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Outdoor Notebook

Steve Griffin, Midland Daily News
06/15/2006

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Beach grooming agreement reached

Environmental and shoreline property advocates have struck an agreement in their long-running battle over beach grooming, the removal of vegetation that often occurs when water levels decline.

Property owners often prefer a clean beach, while conservationists counter that removing natural vegetation removes natural cover for many species.

Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality, which joined and reported the agreement, said it "will protect Michigan's Great Lakes coastal resources while allowing Michigan residents access to our vast water resources."

In 2003, the state Legislature exempted mowing and other beach maintenance activities from wetland protection requirements, and established two pilot areas, including Saginaw Bay, where vegetation removal in Great Lakes coastal wetlands would get speedy approval.

This year, DEQ released an independent study that said that grooming in a coastal marsh alters the ecosystem, reducing or even eliminating habitat for game fish such as yellow perch, and smallmouth and largemouth bass.

DEQ director Steven Chester recommended that the Legislature let its 2003 legislation expire on schedule this year, while he promised his agency would keep working with property owners to address their concerns.

While a long-term process is worked out under the new agreement, an Interim Policy Guidance makes clear that landowners who have long removed vegetation by legal means may continue to do so without having to get additional permits.

Grooming can also be done on shorelines that are naturally free of vegetation.

The guidance outlines other activities that can be conducted without a DEQ permit, although some may require a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

For work that does require a permit, DEQ staff will work to process applications as quickly as possible, the agency said.

Ernie Krygier, president of the property owners group Save Our Shoreline, and Sam Washington, executive director of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs – who have long been on opposing sides in the debate – both praised the agreement in a DEQ news release.

Antlerless license changes

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A couple of big changes have taken place in the antlerless

deer license system.

The Natural Resources Commission adopted a rule limiting hunters to a maximum of three private-land antlerless deer licenses per year, no more than two of them in deer management units (DMUs) in the Upper Peninsula or northern Lower Peninsula.

An exception is within the so-called bovine tuberculosis (TB) area in northern Lower Michigan, where there is no limit on purchases.

Even more telling is a new 40-acre minimum requirement for purchase of private land antlerless licenses for the UP and northern Lower Peninsula (except the TB area).

Hunters buying private land tags must register the telephone number of the landowner granting permission to hunt on private land.

Under the new rules, any DMU even partly in northern Lower Michigan is governed by that zone's rules; that makes Midland County, through which the boundary passes, a Zone 2 DMU.

The changes follow 21 public meetings the DNR held on deer management through the state. Many of the comments received complained of low deer numbers and too-heavy harvests, attendees reported.

Deer hunters, sound off

Got something you'd like to tell the DNR about deer and deer hunting? The agency will hold a deer management workshop for northeast Michigan residents at 9:30 a.m. Saturday at the Quality Inn in West Branch.

The workshop, which will explain the DNR's population estimate process, will be followed by a listening session at 11:40 a.m., with members of the Natural Resources Commission, and a public reception at 1 p.m. with NRC members and DNR staff.

This is the third in a series of workshops the DNR has held. Others were in Marquette in April and in Big Rapids in May.

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