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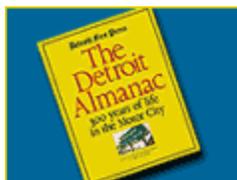
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Wetland policies hold little for state

Official says changes 'small but important'

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BY DAN SHINE

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' policy changes on wetland management won't have much impact on Michigan, an official said.

On Monday the Corps revoked some requirements set during the Clinton administration. John Studt, chief of the Corps' regulatory branch, said the changes were "small but important."

Under the new rules, the "no net loss" policy requiring developers to create a new acre of wetland for every acre filled has changed. Now, that one-for-one goal will be applied across an entire Corps district instead of on each project.

The general rule in Michigan, enforced by the state, is 1 1/2 acres of new wetland must be created for every acre destroyed per project.

Also new, the Corps will issue developers so-called nationwide permits that would allow quicker government approval if a project's impact on streams or marshes is considered minimal.

Rich Powers, chief of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's Land and Water Management Division, said the Corps' new rules won't have much of an impact in the state. That's because Michigan issues one wetland permit that covers state and federal



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requirements.

In Michigan, the Corps issues permits only for proposed wetland development that affects the Great Lakes, its adjoining marshes and navigable rivers.

James Clift, policy director for the Michigan Environmental Council, said the Corps' decision shows that science is being pushed to the background and "business is getting what it wants."

He said the policy shift will harm aquatic habitats and speed environmental degradation.

"It just makes sense that when you destroy wetlands you should try to mitigate it someplace else," Clift said, noting that more than three out of four mitigated wetlands don't work as well as the one replaced.

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