

## ***A Call to Action***

### **Memo to Conservation and Environmental Leaders**

**Sent: March 7, 2007**

On February 7 at the Conservation Summit, the conservation and environmental community was given a call to action to address the dwindling state budget for protection of Michigan's natural resources.

**The time to act is now!** As Michigan policymakers work to address the state's tax restructuring needs, we must ensure that natural resource and environmental protection are considered critical to the economic renewal of this state and a priority of Michigan's citizens. Our state leaders need to hear from their constituents loud and clear that they must work on a solution to this issue now.

Please call or write the Governor and your legislators and send the message that they are abandoning our natural resources and call on them to reverse this trend! The talking points below can be used as a tool for supporting your case. If you don't know how to contact your legislators, go to these sites for a simple search:

<http://senate.michigan.gov/SenatorInfo/find-your-senator.htm>

[http://house.michigan.gov/find\\_a\\_rep.asp](http://house.michigan.gov/find_a_rep.asp)

Forward this to your members, stakeholder groups, colleagues, etc. – the more influencers, the better. And don't wait, make a call today.

Thank you,  
Rachel Kuntzsch, Executive Director  
*Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy*  
& Donna Stine, Acting Executive Director  
*Michigan United Conservation Clubs*

## **The Value of Michigan Conservation Talking Points**

- *Conservation and natural resource protection are directly connected to hundreds of thousands of current and potential jobs in key industries.*
  - Tourism -- “Pure Michigan” sells the state’s beauty (Great Lakes, forests, rivers, waterfalls) to attract travel dollars. In 2004, travelers to and in Michigan spent approximately \$17.5 billion, generating \$971 million in state and local taxes and accounting for 193,000 jobs statewide.<sup>1</sup>
  - Outdoor recreation (fishing, hunting, boating)
    - Michigan has more than 750,000 licensed hunters who contribute \$1.3 billion annually to our economy.
    - Michigan has 2.6 million non-consumptive users who contribute \$1.2 billion to our economy.
    - Michigan’s licensed resident and nonresident anglers contribute \$2 billion annually to our economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Travel Michigan, October 20, 2005.

- Michigan recreational boaters contribute \$2 billion annually to our economy.
    - Michigan snowmobilers have a \$1 billion annual economic impact on northern Michigan communities.
    - 22 million people annually visit state parks and recreation areas.
  - Forest products – The Michigan forest products industry and recreational users contribute \$12 billion and 200,000 associated jobs annually to the state’s economy.
  - Clean air, water and wetlands – Protecting clean air and water contributes dramatically to the economy. Michigan’s coastal wetlands alone “drive nearly a billion dollars in economic activity in the state from sport fishing,” according to the DEQ.
  - Agriculture – In 2005, farm production resulted in \$2.1 billion in net value added to Michigan’s economy.<sup>2</sup>
- *Conservation and natural resource protection are a key part of the quality of life needed to attract the knowledge industries/workers of the future.*
- Studies have found that “amenities and the environment – particularly natural, recreation and lifestyles amenities – are absolutely vital in attracting knowledge workers.”<sup>3</sup>
  - Surveys of knowledge workers found that the quality of life amenities they found essential to a region included “easy access to outdoor activities” and “a clean and healthy environment and a commitment to preserving natural resources for enjoyment and recreation.”<sup>4</sup>
  - Projections show that there will be increasing demand for knowledge workers between 2005 and 2012, perhaps even recreating the workforce shortages seen in the 1990’s. “Capturing a share of America’s 6 million-plus young, single, and college-educated is serious business. This group’s influence is oversized because of its mobility, economic clout, and shrinking numbers. As 78 million baby boomers retire by 2020, today’s 40 million 25 to 34 year olds replace them. Slightly less than 20 million of the young have a B.A. – a group 10% smaller than 10 years ago. The market for the raw material of the knowledge economy is getting tighter.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/MLHTM#FFI>.

<sup>3</sup> Florida, Dr. Richard, Competing in an Age of Talent: Environment, Amenities and the New Economy, Richard King Mellon Foundation: Pittsburg, January 2000 Florida, p. 5. See also Mathur, Vijay, “Knowledge Workers, Quality of Life and Regional Development: A Forum of Reflections and Visions,” Cleveland State University: September, 2002 (knowledge workers typically like to live and work in an amenity-rich environment which enhances their quality of life.)

<sup>4</sup> Florida, Competing in an Age of Talent, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Great North Alliance, “Opportunity Forecast Summary, 2005-2006.” Great North Alliance Website [http://www.thegreatnorth.com/reports/2005-Opportunity\\_Forecast-Summary.pdf](http://www.thegreatnorth.com/reports/2005-Opportunity_Forecast-Summary.pdf)

- *The state budget for conservation and natural resource protection, especially general fund support, has been rapidly shrinking.*
  - General fund support for DNR has shrunk by two-thirds since 2000.
  - Less than one penny of every dollar from the general fund is spent on DNR programs. (In comparison, the Department of Corrections alone receives approximately 20 percent.)
  - The general fund appropriation for DEQ has fallen from slightly more than \$100 million in 2002 to \$28 million in 2007. The agency now faces what one manager calls “huge, gaping deficits in virtually every program, including \$100 million annually for cleanup and redevelopment of non-petroleum-related toxic waste sites; \$5-10 million annually for management of garbage, hazardous waste, scrap tires and storage tanks; \$6 million annually for clean air protection; \$5-7 million annually for clean water protection; and \$6 million annually for protection of wetlands, sand dunes, and other habitats.
  - The state Department of Agriculture’s proposed general fund budget for 2008 is approximately \$28.9 million. In 2001, it was nearly \$57.1 million.
  - Proposed budget cuts in 2007 and 2008 would eliminate the more than \$1.5 million in annual operating grants to Michigan conservation districts, which provide a variety of important services to farmers, other landowners and communities seeking to improve conservation practices.
  - This does not reflect the expectations of Michigan citizens. In a recent statewide poll of 600 registered voters conducted for Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy:
    - 72 percent were surprised to learn natural resource and environmental protection programs (including the DNR and DEQ) receive less than 1 percent of state’s general fund combined.
    - The average respondent estimated natural resources protection between 10 and 11 percent of the state general fund, 10 times more than current funding levels.
- *The recent Emergency Financial Advisory Panel report urges investment in natural resources and other assets as keys to renewing the state’s economy.*
  - “Michigan is a special place, endowed with the magnificent Great Lakes, excellent higher education institutions, and superb cultural and natural offerings ... Michigan must end the disinvestment in education and those other assets that define the quality of life that knowledge-based workers seek—cultural offerings, natural resources, and vibrant cities.”