

Save Our Shoreline, Inc.
P.O. Box 2307
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Dear Shoreline Property Owner:

Do you know who owns the property along the beaches and shores of the Great Lakes during low water? The State of Michigan, through the Department of Environmental Quality, asserts that it does, and that it has, since at least as far back as 1955. Surprised? So were we. That is why we have agreed to act as directors of a new organization formed to preserve the rights of owners of property along Michigan's shores, and to preserve our beautiful beaches and shores.

With water levels falling in the Saginaw Bay and beyond, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the United States Army Corps of Engineers has for the first time asserted ownership and/or control of our shoreline. Through hundreds of letters to property owners along Saginaw Bay, the DEQ and the Corps have demanded that owners refrain from maintaining their beaches; they have demanded that weeds on the beaches be restored; and they have even directed property owners on where they may buy the seeds to do so! We are currently aware of these letters being sent to owners in Tawas, Au Gres, the Linwood/Bay City area, and Caseville.

After reviewing the matter, we are convinced that the object of the DEQ and the Corps is to reverse over 100 years of hard work and development of the Saginaw Bay and similar areas, and to "restore" it to a swamp, or so called "wetlands." This is not a secret. In "The Great Lakes Program to Ensure Environmental and Economic Prosperity," published (and reprinted on the DEQ's website, www.deq.state.mi.us) by the Great Lakes Commission, an agency created by state and federal law, the agency outlines its goal to "[r]estore 100,000 acres of wetlands and critical coastal habitat" in the Great Lakes basin. This report outlines expenditures of up to \$155 million per year to accomplish its goals, including "coastal restoration."

Can they "restore" your shoreline to wetlands? They will if we do not stop them. This is not a new issue. The fight for the rights to Michigan's shorelines started almost as soon as the state and federal governments sold shoreline properties to private owners in the 1800's. After decades of legal challenges, the Michigan Supreme Court made the law clear in 1930 in the case of Hilt v Weber, 252 Mich 198 (1930): shoreline owners on the Great Lakes own to the water's edge, and perhaps even further in the case of certain swamplands. After 70 years, that case has never been overruled. Since that time, the legislature has passed laws and Attorney General Frank Kelly in 1978 issued an "opinion" (Opinion No. 5327, which can be found at www.ag.state.mi.us) that the State owns all shoreline up to the "high water mark," which is defined by the most recent statute as 579.8 feet above sea level.

If the Michigan Supreme Court says you own to the water's edge, can the legislature and the Attorney General take away your property simply by passing a law and rendering an opinion that says the State owns any part of your property below a point 579.8 feet above sea level? We do not think so, and we do not believe the Michigan Supreme Court will think so, either.

The struggle for control of Michigan's shoreline between the State of Michigan and private owners is well over 100 years old, and it continues today, despite clear pronouncements from the Michigan Supreme Court. The DEQ and the Corps are well organized and well funded with your tax dollars. Their strategies and goals are clearly delineated. Shoreline owners and others interested in maintaining our beaches and shorelines need to get organized, too. So we can share information, and so we can speak with a common voice against those that would take our beaches and shoreline away.

The actions we take will of course depend on our membership, whether we seek political, legal, or other solutions, and the information we acquire. This organization started with property owners in Kawkawlin and Bangor Townships, but we intend to expand our membership as far around the Great Lakes as our common interests take us.

Please thoughtfully consider joining us. Our new board, all of whom are shoreline owners and/or residents committed to beach preservation and maintenance without governmental interference, is committed to accomplish our goals. Our success depends on you: there is strength in numbers.

Save Our Shoreline, Inc.
Board of Directors