

# Drop in Lake Superior Water Level Pushes Edison Sault Electric Rate Hike to 7.2%

By Karen Gould

Residential customers of Edison Sault Electric Company will see an average \$5 increase in their electric bill beginning this month, under a rate increase that went into effect January 1. Residential rates will rise by 7.2 percent, from \$71.85 to \$77.03 a month for customers using 1,000 kilowatt hours in a 30-day period, which represents the average residential use.

Much of the rate hike is blamed on a drop in the Lake Superior water level, which is down approximately a foot since December 2005, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That drop has reduced the amount of water available to flow out of Lake Superior through the Canadian power plant, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plant, and the Edison Sault facility.

"The formula calls for minimum flows," Mr. Sawruk told *The St. Ignace News* Wednesday, January 3. "We basically have to shut a

number of our turbines down." So Edison Sault now will seek 64 percent of its power from outside sources, rather than the 60 percent the company had anticipated for the year.

In addition to generating its own hydro-electric power, Edison Sault purchases excess power the Army Corps of Engineers has available, said Mr. Sawruk, and other sources, including those generated by natural gas, coal, and nuclear fuel. The Corps generate power to operate the

Edison Sault originally projected a 2.9 percent rate increase for 2007, said company president Donald Sawruk, to cover increased power costs.

With low water levels in Lake Superior, the amount of water the company is allowed to use has been reduced by the International Joint Commission, which governs the boundary waters.

The commission uses a mathematical formula to determine the amount of water that is allowed to flow out of Lake Superior through the Canadian power plant, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plant, and the Edison Sault facility.

Edison Sault serves an estimated 23,000 customers in the Eastern Upper Peninsula.

On December 1, before new rates went into effect, Edison Sault rates ranked third lowest in Michigan for residential customers using 1,000 kilowatt hours per month, at \$71.85, behind Indiana Michigan Power Three Rivers (\$66.30) and Indiana Michigan Power St. Joseph (\$60.05).

Cloverland Electric Cooperative, which serves 19,000 customers in the Eastern U.P., had a rate of \$88.20 for the same category, according to the Michigan Public Service Commission. It was lowest among cooperatives and fifth lowest in the state, among coops and investor-owned utilities.

Municipal utilities are not regulated by the MPSC and, therefore, are not ranked by the commission.

Upper Peninsula Power had the highest rates in 2006, at \$139.94 for 1,000 kilowatt hours of power. The Houghton company has 50,000 customers in the U.P.



Edison Sault's hydro generating plant on the St. Marys River in Sault Ste. Marie began generating power in 1902. In 2007, the plant is estimated to produce 36 percent of the company's electric power.

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## Suicide Prevention Meeting Set

Public Asked To Take Part Friday in St. Ignace

Finding people and groups who are interested in working to prevent suicides in Mackinac County will be the goal of a public meeting Friday, January 12, at noon at the St. Ignace United Methodist Church. The meeting is sponsored by Mackinac County Human Services Collaborative Body, which is developing a written suicide prevention plan for local communities.

Stephanie Hicks of Hiawatha Behavioral Health will present a program about suicide prevention created by the Suicide Prevention Committee of Chippewa County. It will include statistics and information about this issue designed to help human service agencies develop a prevention program here.

"Mackinac County is taking its first step with this project, and this particular meeting is to see who's interested, who's passionate about working on this issue," said Geraldine Stelmaszek, a prevention coordinator with the EUP Community Dispute Resolution Center. "We'll focus on community awareness, and things like, 'Do people know the right numbers to call to get help? And does calling those numbers actually help? We'll find out who wants to keep working on this so we can get a real concerted effort together."

"Many people's lives have been touched by this issue."

The Human Services Collaborative Body has not yet collected statistics on suicides in Mackinac County, Mrs. Stelmaszek said, but she pointed out that suicides and suicide attempts are thought to be under-reported, and said statistics show that there are many attempted suicides in each community for every one reported.

The written plan for Mackinac County will be a key component in receiving federal and state funding to combat the problem.

Those who would like to attend the January 12 public meeting are asked to call Mrs. Stelmaszek at (800) 873-7658 to assist planners in arranging seating and refreshments.

In Chippewa County, the Suicide Prevention Committee will host a presentation by suicide prevention author Bev Cobain Monday, February 5, at 7 p.m. at Lake Superior State University. It is open to the public.

## City Council Will Meet at Library

St. Ignace City Council will hold its regular meeting at 8 p.m. Monday, January 15, at the St. Ignace Library on 110 West Spruce Street.

Council's February 19 regular meeting is scheduled to be held at Little Bear East Conference Center, and its March 19 regular meeting will take place in front of the student body at LaSalle High School at 1:30 p.m.

## Commissioners Get Assignments for New Year



Mackinac County Board of Commissioners at their annual organizational meeting Tuesday, January 2, are (from left) Larry Leveille, Calvin McPhee, Mike Patrick, Carl Frazier, and Dawn Nelson.

During their annual organizational meeting Tuesday, January 2, Mackinac County commissioners re-elected Dawn Nelson chair and Carl Frazier vice-chair for one year terms and set their meetings for 3:30 p.m., instead of 2 p.m., on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month.

Commissioners, without discussion, elected the two officers for one year instead of two years. The board has the option for either.

The following liaison assignments with county departments were made: animal control, Larry Leveille; animal shelter, Mike Patrick and Calvin McPhee; airport, Dawn Nelson; building and grounds, Carl Frazier; county clerk, Larry Leveille; custodian's office, Calvin McPhee; emergency services coordinator, Calvin McPhee; 911 coordinator, Larry Leveille; Equalization Department, Dawn Nelson;

Friend of the Court office, Dawn Nelson; juvenile office, Mike Patrick; Michigan State University Extension, Mike Patrick; prosecuting attorney office, Carl Frazier; Register of Deeds office, Dawn Nelson; treasurer's office, Calvin McPhee; Road Commission, Carl Frazier; surveyor's office, Mike Patrick; Sheriff's Department, Larry Leveille; veterans office, Carl Frazier; Probate, District, and Circuit Courts, full board.

Committee appointments are: Community Action, Dawn Nelson and Larry Leveille; Eastern U. P. Community Correction Advisory, Larry Leveille; Eastern U.P. Employment and Training, Carl Frazier and Dawn Nelson; Economic Development Corporation, Carl Frazier; Finance and Administration, full board; Hiawatha Behavioral Health, Mike Patrick and Dawn Nelson; H.O.M.E. Collaborative

board, Calvin McPhee; LMAS Health Department, Calvin McPhee and Dawn Nelson; Mackinac County Airport, Dawn Nelson and Calvin McPhee; Mackinac Straits Hospital, Dawn Nelson; Manistique Lakes Dam Committee, Carl Frazier and Mike Patrick; Planning Commission, Mike Patrick; Septic Tank Approval, Mike Patrick and Carl Frazier; Upper Peninsula Agency on Aging, Mike Patrick; UPCAP, Dawn Nelson and Carl Frazier; 511 Corrections/Tether committee, Larry Leveille and Calvin McPhee; 911 board, Larry Leveille and Calvin McPhee; Tri-County Judicial board, Larry Leveille and Calvin McPhee.

The next regular meeting of the county board will be Thursday, January 11, at 3:30 p.m. at the County Courthouse annex building in the commissioners' room.

## County Hears Appeal, Restores Assistant Prosecutor's Salary

By Karen Gould

The Mackinac County Board of Commissioners voted Tuesday, January 2, to partially restore the salary of the assistant prosecutor position to \$45,000. The action was taken when new prosecutor Fred Feleppa appealed a December decision by the commission to cut the salary of the assistant from \$47,436 to just \$23,717 for 2007.

The assistant's position is vacant and was formerly held by Mr. Feleppa. He was just appointed Clayton Graham, who was elected in November to the probate court.

The commissioners had cut the salary last month, believing the job should be part time. But Mr. Feleppa argued that the county has had an assistant prosecutor for 14 years and could not afford to cut the post without jeopardizing public service.

"Our volume keeps growing," said Mr. Feleppa. "We've got trials set."

The office also employs a crime victim advocate, child support coordinator, and a criminal registrar, he said.

The office processed 500 misdemeanor warrants and 126 felony warrants and filed 855 misdemeanor charges and 171 felony charges last year, according to Mr. Feleppa. In family court, the office prosecuted 61 juvenile criminal cases, 13 abuse and neglect cases, and attended eight mental competency hearings.

"I understand you have to be stewards for the county," he told commissioners, "and I'm confident the numbers and statistics are there to back up how important

this is." He told commissioners that hiring an assistant will take time, and, in the meantime, he will have to operate without an assistant.

"We did not do this for a bad reason," said Commission Chair Dawn Nelson of the commission's December actions. "When you have changes, it's really the only time you can sit back and reflect, 'Is this still how we want to do this?'"

Commissioners had questioned last month the need for two full-time attorneys in the office.

In his last days as prosecutor, Mr. Graham addressed commissioners during a December 28 budget hearing, saying he learned about the salary cut in the newspaper and accusing commissioners of poor communication. He said that without an assistant, the new prosecutor might have to stop handling non-mandated cases, including those for paternity, abuse, and neglect.

Mr. Graham explained that he and Mr. Feleppa shared family and probate cases in addition to district court trials. Mr. Graham said he handled most of the Circuit Court cases, office administration, and civil counsel.

While commissioners ended the December budget discussion agreeing that the assistant prosecutor should be full time, they deferred action to restore the salary until Mr. Feleppa took office.

New commissioners Calvin McPhee and Mike Patrick, taking their seats for the first time, joined the three other commissioners in the unanimous vote to do so on January 2.

## Reeves: Portage Twp. Ambulance Operating Smoothly in Face of Rift

By Paul Gingras

Portage Township's ambulance corps is functioning smoothly again, following the demotion of its former director, Harold Reeves, in a 3-2 vote at a special township board meeting Friday, November 17. Despite the unrest, the ambulance corps has continued to provide services without disruption, Mr. Reeves told *The St. Ignace News*.

Mr. Reeves remains an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) on the Portage Township Ambulance Corps, and Township Supervisor Donald Ferris has eliminated the director position. EMTs Brad Kohvakka, Eric Wiegand, and Roberta Willette are now fulfilling the responsibilities of the post.

Mr. Ferris said Mr. Reeves lost his title because he mismanaged personnel and equipment. Mr. Reeves said he feels he managed the department well and that he has strong public support. He added that his demotion resulted from infighting among emergency medical services (EMS) members and unpopular, but necessary, management decisions.

At its regular meeting Tuesday, December 12, the Portage Township Board of Trustees again voted 3-2 against Mr. Reeves, this time on a proposal to reinstate him as director. Trustees Mark

Devereaux and Patrick Abram called for the vote.

Mr. Devereaux told *The St. Ignace News* that the action to remove Mr. Reeves at the special meeting in November was wrong because the board did not give him a chance to defend himself. He added that the action to remove him was also illegal because the board did not follow state laws, one of which includes special protections for veterans who hold public offices.

Mr. Ferris told *The St. Ignace News* that Mr. Reeves insufficiently staffed several ambulance runs. No one was harmed as a result of the alleged staffing mistakes, he added.

"I didn't see any mismanagement," Mr. Devereaux said. "I think he's done a wonderful job. When Mr. Reeves arrived, the EMS was in the dumpster, and he's done a good job of turning our ambulance corps into one of the premier [corps] in the EUP."

At the December 12 meeting, Mr. Devereaux distributed a packet of information describing his complaints about the removal of Mr. Reeves and offering research he and Mr. Abram had done on the matter. The packet includes excerpts of three laws the board submitted as proof that the board

\*Please turn to page 9



## A Taste of Winter

Celebrating the first day of winter Friday, December 22, fifth grade students at Engadine Consolidated Schools make snow cones for the elementary students at lunch time. Pictured eating the cones are first graders Stephanie Owens (left) and Ashtyn Buss. (Photographs courtesy of Engadine Consolidated Schools)