

Genesee County shifts road funds to buy diesel, cutting basic summer road jobs

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GENESEE COUNTY, Michigan -- Diesel fuel is costing the Genesee County Road Commission so much more than expected that the agency is cutting back this summer on some of the most basic road work it does, leaving unfilled potholes and less gravel on dirt roads.

The commission has told townships it is withholding \$179,000 that had been budgeted for a popular cost-sharing program that helped pay for ditch cleaning and other road maintenance when townships split the costs with the county.

That money will be used instead to pay for higher-than-expected fuel costs, said Manager-Director John Daly.

Shifting that money won't hurt seven townships in the county that already have committed to help pay for specific projects, Daly said, but those that have delayed locking in their plans are out of luck.

"(Money for fuel) has to come from someplace," Daly said. "Diesel is our lifeblood."

Although the county budgeted for a 30 percent increase in the price of fuel this fiscal year, prices have risen even faster.

Flint Township, which lost the most 50-50 money, was able to make up some of that loss by getting funding from two other townships that had leftover funds on committed projects.

Some townships aren't willing to pay half the cost of repairs and apparently wouldn't have spent all they were entitled to anyway because officials said they can't afford to match the county's road repair money this year.

But others say the decision to switch the \$179,000 to pay for diesel isn't fair.

Vienna Township Supervisor Tony McKerchie said the decision came without warning.

"We're not going to be able to get any ditching done," McKerchie said. "I've been a supervisor for eight years. We didn't ever (commit to specific jobs) until August.

"These projects -- they've never had a hard deadline."

Vienna Township had an original matching pot of more than \$27,000 to work with but lost more than \$11,000.

Ditching is work the road commission does to help prevent flooding by redigging and cleaning brush, branches and overgrown weeds from ditches.

Grand Blanc Township Supervisor Jeff Zittel said his township's primary cost-sharing program

this year came in under budget, leaving more than \$20,000 uncommitted. That's being recaptured by the county for diesel.

"We've been able to prepare knowing that the 50-50 program wasn't as solid as in the past," Zittel said.

"It wasn't a big shock. It's not a good situation, but it's not unexpected."
