

[https://www.record-eagle.com/news/local\\_news/elevated-great-lakes-water-levels-cause-rising-permit-applications-for-shoreline-stabilization/article\\_92bdf94-5746-11eb-b80f-a3c00e5745b2.html](https://www.record-eagle.com/news/local_news/elevated-great-lakes-water-levels-cause-rising-permit-applications-for-shoreline-stabilization/article_92bdf94-5746-11eb-b80f-a3c00e5745b2.html)

Environment

## Elevated Great Lakes water levels cause rising permit applications for shoreline stabilization

By Sheri Mcwhirter [smcwhirter@record-eagle.com](mailto:smcwhirter@record-eagle.com)

Jan 17, 2021



A crew from Team Elmer's demolishes a Benzie County cabin perched near the edge of an eroding Lake Michigan bluff. The cabin, which dates back to the 1930s in the Congregational Summer Assembly grounds, has been owned by John Miller and family since the 1960s. High water levels have eroded the bluff to about three feet from the cabin, forcing its demolition before it fell into the lake.

Record-Eagle/Jan-Michael Stump



TRAVERSE CITY — It's busy work fighting back the Great Lakes.

High water levels on not only Lake Michigan but all of the Great Lakes have kept both federal shoreline regulators and contractors busy as homeowners try to halt erosion and save as much dry land as possible. It's a challenging battle against a formidable foe, officials and others agree.

Federal permits for shoreline work on the Great Lakes are managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which regulates projects intended to stabilize the lakeshore and keep the oft-mighty waters from washing away land still remaining. Officials said the elevated water levels are the obvious cause of a spike in requests from lakeshore homeowners.

In fact, the workload for the 2020 fiscal year amounted to more than twice the typical number of permit applications, said Kerrie Kuhne, permit evaluation chief for the Corps' Detroit District western branch. The district processed about 4,700 permits during the 2020 fiscal year, she said.

Some situations are more pressing than others, Kuhne said, so the permit team has to "triage" the applications.

"Unfortunately, that is danger to a house over danger to a deck," she said. "It's a balance between our normal routine of first in, first out, with pulling people out of line and expediting some."

Among those who received an expedited permit was Dave LaGuire, who hired a local contractor to stabilize a steep bank and save his home on Old Mission Peninsula. He said federal, state and county permits arrived within a week.

More than 100 cubic yards of fill dirt and 100 tons of limestone helped to secure the steep bank and keep the house safe at 15 feet from the water's edge. It's a common effort around the brimming Great Lakes shorelines.

"Ours worked very well," LaGuire said, adding both county and federal regulators showed up about a month after the work finished to inspect the outcome.

The project was successful enough that four neighbors on one side and four neighbors on the other all hired the same contractor to do similar work on their steep banks to the shoreline, LaGuire said.

Nate McManus, owner of Oliver and Company Property Solutions of Traverse City, said the work in that neighborhood turned out well. He also said he has a long list of similar projects to come.

"We stay steady. Our biggest limitation is the permitting process, honestly," he said.

McManus said he has permits pending for five projects already designed and ready to start, plus another 10 just starting the application process. He said it seems to take between three and five months to wait for the permits to arrive.

But the Old Mission Peninsula-based contractor said he understands the surge in permit applications will cause backlogs.

“It’s not like they have twice as much staff. They are limited,” McManus said.

And it’s not only permit applications that have risen, but officials said also the number of compliance and enforcement investigations are up about 15 percent. Most of the increased cases come down to a matter of timing and urgency, said Don Reinke, USACE Detroit District’s chief of compliance and enforcement.

“People don’t want to wait and have a contractor lined up,” he said.

Only rarely do regulators require structures to be disassembled, Reinke said, such as in cases in which seawalls are built perpendicular to the shoreline that block the natural shifting of sands. And while fines can be levied against property owners, he said there are other ramifications government regulators can’t do much about.

“If you do work without a permit, people in groups are suing each other,” Reinke said.

Not every time can shoreline stabilization efforts actually halt the effects of erosion; this week brought the first Benzie County home to be demolished before it tumbled into Lake Michigan, a bluff-top cabin that was a mere 3 feet from the edge of a long drop to the lakeshore below.

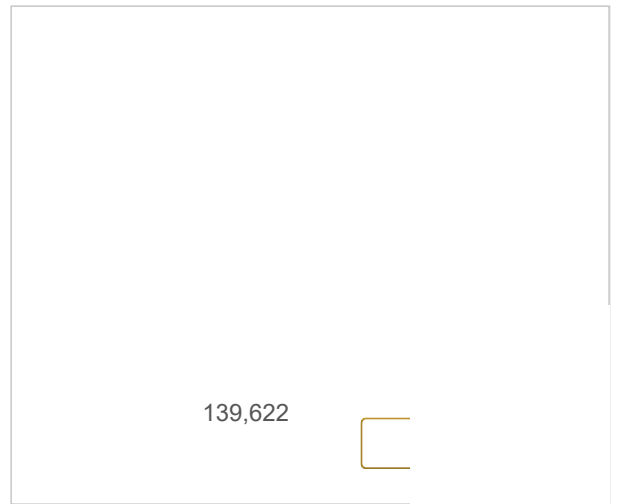
The property lost 5 feet during one stormy November weekend and a crack formed on the cottage’s concrete block foundation, as previously reported in the Record-Eagle.



[Rising waters](#)

## TRENDING VIDEO

5 Easy and Delicious Crock Pot Meatball Appetizer R...



139,622



## Record-Eagle Events

See All Events Add your event

Tue, Sep 28

Tue, Sep 28

Tue, Sep 28

Tue, Sep 28

Tue,



**Foreword: Solo Exhibition by Patrick Earl Hammie**

Crooked Tree Arts Center

**Join Scouts**

Grand Traverse Conservations...

**Souper Tuesday @ UCC**

The Village at Grande Traverse

**Money Management Workshop**

Virtual Zoom Workshop

**Cha Stor**

Croc



TUE  
28

WED  
29

THU  
30

FRI  
1

SAT  
2

SUN  
3

MON  
4

TUE  
5

WED  
6

THU  
7

FRI  
8

SAT  
9

SUN  
10

**Sheri McWhirter**

Reporter

