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**Members of the Army Corps of Engineers and Congressman David Camp visited East Bay recently in an effort to help the owner of Cherry Tree Inn convert an additional 45 feet of wetland into more beach area.**

## Camp goes to bat for hotel owner on beach

*Congressman wants changes in grooming*

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TRAVERSE CITY - U.S. Rep. Dave Camp's efforts to help a hotel owner turn a strip of East Bay marsh into a sandy beach prompted the Midland Republican to trek to Traverse City with two high-ranking federal bureaucrats in tow.

Camp's goal: push the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to back off a plan to preserve a specific percentage of bay wetlands along U.S. 31 north.

The beneficiary of Camp's trip was to be Michael P. MacColeman, owner of the Cherry Tree Inn on the Beach. MacColeman has fought the Corps to create a 200-foot sandy

beach along the shoreline of his resort, as opposed to the 155-foot stretch the agency offered, a Camp spokesman said.

In April, Camp gathered in Traverse City with Assistant Secretary of the Army John Paul Woodley, a political appointee in charge of civil works, and Lt. Col. Donald Lauzon, commander of the Detroit District Office of the Army Corps of Engineers, to meet with MacColeman.

Camp, the officials and MacColeman walked the disputed shoreline area outside his resort, but MacColeman contends the meeting wasn't designed to air his complaints.

And MacColeman said he spoke not for himself, but as a board member of Save Our Shorelines, a group of Great Lakes property owners who've lobbied state and federal lawmakers for the right to clear shorelines of vegetation, and in some instances to restrict public access to those areas.

"My permit was not even discussed because it was still under review at the time," MacColeman said. "It was to discuss shoreline issues and the Corps' role in assisting in the permitting process."

James Clift, of the Michigan Environmental Council, said it was "unusual" for such a high official to visit a property over a minor permit application.

"I wouldn't be surprised if there were political contributions spread around there somewhere," Clift said.

He was right. Within three weeks of the Camp visit, MacColeman donated \$2,500 to the Republican National Congressional Committee, followed by another \$2,500 donation in May.

MacColeman didn't immediately receive relief in his quest to clear more shoreline, but since the visit Woodley said he directed the regional office of the Army Corps of Engineers to work towards getting its beach-grooming-permit process to "mirror as closely as possible" the State of Michigan's controversial pilot grooming program.

The state program was ushered in two years ago, amid low lake levels that exposed vegetation around Great Lakes shorelines, particularly in Saginaw and Grand Traverse bays.

The state legislation would allow MacColeman to groom or grade 50 percent, or 200 feet, of exposed Lake Michigan bottomlands behind the inn on U.S. 31 near Holiday Road.

MacColeman said the political contributions weren't meant to thank Camp for his attention.

"At the local level we were being stonewalled and when you don't get satisfaction from one, you go up the chain of command," MacColeman said. "If you print anything different than what I'm telling you I will follow up with a lawsuit."

Woodley toured MacColeman's property but said the group did not directly discuss the pending application.

He discussed MacColeman's permit "in general" at two other meetings and said he can now understand why MacColeman thought the limited permit he was offered would be "a negative" for his guests.

Camp spokesman Sage Eastman said there wasn't anything extraordinary about Woodley's visit to Traverse City and said Camp makes such high-level access available to any constituent having a problem with a federal agency.

"What is extraordinary is that we have to rise to this level without any resolution," Eastman said. "We will continue to push this up the chain until this is resolved."

Tom Allenson, a biologist with the Corps in Detroit, said the agency's goal is to restrict wetlands destruction in that area of East Bay to about one-third.

"We have a large number of applicants in that area and to grant them all would lead to removal of half the wetlands," he said.

On Aug. 29, Camp wrote Woodley to complain the Corps of Engineers' behavior towards MacColeman was "unacceptable" and "very disturbing."

Baykeeper John Nelson, of the Watershed Grand Traverse, said Camp's position seems to support the destruction of the coastal marsh along East Bay.

"I think he went beyond just giving his constituent a fair hearing. He went on to advocate the coastal marsh be compromised," Nelson said.

The area is not an emergent wetland formed by low water levels but a coastal marsh that has existed for 60 years or longer, Nelson said.

"It changes as the water goes up and down, but it's always there," he said. "The bottom line is they built in a coastal marsh, not on a sandy beach area."

MacColeman said the Corps of Engineers couldn't prove it was a historic coastal marsh during his permit application "so how could John Nelson be so right?"

Eastman said he had no knowledge of the Detroit district's goal and said Camp does not favor destruction of half the wetlands. He said Camp wants the Corps to work with the state.

"We need to find a solution because no one should be trapped in this conflicting set of rules," Eastman said.

Woodley agreed.

"This struck me as something that is unsustainable in the long run," Woodley said. "I've asked the (Corps) to continue to dialogue with SOS, environmental organizations, and state agencies to work out a parallel permit so you don't have this divergence."

Nelson said the state pilot program is a bad law.

"It treats all 138 miles of shoreline in Grand Traverse Bay as if it's all the same and it's not," he said. "Each parcel is unique."