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## What a relief: State, feds agree on beach weeds

Sunday, May 25, 2003

Beach wails finally have been answered.

An agreement to allow mowing of Great Lakes beach weeds is a pleasant surprise, just in time for the first weekend of the summer season.

In a meeting with The Bay City Times Editorial Board on Monday, the top dogs with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Detroit District and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality announced their new standards for maintaining Great Lakes beaches.

The rules are the result of compromises by both the state and federal agencies.

The guidelines are clear and consistent.

They are what we have repeatedly called for since lake levels dropped and bulrushes popped up three years ago.

Beach owners who follow the rules ought to stay out of hot water with the regulatory agencies.

Until now, the Corps allowed mowing of beach weeds, but the DEQ

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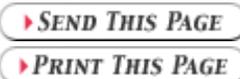
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didn't.

The DEQ, at least for this summer, will go along with the Corps on mowing.

Until Monday, the Corps didn't allow homeowners to move around windblown sand without a 41-page permit application and a three-month wait.

That application is now one page. The Corps is committed to expediting approval, hopefully within a week.

The rules come from negotiations between the state and federal agencies. They used information gathered from the Shoreline Task Force and comments from citizens and public agencies.

Here's the best part: The state and federal agreement is in effect right now.

We know that many shoreline residents in the past couple of years have mowed down beach vegetation, regardless of the state prohibition against it.

So what's the difference now?

They aren't breaking the law.

That should be a relief to at least some of those wondering when a state inspector would come knocking.

More often than not, compromise is the fine art of making everyone equally unhappy.

Environmentalists from the Mother-Earth-knows-best school of thought would prefer to let beach vegetation grow unchecked.

Many of those who own nice houses on the beach and pay hefty property taxes for the privilege want to create pristine, sugar-sand beaches.

Neither extreme has anything to crow about in this compromise between two government agencies that claim jurisdiction over Great Lakes shorelines.

In fact, the fight for control of the beaches continues. Proposals to allow beach owners to turn the sand up to 4 inches down are moving through the state Legislature.

Such a state law, though, would run smack into federal law, which doesn't allow wetlands tilling that destroys plant roots without a permit.

It's likely that state and federal officials will be duking it out over the beaches for years to come.

But for shoreline owners who just want a view of the water and access to Saginaw Bay this summer, the agreement is something they can work with - right now.

- 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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