

## **Editorial: Michigan must fight for its role on Great Lakes**

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The Obama administration is developing a massive plan for conserving and managing all of the nation's ocean territory and the Great Lakes. As this process moves forward, state officials must make sure they maintain control of the Great Lakes.

Recommendations for this grand master plan will come from the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, made up of representatives from an array of agencies in the government's sprawling bureaucracy. Some claim it lays the groundwork for a federal takeover that could strip Michigan and other Great Lakes states of their right to regulate fishing, recreation and resources.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm and our state and federal lawmakers have a duty to ask questions and make sure the federal government isn't usurping authority over the giant freshwater lakes that define our region and state. The \$2.2 billion the administration is dangling for Great Lakes restoration is not worth losing control of this vital resource.

A statement from the White House's Council on Environmental Quality in December said the task force is supposed to develop a "framework" that would lead to regional planning among federal, state, local and Native-American tribal authorities, with comments from citizens. To many, that's bureaucratese for added intrusion by Uncle Sam.

Anglers and firms that cater to them are particularly concerned that federal regulations could replace state fishing rules and harm a multibillion-dollar recreational industry that accounts for more than 27,000 jobs in Michigan.

As precedent, they point to the National Marine Sanctuaries program, under which the Bush administration declared 120,000 square miles of water adjacent to the Hawaiian Islands off-limits to fishermen. They also note that charter boat operators in the East fear they'll be driven out of business by a quota system the federal government imposed, beginning in 2008, on summer catches of flounder from ocean waters off New York and New Jersey.

There is also concern about the federal government usurping state authority over waterways that link to the Great Lakes.

Some of the verbiage regarding proposed activities in an interim report, issued by the federal task force last December, appears to blur the lines between the role of federal agencies and the management responsibilities of the nine Great Lakes states, according to Tammy Newcomb, research program manager for the Fisheries Division in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

Newcomb says her observation applies only to that part of the report and not to the overall document or the task force.

Others, such as attorney and director Sarah Chasis of the Ocean Initiative in New York, praise the Obama effort as landmark environmental policy. It will guide federal actions on issues ranging from overfishing to ocean acidification and finally bring order to 140 laws and 20 agencies that now govern oceans, coasts and the Great Lakes -- often in ways that are at cross-purposes with each other, Chasis wrote in a September blog on the Natural Resources Defense Council's Web site.

The Obama administration is giving Great Lakes issues more attention than they have received from Washington in many years. But fishermen and others are right to be worried that one result of the White House's interagency ocean policy plan could be new regulations from a level of government that's thrice-removed from the local officials who used to give their issues a friendly hearing.

It's up to Michigan policymakers to fight to keep that from happening.

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