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## Cooperative Effort Creates Innovative Beach Grooming Agreement

**Contact:** Robert McCann (517) 241-7397

**Agency:** Environmental Quality

**June 5, 2006**

The Department of Environmental Quality announced an agreement today between the state, shoreline property advocates, and environmental groups that will protect Michigan's Great Lakes coastal resources while allowing Michigan residents access to our vast water resources. The agreement comes following a number of meetings between the DEQ and the public to discuss the impacts of beach grooming, and develop a long-term strategy to determine what types of maintenance activities should be allowed, and how to control the spread of Phragmites and other invasive shoreline plants.

In June of 2003, the Michigan Legislature exempted mowing and other beach maintenance activities from wetland protection requirements, and established two pilot areas where vegetation removal in Great Lakes coastal wetlands would be given expedited approval.

The DEQ released an independent study earlier this year that showed that clearing vegetation through a coastal marsh alters the conditions of nearshore waters, reducing or eliminating habitat for Michigan's important game fish including yellow perch, smallmouth bass, and largemouth bass.

In light of this research, DEQ Director Steven E. Chester recommended to the Legislature that the provisions created through the 2003 legislation be allowed to expire, but made it clear that the DEQ would continue to work with concerned property owners and residents to address their concerns.

"We have developed a policy that helps property owners and DEQ staff work better together," said Director Chester. "This is a great example of all sides of an issue coming together and working towards the common good, and is truly a step forward in keeping our environment safe."

Director Chester thanked the shoreline property owners and environmental groups for their help in creating a collaborative process to develop an improved approach to regulating shoreline vegetation and beach maintenance. The ongoing process may eliminate the need for new legislation, and will result in a workgroup being established to develop preliminary recommendations to address beach maintenance and vegetation removal by the end of July, 2006, with a final management plan in place by July, 2007. The agreement also calls on the DEQ to release an Interim Policy Guidance that explains what

activities are currently allowed under Michigan law.

"I am encouraged by the discussions between the shoreline property owners and the DEQ," said Ernie Krygier, President of Save Our Shoreline. "By working together, my hope is that we will develop a long term plan for our beaches that will respect the property rights and needs of the homeowners, while protecting valuable resources."

The Interim Policy Guidance makes it clear that landowners who have historically removed vegetation by legal means may continue to maintain the area free of vegetation without the need for additional permits. This work can also be done on shorelines that are naturally free of vegetation.

The guidance also outlines other activities that can be conducted without a permit from the DEQ, though it specifies that some of them may require a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers. For work that does require a permit, DEQ staff will work to process applications as quickly as possible. Permit applications are available on the Web site, or in local DEQ offices.

"We were interested in finding a common-sense resolution to this issue which recognized the critical role coastal wetlands play for our wildlife and fisheries resources," said Sam Washington, Executive Director of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs. "We believe that this Agreement meets our goals."

The interim policy guideline will be available on the DEQ's Web site at

<http://www.deq.state.mi.us/documents/deq-lwm-glss-beach-maintenance.pdf>.

Editor's note: DEQ news releases are available on the department's Internet home page at [www.michigan.gov/deq](http://www.michigan.gov/deq).

"Protecting Michigan's Environment, Ensuring Michigan's Future"

*Revised June 5, 2006 by Pat Watson*

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