

**By Ralph R. Echtinaw**  
staff writer

Wetlands absorb and process pollutants like phosphorous, disease-causing germs, toxic metals, pesticides and grease; 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 Action Council, spoke about wetlands to

# Great Lakes need work

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

"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 next that."

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

Usually found along coasts, at the edge of lakes, mouths of rivers or in

edge of lakes, mouths of rivers or in low-lying fields, wetlands can take the form of swamps, bogs, 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 waterfowl like whistling swans and buffleheads.

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 perfect job is to have somebody almost

every place in the state."

Harris urged her audience to phone the DNR whenever they see someone filling in a wetlands. Sometimes, however, the DNR will allow a developer to wipe out a wetlands area if he agrees to create another wetlands somewhere else. This is called mitigation and the developer is usually required to build the replacement wetlands twice the size of the one he destroys.

While mitigation might help the state toward its goal of adding 500,000 additional wetland acres, Harris questions the viability of man-made wetlands.

"In five or six years, we may have something that (just) looks like a wetlands," she said. "We need many more experiments at lower risk."

Harris suggested the state should buy former wetlands areas from pri-

private owners and put the wetlands back where they were to begin with.

She said the places where wetlands naturally occur offer the best chance for their survival.

**WHILE THE** Goemaere-Anderson Wetlands Protection Act of 1979 goes a long way in preserving Michigan's wetlands, some communities don't feel it's restrictive enough. Several have established local wetlands ordinances that place more restrictions 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 recently enacted ordinance. "Many

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 programs to teach kids the importance of the environment, including wetlands.

The Bloomfield Hills 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 years.

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

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

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