

Officials: Inland lakes



Jeff Krcmarik of the Washtenaw County Environmental Health Division shares a case study on a local inland lake ordinance adopted in the county.

**By John Hummer
Brooklyn Exponent
staff writer**

Michigan: Land of 11,000 lakes with 1,250 townships and 83 counties who all share a role in keeping our inland lakes clean for future generations.

Last week, a gathering of local officials and concerned citizens learned in depth the benefits of inland lakes to communities, the regulations that govern them, and the opportunities for enhancing protection at the local level thanks to a workshop organized by the Van Buren Conservation District, and co-sponsored by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, and the Michigan Lake and Stream Associations. The workshop was funded in part with an Environmental Protection Agency Wetlands Program Development grant.

"We're trying to reach out to local governments and community members who are passionate about their inland lakes and trying to give them tools that they need to protect those in their communities," said Erin Fuller of the Van Buren Conservation District and workshop coordinator. "We also had a lot of lakefront property owners and lake association members here. I think that's where a lot of this starts. That's where people have the passion — they're passionate about their lakes and they'll take this information back to their communities and officials. Hopefully it will snowball."

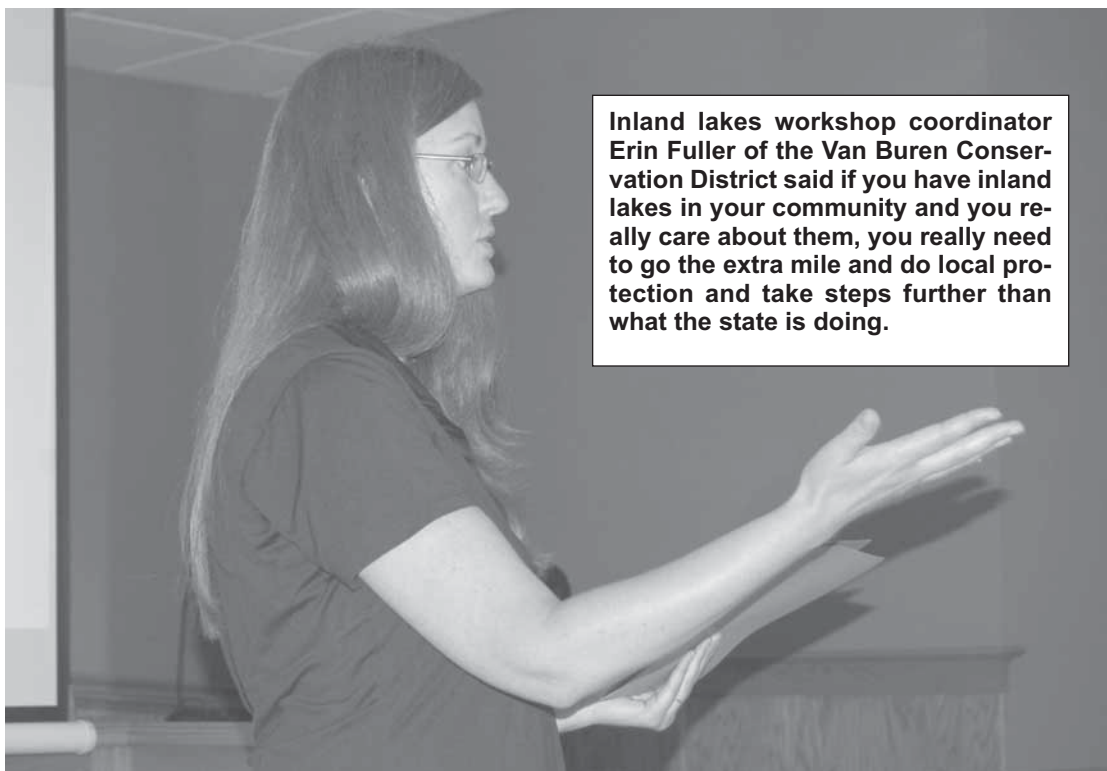
At the July 21 workshop titled *Protecting Michigan's Inland Lakes: Lake and Wetland Protection Tools for Local Governments* at the Franklin Township hall, participants learned the importance

of inland lakes and wetlands and the existing legal framework for protecting them.

"Michigan is one of two states that have the authority to administer Section 404 (federal level) wetlands permits through state law," said Amy Berry, wetlands policy analyst with MDEQ and one of the workshop's speakers. Part 303 of the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act is Michigan's wetlands protection statute while Part 301 of MNREPA governs the state's inland lakes and streams.

"If you go through our permitting process, you'll find that we work with other programs to make sure all of the laws are covered before a project is permissible," Berry said.

Berry set the stage for workshop topics on how, at the local level, inland lakes, streams and



Inland lakes workshop coordinator Erin Fuller of the Van Buren Conservation District said if you have inland lakes in your community and you really care about them, you really need to go the extra mile and do local protection and take steps further than what the state is doing.

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Kris Olsson of the Huron River Watershed Council advised workshop participants that the more natural features ordinances a community has is a more proactive way of keeping development out of those natural features.

wetlands can be protected either in conjunction with state laws or protecting them at the same level but being able to tailor them to meet local needs and community goals.

"Local governments have the option to be more stringent than state law by enacting ordinances that are laid out in Part 303 [of MRNEPA] that basically lays the groundwork for what is allowed under local ordinances," said Berry. "In Michigan, we regulate specific wetlands. Just because it's a wetland doesn't necessarily mean it's regulated by the state. There are some gaps that local governments can fill by enacting a local wetland ordinance. We have model ordinances available that they can use as a starting point."

Marcy Colclough of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission took workshop participants more deeply into local wetlands ordinances, natural features setbacks, and other options for local protection of inland lakes and wetlands. Some of the options she reviewed included site-plan review regulations, linking-permit approvals, stormwater management, open space zoning and conservation design, septic system ordinances, weed ordinances, watercraft and "keyhole" ordinances, and aquatic invasive species ordinances.

"Having a wetlands ordinance, having a natural features setback ordinance, having a stormwater ordinance, and others – really once you get it into the administrative part of the township's policies – it's really not that much more than what the township is already doing as part of their site-plan review process," said Kris Olsson, a staff member of the Huron River Watershed Council. Olsson works with many local units of government in that watershed in developing ordinances.

"What I tell people is if you really care about the lakes in your community, the water quality, and natural areas – if you leave it up to the state and federal government to protect what's important to you locally, it's not going to be protected."

**Erin Fuller,
Van Buren Conservation District**

"The more natural features ordinances a community has is a more proactive way of keeping development out of those natural features," Olsson said. "Developers would just rather not do the extra paperwork. There usually ways to design your development so you're avoiding those natural features."

"Administratively and politically, once people realize it's really not that much different than what they're already going through, it's really pretty smooth. There haven't been many lawsuits; it's not much of a legal problem for a township."

"What I tell people is if you really care about the lakes in your community, the water quality, and natural areas – if you leave it up to the state and federal government to protect what's important to you locally, it's not going to be protected," said Fuller. "Their standards are minimum standards that offer a base level of protection. If you have these assets in your community and you really care about them, you really need to go the extra mile and do local protection and take steps further than what the state is doing."

"We want to keep our lakes

clean and healthy and that's what people who live on the lakes want, too. We try to emphasize that being proactive in keeping your lake clean and healthy is always cheaper and easier than being reactive. Doing some education up front and putting in some ordinances can be hard work, but it's going to be way easier than having to deal with problems later on if you haven't been proactive."

Scott Brown, executive director of the Michigan Lake and Stream Associations, echoed Fullers sentiments.

"People who live on inland lakes play an important role in saving our lakes for future generations by working with local governments and lake associations. We're trying to encourage local governments to adopt some of these ordinances to help protect lakes and we're encouraging our lake associations to encourage their local governments to do that. You need people involved."

For more information, contact Erin Fuller of the Van Buren Conservation District at 269-657-4030 ext. 112 or erin.fuller@mi.nacdnet.net.

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DNR accepting aps for aquatic habitat improvements

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources announced its next round of funding for the Aquatic Habitat Grant Program. There is approximately

\$1,250,000 available for this year's program, which is focused on funding projects that protect intact aquatic habitat and rehabilitate degraded habitat.

Funded projects will emphasize the rehabilitation of degraded aquatic resources; development of self-sustaining aquatic communities that provide for continuing recreational opportunities and natural resource-based economies, and development of strong relationships, partnerships and new expertise with respect to aquatic habitat protection and recovery. Projects can address issues on streams, rivers, inland lakes or the Great Lakes.

Funding is available through an open, competitive process to local, state, federal and tribal governments, nonprofit groups and individuals for single- and multiple-year projects. Minimum grant amounts will be set at \$25,000 with the maximum amount being the amount of funds available for the grant

cycle. Smaller projects within the same watershed addressing similar issues and system processes can, if necessary, be bundled into a single grant proposal package in order to reach minimum grant amount requirements.

All applicants must complete and submit a three-page pre-proposal form for review by the DNR's Fisheries Division. Pre-proposals must be postmarked no later than Aug. 28. Applicants will be notified by Sept. 30 of the outcome of their pre-proposal and, if successful, will be invited to submit a full application. Please note an invitation to submit a full application does not guarantee project funding.

This grant program is funded by revenues from fishing and hunting license fees. The detailed program handbook (including timeline and pre-proposal guidelines) is available at www.michigan.gov/dnr-grants under the fisheries section.

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