

# Gros Cap Board Sees Potential Problems in Senate's School Funding Bill

## Concerns Loophole in New Business Tax

By Paul Gingras

At its Tuesday, December 18, meeting, the Moran Township School Board of Education discussed a senate bill to correct a school funding problem related to the Michigan Business Tax (MBT), which cut revenue to non-traditionally funded districts like Gros Cap, Mackinac Island Public School, and Mackinaw City Public Schools. The board noted, however, that there are potential problems with the bill that must be addressed before July, when school taxes are collected.

"We are very pleased that [the bill] is there," said Gros Cap Superintendent Bill Peltier. "It puts the issue on the table" and seeks to ensure that legislators keep their promise to avoid harming school districts through tax cuts provided by the business tax.

Mr. Peltier said he has written to the bill's sponsor, State Senator Jason Allen, regarding his concerns. The business tax goes into effect January 1 and reduces personal property taxes on businesses, a main funding source for Gros Cap, Mackinac Island Public School, Mackinaw City Public School, and some other districts in Michigan.

"The MBT states that it will hold school districts harmless," Mr. Peltier said, which means that schools will not be financially affected by the tax cuts because the state will compensate for them by increasing its per-pupil allowance.

This is not a problem for most Michigan schools that receive per-pupil state funding, but the state overlooked 24 districts that do not receive the allowance from the state. There is no formula in place for these districts to recover lost revenue.

Senator Allen's bill seeks to correct that problem. He has several non-traditionally funded districts in his jurisdiction, and his bill provides a maximum of \$1.3 million to compensate all 24 such schools in Michigan.

If the oversight is not correct-

## New System Will Improve Sobriety Court

The sobriety court program operated through the 92nd District Court in St. Ignace will be enhanced with the implementation of a drug court case management system that will provide a better overall program for repeat offenders of drugs and alcohol laws.

The State Court Administrative Office will provide the Sobriety Court program with a software system called Drug Court Case Management Information System, which will provide a more intense probation system and greater oversight of repeat offenders' rehabilitation process, such as outpatient therapy and treatment, and getting defendants reconnected into society, helping them find jobs and transportation, said District Court Judge Beth Gibson.

"This system will be a great asset to our Sobriety Court program, utilizing a state-wide based program as a resource," she said. "Additionally, with this data system, we will be able to seek additional grants and funding to sustain and expand the program."

The Sobriety Court also was recognized by the National Highway Traffic Safety Association and will be eligible for a one-day training session to be held this spring in St. Louis, Missouri.

Judge Gibson's staff began training for the Sobriety Court program in August 2006. The program's first offenders were enrolled in January 2007.

The program places offenders in an environment where they undergo treatment and counseling, submit to frequent and random drug testing, make regular appearances before the judge, and are monitored closely for program compliance.

Those who participate in the Sobriety Court are reviewed by their probation officer and a Sobriety Court coordinator.

ed, Gros Cap will lose approximately \$33,000 and Mackinac Island Public School, according to Mr. Peltier, will lose approximately \$100,000.

Moran Township school board members said they are concerned that, even if Mr. Allen's bill passes, the \$1.3 million may not be enough to avoid taking a serious financial hit, because 22 other districts require a portion of the allotment.

Clarification is needed about how the money is to be divided,

Mr. Peltier told *The St. Ignace News*.

A second problem is related to eligibility for the money. To receive a portion, the bill states that school districts must levy the maximum millage they are authorized to levy.

This creates a gray area, Mr. Peltier explained, owing to the Headlee Amendment, which requires schools to reduce local taxes when property values rise faster than the rate of inflation. If this happens in Moran Township, the school district will not be able to levy its maximum millage and may have to call for a vote by res-

idents to allow the school to do so. Otherwise it would be ineligible for a portion of the \$1.3 million.

Whether such a vote will be necessary is questionable, Mr. Peltier said. In his letter to Mr. Allen, Mr. Peltier asked how Headlee affects the bill.

A second problem arises if a school has already chosen not to levy the maximum millage allowed. This is the case on Mackinac Island, where personal property values are high enough that the local school district chose not to levy the full amount it was authorized to collect, Mr. Peltier

said. "It appears in that bill that, if for any reason a school district does not collect the full amount, it may not be eligible for any of the \$1.3 million," he said.

"Your [savings] just got cut in half," Mr. Peltier told the school board of its \$300,000 fund balance.

This year, the district faces as much as \$170,000 in lost tax revenue.

The revenue the school will potentially lose owing to changes in the business tax comes at a time when school administrators already are concerned about money the district will have to pay back to energy companies, the result of an inaccurate tax collection.

The district has already repaid American Transmission \$45,000 this year, and it is facing a repayment demand of approximately \$88,000 by Enbridge Energy,

which claims the township overtaxed it on its personal property. The district has budgeted \$75,000 for repayment demands by Enbridge as well as Cloverland Electric Cooperative and Edison Sault Electric Company.

Although the district knows how much it will have to pay Enbridge, it does not know how long it will have to do so.

"I will have a recommendation for you when we get the bill," Mr. Peltier told the board, noting that the company could demand full repayment in a short amount of time, or allow the district to spread it over several years.

Sue Dionne from the Mackinac County treasurer's office said Cloverland Electric has withdrawn its appeal through the Michigan Tax Tribunal. Edison Sault's appeal is still pending, however, the county does not know how much money Edison Sault will demand, she added.

## 8 Learning Trade at Boat Building School

By Amy Polk

The signs of the season were scattered about the Great Lakes Boat Building School in December. Nearing the end of the first quarter, students were wrapping up projects, and sounds of buzzing saws and pounding hammers filled the workshop, the scent of fresh-cut lumber hung in the air, and curly wood shavings littered the floor.

The atmosphere was warm and busy inside the school, while, outside, snow blanketed the landscape and ice began to form on Cedarville Bay. The school has become a haven for students, who spend their days and occasional nights learning to build and refinish boats.

"We've made a policy of having the school available for students when they need it," said Director Dave Lesh.

The school's charter class of eight students feels like a large family, even though its members come from varied backgrounds and have different reasons for attending the school. It's a benefit of a small class, said Mr. Lesh, who has organized boat rides, pizza parties, cooking classes, and field trips, along with business



Great Lakes Boat Building School student Bob Causley of Hessel works on an oar in the workshop during the school day.

manager Michele Fiering, head instructor Pat Mahon, and instructional assistant Jonas Altmaier.

"We have a great group of people in this course, and it's really been a pleasure getting to know them," he said.

All the students except one

Cedarville High School graduate and a Hessel resident rent housing in Clark Township.

Students in summer courses built a "Heidi" lapstrake skiff and a *Chippewa* row boat from antique plans. The nine-month program students have nearly finished two more Heidi skiffs, and when the students return from holiday break, they will build a 21-foot utility launch powered by an electric motor provided by Elco Electric Launch Company of New York. The school worked with Cedarville cottager Steve Upham, president of Elco Launch, to develop the project. The Elco project is an example of the professional and educational partnerships the school has established.

"We're constantly looking for ways to expand our world," Mr. Lesh said.

Part of the curriculum involves restoration work, and the school welcomes donations of boats for

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At left: Instructional Assistant Jonas Altmaier (upper left) helps students Robert Coady (left) of Cedarville and Christiaan Fields of Wolverine as they work on the hull of one of two Heidi skiffs students are building.



Members and instructors of the first Great Lakes Boat Building School class in Cedarville include (standing, from left) Bob Causley of Hessel, Chris Musson of Wausau, Wisconsin, Bryan Madigan of Traverse City, Program Director and Head Instructor Pat Mahon, Christiaan Fields of Wolverine, Josh Walker of Franklin, Instructional Assistant Jonas Altmaier of Cedarville, Randy LaPlant of Marinette, Wisconsin; (seated in front) Yong Heo of Plymouth, and Robert Coady of Cedarville.

## DeTour, Sault Receive Grants for Recreation Park Projects

More than \$600,000 in grant funding will enhance public park projects in DeTour and Sault Ste. Marie, State Representative Gary McDowell announced December 6. The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board allocated the acquisition funds, to be used for outdoor public recreation or resource protection projects.

DeTour was awarded \$495,000 to be used toward purchasing 800 feet of waterfront property that will be developed for public use as a recreational area for kayaking, a boardwalk with fishing, a dock, and a picnic area. The property will also be an endpoint on the North Huron Pathway, a planned eight-municipality hiking and bicycle pathway from DeTour to St. Ignace.

"This project is not only good for DeTour, but for the entire

Eastern U.P., in the means of the tourism dollars and economic impact it's going to have," said Terry Nelson, mayor of DeTour Village.

Sault Ste. Marie was awarded \$136,000 for two improvement projects at Ashmun Bay Park. The funding will develop the entrance to the park, and to expand the park to an area that will eventually feature a waterfront trail system.

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board of Trustees recommended to Governor Jennifer Granholm that 65 recreation projects and land acquisitions totaling nearly \$34.5 million be funded for 2007. The board considered 153 applications for projects and acquisitions totaling \$75 million, which were competitively evaluated based on scoring criteria developed by the board.

## St. Marys River System

### Early Results Show Walleye Stocking Augments Fishery

Walleye fishing in the St. Marys River received a boost in 2007 as 337,000 two-inch walleye summer fingerlings were stocked at various locations in the river, reported Tom Gorenflo, Inter-Tribal Fisheries and Assessment Program (ITFAP) director. This year, the program will again seek assistance by local anglers to submit walleye samples for study.

The program contributes significantly to the walleye population, Mr. Gorenflo noted, with reports indicating 21% of walleye sampled by the program in 2006 were stocked fish. That percentage is expected to rise.

Summer fingerling walleye were stocked at Potogannissing Bay, Raber Bay, Charlotte River, Lake George, and Aune Osborn Park. The program also assisted in the rearing and stocking of an additional 7,000 six- to eight-inch fall fingerling walleye, which were stocked in the river near Raber Bay and in Caribou Lake near DeTour.

In addition to the summer fingerlings, fall fingerling walleye were raised and stocked in a cooperative venture between ITFAP and landowners Nathaniel Armstrong and Andrea McDonald, who own and operate several walleye rearing ponds in the Barbeau area. Three local sport-fishing clubs, including the Raber Area Sportsmen's Club, St. Marys River Sportsmen's Club, and the Caribou Lake Association purchased some of these fall fingerlings for stocking in the river and in Caribou Lake. The tribes and landowners donated approximately 3,800 fall fingerlings to these clubs to help bolster their stocking efforts.

Most of the fingerlings stocked by the tribes since 2001 have been marked using oxytetracycline (OTC), a common fish marking technique. The primary purpose for marking the fingerlings is to help biologists distinguish stocked walleye from naturally reproduced walleye in the river. This helps biologists evaluate many aspects of the stocking program, including whether stocking

is benefiting the sport fishery in the river.

During fall 2006, tribal biologists collected 62 walleye samples from a local charter boat operator in the river, and determined from OTC marks that 21% were stocked fish.

In January 2007, the tribal fisheries program requested the assistance of several sport-fishing clubs in collecting walleye heads for analysis, and has received more than 300 walleye samples from local sport fishermen. These samples will be analyzed for OTC marks during the winter, providing a better picture of the contributions of stocked fish to the sport fishery.

The program will again seek assistance from local anglers in 2008, as evaluating the stocking program will require collecting samples for several years. Understanding where stocked walleye are harvested will also be valuable for determining the most appropriate stocking sites, and the best number to stock per site.

In addition to the St. Marys River stocking, the tribal fisheries program continued the stocking of 100,000 walleye summer fingerlings at Bay Mills in Brimley Bay, and 140,000 in Lake Michigan's Grand Traverse Bay. Beginning in 2008, ITFAP plans to re-institute walleye stocking in Lake Huron's St. Martin Bay, near the Carp and Pine rivers.

Like all Great Lakes fishery agencies, ITFAP is concerned with the newly discovered fish virus, VHS. Since walleye are susceptible to this disease, ITFAP sent samples of either adult walleye or pre-stocked fingerlings to accredited laboratories for testing prior to stocking. Thus far, all 219 samples have tested negative for VHS.

The Inter-Tribal Fisheries and Assessment Program's hatchery is administered by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and receives funding support from the Bay Mills Indian Community and the Grand Traverse Band of Chippewa and Ottawa Indians.