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## Corps hosting public hearing on bay issues

TRACI ANDERSON , The Huron Daily Tribune

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### UPPER THUMB - "I think people will come unglued at this public hearing."

That's the prediction of Save Our Shoreline board member Joe McBride of Caseville for an Army Corps of Engineers public hearing scheduled for 2 p.m. Tuesday at the Bangor Township Hall in Bay City. The subject of the public hearing will be the benefits of wetlands and other environmental issues regarding Saginaw Bay, but McBride expects the talk to turn to beachfront maintenance and why the Corps of Engineers and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality are enforcing regulations on maintenance activities.

"There will be many angry people there," McBride said. "The Corps of Engineers will be on their own (in dealing with the anger)."

Lt. Col. Tom Magness of the Army Corps of Engineers Detroit office said the public hearing will take a comprehensive approach on Saginaw Bay as a resource. He said the hearing will bring together a variety of different views, including state and federal government representatives, biologists and environmentalists, academic representatives from Michigan State University, DEQ and Department of Natural Resources representatives, and legislative aides.

"They've all been asked to make three- to five-minute presentations to identify their perspectives," he said.

After the presentations, a question and answer session will be conducted. McBride said he predicts things may get a bit disorderly, which he's not looking forward to.

"That's not what SOS is about," he said.

Magness said he hopes the audience doesn't get too rowdy, but he expects there will be a lot of emotion at the hearing.

"I've been told the moderator, who is separate from the Corps of Engineers, runs a pretty tight ship, so I don't think things will get out of control," Magness said. "Furthermore, getting hostile doesn't help anybody."

Members of SOS will not be the only ones in the audience. McBride expects environmentalists to attend, as well as private property owners who are not SOS members.



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Magness said the goal of the public hearing is to develop a balance between all of the parties involved in helping improve Saginaw Bay.

"We hope to bring to the table some proposals and initiatives for some possible solutions for the problems facing those in the Saginaw Bay region," he said. "We won't be able to solve everything, though. Some people will be left unsatisfied."

Before the public hearing, a private meeting between representatives from the Corps of Engineers, DEQ, environmental groups and SOS will take place from 10 a.m. to noon.

"At this private meeting, we hope to work on some of the proposed solutions so we can address them at the public hearing," Magness said.

McBride said SOS members will be there to discuss who the group is and why they've organized.

"The SOS members will explain to them how beachfront property owners are environmentally conscious," he said. "After all, water is our front yard. It's an extremely important resource, and we understand that."

He said the focus of the private meeting for the SOS members will be how to clean the waters of the state.

"We need to find a way to stop the sewage dumping into our lakes, how to reduce toxins and prevent contamination runoff," he said. "We need to stop the invasion of our waters by non-native species, such as zebra mussels. We need to address the issue of terrible examples of dredging and improperly designed piers that are damaging the shoreline."

McBride said the SOS members will also discuss the group's support of well functioning wetlands in the state.

"We know that well-functioning wetlands, such as Wildfowl Bay, are a very valuable resource," he said. "We don't want them destroyed."

He said SOS members are looking for a balanced approach in preserving wetland areas.

"We need to balance the usefulness of the wetlands with the need for tourism, a healthy economy, public health and private property rights," he said.

McBride said SOS's goal for the private meeting is to develop a cooperative approach to solving the water problems in the state that are "destroying our communities."

He said the group's goal for the public hearing is to help the Corps understand the landowners' passion to protect their private property rights and maintain clean, safe beaches.

"They need to understand that we're here and we're not going anywhere," he said.

Magness said he hopes people who attend the private and public meetings will recognize the Corps of Engineers approach to the Saginaw Bay resources.

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"We want people to understand what we're doing and what our involvement is with Saginaw Bay resources and why we do what we do," he said. "There are laws and regulations behind what the Corps does."

He said having so many different perspectives represented at the meeting and the public hearing will be beneficial for everyone involved.

"Education is an important component to this," he said. "We can all learn from one another. I think it will be a productive public hearing."

He said now is a good time to have the private and public meetings because of the season.

"During the winter months, people don't pay much attention to beach issues, so it's a perfect opportunity to identify solutions," he said. "I've been pressing my staff hard to come up with possible solutions. We now have time to work on solutions before next summer comes and people's attentions get back to beaches and water."

He noted that he's been in his position at the Detroit office for just four months now.

"That's why we didn't have it sooner," he said.

Anyone interested in attending the public hearing is welcome. The Bangor Township Hall is located at 180 State Park Drive in Bay City.

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