

Environmentalists: Revisions muddy water act

BY SANDRA ARMSTRONG
STAFF WRITER

Local environmental groups are at odds with congressional attempts to rewrite the national Clean Water Act, an effort receiving particular concern after the closure of eight Oakland County lakes recently.

"It's hard to gauge what will happen," said Paul Wentachler, of the Huron River Watershed Council. "In our opinion, it will severely roll back improved water quality."

Wentachler said his organization hoped the changes to the 1972 legislation, which were recently approved by the House of Representatives, would not be approved by the U.S. Senate. "The president has promised to veto it, but there will be changes due to the political climate," he said.

Likely to change are timetables or standards for compliance in achieving acceptable clean water levels, he said.

Republican Congressman Joseph Knollenberg of Bloomfield Township, speaking through his press secretary Trent Wisecup, said that he voted for the revisions to maintain a commitment to environmental protection of the nation's waterways, while "restoring common sense to environmental protection." Knollenberg, whose district includes much of western Wayne and Oakland counties, added that "cost-benefit analysis and risk assessment ensure that the changes made are based on sound science" and maintain protection of the waterways while providing for a strong economy.

Vote on the revision was 240 to 185 in favor, with 45 Democrats joining Republicans to approve passage of HR 961.

Also voting in favor of the changes was Dick Chrysler. Those opposing it from this area were Dale Kildee, Sander Levin, Bart Stupak and Lynn Rivers.

"We urge Senators (Carl) Levin

and (Spencer) Abraham to reject the House bill and work to strengthen the existing law," said Sherril Harrison from The Public Interest Research Group in Michigan.

HR 961 revisions

Harrison stepped in a press release that the House weakened the Clean Water Act by allowing industry to violate the law by arguing that their violations were "merely statistical irregularities."

Furthermore, she said the changes will allow more discharge of toxins and sewage in waterways, remove up to 80 percent of wetlands from federal protection and create "numerous special interest loopholes."

Wisecup said that Knollenberg was specifically concerned with bringing the Clean Water Act in line with unfunded mandate legislation, requiring that programs costing states more than \$100 million be paid for. The congressman also was reported to be concerned that those whose property is devoted 20 percent or greater to wetlands be compensated.

Also concerned about the removal of wetlands areas is Erich Ditschman, who is president of the Rochester Hills-based Clinton River Watershed Council. "We have concerns with wetlands that are critically important for controlling water quality" and preservation of various species, the Great Lakes initiative (which would include Lake St. Clair) and changes that would make compliance "more voluntary than mandatory."

Decision pending

Noting that the Clinton Watershed Council includes both government agencies and businesses, Ditschman said the group will be trying to "firm up" its position on the Clean Water Act during a public hearing at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 12, in Rochester Hills City Hall, Livernois and Avon roads. Key speakers

will be Tim Eder from the National Wildlife Federation and Tracey Mullan, who is director of the Great Lakes for the State of Michigan. Spokesmen were invited from General Motors and Ford, Ditschman said, but they were unable to attend because of shutdown time for the automakers.

A second issue to be discussed is the "takings issue," in which government could take over private property.

River systems in southeastern Michigan, such as the Rouge, the Raisin, the Clinton and the Huron, face varying problems that are much the same as are faced by infrastructures in the towns they flow through. Older, urbanized communities with crumbling roads and sewers also have more problems because of sewer overflows and point-source pollution (direct location of contamination).

Along the Rouge, which runs through 48 southeastern Michigan communities on its 128-mile path, efforts to clean up the river have been on going for more than 20 years. "The amount of water from the river is decreasing each year, and in Southfield, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation jointly began an improvement project in 1986 whereby the river would clean itself."

Improving quality

But "the Huron is in generally better shape. It doesn't have contaminated sediment," Wentachler said. "The water quality is typical of an agricultural area. Urban areas have construction sediment."

The 903-square-mile Huron River system has 80 point-sources of contamination, but many of those are cooling systems. Of those are the counties of Oakland, Livingston, Washtenaw, Ingham, Wayne, Monroe and Jackson.

CLEAN WATER ACT VIOLATORS Top 10 States in Significant Non-Compliance

Rank	State	#Major Facilities	# In SNC	% In SNC
1	Texas	597	147	24.6
2	S. Carolina	193	97	50.3
3	Pennsylvania	403	92	22.8
4	Ohio	292	91	31.2
5	New York	366	77	21.0
6	Louisiana	253	65	25.7
7	Indiana	181	57	31.5
8	Michigan	184	50	27.2
9	Alabama	225	49	21.8
10	New Jersey	201	49	24.4

Water quality on the Clinton system is actually improving, Ditschler said. "Before the Clean Water Act, you wouldn't want to be near (the river). You couldn't find a live fish in it. It was pretty dismal."

Now that there has been improvement, Ditschler worries that officials aren't recognizing "what the cost would be to clean up" the river if the trend were reversed on the 700-square-mile system. He noted that the biggest problem is sources of pollution left (waste water treatment plants) and roughly 12 cooling plant sources, which are "not of concern."

PIRGIM said, in its news release, that according to Environmental Protection Agency statistics, 50 of the major water polluters in Michigan were in significant non-compliance with the Clean Water Act. And 27 municipal facilities and 23 industrial

facilities were in significant non-compliance at least once.

Summarizing its concern about water quality in a press release was the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, which said: "Areas of progress in water quality were

few in the past year while fouling of the beaches on Lake St. Clair with decaying vegetation and high bacterial counts from combined sewer overflows dramatized the need for water quality protection program."

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OCC chancellor steps into Auburn Hills job

Dr. Patsy Calkins, chancellor of Oakland Community College, has moved into the vacant office of the Auburn Hills Campus president for the summer.

"It will give me first-hand knowledge of the campus. This knowledge will be helpful as we interview and select a new president," she said.

Dr. Richard Saunders, 60, retired June 30 as president of Auburn Hills, one of five campuses

in the OCC system. Saunders continues to work under a personal services contract to assist in the operation of the Advanced Technology Center until 1995, when he plans to move to Arizona.

Calkins said a committee of administrators, staff, union officials and students will draft qualifications for the presidency of Auburn Hills, where OCC's technology programs are offered. The job will be posted nationally in September and filled around June of 1996.

Calkins said she will continue to develop the business and industrial contacts that are important to Auburn Hills. As chancellor, she works out of the George A. Bee Administrative Center in Bloomfield Hills.

A business educator from Texas, Calkins has occupied every rung on the higher education ladder, from faculty member to department chair to dean and vice

president. "It will be useful to experience what people who work for me are doing," she added.

Saunders has returned from Sunderland, England, where he spoke to and was the guest of the International Automotive Conference.

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