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UW Sea Grant Program

43 Per Cent of People In 15 Coastal Counties

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(First of Series)

The nation's coastal area needs particular and immediate attention.

That was one of the conclusions of the Stratton Commission, more formally, the Commission on Marine Science, Engineering and Resources — in its report to Congress in 1969.

The commission itself grew out of growing concern in the mounting pressures on the nation's rapidly changing economic patterns in and the recognized deterioration of the general deterioration of the nation's shorelines.

Most of the nation's trade and industry and half its population are located near the coast, one of the most biologically productive areas in nature.

In Wisconsin, where most of the state's border is non-coastal, some 43 per cent of the population is concentrated into the 15 coastal counties.

Among the many and sometimes compelling demands made on the coastal zone are industrial and urban development, waste disposal, power and water supply, and recreation, industrial and commercial fishing, and mineral production and spoilage.

Amidst all these cross pressures, the coastal zone has become a storehouse for the nation's pollution of all sorts are primary victims of all sorts are the lands, marshes, estuaries and beaches, lake bottoms and shorelines into which the nation's factories, municipalities and homes dump their wastes.

Coastal wetlands, rivers and streams and the land areas are prime places in which coastal waters are contaminated with such notorious substances as the DDE, DDT and PCBs.

Following up on the recommendations of the Stratton Commission, Congress passed the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, encouraging states to develop comprehensive plans to manage, develop, preserve and protect their coastal areas.

Specifically, the act provides funds for the preparation of such plans and for the administration of coastal zone management programs.

Last June, the Office of Coastal Zone Management (OCZM) within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) awarded the state of Wisconsin a grant to begin developing a coastal management program for its Lake Michigan and Lake Superior coastline. The state was awarded another $186,000 grant for the current year.

Allen H. Miller, administrator of the Wisconsin Coastal Zone Management Program in the State Planning Office of the Department of Administration (DOA). The DOA is the lead agency in the state's program.

Although there are numerous legislative and technical studies being done by various agencies and by the University of Wisconsin, Miller said the primary problem for the next few years is administrative.

He said many local planners and even some regional planners were instinctively resistant to the program, fearing federal or state domination of coastal planning.

"Primarily, local resistance is the think there's enough people didn't understand the intent. It was viewed as a land use program initiated by the state as federal legislation to help in the administration of the laws, as well as the tools we are handling as the tools they are."

At the end of the initial three-year planning stage, legislation and agencies are scheduled to handle the coastal program. It may be necessary to put in new management legislation to do this, Miller said.

If the reverse is decided, time may be called for. Gov. Patrick Lucey has appointed a 25-member Lower Lake Michigan Coastal Coordinating and Advisory Council co-chaired by State Senator Dave Stern and Harry Graves, State Planning Director. The council includes representatives of county, city and village governments, three regional planning commissions, the University system, and state agencies.

Its duties are to set program direction and to advise the Governor on matters of coastal policy.

At this stage, the council has moved in on the problems of recreational pressures, power plant siting, public access, development, water level levels.

The coasts along Lake Michigan and Lake Superior are quite distinct, and the relative importance of these issues varies with each. The Superior coast is largely unpopulated, is largely privately owned, and is largely undeveloped. Lake Michigan has a large metropolitan area with its two large communities at Green Bay and Milwaukee.

The council's co-chairmen have appointed another 30-member committee — a citizens' committee consisting of representatives of identifiable interest groups in the coastal region, and representatives of local governments.

The committee is to function as a liaison between the various interest groups and the council in coastal policy, the committee is also expected to provide a linkage to the general public.

And, to head off the tendency of such citizens advisory groups to become nearly rubber stamps for the real policy advisers, the committee has been given its own staff, a coastal management specialist housed in UW-Extension.

The rather-stormy spectre has faded away as observers have noted that the citizens committee is far more active than anything, more aggressive than the council.

It was admitted that the institutional structure of the new state coastal zone program is complex. But no less extensive and complex than the governmental coordination and public participation in the program stage, the DOA's planning will dissolve after the first year.

One-third of the program's first-year funding was tied up in public participation and information.

In the long run, said Beyer, the federal government, by participating in the program — as opposite to engage in factual opportunity to engage public attention, and make broad-based decisions on how we wish to deal with the forces of change affecting the coastal zone.

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