



Extension of Au Sable dredging under review

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Help may be on the way for boaters fighting sand bars and low-water conditions at the mouth of the Au Sable River.

A U.S. House of Representatives bill authorizes a study to determine if the Au Sable can be dredged one-quarter mile upstream from the US-23 bridge. The dredging would benefit beleaguered marinas, private docks owners and a public boat launch.

"The mouth of the river there is pretty critical to the boating and sport-fishing portion of our economy here," said Ronald J. Lamrock, Au Sable Township supervisor.

Lamrock said Wednesday a combination of low water and an accumulation of sand has made the lower river difficult to navigate in recent years.

"For the bigger boats, anything that draws more than 30 or 32 inches of water has got a problem," said Calvin C. McLaren, owner of Northeast Michigan Marine.

McLaren said he's spent about \$50,000 since 1999 to dredge sand from the mouth of his 50-slip marina, but it has proven only a temporary fix.

"It's killing me. I can't afford that kind of money and I've lost a lot of business," he said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also spent about \$200,000 in 2001 to dredge sand from the mouth of Au Sable River below the US-23 bridge to Lake Huron - the only area of the river currently authorized for maintenance by the federal government.

The Water Resources and Development Act approved by the House Sept. 24 seeks to expand the dredging area to benefit recreational boaters in order to help the local economy, according to U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Menominee.

In a prepared statement, Stupak said the House bill authorizes the Army Corps to determine if a dredging project upstream from the US-23 bridge is feasible. If the study concludes the dredging is possible, money to do the work would be earmarked in a future appropriations bill, Stupak said.

It is not known how much the dredging project would cost. Lamrock said the township previously estimated it would take about \$1 million to dredge the river for a mile upstream, rather than the quarter-mile now under consideration.

Lamrock said the township does not have the funding to undertake any dredging project by itself.

Stupak said the U.S. Senate will now consider the House bill, and any differences must be worked out in a conference committee.

"I'm pleasantly surprised," Lamrock said. "But we've still got a long way to go."

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