Wetlands preservation: well worth the fight

While preserving Michigan's wet-lands and cleaning the Great Lakes may be two separate jobs, the for-mer can assist the latter. Wetlands absorb and process pol-lutants like phosphorous, disease-cides and grosse; some of the things that have created a Great Lakes populated by fish not safe to eat. Elizabeth Harris, director of the East Michigan Environmental Ac-tion Council, spoke about wetlands to

Great Lakes need work

By Ralph R. Echtinaw staff writer

Most people will agree that keeping a drinking-water source for 26 million people free of pollution is important.

Most people will agree that preteting the integrity of the magnet for a multi-billion dollar tourism industry is important.

for a multi-billi odlar tourism in-dustry is important. Most people will agree that an im-portant resource to 75 percent of Canada's agriculture is worth pre-serving. And most people will agree that they should be able to eat Great Lakes fish without wondering if they'll be risking their health in the process.

they'll be risking their health in the process.

"What we're doing to the Great Lakes, we're also doing to ourselves," said Saily Cole-Misch, director of public affairs for the international joint commission, Great Lakes regional office. "We need to take action now or we are threatening the health of future generations."

Cole-Misch spoke about the state of Michigan's most prized asset Monday at an Oakland Community College environmental seminar at the Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills.

ton Hills.

SHE RECITED the litany of prob-lems the Great Lakes have been more and more best with as tech-nology and progress march on.

Two aquatic creatures transport-ed landwertently to the lakes by ships arriving from the Baltic Sea are multiplied faster than they can

ships arriving from the Baltic Sca are multiphying faster than they can be dealt with. The River Ruffe, a small fish threatening to take over Lake Superior, is what Cole-Misch calls "the rabbit of fish speeles." The Zebra Mussel is also causing problems. Of primary concern is the mussel's tendency to attach to water intakes, a practice that could lead to expensive irradication operations. Buoys in Lake St. Calir, Cole-Misch said, have been known to sink, weighed down as they are by Zebra Mussels.

Mussels.

Both the mussel and the River Ruffe "multiply incredibly fast (and are) changing the food chain tremendously," Cole-Misch said. "We don't yet have a predator for (either of them)."

dously," Cole-Misch said, "we contry tey have a predator for (cither of them)."

The lakes' most pressing problem, however, is toxic contamination. Scientists have found more than 1,000 chemicals in the Great Lakes that shouldn't be there in the quantities they are. "Most of these are extremely persistent chemicals that may last for years." Cole-Misch said. Arsente, DDT, "Cole and Cadmium are just four of the them to the control of the c

Lakes fish were healther on average.

Cole-Misch said her organization works mostly through the governments of the United States and Canada, but hig government can't solve all our problems.

"Government can help, but I think the cilizens are the keys to the success," she said. "We can all play a vital role in how we educate each other and how we educate ourselves."

Although Cole-Misch told ber audience of perhaps 20 people the time has come for "drastic action," she stopped short of advocating civil disobedience a la Earth First! and Greenpage.

"For my professional life, I'm, going about as far as I can today (by giving this lecture)," Cole-Misch said. "In my personal life I may go pest that."

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In Oakland County, West Bloomfield Township and Rochester Hills have adopted wetlands protection ordinances.

a small audience at an Oakland Community College, Orchard Ridge campus, seminar on the environment last week.

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Usually found along coasts, at the
edge of lakes, mouths of rivers or in
ow-lying fields, wetlands can take
the form of swamps, begs, marshes
or wet meadows. They are home to a
lot of plants and animals, a spawning ground for fish and a necessary
pit stop for migratory waterfoul like
whistling swans and buffeheads.

Harris noted that 70 percent of

Michigan's wetlands have been destroyed. And of the 3 million plus acres remaining, some people are filling them in as long as they think the Department of Natural Resources isn't looking.

WHILE PATTING the DNR on its back for doing "a tremendous job given the resources they have," Harris said an awful lot of cheating goes on behind the agency's back. "What they would need to do a per-fect job is to have somebody almost

every place in the state."
Harris urged her audience to phose the DNR whenever they see someone filling in a wettands. Sometimes, however, the DNR will allow a developer to wipe out a welloam a developer to wipe out a welloam wellands somewhere else. This is called mitigation and the developer is usually required to build the replacement wellands twice the size of the one he destroys.

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the one he destroys.
While militation might help the
While militation gain of adding
500,000 additional welland acres,
flarris questions the viability of
man-made wetlands.
"In five or six years, we may have
something that (just) looks like av
wellands," she said. "We need many
more experiments at lower risk."
Harris suggested the state should
buy former wetlands areas from private owners and put the wellands
back where they were to begin with.

WHILE THE Goemaere-Anderson Wetlands Protection Act of 1979 goes a long way in preserving Michi-gan's wetlands, some communities don't feel it's restrictive enough. Several have established local wet-lands ordinates that lace more nolands ordinances that place more re-strictions on developers than the

strictions on developers than the state does.
In Oakland County, West Bloomfield Township and Rochester Hills have adopted wetlands protection ordinances. While West Bloomfield's ordinance is considered the more restrictive, Rochester Hills is being sued by a developer over its more communities are deciding that it's well worth the cost," Harris said.
Government regulation of wetlands is well and good, Harris sug-

gested, but environmental education in public schools is important too. Schools, she said, should have pro-grams to teach kids the importance of the environment, including wet-

lands.
The Bloomfield Hills resident has the Bloomieta Hitis resident has been active environmentally since the early 1970s. A longtime member of her 20-year-old organization, she has been its director the last four

"WE'VE MADE tremendous prog-ress in addressing the most obvious (environmental) problems," Harris said. "But the more difficult prob-lems are the ones we're dealing with now. This is going to be a challenge probably greater than any we've met."

Anyone wishing to find out more about the East Michigan Environ-mental Action Council can call Harris at 258-5188.

268-3440

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