

# DNR's Guyer: Speed up wetlands permits

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Dr. Gordon E. Guyer has set a tough goal for his state Department of Natural Resources: to process wetlands development permits in 30 days instead of the current 75.

"There has been criticism of this administration. I accept that," the DNR chief said as he received and embraced more than 30 recommendations from a 17-member Wetlands Permit Process Review Committee. "They've done a heckuva job. I couldn't be more pleased," Guyer said in a Tuesday morning news conference. "It's an excellent blueprint for action."

Guyer estimated it would cost \$600,000 to do an inventory of all wetlands in the state, and another \$300,000 to \$400,000 for staff to handle permits and implement a recommended public education program.

"BUT COSTS aren't a big issue. It's priorities. It's not a big staff I want to see. It's a program," said the former Michigan State University professor and administrator who has been at DNR's helm for 18 months. "Much will be on the way by the first of the year," he promised.

But Guyer repeatedly refused to say if more land — or less — will be redefined as wetlands. Developers had complained the definition is vague.

The advisory group recommended that definitions be clarified, particularly such phrases as "feasible and prudent alternative," "mitigate the impact of," "primarily dependent upon being located in the wetland" and "unacceptable disruption to the aquatic resources."

Guyer agreed: "It's essential we get on with clarifying terms."

PIONEERS in the 19th century denounced Michigan as a swamp because 30 percent of its area was wetlands. Since then, an estimated half to two-thirds of the wetlands have been drained or filled in.

The committee said wetlands are valuable for nesting and breeding grounds for wildlife; for recreation; for absorbing and controlling flood waters; for straining and purifying fresh water.

"There is a widespread perception among members of the public that the state's wetlands statute is being applied inconsistently by the DNR," the panel said. It said that business people, architects and local officials often don't accept state and federal definitions.

"The result is often a confusing set of local authorizations with some local units of government permitting developments in wetlands without notifying the DNR of the

activity.... Others mistakenly claim that if an area is a wetland, the state permits no activities whatsoever."

THE FEDERAL Clean Waters Act of 1977 regulates wetlands, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency agreed to delegate its power to the state. The Legislature passed the Goemaere-Anderson Wetland Protection Act in 1979.

One sponsor, former Rep. Tom Anderson, D-Southeast, is now a member of the Natural Resources Commission to which Guyer reports. Anderson said Michigan alone of the 50 states received such an EPA assignment.

The advisory group recommended — and Guyer agreed — that "there's no question Michigan should retain its responsibilities."

Guyer also agreed it's important to "have on-site determination of wetlands" and "an unbiased ombudsman for disputes."

He assigned deputy DNR Director Jack Bails responsibility for implementing the recommendations.

THE REVIEW committee, appointed by Guyer in July, included representatives of business, local government, environmental groups, universities and real estate developers.

Area members included Elizabeth Harris, staff attorney for the East Michigan Environmental Action Council in Birmingham, and Ann Bolin, executive director of the Conference of Western Wayne, representing local suburban governments.

Chairing it was Greg Lyman, Guyer's assistant. Thomas Washington, executive director of Michigan United Conservation Clubs, and Judith Mullins, a General Motors Tech Center environmental staff engineer, also served.

The group held five meetings, including lengthy public hearings in St. Ignace and Lansing.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Publish a guidebook to the law for landowners, developers and local governments.

- Notify local government clerks of pending permits.

- Name a person in DNR to foster "voluntary, non-binding conciliation" between the department and applicants.

- Hold public hearings on the completed wetlands inventories.

- Make applications for permits easier to understand.

- Name at least two more administrative law judges to handle appeals.

- Initiate efforts with colleges to improve the curriculum for developers and planners.



A wetland in state law is "land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support — and that under normal conditions does support — wetland vegetation or aquatic life and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp or marsh." Wetlands store and purify water and provide homes for ducks, as in this area near the Maple Grove Center, West Bloomfield Township.

DAN DEAN/staff photographer

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## Women-divorce workshop at OU

A conference on "What Women Need to Know About Divorce" will start at 8:30 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 31, in Varner Hall on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. Nickie McWalter, columnist for the Detroit Free Press, will be the keynote speaker. The conference, open to the public, is sponsored by OU's Continuum Center.

Registration is \$35. It received by Oct. 24, or \$45 at the door. For registration details, call the Continuum Center at 370-3033.

Three sets of workshops will be

held covering the personal, legal and financial issues of divorce.

Workshop leaders include Dr. William Jones of Oakland University; Louise George of Jewish Vocational Service displaced homemaker program; John Schaefer and Janice Morganroth, attorneys; Marilyn Gunther, financial planner; and Judith Hopkin, counselor and career specialist at the Continuum Center.

The Continuum Center serves as an outreach arm of the university, providing programs for individuals, groups and the business community.

## Pre-college classes in design at LIT

High school juniors and seniors and adults can explore their talents during two special design programs being offered on Saturdays by the Lawrence Institute of Technology School of Architecture.

The Design Discovery and Pre-College Programs will be held Jan. 23 through May 21 on LIT's campus, 21000 10 Mile, Southfield. Students will gain preliminary exposure in the beginning course work in the fields of architecture, interior architecture and interior design.

In addition, there will be an Art and Architecture Awareness Seminar, which will include field trips to museums, art galleries and LIT's Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Art-Frank House.

Participants may take one, two or three classes. Tuition for each studio class is \$150. The seminar is \$80, and an estimated \$100 may be needed for books and materials for a full program.

SEVERAL FULL-COURSE tuition scholarships will be awarded to the pre-college applicants presenting the highest academic credentials. Students interested in scholarships must apply by Jan. 1.

Scholarships will be awarded to only those students who apply for a full-program in architecture or interior architecture. Awards don't include materials, transportation or meals.

College credit toward a bachelor of science degree program will be awarded to pre-college students upon successful completion of these courses.

Applications will be accepted through Jan. 10. For registration information, contact your high school art, drafting or home economics teacher, counselor, or the LIT Admissions Office at 356-0200, Ext. 3178.

## Get ready for SAT test

Three workshops to prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test are being offered on Saturdays by Oakland University.

Dates are Nov. 14 and 21 (from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.) and 28 (9 a.m. to noon) for a fee of \$75, including materials.

The next SAT exam is Dec. 5.

For registration information, call OU's Continuing Education office at 370-3120 weekdays before 8 p.m. The campus is east of I-75 near Rochester.



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