

Access to lakefront requires regional approach.

Vision by Mark Reshkin

Lee Botts' opinion concerning the need for much greater public access to our Lake Michigan shoreline is on target -- a need to be met.

This need should be considered using the Quality of Life Council's indicators study, released several months ago.

The indicators' study was a powerful statement on the quality of life in our region and should focus our attention on the data presented, the trends indicated and actions recommended.

But of utmost importance is its recognition of the inter-relatedness of all of the areas of concern and the need for holistic approaches to solving regional problems.

That is what sustainable development is all about -- simultaneously looking at social equity, environmental quality and economic growth.

Increasing access to the shoreline should be considered and evaluated in such a holistic manner.

It involves these sectors simultaneously:

* The indicators report revealed that there are great contrasts in public access from community to community in northwest Indiana. Increasing access requires a regional approach beginning now.

Some of our elected officials talk the talk about such regional approaches but few walk the walk. A commitment to increased public access by the Northwest Initiative, an effort at regional economic growth, should be an integral part of this effort at regional economic development.

Increased access should not be viewed as a process that detracts from economic development. Increased access should be an integral part of this effort at regional economic development along the coast whether it is industrial redevelopment or casino expansion.

* We are a part of metropolitan Chicago for employment, for recreation and for much more and we must improve our transportation infrastructure to take advantage of this proximity and its many and varied recreational activities along both Indiana and Illinois Lake Michigan shorelines.

* We must confront the de factor segregation in our region.

Certainly, this applies to access to the shoreline. Some initial efforts are underway, but they are hardly sufficient. And while environmental quality is improving, much remains to be accomplished. Preventing new pollution is an active effort nowhere needed more than along our shoreline.

Although we will always find new pollutants to manage and alleviate, stopping past pollution has and is occurring and with much success.

Throughout these activities, the focus has strongly been on regulations, monitoring, fines and consent decrees. But as Pogo said about our being the enemy, much of the future pollution prevention effort must come from us as individuals.

Are we willing to change our habits; our stormwater management practices; our efforts in the area's eight cities to end combined sewer overflows: our commitment to improved beach monitoring that is done in less time: and better communicated to the public?

Increasing public access to our shoreline is a quality of life improvement. It should be viewed as increasing economic growth, improving environmental quality and advancing social equity.

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