

(A10) Monday, May 21, 1979

Bill to protect state's wetlands passes senate

The first wetlands protection bill to pass the Michigan Senate after 10 years of trying was supported by three of five senators from the Observer & Eccentric area.

Democrats William Faust of Westland and Doug Ross of Oak Park voted for the bill, as did Republican Robert Geake of Northville.

Sen. Donald Bishop, R-Rochester, voted against it. Sen. Bill Huffman, D-Madison Heights, was excused from the May 7 session, at which the Senate passed the bill, 25-8, and sent it to the House of Representatives, where it faces a tough battle.

The bill would prohibit owners of most swamps, bogs and other wetlands from draining, dredging, filling in or building upon their land unless authorized by the state.

The Senate bill, sponsored by Sen. Kerry Kammer, D-Pontiac, contains a broad exemption for farmers and exempts wetlands of five acres or less, unless the state Department of Natural Resources designates such small parcels as protected.

ROSS SAID the Senate vote was "symbolically an important victory," because it shows "the emergence of a coalition of Republicans and Democrats in the Senate concerned with preserving natural resources." Six Republicans joined 19 Democrats in support of the bill. Six Republicans also voted against it.

Such a coalition was virtually impossible in previous years as Sen. Joseph Mack, D-Drownwood, blocked most such legislation as chairman of the Senate Conservation Committee. But the committee chairmanship was taken away from Mack earlier this year by Senate Democratic reformers, including Ross, whose district includes Southfield and Farmington.

In past years, Mack prevented full Senate discussion of wetlands legislation by not reporting any bills out of committee, Ross said. Environmentalists and the state DNR had been trying for strong wetlands protection for 10 years.

During four months of deliberations, supporters

of the Senate bill fought off a number of weakening amendments proposed by Mack and other Upper Peninsula legislators. Mack said the bill would harm the mining industry in the UP.

Geake, whose district includes Plymouth, Livonia and Redford, said the bill was "long overdue" and needed for flood control, water purification and protection of wildlife and "winding marshlands."

BISHOP, WHOSE district includes Birmingham, West Bloomfield and part of Troy, opposed the bill for several reasons.

He said it "borders on taking away" land from owners of wetlands, with no compensation, since the state would be advising people not to use the property.

The agricultural land exclusion was a "calculated political decision" by wetlands supporters, Bishop said, because the bill wouldn't have passed without support from agricultural communities. Farmers would benefit most from wetlands protection, Bishop added.

The bill failed to provide for an inventory of wetlands. "No one knows exactly what it is we're talking about," said Bishop, adding he didn't know how many wetlands there were in his district.

Bishop was not surprised by the Republican split on the wetlands vote. "I don't think it was a partisan issue," he said. "Everyone voted based on what they thought was the right thing to do."

Fellow Republican Geake gave the bill a "50-50 chance" of passing the House. "Once it gets out of committee, anything could happen," he said.

Consideration of the bill began last week in the House Conservation Committee. Chairman Thomas Anderson, D-Southgate, said chances of the full House of passing the bill before the Legislature's summer recess were "quite good."

Some legislators have suggested sparing the bill from its tough House fight until September, but Anderson said he expected the bill to be considered with the budget appropriations bill before the summer recess.

The vote shows, 'the emergence of a coalition of Republicans and Democrats concerned with preserving natural resources.'

— Sen. Doug Ross

Bank economist predicts recession

Over-extended consumer debt could lead to a recession by the end of the year or early in 1980.

That's what an economist for Michigan National Investment Corp. has predicted. The company is a part of the corporation that owns Michigan National Banks.

Economist Dale Page said consumer installment credit outstanding has been rising faster than disposable personal income since early 1976. He said the consumer accounts for about two-thirds of economic spending.

According to federal statistics, consumer debt took its fastest one-year jump in history last year. Consumer credit ballooned to \$298 billion last year, an average of \$1,367 for every man, woman and child. That was an increase of \$15 billion over 1977.

After a "short spring spending spree," the consumer will cut back, Page predicted, because of over-extended credit and psychological cost barriers.

"The consumer just will not be able to buy more because of higher prices," Page said, "and will give up on the buy-in-advance philosophy."

"When this happens, a recession will follow."

Once the "beat inflation" spending spree is over, Page said, the money supply will fall, as will interest rates.

Interest rate indicators, according to Page, show the prime rate (that charged large corporate customers) may reach 13 percent but drop to 8 percent by the end of the year.

Fluctuations in the prime rate and interest on U.S. Treasury bills, frequently purchased by corporations, are "benchmarks that affect all kinds of rates," such as interest charged on mortgages and other consumer loans, a spokeswoman for Michigan National Banks said.

Yields on 91-day treasury bills (issued for \$10,000 and up) could reach more than 10 percent within the next two months, Page said, but drop to 6 percent by the end of the year.

KATHLEEN WAGNER, director of marketing for Michigan National Bank of Detroit, said Page's forecast shows indications of an economic downturn should be "very obvious" by the end of the year.

"If the prime rate is at 8 percent and T-bills at 6 percent, I would call that a recession," she said.

But a recession would be "like a trimming of the sails," she said, not as severe as in 1974-75.

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