

GRATIOT COUNTY

County to consider septic system ordinance

By Linda Gittleman

For the Morning Sun

In a surprising move, representatives from all three counties in the Mid Michigan District Health Department unanimously agreed that it's time for septic system regulations.

The counties of Gratiot, Clinton and Montcalm are represented by the health department.

Michigan is the only state

ORDINANCE » PAGE 2

Ordinance

FROM PAGE 1

in the U.S. that has no statewide standard for septic systems, said Gary Rayburn, chair of the Healthy Pine River group. It's left up to the local cities, townships and counties.

Marcus Cheatham, health department officer, said it's estimated that 15 to 20 percent of the homes along the rivers have no

sewer system or have failed systems.

Cheatham told the members of the Healthy Pine River group, "we know that human (waste) contribution is significant" to the pollution to the river.

The group however, also believes that animal waste is an even more significant cause to the deteriorating state of the Pine River.

Even so, Rayburn said that there are homes along the river and outside the

cities that are handed down from one generation to the other and the septic systems are never inspected.

Cheatham stressed that the move to initiate septic system regulations is driven by the stakeholders - the committee members - and not the health department.

The approximate 20-member group make up "such a different variety of people," Rayburn said.

They include realtors.

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private business people, and representatives from the conservation districts, said Rayburn, who is a member.

Committee members are now drafting an ordinance and the next step is

to present it to the three county commissions.

Rayburn said he expects that to be given to the boards by August or September.

He said he also expects some other local govern-

ments will have to "buy in."

Cheatham cautioned that cleaning up the systems will be a very long and costly step-by-step process.

"It will take years to do," he said.

Cheatham also noted that the committee is well aware that a most important factor in the whole project will be financial assistance for those needing it.

The group is looking at ways to help provide that assistance.