



STATE EDITION



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Group to apply for federal funding to replace sand pier diverted from land

Tuesday, February 13, 2001

By Derek Emerson
The Grand Rapids Press

SAUGATUCK -- Saugatuck area residents know all about beach erosion. Part of their Lakeshore Drive has been claimed by Lake Michigan, and much of their beach has experienced erosion's ravaging effects.

A group of concerned citizens and government officials think they know part of the reason for the erosion, and how to get it fixed.

The problem may be the Saugatuck Pier Head, and the solution is replenishing the sand the pier has been diverting away from the land to the south of it.

The Saugatuck Area Beach Protection Ad Hoc Task Force is beginning the process to apply for federal funding to replenish the deteriorating beach front.

Don Olendorf, a member of the committee and Saugatuck Township planning commissioner, told Saugatuck city officials Monday that they are seeking Section 111 designation for the beach. The designation is a provision of The Rivers and Harbors Act. If successful, the federal government will oversee the replenishing of the area for 50 years.

A bulletin from the ad hoc group says the U.S. Army

INSIDE

News

- » [News Flash](#)
- » [Photo Gallery](#)
- » [Columns+Editorials](#)
- » [Election 2000](#)
- » [Strange News](#)
- » [Capital News](#)
- » [Tax Center](#)
- » [Obituaries](#)
- » [Weather](#)

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Corps of Engineers estimates that the pier structure has impacted the Lakeshore for up to five miles, almost the entire southern shore border of Saugatuck Township.

The federal government built the pier in 1905, and because of that they will pay the costs to replenish the sand -- if it can be shown that the pier is the cause.

To determine the cause, a feasibility study must be completed. The federal government will pay the first \$100,000 of such a study, with local groups paying 50 percent of costs over that.

Olendorf said such designations have been in place for Holland, South Haven and St. Joseph for years. But when the Saugatuck area looked at in the 1990s, the cost for the study was estimated between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

Local governments were not in a position to support the cost, Olendorf said.

The current estimate, thanks in part to improvements in scientific technology, is \$190,000, which Olendorf says is the high end possibility.

To cover the \$45,000 needed for local support, the ad hoc group is seeking \$13,500 from both Saugatuck city and the township, \$6,750 from both Allegan County and Douglas, \$2,250 from Laketown Township, and the remaining \$2,250 from private support.

But Olendorf said he never really expects to actually collect the money.

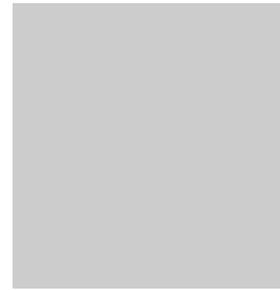
"This is an insurance policy. I believe other funding sources will be found to pay the match."

He said U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra's office has been involved in the discussions, and Hoekstra has indicated he may be able to find funding to cover the local contributions.

Saugatuck city officials are considering a resolution of support for their next council meeting, and Olendorf said Saugatuck township officials are voting on it next week.

If the support comes through, Olendorf expects the study to begin by May, and be completed in 12 to 18 months.

Should the expected results come through, the Saugatuck area may be seeing some of their Lakeshore returning in the next few years.



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