

Sawdust Pile May Be Worth Millions

By Gordon Turner

CHEBOYGAN — What has been called the world's largest sawdust pile, 104 years old, 12 acres big and 50 feet high, has long been considered by most local residents as a useless hill but now may be worth \$9 million.

City Engineer James Muschell says a Maryland industrialist is interested in processing the pile for fireplace logs. Muschell was authorized by the City Council to follow up, as the city owns 75 per cent of the land under the pile. Consumers Power Co, owns the rest.

The pile contains 142,000 yards of wet sawdust, which would require a drying process.

The claim of "world's largest" was made in a book published by the federal writers project, a Works Progress Administration (WPA) activity in the Great Depression.

Cheboyganites are so used to the pile, on the east bank of the Cheboygan River and next to the city Recreation Center, that they pay it little attention.

Children coast on it in wintertime, while a few persons ride snowmobiles over it.

Youngsters playing on it sometimes start fires, and firemen are called to it about once a year to extinguish blazes there.

Two years ago, Councilman Gerry Ireland, former ski coach at Central Michigan University, proposed developing an elementary ski practice run on the hill. But he discovered there are caves inside the pile, which could make it dangerous, and the ski plans were dropped.

An industrialist began using the sawdust years ago in a commercial cleaning product. He soon went out of business.

The pile got its start in 1871 when the legislature adopted an act forbidding the W. & A. MacArthur Co. of Cheboygan from dumping sawdust from its sawmill in the Cheboygan River.

The legislators acted after the sawdust fouled



Cheboygan Sawdust Pile World's Largest

the engine of a boat owned by one of the lawmakers.

The mill was operated by waterpower and could not burn its sawdust for fuel, so the firm began piling up the stuff in what became known as Watermill Field.

That sawmill has long since gone out of existence.

But now in may turn into a rich asset. Muschell said a plant 4,000 feet square probably would be needed for processing the sawdust. He plans to send a couple of bushels to the industrial prospect as a sample.

If the pile is used up by an industry, there could be some interesting discoveries. One story is that a team of horses broke through one time and never was rescued. The skeletons still would be in harness.