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ONLINE EDITION

Cheboygan Daily Tribune

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Welcome to the Tribune! Tuesday, June 13, 2006

Archives

Low water levels exposes rare natural form of wetlands

By DORIS PARKER

Water levels in Lake Huron and Lake Michigan are approaching historic lows. Water level fluctuations are a natural occurrence. The other Great Lakes are not experiencing low levels to the same extent. Many of the exposed areas are now colonized by wetland vegetation.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality reports exposure of these submerged lands “represents restoration of a natural condition that has not existed for many years, and in many areas newly emerged wetlands represent a substantial increase in essential wetland habitat for fishes and waterfowl.”

In Georgian Bay and the North Channel, “many wetlands have been significantly reduced in size through drying. This has reduced availability of critical spawning habitat for fish species such as northern pike, muskellunge and smallmouth bass.”

Wetlands are protected under the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act and the Great Lakes Submerged Lands Act.

Wetlands have three common characteristics. They are areas where water is a controlling factor in plant and animal communities. There could be an underground water table that is close to the surface with no visible water. Or, if water is present, it could be visible only part of the year. They are often located near aquatic areas.

The second characteristic is the presence of plants that prefer wetland conditions. The third condition is a special type of soil. Water can prevent oxygen from reaching organic matter in the soil. This matter accumulates and forms a dark muck. In sand or clay areas, the water brings out patterns of color from minerals in the



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soil. These are referred to as hydric soils.

Marshes are breeding grounds for water birds, including ducks, geese, swans and herons. Loons and eagles use marshes for feeding and nesting areas. The marsh is home to the muskrat and beaver, and also spawning grounds for fish. A marsh can be covered by standing or slow-moving water, or can be a freshwater meadow.

A swamp is a wooded or shrub wetland. Different types based on vegetation are: a conifer swamp; a hardwood swamp; or a scrub-shrub swamp (containing alders, willows, etc.)

A bog is a wetland with peat soils, a high water table and surface mosses. Bog soils are highly acidic, lack oxygen and have few minerals. Common plants are blueberries, cranberries, peat moss and orchids.

A fen is more mineral-rich and moderately acidic. They have peat soils and a high water table.

Wetlands can store water and prevent flood damage. They act as a filter by removing sediments from water.

In the two decades between 1950 and 1970, an average of 458,000 acres of wetlands were lost each year. Areas were drained and filled for agriculture and the development of cities and towns.

Coming events: June 17 is large-item pickup day from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Bearinger Township Hall.

Tires will be accepted for a charge of \$2.50 each. Refrigerators accepted for \$25 (charge to remove freon). No propane tanks please.

On July 1, the Huron Beach Civic Association will host a strawberry social from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Community Hall. Fresh picked berries over homemade biscuits and ice cream are the bill of fare.

July 1 and 2 is the annual Dancing Hippopotamus Arts and Crafts show from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Bearinger Township Hall. The hall is located on Town Hall Hwy. And Balch Rd. Directional sign will be posted on U.S. 23

July 1 is the annual garage and bake sale from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church, on Ocqueoc Road between U.S. 23 and M-68.

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