

Risks and Dangers of Feeding Black Bears

Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks



Will Great Lakes Water Protection Policies Include Groundwater?

There is concern in some circles that the Great Lakes Compact, the anti-diversion pact sent to Congress last week after Michigan was the last state to approve it, might fail on Capitol Hill because thirsty states have more clout than the lakes states.

Lieutenant Governor John Cherry, chairman of the Great Lakes Commission, is not in that circle – especially if Congress votes before the next Census costs Rust Belt states even more seats.

Congress up to this point has been responsive to “regional needs,” Cherry said in a phone interview as he worked his way up the Lake Michigan shoreline for Saturday events at Traverse City’s National Cherry Festival. Congress has approved about 40 water compacts.

Cherry noted that the National Lieutenant Governors Association in February unanimously approved a resolution that he co-sponsored in favor of the compact.

Much more significant is the support of two senators who are presidential nominees-in-waiting, Republican John McCain of thirsty Arizona and Democrat Barack Obama of our Lake Michigan neighbor, Illinois.

On his Michigan visit last week, McCain joked to the Associated Press: “I’ve often had dreams of a giant pipe that ended up in my backyard in Phoenix. But the fact is that any decision concerning water should be made by the people who own the water. That’s the states.”

Senator Carl Levin will lead compact efforts in the Senate along with Senator George Voinovich (R-Ohio), fellow co-chair of the Senate Great Lakes Task Force.

In signing the compact, Governor Jennifer Granholm called it “a defining moment in Michigan history. We must do our part to ensure that our Great Lakes are protected and preserved for generations to come. This legislation fulfills that promise.”

Not quite. It’s weak on protecting groundwater.

“If you’re not in favor of commercializing the Great Lakes, you won’t be pleased by the water policy Michigan’s Legislature just enacted,” said Dave Dempsey, former policy director for the Michigan Environmental Council and author of a powerful and most timely book, “Great Lakes for Sale: From Whitecaps to Bottle-caps.”

It was published by the University of Michigan Press and Petoskey Publishing of Traverse City about a month before the Legislature’s June 23 compact compromise. But Dempsey, ever the advocate since his days as environmental aide to ex-Governor Jim Blanchard, wrote in the *Detroit Free Press*:

“While the laws contain some worthwhile features, they estab-

lish a state policy that the water in Michigan’s lakes and streams and springs can be sold; that our water can be exported in any volume as long as it goes out in containers of 20 liters or less; that up to 25 percent of any Michigan river or stream can be legally consumed by water exporters and others; and that groundwater, which supplies up to 50 percent of the flow to the rivers and Great Lakes that we enjoy for fishing, boating, swimming and drinking, is not protected by a public trust standard.”

It’s encouraging that Cherry, in response to my question, said, “I personally favor” ultimately extending the public trust concept to groundwater. He said, “It makes sense. The line [between groundwater and flowing waters covered by the compact] is pretty thin.”

But he hailed the compromise worked out between the Democratic House and Republican Senate, and said it is “inevitable that there will be further efforts” to strengthen the standards “in stages.”

Cherry, named the 2005 Conservationist of the Year by the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, is working with the MUCC on developing a Great Lakes agenda to present to the next president.

In that pursuit, he is talking up issues as he did last week – watershed restoration in Benton Harbor, pollution issues in Muskegon, Great Lakes tourism in Traverse City.

His goal, he says, is to emphasize importance of commerce, as well as conservation. He said, “The Great Lakes always have been a foundation of our economy” – attracting fur traders, transporting lumber, luring tourists.

He bristles at those of us who note that his tour, beyond any policy value, contributes to build-up toward a likely 2010 bid to replace term-limited Granholm, a decision he says he will make early next year.

He said, “I would run based on my passions.” Protection of the Great Lakes “is a passion of mine.”

Indeed it has been. Having covered the Legislature when Cherry chaired the Senate Conservation Committee, and written a book about the governors of Michigan, I’ll say this:

If Cherry, an avid hunter and outdoorsman, runs for governor, he will enter gubernatorial campaigning as the staunchest conservationist since Republican Chase S. Osborn, who was state game and fish warden long before he became Michigan’s only governor from the Upper Peninsula in 1911.

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.

Downing Family Benefit Is Saturday

A benefit for the family of the late Derek Downing will be at the Historic Depot Restaurant in Mackinaw City Saturday, July 19.

A spaghetti dinner will be from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. The cost is \$8 per

plate. The event includes 50/50 raffles, drawings, and prizes. Charlie Reager will perform live from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. and The Eddy King Band will play from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.

A car seat safety inspector will be available to inspect car seats and explain the new car seat laws.

Great Start is a program of the intermediate school district.

Great Start Hosts Playgroup in Kincheloe

Great Start will host an infant and toddler play group Monday, July 21, from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Recreation Center in Kincheloe. Finger painting will be available for

children. A car seat safety inspector will be available to inspect car seats and explain the new car seat laws.

Polk is New Tourist Association and Chamber Coordinator for Les Cheneaux

Amy Polk has been hired as the Les Cheneaux Chamber of Commerce and Tourist Association coordinator, beginning work at the Welcome Center Tuesday, July 8. The position was previously held by Bud Lowers.

She previously worked for 11

years as a reporter at *The St. Ignace News* and *Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave* in the Hessel and St. Ignace offices. Originally from Dearborn, she spent many summers in the Upper Peninsula before moving to Cedarville in May 1997.

Outdoor Matters

A column from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources



Spring and summer can be very difficult seasons in the life of Michigan’s black bears. They emerge from their dens with depleted energy supplies following a long winter period of inactivity at a time when natural foods are scarce. In addition, bear family groups begin to break up with the onset of breeding activity, which occurs in May and June.

Yearling bear (1.5 years old) soon realize their mother no longer favors their companionship when her interest turns to breeding. This is especially true for young males, who are aggressively driven away by their mother. In search of their own territory, these young males are most likely to come into contact with humans and create problems.

Black bear have huge appetites and an excellent sense of smell. They are capable of remembering the locations of reliable food sources from year to year and will travel great distances to find food. When natural foods such as tender grasses and vegetation, nuts, berries, and insects are scarce, bear are more likely to come into contact with people.

Problems occur when bear attempt to feed on human foods, garbage, compost, pet foods, or birdseed. Bird feeders are one of the biggest attractants of bear to homes and yards in Michigan.

According to the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Division, in 672 reports of bear activity received over the past two years, 281 (42%) were bear that were attracted to bird feeders. In an additional 23% of the cases, bear were attracted to garbage or were intentionally fed.

Although bear are secretive and shy by nature, they will tolerate contact with people for food. To avoid possible confrontations and property damage from bear, the most effective and long-lasting strategy is prevention.

Never intentionally feed bear. With the exception of baiting for hunting purposes in remote areas, placing food to attract bear near homes, cottages, parks, campgrounds, and picnic areas may

teach them to associate people with food. This may place both bear and people at risk.

Some people consider bear in close contact with people as a threat to human safety; bear in these situations occasionally may be killed. Attracting bear close to people also may increase their risk of being killed by vehicles on roads, too.

“Road-killed bears near rural subdivisions often have stomachs full of birdseed,” said DNR Wildlife Biologist Larry Visser of Cadillac, who has studied the habits of bears for more than two decades.

Bears that become habituated to people and cause property damage sometimes have to be trapped and moved, an expensive and time-consuming project that often fails to solve the problem. These moved bear may just become problems in new areas.

The Department of Natural Resources recommends the following actions for potential bear problems:

- Bear in bird feeder or suet: Remove all bird feeders.

- Bear in garbage can or dumpster: Store garbage containers in a secure location. Do not put out for pick-up the night before, and be sure dumpster lids are securely fastened.

- Bear in a tree in a residential area: Clear all people and dogs from the site to allow the bear to come down on its own and leave. Treed bear are more inclined to leave at dark if left undisturbed.

“Cities like Cadillac are particularly vulnerable to problems resulting from bear feeding because of the proximity of good natural bear habitat adjacent to urban neighborhoods, lakeshore residences, and state and city parks,” said Ruthann French, a wildlife technician in Cadillac.

The city of Cadillac has two lakes with their associated wetland complexes in proximity to urban areas and intensive lakeshore development where good spring and early summer bear habitat may occur right beyond people’s backyards. These nutrient-rich wetland marshes provide natural foods, home territories for



The DNR provides assistance to landowners to avoid unnecessary bear problems, including removing offending animals in situations where bears continue to be a problem or cause property damage. Bear will not be relocated for causing minor property damage, such as destroying bird feeders, tipping over garbage cans, or eating pet foods. (DNR photograph by David Kenyon)

resident female bear to rear their young, and provide travel corridors for other bear throughout the year.

People who live in these environments of Michigan have a special responsibility to be good stewards of the wildlife that also resides here, including avoiding

conflicts with bear.

If you live in one of these unique bear habitat areas or have had a bear visit your neighborhood, making little adjustments – such as temporarily removing bird feeders – can make a big difference in minimizing human/bear conflicts.

Coast Guard Auxiliary Will Host Boating Safety Course

A boating safety course called “American Boating Course/About Boating Safety,” will be offered Tuesday, July 29, and Wednesday, July 30, from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., at the Great Lakes Boat Building School in Cedarville.

The cost is \$30 and includes course and book. The cost is \$5 for each additional family member.

The course is offered by the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Registration is required, and can be made by calling John Griffin at 484-2022.

Sponsors Sought for Project Backpack

The Mackinac County Child Protection Roundtable is seeking sponsors for Project Backpack. The project helps families needing extra assistance in getting their children ready for the new school year by providing students with a new backpack filled with school

supplies, personal hygiene items, and a new outfit complete with shoes. Sponsors will be matched up with a boy or girl from kindergarten to eighth grade.

For more information, contact Sheri Damron at 643-6122 or Ronda Engle at 643-6115.

Exclamation To Play at Mackinaw City

Exclamation! will play for the “Music in Mackinaw” concert series Saturday, July 19, at 8 p.m.

at Conkling Heritage Park in Mackinaw City. The outdoor concerts are free of charge.

Area Ostomy Association Meets July 20

The Straits Area Ostomy Association will meet Sunday, July 20, at 2 p.m. at the United

Methodist Church in St. Ignace. For more information, call 643-8536.

St. Ignace News Policies

Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

Weddings:

Weddings with photographs are published without charge within 45 days of the ceremony. After 45 days, a photograph can be included for \$35.00.

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed “Ideals of the Press” or “The Newspaper in a Free Society,” and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.