

Goldenrods Are Indication That Summer Is Winding Down

You know that it's late in the summer, not only because we're all trying to pack too much into a short period of time, and going a bit nuts doing it, but because the asters and goldenrods are blooming, and right now they're blooming in abundance. Some people cringe at the mention of goldenrod, as they think of allergies, sneezing, and stuffy heads, but contrary to popular idea, goldenrods cause little of the hay fever symptoms from which people suffer.

Little of the pollen from goldenrod gets into the air, as the pollen is relatively heavy. Instead of the pollen being

Bridge Officials Seek To Shore up Flaws in Token System

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use of discounted tokens is only part of the revenue problem facing the MBA. Bridge traffic has been declining for seven years, with a resulting decline in fare revenue. While bridge tolls pay for the every-day maintenance of the bridge, larger projects will need to be paid for with other funds, the MBA predicts. The \$10 million shortfall projected for next year, to pay, in part, for the painting project, is a harbinger, members say.

In its current business plan, the MBA will begin next year dipping into an investment fund that contains more than \$28 million to pay for a new, four-year, \$75 million painting project. As toll revenue fails to match increasing maintenance costs, and necessary preservation work on the 50-year-old structure mounts, Mr. Wikol said the MBA will need to take more than \$19.6 million from its investment fund to supplement annual budget needs over the next five years.

"We kind of burn through our capital fund over that period of time," he noted.

A \$200 million deck replacement is planned in 10 years, and that project may have to be funded by a bond sale, said Mr. Sweeney.

More than 80% of the new budget is earmarked for bridge maintenance and preservation. Bridge operations, which include such projects, are completely funded by tolls and investment income. The investment income be about \$1.2 million in 2008, said Mark Haas, the state chief deputy treasurer, who attended the meetings and overseas investments for the MBA. But he noted that as the MBA eats into its investment funds, the \$1.2 million earned each year from those funds also will drop.

"We have tried to keep whatever expenditures that we have control over, such as labor, to a minimum," said Mike Litzner, the chief financial officer at the bridge, in presenting the \$22.4 million budget for 2008. "Purchasing, such as office sup-



Nature Notes

By
Patricia Martin

carried by the wind to cross pollinate, the lovely golden heads of this showy flower attract bees and other insects, which do most of the pollination. While people might be sensitive to the pollens, they probably will not come into

contact with it, as long as they don't stick their noses into a bunch of the flowers. The reason for these flowers getting blamed for allergies, is that at the same time that they bloom, another, much less showy, plant is also flowering,

applies, we keep within the governor's directives." "We face three challenges to look at in 2008, and in the 20-year projections," said Mr. Wikol, who is chairman of the finance committee. With upcoming budget deficits, the MBA can either cut expenses, raise revenues, which is difficult in the declining traffic environment, he said, or look at a combination of both.

"I think, sooner or later we are going to have to address a combination of both," he said.

Fare increases are not being contemplated at this time, however, Mr. Gnodtke told *The St. Ignace News*.

"There have been no discussions of fare increases in the Fares, Fees, and Classifications Committee," he said, "and no meetings are scheduled in the immediate future."

He added, however, "At some point, we will have to find additional revenue. Nothing is off the table."

Possible funding options include seeking a direct appropri-

ation from the legislature, receiving a subsidy from the Michigan Department of Transportation, tapping Federal Highway funds, and issuing revenue bonds.

Traffic crossing the Mackinac Bridge has dropped 16.3% between 1999 and 2006, said Mr. Sweeney. Over the seven-year period, the average annual decline is 2.51%, equating to 114,801 fewer vehicles making the crossing annually. At its peak in 1999, a record 4,936,417 vehicles crossed the link between the upper and lower peninsulas, while in 2006, 4,132,810 vehicles made the trip.

If traffic patterns continue, Mr. Sweeney said, the MBA will see a \$350,000 drop in revenue in 2007.

A decline in state population and higher gas prices have reduced travel on roads leading to the bridge, said Kirk Steudle, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation. Mr. Steudle gave a report to MBA on state travel trends and bridge traffic from 2005 to 2006.

"It appears as though people

sending its wind-borne pollens into the air. This plant is ragweed, and the other day I noticed a mass of it growing and blooming in the unused portion of the turnout next to the 4-H barn. (By the way, the ragweed was looking very healthy).

Goldenrod is truly a North American plant, as there are only a few species growing outside of the United States and Canada, and most of those in Mexico. There are some in Europe, but most of those are cultivars that have been imported to gardens. On Mackinac, there are at least a half dozen species of this plant, some of which many

people would not recognize as goldenrod. Most people are familiar with the tall goldenrod (*Solidago altissima*), which grows in open, dry places, or the Canada goldenrod (*S. canadensis*), which looks quite similar, but there also are goldenrods who

live in the rich woods, like one of my favorites, the zigzag goldenrod (*S. flexicaulis*) or the hairy goldenrod (*S. hispida*), which grows in open dry woods or rocky slopes in areas rich in limestone. There are even goldenrods that live living in wet areas, such as the Ohio goldenrod, which likes bogs, wet meadows, and sandy shores. Here at Mackinac, we find it in the calcareous fens along the

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Goldenrod

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