

Great Lakes aid, diversion argued in House

Michigan property owners are anxiously watching congressional hearings to see what Congress will do about Great Lakes shorelines threatened by high water levels.

Ohio Gov. Richard Celeste and officials from other Great Lakes states last week asked Congress to provide more federal money to help protect imperiled homes and property.

Celeste proposed a \$100 million, five-year program to offer low-interest loans and grants to elevate, flood-proof or move threatened homes and commercial buildings, build shoreline protection structures and in some cases buy property that cannot otherwise be saved.

"WE SEE the damage at the community level and at the human level," Celeste told the House Public Works subcommittee on water resources.

"The human cost is real. . . . Everyone is trying to deliver assistance, but with no budgets or programs, the needs go unfulfilled."

Celeste would pick up 30 percent of the costs and would have to strictly limit development in shoreline areas to guard against construction of buildings that might be vulnerable to future flooding and erosion.

Celeste's proposal is patterned after state-level efforts undertaken in Michigan, where Gov. James Blanchard already has called for additional help from the federal government.

THE GREAT Lakes have been at record high levels over the past few years, swollen by two decades of high precipitation and cool temperatures that have resulted in more runoff than would have occurred with average temperatures.

Encroaching waters have caused millions of dollars in damage to homes, property and shorelines.

"A lot of people from inland counties own Great Lakes shoreline property," said Bloomfield Hills resident James K. Schmidt. He said the Great Lakes Coalition, of which he is a member, argues that "man can counter extreme water levels to a significant degree."

The 2,000-member coalition has asked the U.S. and Canadian governments to close Hudson Bay diversions, which send water to the Great Lakes, increase the Chicago diversion into the Mississippi River, increase flows in the Niagara River and Welland Canal to maximum capacity and increase the flows from diversions out of Lake Ontario.

"THE HOMEOWNERS, communities and states that border the Great Lakes need your help in protecting themselves from storm damage," Tom Martin, director of Michigan's Office of the Great Lakes, told the subcommittee.

Celeste and Martin both said more can be done to control the lake levels, to a limited extent, by faster movement of water through various locks and canals — without diverting water to areas outside the Great Lakes basin.

But diversions were opposed by another official.

"Increasing diversions can have irreversible impacts," said David Miller, executive director of the Buffalo, N.Y.-based Great Lakes United coalition of environmental, sports, union and small business groups.

Diverting water to other parts of the country would be ill-advised, Miller said. It would do little good in the current situation and might make it hard to cut off that flow once the cyclical Great Lakes again experience low water levels, he argued.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Tourism index continues rise

In 1986, the index of Michigan tourism established a new record, gaining an average of 8.5 percent from 1985, according to David L. Littmann, vice president and senior economist with Manufacturers National Bank of Detroit.

Michigan's Tourism Index rose to 129 during the fourth quarter of 1986. That was nearly 5 percent higher than tourism-related activity in the third quarter and 13 percent above levels from the final quarter of 1985.

At a level of 129, tourist-related activity in Michigan, after removing the effects of inflation, is 29 percent above the average during the base year of measurement, 1980," Littmann said.

All components of the tourism index showed gains between the third and fourth quarters. Seasonally adjusted, all but occupancy rates were up from the same period in 1985. From third to fourth quarters:

- Air passenger traffic rose 5.8 percent.
- Occupancy rates at Michigan lodgings rose 2.3 percent.
- Mackinac Bridge crossings were up 5.1 percent.
- Southeast Michigan vehicular traffic rose 4.8 percent.

The Michigan Tourism Index is a quarterly summary of four seasonally adjusted travel and lodging data series which serve as a noninflationary proxy for statewide tourist activity.

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