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News from Save Our Shoreline, Inc.

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House Passes Beach Maintenance Bill

BAY CITY, Michigan – April 10, 2003 – Save Our Shoreline today is applauding the passage of H.B. 4257 by a vote of 64 to 43, a bill which would clarify the rights of Michigan shoreline owners to continue beach maintenance as they have done for decades. The bill is a response to strained interpretations of law by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality starting in 1998, and subsequent enforcement aimed at curtailing beach maintenance activities. Those enforcement efforts included the mailing of letters to hundreds of shoreline residents, threatening them with legal action, fines and criminal penalties if they continue their beach-maintenance activities.

“We are extremely pleased with the passage of the bill, and the overwhelming expression of support we have received from our legislators,” said Ernie Krygier, SOS President. SOS would especially like to recognize the efforts of the bill’s leaders in the house, such as Rep. Brian Palmer (R), the primary sponsor of the bill; Rep. Dale Sheltrown (D), who testified twice in favor of the bill; Rep. Tom Meyer (R), who used his influence both in committee and on the house floor; Howard Walker (R); and Jennifer Elkins (D), who fulfilled her campaign promise to support shoreline residents. The bill received extraordinary attention from the House Committee on Great Lakes and Tourism, which devoted an entire afternoon to hearings on the bill before recommending it to the full house by a vote of 5 to 1. SOS applauds the committee for its attention to the issue.

Although retaining its main thrust, the original bill was fine-tuned after extensive discussions between the bill’s sponsors, the MDEQ and the Governor’s office. Changes include the addition of language that clarifies that the bill would not apply to “environmental areas,” which are areas which, as a result of studies, are deemed by the MDEQ as “necessary for the preservation and maintenance of fish and wildlife.” Approximately 50% of the shoreline of the Saginaw Bay has been previously designated as “environmental areas,” as are other vast expanses of Michigan’s Great Lakes shoreline. The designation does not apply to Michigan’s traditional beaches. The bill also clarifies that beach maintenance activities must yield to state and federal endangered species laws. Finally, the bill now includes some definitions of terms, such as “grooming.” “As the situation currently exists, these are changes that we can probably live with,” said Krygier. “Our mission statement calls for a proper balance between man and nature in and around waterfront property, and we have always supported the preservation of our true wetland areas, which were inventoried by the MDEQ long ago, and beaches were never part of that inventory,” said Krygier.

The MDEQ asserts that as a result of low water, “previously unknown” beach vegetation is re-establishing itself along Michigan’s Great Lakes shoreline. SOS argues that the new beach vegetation in many areas is the result of increased fertilizers, sewage discharges, other pollutants, zebra mussels, and non-native, invasive species, such as phragmites australis (giant reed). SOS cites the Bay City State Recreation Area—for decades one of Michigan’s most popular beaches, and now a vast swamp—as a case in point. “We don’t know why these agencies, who are supposed to protect our waters, are ignoring the harm these invaders are causing on our beaches,” said Krygier.

SOS anxiously awaits consideration by the Senate. Representative James Barcia (D) and 14 other co-sponsors have already presented the bill in the Senate. Barcia also testified before the House Committee in favor of the bill. Other supporters of the bill include the Bay Area Chamber of Commerce; the West Michigan Tourist Council; the Michigan Association of Realtors; the Mackinac Area Visitors Bureau, the National Federation of Independent Business, and others. If passed by the Senate and signed by Governor Granholm, the bill will become law.

Founded in 2001, Save Our Shoreline is a nonprofit membership basis corporation of 1,650 households committed to the preservation of beaches and waterfront areas, and to the protection of rights to maintain beaches and waterfront areas. Those interested in Save Our Shoreline can find more information at <<http://www.saveourshoreline.org/>> or by calling (989) 667-2910. For more information about this press release, contact Ernie Krygier at (989) 793-3711.

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