARA J. ARENS
PATRICK F. GLEASON
KIRK T. STEUDLE, P.E.,
DIRECTOR

R. DAN MUSSER, III
MATTHEW E. MCLOGAN
NICK KHOURI, TREASURER
ROBERT J. SWEENEY, P.E.
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MAY 9, 2016**

MONDAY,

CONTACT: Bob Sweeney, Mackinac Bridge Authority, 906-643-7600

Springtime at the Mackinac Bridge

May 9, 2016 – Just like in your yard at home in northern Michigan, springtime at the Mackinac Bridge means the beginning of outdoor maintenance that doesn't involve a snow shovel.

Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) maintenance crews start removing snowplows from the front of their trucks (leaving a few on in case of an errant early spring snowstorm), and begin sweeping up sand that's accumulated on the causeway and bridge over the winter.

"We don't use road salt on the bridge, but some gets tracked onto it anyway. Sand stuck in the nooks and crannies of the bridge holds moisture, too," said MBA Executive Secretary Bob Sweeney. "So once our crews have swept up all they can, they'll wash the bridge beams and rails over the next several weeks."

Bridge steeplejacks (the brave and hardy souls who climb out onto the bridge's cables and beams) are also out inspecting the bridge for any damage that may have occurred during the winter months. They're looking for areas of the steel grating that need some reinforcement, or bridge deck joints – there are more than 200 of them – that have been damaged by snowplows.

"The bridge moves a lot in the wind, and many of the parts are designed to expand and contract with temperature changes," Sweeney said. "If some corrosion inhibits that movement, sometimes some of the pieces, such as the railing, can bend.

These aren't safety concerns, but crews do their best to fix them as quickly as possible."

Spring is also when crews begin replacing some of the steel grating sections that make up the driving surface in the inside lanes of the bridge. Each is 38-feet-long, and between six and 20 are replaced each year as needed. Other projects, including spot painting and concrete patching, resume in the spring as that kind of work is temperature-sensitive.

This year is somewhat unique in that it's the first time in 14 years the bridge doesn't have any construction work scheduled by outside contractors, such as major painting or roadway resurfacing. Don't worry, though: two back-to-back two-year bridge tower painting projects will be starting up in 2017.

Spring is also the start of the tourism season, when the bridge sees traffic volumes begin to pick up again as tourists head north to the Upper Peninsula to see the Soo Locks, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, and Michigan State Parks. The lowest traffic levels are from December through March, and start rising in April, building through the summer to their annual peak in August.

Tourists are also headed to the bridge for springtime special events. Jeep the Mac just occurred on April 22; the Memorial Bridge Run sponsored by the Mackinaw Area Visitors Bureau is May 28, the Big Mac Spring Bike Tour sponsored by the Mackinaw City Chamber of Commerce is June 12, and the Antique Car/Truck Parade sponsored by the St. Ignace Visitors Bureau is June 17.

Why are the special events starting back up in the spring? Mostly the weather. At times, it's foggy in the Straits of Mackinac in the spring, but the ice is gone and the winds that prompted high wind warnings and even some brief closures during the winter have abated.

It's also the view. The Soo Locks have opened for the new shipping season, and anyone on the bridge can see freighters plying the Great Lakes alongside Mackinac Island ferries, fishermen, and pleasure boaters. The trees of both peninsulas and Mackinac Island are budding and leafing out, replacing the white backdrop of winter with a green panorama.

For more information on the bridge, upcoming special events, and links to the bridge webcams, visit www.mackinacbridge.org.

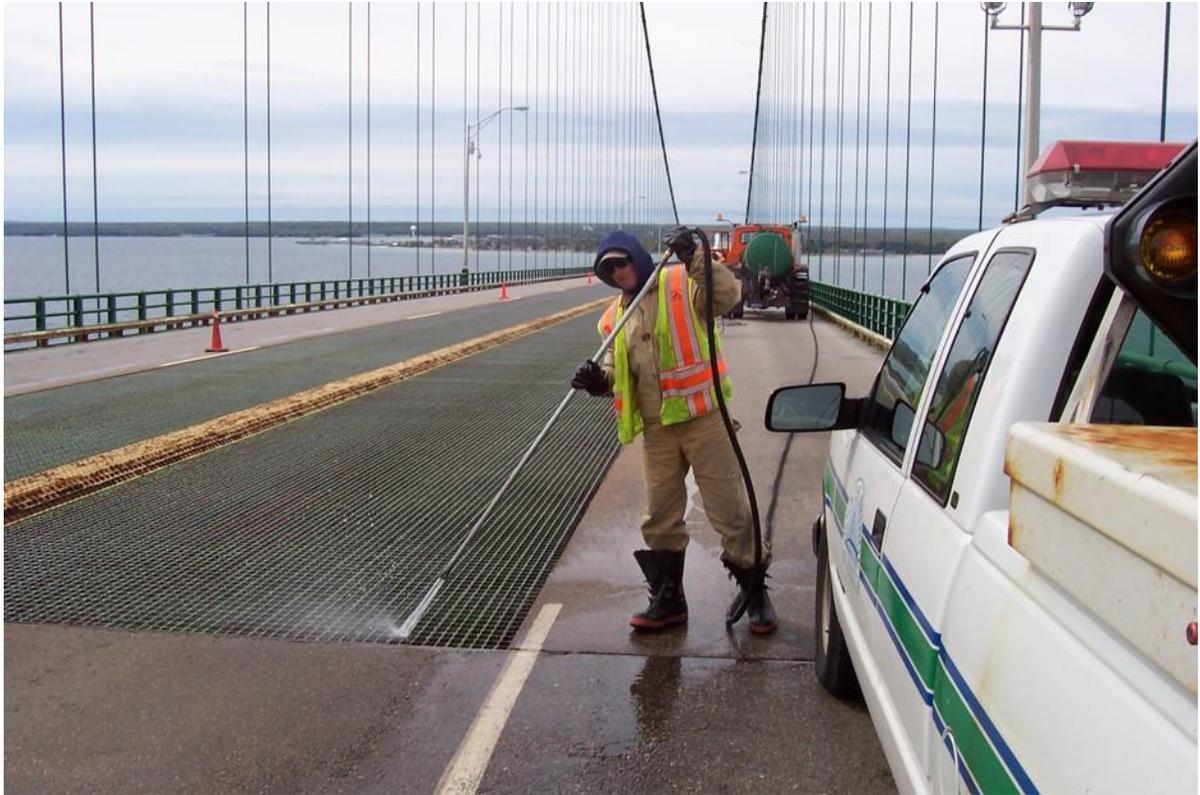


Photo caption: Each spring, Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) employees sweep and wash off sand and road salt that is tracked onto the bridge and accumulates in nooks and crannies each winter. (MBA photo)

###

Download MDOT's Mi Drive traffic information app: www.michigan.gov/drive

www.michigan.gov/drive | www.twitter.com/MichiganDOT | www.facebook.com/MichiganDOT