

NEWS RELEASE: Monroe Creek

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LANSING (Dec. 2)—Michigan's Natural Resources Commission was urged today to order a moratorium on all dredging, filling and damming of the state's streams and swamps.

Sierra Club leader Dr. John H. Tanton, a Petoskey surgeon, asked the Commission to declare the "free flowing waters and the wetlands of the state nonrenewable resources, which are endangered by present land development patterns."

In calling on the Commission to order the Department of Natural Resources to refrain from issuing permits to alter the natural character of streams, swamps and lake shores, Dr. Tanton cited a developer's request to dam a small Charlevoix County stream.

The developer, Francis D. Sheldon, proposes to create a 440 acre artificial lake by impounding Monroe Creek and flooding the still wild cedar marsh along its banks. Sheldon owns 1,600 acres along the creek and has submitted plans to the Commission for selling approximately 1,300 cottage or home lots along around shores of the lake, if he is given permission to build the dam.

Sheldon's request has been pending before the Commission since July. DNR Director Ralph MacMullan recommended that Sheldon be given the dam permit last month. The Commission, at that time, tabled MacMullan's recommendation.

State fisheries and wildlife biologists, in a report presented in August, stated the creek is one of the most productive natural trout hatchery and nursery streams in Northern Michigan, and that its bordering swamp is rich in wildlife habitat.

"Lakes can be created from streams," as the Monroe Creek developer proposes, Tanton said. But, he added, "The reverse is not the case. Once a stream is lost it cannot be reclaimed on any human time scale and, to my knowledge, no one has ever proposed the creation of a new stream where none existed before."

Tanton said that Charlevoix County and Township laws now make it illegal for the developer to destroy the natural character of the stream and swamp, unless he gets the

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Commission's approval to flood the area.

If the Commission approves the dam construction permit, he said, it "will actually lower standards" for environmental protection.

If the dam is not allowed by the Commission, Tanton said, the developer will not be able to sell cottage building lots in the swamp or scalp the creek's edge of its cedar trees and ground hemlock. Only by getting Commission approval to flood the valley, he said, can the developer destroy the creek's naturalness and cash in on his investment.

Tanton added that because the developer has already escalated land values in the area, local residents will be forced to pay higher property taxes, and this will accelerate the land "development spiral."

"Needless to say," he explained, "the local interests who help promote schemes such as this one are not the same folks whose taxes are going to be run through the roof by it."

Charlevoix County, he pointed out, is the fastest growing Northern Lake Michigan shoreline county, according to the 1970 census, but has the fourth smallest land area in the state. The county, he added, has about 50 square miles of inland lakes water, plus hundreds of miles of Lake Michigan water, stretching out to the Beaver Islands. The county's economic growth, he said, has increased spectacularly.

Considering these factors, Tanton said, Charlevoix County does not need additional economic growth or land consumption and, maybe, cannot survive it.

Tanton cited a Detroit Free Press Action Line poll, which reported that 82% of the respondents favor more stringent controls on Michigan land use.