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NEWS with THE BAY CITY TIMES

# Corps won't budge with ban on muck raking

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has beached a proposal to let shoreline property owners groom the sand in front of their houses and cabins.

These people waited far too long for some word from the federal agency on what they are allowed to do with their beaches after Lake Huron water started falling years ago - leaving a weedy, mucky mess in many places.

Two weed-growing seasons later, they finally got word from the feds.

It wasn't worth the wait.

The Corps of Engineers will not change its rules so property owners may disk, plow or otherwise groom the sand on their beaches or in marshy low spots.

While we agree with the decision to let nature run its course, a "steady as she goes" decision from the Corps of Engineers should have come much sooner.

The federal agency claims jurisdiction over all lands between the high water mark - that was in 1986, remember - and the water.

Beach dwellers had sought a "regional permit" so they could make a path to the water and plow the weeds under up to 30 feet from shore. Such a permit, based on Michigan Department of Natural Resources guidelines, would have waived federal requirements for a beach-grooming permit for each, separate property.

The Corps of Engineers is opposed to disturbing the soil of the "emergent wetlands" and to anything else

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that disturbs the roots of plants growing there.

Property owners may mow down the weeds on their beaches, the Corps said.

The Corps of Engineers, in announcing its decision, cited 36 letters from environmental organizations and property owners opposed to any rule change and 18 letters from people wanting permission to groom beaches.

The federal agency's decision to stay the course with its rules is a good call.

A "regional permit" might have opened the doors to shoreline alterations across the Great Lakes, not just on Saginaw Bay. That prospect alone was too big a risk.

While sometimes unsightly and smelly, marshes filter the water, slow erosion and give birds, fish and other animals places to rear their young. They are critical to an environment that is still healing from decades of our abuse.

We sympathize with the landowners who say the marsh that has appeared in front of their beachfront homes isn't what they bargained for when they ponied up big money to live on the water.

They deserved to hear from the Corps of Engineers much sooner, when the vast expanses of reeds and rushes sprang up almost two years ago.

The water might someday rise and drown the weeds - and the controversy. But for the time being, mowers will have to suffice.

- Our View is the editorial opinion of The Bay City Times, as determined by the newspaper's editorial board, which includes the editorial page editor, the editor and the publisher.

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