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Legislation Key to Protecting Majestic Great Lakes

Package would lead the way in eight-state effort to prevent diversions and maintain world's greatest freshwater resource

Michigan residents who enjoy Great Lakes beaches, depend on the state's vast water-based economy, or oppose water diversions from the lakes will benefit from a package of bills introduced today in the state House of Representatives.

The legislation creates a firewall of legal protections defending the state's waters from diversion, pollution, and harmful misuse by water bottling companies, mining operations and others. It also puts Michigan in compliance with the eight-state Great Lakes Compact agreement signed by all the states' governors in 2005.

"As the only state entirely within the Great Lakes watershed, Michigan has the most to gain from the strong regulations included in this package of bills," said David Holtz of Clean Water Action. "It puts Michigan front and center as a leader in the fight to protect the Great Lakes from massive diversions to other states, countries, or by profit-hungry corporations."

The Compact must be approved by all eight state legislatures; passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by the President to take effect. It was crafted during years of intense negotiations among Great Lakes states.

The proposed Michigan rules establish a permit system for water withdrawal that requires users to prove they will not harm the resource. That's essential for protecting the Great Lakes, and also the countless brooks, streams, ponds, swamps, creeks, lakes and groundwater that pulses through Michigan.

"With over 5 million Michigan residents dependent on well water; and millions more who value their trout streams, ponds and wetlands, these standards are no-brainers," said James Clift of the Michigan Environmental Council. "They give manufacturers, farmers, companies who depend on water clear access to the resource, while ensuring it is done sustainably."

The protections come at a crucial juncture as the Great Lakes face unprecedented challenges. The lakes are under siege from more than 180 invasive species; lake levels are dropping due to global warming and other factors; billions of gallons of raw sewage flow into the lakes each year and the foundation of the food chain – tiny freshwater shrimp – have all but disappeared in many lakes.

"We won't solve all the lakes complex problems with this Compact and its implementing legislation," said Mike Shriberg of Environment Michigan. "But we can make a stand right here and declare that our precious water resources will be managed carefully for the benefit of the state's residents; not pillaged in the name of profits or recklessness."

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