

## PROPOSED CRYSTAL LAKE BOAT LAUNCH:

# 3 STEPS

## TO IMPROVE PUBLIC ACCESS

- ✓ Downsize launch site
- ✓ Invest in Beulah too
- ✓ Better manage lake recreation

Boat Launch  
Public Hearing

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources proposes to build a boat launch this spring that provides Benzie County residents and visitors improved access to Crystal Lake. The Michigan Land Use Institute supports the general thrust of the state's proposal because public boat access to Crystal Lake is currently limited, and because the magnificent lake belongs to all of the state's people, who should always be able to enjoy it.

The state's work, however, is not done. After studying the issue and meeting many times with shoreline owners, local residents, and with state and local officials, the Institute concludes that the DNR's site design is too big for likely demand and has a larger impact on the lake than necessary. We recommend that the DNR and the community take three additional steps that would benefit the lake, the residents who live by it, and all those who enjoy using it.

### THE INSTITUTE RECOMMENDS:

1. Reducing the size of the boat launch to reflect uncertain demand on a very steep site.
2. Investing in the Village of Beulah's forthcoming beach and boat launch plan.
3. Developing a plan to better manage recreation on Crystal Lake.

### SEND A MESSAGE TO STATE OFFICIALS ON FEBRUARY 25

We urge citizens who care about the lake to attend an important public hearing about the design of the boat launch. (Please see box at right.) Crystal Lake merits a public boat ramp designed and built with the highest standards of quality, foresight, and environmental protection.

The stunningly beautiful lake is a mainstay of Benzie County's economy and cultural heritage. Its clarity, captivating shades of blue, sandy bottom, bluff-lined shore, and sheer vastness set it apart from Michigan's thousands of other inland lakes. Just hearing its name — Crystal Lake — brings smiles to the faces of those who enjoy it. The Michigan Land Use Institute and many Benzie County residents are determined to ensure that a new boat launch does not threaten these values.

*The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality will hold a public hearing at 7 p.m., Wednesday, February 25, at Benzie Central High School, 9300 Homestead Road, in Benzie County. The hearing will take public comment on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' request to fill a wetland and dredge some of the bottom of Crystal Lake for a new boat launch.*

Michigan  
Land Use  
Institute

# THE CHALLENGE: DESIGN AND SIZE

Deciding the shape, size, and location of a large boat launch along the shores of such a marvelous lake is difficult. The DNR initially sought to locate the launch near Crystal Lake's outlet, adjacent to the Railroad Point Natural Area. Citizens opposed the idea because the site contains water-cleansing wetlands and a very popular spot for wading. The DNR eventually agreed; the state, however, still owns the site and could revive its first proposal if this new one is unsuccessful.

The new site also sits on Crystal Lake's south shore, with its entrance about 1.8 miles west of the traffic signal in Benzonia. This site also presents challenges, including a small wetland, a portion of the Betsie Valley Trail, and an extremely steep, 76-foot embankment that would require difficult hikes up and down more than 150 steps between the parking lot and boat ramps.

This plan is also prompting some well-reasoned environmental concerns about dredging, wetland loss, and storm water runoff. Yet the site has real merit: It would protect

boaters from prevailing winds and waves and assure that the outlet near Railroad Point remains untouched.

Anglers and recreational boaters would gain a new, state-owned launch on a lake that has only a few small launches. It could also relieve some of the peak-hour pressure on Beulah's launch site.

After a thorough review, the Institute agrees with the state's position that a more suitable spot does not exist along the lake's heavily developed shoreline — despite the drawbacks mentioned above. The Institute is convinced that the DNR acted reasonably by respecting local residents' concerns about the Railroad Point outlet. We think the state did so again when it agreed to install a high-tech storm water treatment system, apparently a first for a state launch.

The Institute commends the state's efforts to seek a suitable compromise. That's exactly how a state agency should conduct its work. We ask the DNR to continue its openness to improving the proposed launch.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Institute recommends that the DNR take three more crucial steps to improve the new site, enhance Beulah's waterfront, and better manage the lake's sometimes-conflicting recreational uses.

### **Step One: *Reduce the size of the boat launch to reflect uncertain demand on a very steep site.***

The DNR proposes building 100 truck-trailer and 21 non-trailer parking spots on the site's upper level. Seventy-six feet below, at the shoreline, the state would build two double ramps for launching up to four boats at a time. The state based these dimensions on the size of the lake and says it could justify making the project three times larger. But this formula is not based on any survey of actual demand and does not consider how the steep slope will diminish use of the site. The bluff between the upper parking lot and the shoreline drops away sharply — there is a 60 percent grade at one point — and will require walking up and down seven full stories of stairs. Some people are unwilling to make such a climb; some aren't even capable of it. For solo boaters, the challenge is even greater because the long climb will significantly lengthen the time that they must leave their boats unattended.

These serious problems will surely limit interest in the site. So, we recommend that the state cut the site's parking and launching capacity in half — to, respectively, 50 gravel truck-trailer slots and two boat ramps — and then survey actual usage for a few years to see if there's need for additional capacity. The size reduction would also better protect the lake's water quality by reducing dredging and minimizing wetland filling and would reduce initial public investments necessary to get the project moving.

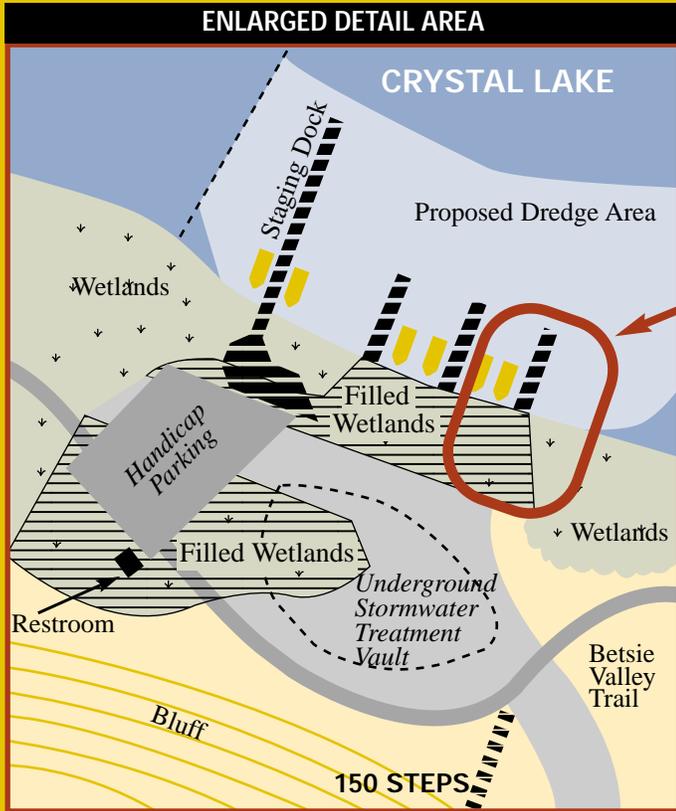
### **Step Two: *Invest in the Village of Beulah's forthcoming beach and boat launch plan.***

The Village of Beulah, which hosts Crystal Lake's finest and largest public beach, is planning to improve its waterfront by establishing more public beach and swim areas, moving leased boat moorings away from shore to floating docks, and revamping its own boat launch. These enhancements will further develop Beulah's active and walkable downtown. We urge the DNR to follow the recommendation of Governor Jennifer Granholm's bipartisan Michigan Land Use Leadership Council to strengthen existing town centers by working with Beulah officials to direct some public dollars toward making the lakeshore even more accessible and enjoyable for recreation of all sorts.

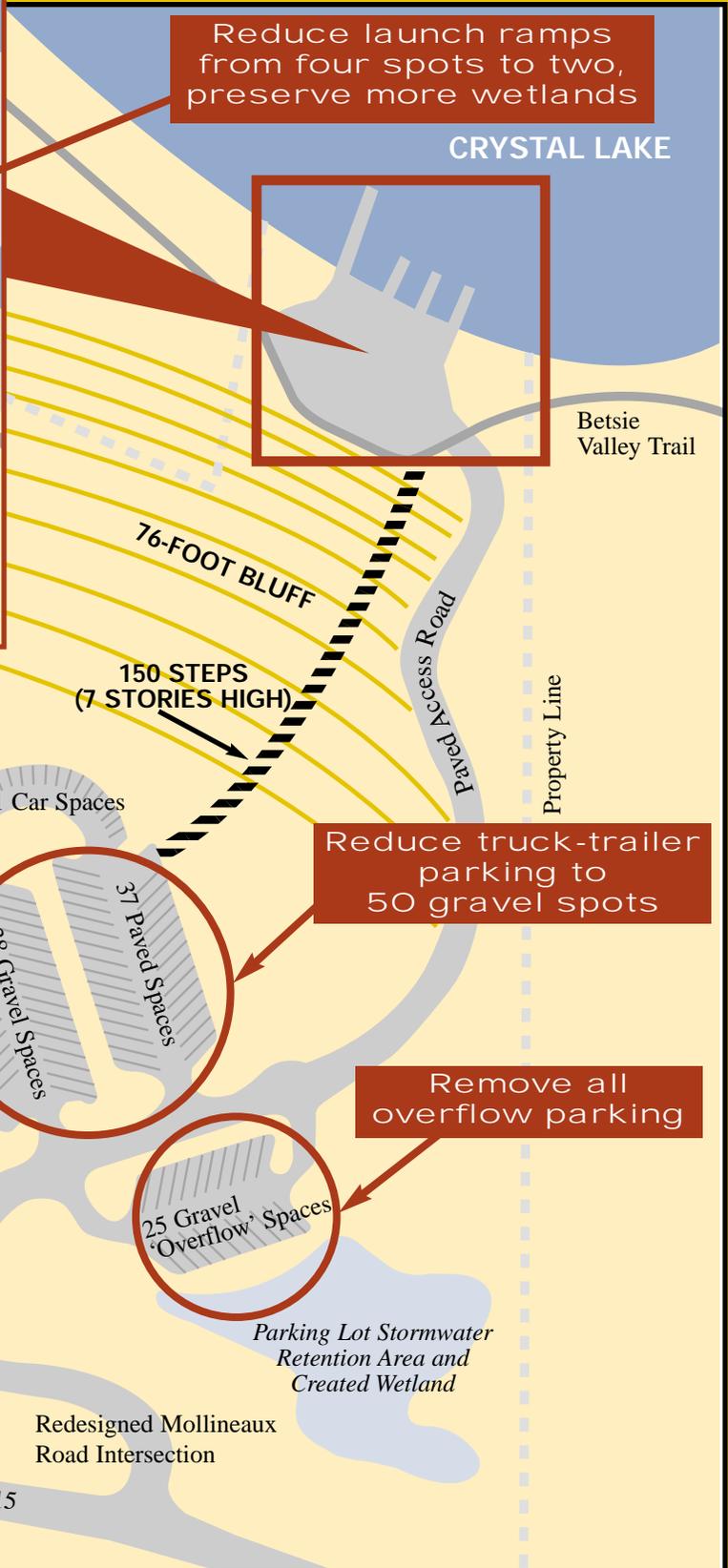
### **Step Three: *Develop a plan to better manage recreation on Crystal Lake.***

With its large sandbars, variety of fish, and nearly 10,000 acres of open water, Crystal Lake accommodates many mixed uses that sometimes conflict with each other. Boaters pulling water skiers or children on inner tubes, anglers seeking a quiet spot, swimmers needing safety from boats and Jet Skis, and beachgoers splashing in the shallows all deserve their own space. Add a new state boat launch and a revitalized Beulah lakeshore and the challenges will grow. That's why the lake needs strengthened rules and enforcement to manage recreational behavior. The DNR should help fund a comprehensive cataloging of existing lake uses and conflicts, as well as a locally driven process to develop a management plan guiding recreational behavior on Crystal Lake. The process would inventory all public and private lake access points, consider how different recreational uses interact and affect the lake's ecology and beauty, and recommend reasonable regulations that protect the health of the lake and its users.

# PROPOSED CRYSTAL LAKE BOAT LAUNCH:

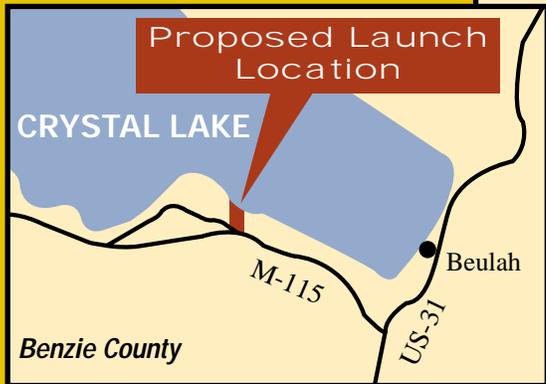


## Institute's Proposed Site Changes to DNR Design



### Basis for Downsizing:

- Current demand at nearby Beulah launch rarely exceeds 30 trailers.
- Requiring boaters to climb the equivalent of a 7-story building will reduce use of this site.
- Scale of state's plan is based on lake size, not on any study of demand.



Proposed launch site is 1.8 miles from the intersection of M-115 and US-31.

Reduce launch ramps from four spots to two, preserve more wetlands

Reduce truck-trailer parking to 50 gravel spots

Remove all overflow parking

Maps: MLU/Gail Dennis. Reference: Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources

# Your voice matters

You can help support the downsizing of the state's proposed Crystal Lake boat launch by attending the **Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's public hearing at 7 p.m., Wednesday, February 25, at Benzie Central High School, 9300 Homestead Road, in Benzie County.** Because Michigan's Wetland Protection Act says that the state DEQ will not allow wetlands to be filled if there is a "feasible and prudent alternative," the Institute believes there is a strong case for building a smaller facility at the same location. In addition, the law says that the DEQ must consider the proposal's "probable impact on recognized historic, cultural, scenic, ecological, or recreational values and on the public health or fish or wildlife." **The DEQ will accept written public comments until Saturday, March 6, 2004.**

## Written comments can be sent (until March 6) to:

Barry Peterman, Michigan Dept. of Environmental Quality  
120 West Chapin St.  
Cadillac, MI 49601-2158  
Email: PETERMAB@michigan.gov  
(231) 775-3960  
Reference MDEQ File No. 03-10-0044-P

## DEQ Electronic Comment page (until March 6):

<http://www.deq.state.mi.us/lwmpnh/commentform.asp?aid=03100044&at=ph>

## For questions about the boat launch's design, contact:

Troy Rife, Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
8015 Mackinaw Trail  
Cadillac, MI 49601  
Email: RIFET@michigan.gov  
(906) 293-5669

## DNR wetland application to DEQ:

PDF format, with drawings of proposed boat launch, etc.: <http://www.deq.state.mi.us/lwmpnh-data/03100044pn.pdf>

## About the Institute

The Michigan Land Use Institute, founded in Benzonia in 1995, is one of America's largest state-based environmental and land use policy organizations. The Institute deploys its 15-member staff to help citizens here at home and throughout Michigan develop more prosperous communities, enhance recreational opportunities, and protect natural resources. The Institute relies on support from its members and from state, regional, and national foundations. Our home office is in downtown Beulah and we have field offices in Traverse City, Lansing, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about us, please call 231-882-4723 or visit our Web site at [www.mlui.org](http://www.mlui.org).

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