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to the Portage Lake Watershed Forever Committee*

For Immediate Release

**STATE APPROVES PORTAGE LAKE WATERSHED FOREVER PLAN
Governor Granholm Salutes Effort in Visit to Onekama**

Onekama, Michigan -- The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) has formally approved the Portage Lake Watershed Forever Plan.

The MDEQ's "seal of approval" opens the door to State, Federal and other sources of financial and technical assistance to protect, preserve and wisely use this high quality 24.6 square mile watershed located in Manistee County. Perhaps even more importantly, Plan approval signals a "call to arms" and provides a blueprint for all interests to protect and manage a water resource treasure for future generations.

Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm congratulated community leaders while in Onekama, Michigan on June 13, 2008 for achieving State approval after a two-year planning effort involving over 150 organizations and individuals. Granholm saluted the effort in a meeting with Mike Acton, chair of the Portage Lake Watershed Forever Plan Executive Committee.

MDEQ approval was contained in a June 3, 2008 letter from the MDEQ. State approval enables applications for financial support to help implement the plan under Section 319 of the Federal Clean Water Act as well as the Clean Michigan Initiative Nonpoint Source Pollution Control program.

"It's a sound and complete Plan, one of the best we've reviewed," said Mike Stifler, head of the MDEQ's District 2 Water Bureau in Cadillac. "From its artesian wells to the 60 foot depths of Portage Lake to the connecting channel to Lake Michigan, the Portage Lake watershed is one of Michigan's water resource treasures. With the continued participation of the community that lives, works and plays in the watershed, this Plan will ensure that this resource is protected, preserved and wisely managed. We look forward to supporting the community during Plan implementation."

The Plan was developed by the community with the assistance of Public Sector Consultants based in Lansing, Michigan. It identifies several threats to the Portage Lake watershed that need attention, including:

- Public health threats from failed septic systems or uncontrolled runoff
- Threats to plants and animals from increased phosphorus pollution due to septic tank failures, landowner lawn fertilization practices and storm water discharges
- Development that is not "watershed friendly." Between 1990 and 2000, the population in Onekama Township that is fully encompassed in the watershed grew by 20%, over three times the state average

The Plan identifies many steps that should be taken to protect, preserve and wisely manage the watershed. They include:

- Testing and monitoring of water quality to detect problems
- Educating property owners about protecting water quality from run-off
- Developing master plans and ordinances that protect the watershed
- Educating lake users about how to avoid spreading invasive species
- Educating property owners about proper use and maintenance of septic systems
- Supporting educational programs at Onekama Consolidated Schools that help the community learn about the watershed
- Advocating for federal funding to support dredging and improvements of the Portage Lake harbor and channel
- Implementing projects that improve recreational opportunities and universal access to the watershed for a variety of uses
- Organizing watershed clean up programs

“We are moving forward to convert the Plan into action,” said Mike Acton, who helped spearhead the effort. “One of the Plan’s priorities was to encourage local governments to develop a joint master plan. And the Village of Onekama and Onekama Township just launched a community-driven process to do just that. Local groups and associations, such as the Portage Lake Association, will ask for volunteers to help begin plan implementation and help keep everyone in our watershed informed of progress and plans. In addition, we have a communications team that is developing all sorts of ways to let people know that the Portage Lake watershed is to be respected, treated with care and developed in ways that are watershed friendly. This is a plan that is by, for and about all who value the Portage Lake Watershed.”



A Portage Lake Watershed Forever Endowment Fund has been created at the Manistee County Community Foundation to provide funding to support implementation of the plan. The Endowment

was created in part in recognition of decreased funding for state and federal programs for watershed management. Contributions to the Endowment are eligible for federal and state income tax deductions.

To review the Portage Lake Watershed Forever Plan or to learn more about the Endowment Fund, go to www.manisteefoundation.org. To participate in implementing the Plan, contact Mike Acton at mikeacton@charter.net.