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Detroit District

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Corps Contact: Lynn Duerod 313-226-4680
Lynn.M.Duerod@lre02.usace.army.mil

MDEQ Contact: Patricia Spitzley 517-241-7397
spitzlep@michigan.gov

www.lre.usace.army.mil

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Joint effort creates changes in permit process for Bay area

DETROIT -- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) announce the completion of several initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of shoreline property owners during the continued low water levels on the Great Lakes. These initiatives respond, in part, to the recommendations of the Shoreline Task Force, which outline the activities property owners can perform without a permit and helps simplify the application form.

The Shoreline Task Force worked toward balancing environmental concerns with the shoreline residents' desire for sandy beaches with unobstructed views of the lake. To formulate their recommendations, the task force consulted mosquito experts, coastal wetlands specialists, lawyers, property owners, real estate experts, academic professionals and representatives from environmental groups.

“The purpose of the task force was to identify potential solutions through a broad-based set of inputs representing the diversity of viewpoints. The situation demanded compromise and the task force’s recommendations represent an appropriate compromise between one community that wants complete elimination of all vegetation and another community that insists on preservation of the vegetation,” said, Lt. Col. Thomas H. Magness, Detroit District Engineer, commenting on the goals the task force achieved.

At the prompting of the task force recommendations, the Corps and DEQ were able to agree on a streamlined approach to help meet the needs of the costal homeowners. These approaches include a shorter permit application process, the ability to mow vegetation and clean the shoreline areas, the ability to create boardwalks or pathways to the water’s edge and the capability to move sand from one area on their property to another.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District civil works program encompasses 93,000 square miles area of the lower Great Lakes basin in Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio. The Corps operates and/or maintains 104 navigation structures in the basin. Its mission includes real estate transactions, flood control, regulatory activities, disaster response, and mobilization readiness.

Joint effort 2-2-2

“The DEQ supports the streamlined permit application,” said Steven E. Chester, DEQ Director. “It is a common sense solution that allows shoreline property owners to engage in reasonable beach maintenance activities while recognizing the environmental regulatory responsibilities of both agencies.”

The task force released a consensus document that sorted out perceived differences between the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the Corps, clarified the range of activities that shoreline property owners can undertake without a permit and made recommendations regarding possible general permits. The entire document can be found on the Corps web page at <http://www.lre.usace.army.mil/functions/rt/sagbaygen/stfconsdoc.pdf>.

Additionally, the document clarifies the values of coastal marshes to people and wildlife, coastal marsh impacts on property appraisals and facts about the much-dreaded West Nile Virus.

This task force was made up of representatives from federal and state agencies, Save Our Shoreline, various environmental groups from around the state and joined by observers representing several state politicians.

The Corps and DEQ are looking at ways to accommodate the task force's recommendations and before the end of the summer, plan to work further to improve their regulatory processes to meet the needs of the homeowners while balancing environmental concerns.