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# Give beach-grooming rules a chance to work

June 10, 2004

Now that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has finally simplified the permit process for resort beach grooming along exposed bottomlands in Grand Traverse and Saginaw bays, everyone needs to give it a chance to work.

The Corps' standard still seems too generous, allowing resorts to rout out a path and play area up to 100 feet wide or a quarter of their shoreline, whichever is smaller. Unfortunately, it fits with past Corps practices. Lt. Col. Thomas Magness, Detroit district commander, said a review of a dozen previous permits showed that the Corps ended up approving roughly a 100-foot width even with more rigorous review. A stricter rule may be in order, but the Corps apparently doesn't have the history to back one up.

Nonetheless, the Corps has remained the best line of defense as the Great Lakes bottomlands became exposed, and this regional plan is still superior to a state law rushed through last year. Lawmakers only belatedly have begun to grasp the importance of letting natural actions proceed, as the exposed bottomlands transform themselves into landscapes of undulations filled with native plants. That serves many purposes -- including one of huge interest to owners: anchoring the soil so a return of high water won't trigger erosion and threaten their upland investment.

After last month's appeals court ruling that gives lakeside owners exclusive use of exposed bottomlands, some have suggested the state and Corps no longer have oversight. But the bottomlands remain in the public trust, and regulations apply. Many people rely on the lakes -- for drinking water, for fish, for navigation and recreation -- and have a fervent stake in ensuring that the bottomlands are not abused.



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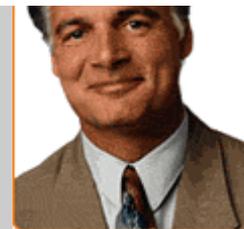
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