

# Water board hearings to start

By TIM RICHARD



RICHARD COGGER  
Are the fish edible?

The long controversy over the environmental impact of an M-275 freeway in Oakland County might have been settled with more speed and less heat had an Area Water Quality Board been functioning during the last few years.

Leaders of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments are proposing such a 27-member board to oversee the region's implementation of a 1985 clean water plan.

The management segment of that plan goes before the public in a series of hearings this week.

"AS AN OVERSEEING group, it would have to comment on the impact on water resources of such a proposed project as M-275," said SEMCOG Chairman David Shepherd of Oak Park.

"I would see it as having a part in the decision," added Lathrup Village Mayor Richard Cogger, chairman of SEMCOG's Council on Environmental Strategy.

They agreed a water quality board could have helped settle the M-275 controversy without the stormy political confrontations that occurred before the State Highway Commission cancelled the project in January.

One major reason for the demise of M-275 was the adverse impact it was expected to have on the headwaters of the Huron and Clinton rivers.

"A big function of the Area Water Quality Board would be monitoring other agencies," said Cogger. "But the board would not be an enforcement agency."

But the SEMCOG leaders were

A special public hearing for Oakland residents is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 1, in the board of commissioners auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph north of Elizabeth Lake Road, Pontiac.

A "regional" hearing—for anyone who can't attend one of the regular evening sessions—is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 1, in Room 115 of the Southfield Civic Center, 26000 Evergreen.

THE AREA Water Quality Board would be a separate, new body running with a staff of up to 15 and a budget of up to \$500,000 a year. Such a structure was proposed by SEMCOG staff, Cogger said.

Glusac likened it to "an ombudsman for water quality."

But Cogger noted the plan had aroused some controversy, particularly in Washtenaw County. So two alternatives will also be considered in public hearings, he said.

One would have the monitoring function performed by the Michigan Water Resources Commission.

The other would have monitoring performed by a committee within the existing SEMCOG, a voluntary association of governmental units controlled by local elected officials.

SEMCOG's General Assembly, composed of all 120 member governments, is scheduled to vote Oct. 20 on the final structure.

After this week's hearings, said Shepherd, there will be a 10-day period during which SEMCOG will receive further comments. He said the water quality board idea, though developed over a year of work, "could

be modified considerably through the public hearing process."

EACH HEARING will begin with a 20-minute verbal and slide presentation. Both elected officials and SEMCOG staff will listen to and record public comments.

Shepherd said a water quality board would have the tasks of monitoring other agencies' adherence to the plan, sampling waters for quality and reviewing major private and public developments that might have an impact on water quality.

What makes the current effort different from the past, they said, is the new emphasis on "non-point" pollution—contamination of rivers and lakes by such things as urban road runoff and agricultural chemicals.

These are far more complex problems to deal with than domestic sewage. Moreover, because of imperfections in sewage treatment systems, what one community does upstream affects communities downstream—and can be the source of conflicts between them. One job of an Area Water Quality Board would be to resolve such disputes.

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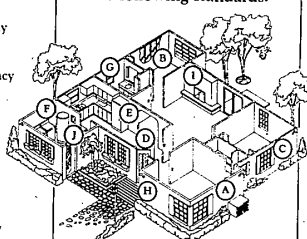
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