



A publication of the Michigan League of Conservation Voters

elements

TURNING ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES INTO COMMUNITY PRIORITIES | SPRING 2009

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Michigan's Funding Crisis: Will Our Favorite Places Become Just a Memory?

BY BILL KIRK & PAM BIERZYNSKI

Take a minute to remember the warm, peaceful, and relaxing days of your childhood. Think about the times you read a book under your favorite tree or climbed high onto its limbs. Remember walking along the shores of your favorite lake, the sand squishing between your toes and the water gently lapping against your legs. Feel the wind caress your face as you sail across the water or ride your bike up and down a woody trail.

Now imagine it all gone.

In 1995, via executive order, Governor John Engler created the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The DEQ was given responsibility for environmental regulatory functions previously administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and other state agencies.

Regardless of Governor Engler's intent, the creation of the two departments has changed the way Michigan protects and regulates our beautiful places and our natural resources. Simply put, the DNR has become the protector of our state lands, and the DEQ has become the enforcer of our environmental laws. Today, both agencies are in financial peril and hindered in their ability to effectively perform their constitutional mandates. As a result, our magnificent natural resources and our way of life are both in great danger.

Budget and funding issues are affecting all state departments. Every line of state spending will have to be carefully reviewed and some very difficult decisions made. In the midst of these hard economic times, it



is imperative that our elected officials understand that short-term and short-sighted solutions that short-change our natural resources are not acceptable. State park facilities are in disrepair, contaminated wells for drinking water remain dirty, and brownfield redevelopment sites sit idle. Beyond the basic damage to our natural resources, these issues are damaging Michigan economically, as well.

The DNR manages the largest dedicated forest system in the nation. Hunters, tourists, and the forest products industry that are "customers" of this system contribute approximately \$30 billion dollars annually to Michigan's economy, and account for nearly 400,000 jobs. Tourism/recreation is the third largest industry in Michigan.

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Time For a New Environmental Ethic



Without a doubt, the State of Michigan is at a crossroads. Economically, we are facing enormous challenges. Politically, we have many new faces in the legislature and with the 2010 election right around the corner, even more changes are on the way. Environmentally, our State is facing some crucial choices that will

affect future generations for years to come.

At this point in Michigan's history, we all have a choice. We can choose to put the State back to work on a path of progress into the future by making a dedicated commitment to manufacturing and developing renewable energy technology. We can choose to honor our heritage of protecting, maintaining, and improving our natural resources by responsibly funding the State departments charged with those duties. We can choose to put the health of our children and families first by regulating toxic chemicals and pollutants that put all of us at risk.

These all seem like logical choices to make, putting our families, our health, and our wonderful natural resources first.

Unfortunately, this logic is not widespread in our State's capitol. Historically, Michigan has always been a leader on conservation and environmental protection. Dating back to the days of Governor William Milliken, Michigan was never afraid to show the rest of the nation how much we value our Great Lakes, our forests, and every stream, river, and inland lake. Progressive policy to protect these

wonderful resources often provided an example for other states.

Today, this type of "environmental ethic" is noticeably lacking in Lansing. This is extraordinarily troubling considering the economic importance of our natural resources. Tourism/recreation is our third largest industry in the State. The *Pure Michigan* campaign is poised to spend tens of millions of dollars over the next few years to promote and boost this industry, yet our elected leaders in Lansing are only using 1% of the State's budget to protect and maintain the very things that we are so eager to promote.

It is time for us to demand a new environmental ethic from our leaders. Our beautiful natural places are what define us as a State. It is the reason people live here, work here, and play here. We invite you to join the Michigan League of Conservation Voters in demanding these values from our elected leaders. We are here to provide you with the information, resources, and methods to do just that. One new resource is our *Michigan Environmental Facebook*, which highlights the team of newly elected conservation leaders. Check it out on line at www.michiganlcv.org/facebook.htm and then stand up with us and take action! Together we can be the leaders we want to see! ■

Lisa Wozniak, Executive Director

JOIN US! UPCOMING IMPORTANT EVENTS

**Ecology Center Fundraiser
Dance for the Earth**
Ann Arbor, April 25

**MEC 11th Annual
Environmental Awards
Celebration**
Ann Arbor, Cobblestone Farm,
April 30

Green Today, Jobs Tomorrow
Lansing, May 11

**Urban-Rural Connections:
Sustainability in a Volatile
World**
Ann Arbor, May 13

Michigan Policy Summit
Detroit - Cobo Hall, May 16

**MRC Annual Conference
& Expo**
Mt. Pleasant, May 19-21

Sustainable Urban Mobility
Ann Arbor, June 10-12

**The National Summit: New
Solutions for a New Economy
Built on Innovation**
Detroit, June 15-17

**Air & Waste Management
Association's 102nd Annual
Conference & Exhibition**
Detroit - Cobo Hall, June 16-19

UPCOMING EARTHWORK MUSIC DATES

Seth Bernard
Grand Rapids Public Library
April 22

Breathe Owl Breathe
The Ark, Ann Arbor
May 1

Rachael Davis
Ten Pound Fiddle
East Lansing
May 1

**May Erlewine and
Seth Bernard**
The Ark, Ann Arbor
May 15

Grand Rapids Water Festival
Riverside Park, Grand Rapids
June 20



SAVE THE DATE

November 5, 2009 at The Ark
with May Erlewine & Seth Bernard

For details and a list of the latest happenings,
please check out

www.michiganlcvdefund.org
[www.michiganlcv.org/!](http://www.michiganlcv.org/)

The 2009-2010 Environmental Briefing Book is Here!

BY HANNAH SMITH, FORMER MICHIGAN LCV POLICY AND PROGRAMS ASSOCIATE



Michigan LCV Executive Director (middle) speaks with Rep. Joan Bauer (D-Lansing) (left) and Rory Neuner, MEC Urban Policy Specialist (right).

The *2009-2010 Michigan Environmental Briefing Book* was released on February 12th in Lansing, at the Michigan Environmental Council's annual legislative breakfast. The breakfast marked a crossroads; the months spent creating the *Briefing Book* had come to an end, and the considerably more challenging task of actually accomplishing the initiatives set forth in the book lay ahead.

The *2009-2010 Environmental Briefing Book* describes the environmental community's legislative and administrative priorities for the next two years. This 2009-2010 edition highlights three major priorities; securing state funding for environmental protection and conservation, addressing the threat of global warming in Michigan, and protecting our children's health. The book also emphasizes the need to revitalize efforts to preserve Michigan's wild natural places, clean up animal factory farms, and update Michigan's waste management (trash) laws. The *Briefing Book* provides comprehensive background information on each of the issues, and explains the actions that the legislature and administration must take in order to address each issue. The goals outlined in the book are key to ensuring the long-term health and heritage of our state, and the mood at the legislative breakfast reflected the dedica-

tion of the conservation community in pushing this collective agenda.

MEC president Chris Kolb and Michigan LCV executive director Lisa Wozniak spoke to a large crowd that included representatives from a number MEC member groups, as well as more than 75 legislators and their staff. Food was an afterthought at the breakfast, where the real issues on everyone's plates were Michigan's energy future, toxics in children's toys, and regulation of our state's wetlands. Legislators received the *Briefing Book*, and Lisa Wozniak warned them that they should keep their copy handy; securing a healthy future for Michigan and its citizens depends on our legislators actually addressing the issues in the book, not letting the book collect dust on a shelf.

The legislators received their *Briefing Books* in three-ring binders so that as the priorities in the book are addressed, Michigan LCV and MEC staff, as well as staff from other environmental organizations, can supplement the book with updated information. The *Briefing Book* is meant to be a living document, a continuously relevant and useful

point of reference for Michigan's elected officials.

As someone deeply involved in the creation of the *Briefing Book*, the MEC legislative breakfast was an exciting and gratifying occasion. The experience of seeing the book go from a web of ideas on a whiteboard in November, to a gorgeous document in the hands of legislators in February, was particularly rewarding. Bringing the book to life was a collaborative effort that required the help of numerous members of the environmental community, and abundant thanks are owed to everyone who assisted with its creation. But the *Briefing Book* is only a jumping-off point; it is what the decision-makers in Lansing *do* with the book that will make a difference in the long run. As exciting as it was to hold a finished copy of the *Briefing Book* in my hands, I will be monumentally more excited when I see the actions proposed in the book become laws.

You can find the *2009-2010 Environmental Briefing Book* on our website, at www.michiganlcvedfund.org/ ■



Shortchanging Our State Parks

BY ABBY RUBLEY

The State of Michigan is hoping that a \$30 million investment in a new ad campaign will increase tourism. Over the last five years Michigan has spent \$26.34 million on out-of-state tourism promotion which has resulted in nearly 5 million new tourists coming to Michigan who spent \$1.1 billion and contributed \$75.3 million in tax revenue. That is a \$2.86 return for every \$1 spent and is clearly a significant investment for an industry that ranks in our top three, along with agriculture and automobiles.

In addition, 2009 is the 90th year anniversary of the State of Michigan's Park System. Over 120 million people visit our 77 state parks each year. Did you know that in Michigan you are never more than 6 miles from a lake or stream? With over 11,000 inland lakes and 3200 miles of lakeshore, Michigan is truly a water wonderland.

Given this information, it is baffling that less than 1% of our state's budget goes towards the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the two state departments that are charged with restoring, protecting and enhancing our natural wonders. It is counterintuitive that Michigan would make an investment to increase our tourism while failing to invest in the very product they are promoting.

We need a new environmental ethic in this state and I can think of no better time than now. To weigh in on this issue and see one of the many suggested proposals to fund our state parks and natural resources, visit us online at www.michiganlevedfund.org. ■



“There are still places that can slow the world down just long enough for us to catch our breath. Reconnect with what really matters at one of over 11,000 crystal clear lakes, thousands of river and streams, and more freshwater coastline than any other state in the country. Come find out what pure Michigan feels like.”

—Pure Michigan Tourism Campaign

Lack of DEQ Funding Hurts Clean Up

BY BILL KIRK

Recently on the Kalamazoo River, federal and state agencies worked together to clean up a heavily contaminated site. Getting PCBs out of the river near Plainwell was an expensive endeavor that involved genuine cooperation, ample funding, and years of work. Thanks to these efforts, there is a mile and a half of clean riverbed that was once saturated with toxic chemicals.

There are examples of successful cleanups like this all across Michigan but, unfortunately, there are many “areas of concern” (AKA hazardously polluted areas) that still need to be addressed. These areas, however, are in danger of being neglected if the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) does not have the funds to effectively address them.

One such recent example is a toxic site in Kalamazoo Township. Residents of Orchard Avenue (just west of Douglas) notified authorities last year when their tap water was giving off a strange odor. After extensive water testing and investigation, high levels of trichloroethylene (TCE), an industrial solvent used to degrease metal, were found. A total of 15 private wells within a one mile radius were contaminated, some with levels of TCE that were as much as 16 times the safe standard for drinking water. Taxpayer funds will now be used to connect the houses with contaminated wells to the municipal water supply. But that is where the solution stops.

The DEQ does not have the funding to investigate or track the source of the pollution,

so even though the affected residents will have safe, municipal drinking water, the contamination will not be cleaned up, the source of the pollution will not be addressed, and the polluter will not be held accountable. There are at least 400 other contaminated sites around the state that will be neglected without proper funding. This is a systemic problem that will leave Michigan residents in danger.

Without proper funding, the DEQ cannot carry out its core mission of protecting public health and Michigan's natural resources. In the words of DEQ Director Steve Chester: “The public won't be able to look to the DEQ for assistance. We won't be there. That's the bottom line.” ■

Michigan Gets On Board With Mass Transit

BY BILL KIRK

For years, mass transit has been talked about in Michigan. Today, mass transit projects are as close as they've ever been to jumping off the drawing board and breaking ground. Thanks to an influx of private support, funding from a variety of federal sources (including the Recovery and Reinvestment Act), and a welcome display of political cooperation, these projects signal a new hope for Michigan's future.

This new dedication to mass transit reflects the understanding of the public and our elected officials that public transportation is necessary to compete with other big cities around the United States for professional talent, new industry, and economic development. According to a recent Detroit Free Press article, "The potential is big...The regional transit plan being considered for southeast Michigan envisions 30,000 new jobs, \$1.4 billion in annual payroll and almost 11,000 housing units built near the transit lines, as well as boosted retail sales and other benefits, all spurred by the year 2035 if a regional transit system is built."

In the Grand Rapids area, one of the most successful bus systems in the nation--the

Rapid--is on the verge of building a new Bus Rapid Transit Route (BRT) down the city's north/south dividing line, Division Avenue. Known as the Silver Line, the BRT will connect southern Grand Rapids with the "Medical Mile" in northern Grand Rapids.

If Grand Rapids voters approve a Transit Millage Ballot Proposal on May 5th, the Rapid will receive \$40 million of federal and state funds to construct the Silver Line. It will create an estimated 405 permanent jobs, and nationwide studies of similar BRT lines have shown a return on investment through economic development of 100% to 1000%. The Silver Line's return on investment is projected to be about 400%.

As a resident of the Heartside neighborhood along South Division Avenue, I am personally and professionally thrilled by the BRT proposal and am working closely with Friends of Transit to support passage of the May 5th millage. Heartside is currently undergoing vibrant revitalization by promoting the extraordinary talents in the local art community. The Silver Line will connect more

people from other areas of the city to the local artists and the local economy, and the city, overall, will benefit. I'm very excited about the potential, and proud to be a part of the effort.

If you live in Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Wyoming, Grandville or Walker, vote YES on May 5th in support of the Silver Line Millage. ■



FUNDING CRISIS

(from page 1)

The DEQ keeps our water clean and drinkable, and our air clean and breathable.

Without these two departments operating effectively, the health of our economy and natural resources is at risk. That is why it is so disturbing that both of these departments receive less than 1% of our state budget's general fund (see the Michigan LCV Education Fund report, *Losing a Legacy* at www.michiganlcved-fund.org). Money in the general fund is not specifically allocated or required to go to a certain program or department. It consists of our tax dollars, and the fate of the appropriation of these funds is left up to our lawmakers.

To put our natural resource funding in perspective, while the DNR/DEQ combined receive less than 1% of general fund dollars, the Department of Corrections receives almost

20%. Even more shocking is that the DEQ has seen a 67% reduction in general fund dollars since 2002. This disproportionate funding allocation illustrates an unacceptable neglect of our natural resources on the part of our lawmakers.

While there is no silver bullet solution, one thing remains clear: the infrastructure to protect and preserve our natural resources deserves adequate funding!

Michigan LCV believes that our elected officials must come to grips with the fundamental connection between the health of our environment and the health of our economy, by providing necessary funding to the DNR and DEQ. As citizens of this great State, we all have an opportunity and a duty to educate our lawmakers and communicate to them the

importance of our air, land, and water. We elected these folks, they work for us, and they exist to serve our best interests. They need to hear from us, and we need to tell them not to shortchange our natural resources.

Please call, write, fax, and/or email your state Senator, Representative, and Governor Granholm to tell them that Michigan's future hinges on the protection of our beautiful places. Adequate funding of the DEQ and the DNR is essential for our economy and it is essential to ensure that our children and grandchildren can enjoy the same *Pure Michigan* in which we grew up. Don't let our Michigan way of life become just a memory! ■

**Please refer to page 6 to find more information and methods for contacting our lawmakers.*

President Obama Commits to Restoring the Great Lakes

Governor Granholm Offsets Progress with Budget Cuts

BY ABBY RUBLEY

Kudos to President Obama and his administration for taking an important step toward fulfilling his campaign pledge to fund Great Lakes Restoration by including a \$475 million down payment in his fiscal year 2010 budget!

Today the health of our lakes is threatened by problems such as invasive species and untreated sewage. Unless America invests in the lakes, these problems will get worse and the price we pay will be higher. An independent report published by the Brookings Institute concludes that restoring the health of the Great Lakes will result in \$50 billion in new jobs, industrial development, and increased property values.

Ironically, while President Obama took this giant step forward in protecting our Lakes, Governor Granholm announced the return of our wetlands program to the federal government – a huge step backward! This move would undermine the protection, maintenance, and restoration of our wetlands, as well as surrender a nationally revered



state-level permitting program to the federal government.

The Governor's proposal is simply reactionary and short sighted. The estimated savings--\$2.1 million within a \$6 billion shortfall--does not justify the associated risks. Our State's natural assets define our economy and our way of life, and we cannot afford to put those assets in jeopardy.

Further complicating this issue are multiple Supreme Court decisions that have limited the scope of the Clean Water Act in reference

to regulating wetlands by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers. Congressman Dingell (D-Dearborn), along with Congressman Oberstar from Minnesota, has introduced the Clean Water Restoration Act, which would clarify the role of the federal government in regulating all waters – including non-navigable waterways (or wetlands). Unfortunately this legislation is languishing in Congress. Without this piece of clarifying federal legislation, passing our wetlands authority back to the federal government would mean

putting nearly 1,000,000 acres of wetlands in Michigan into regulatory no-man's land, and in danger of being lost.

Wetlands are often referred to as the kidneys of the Great Lakes. We can't have healthy Lakes without healthy wetlands. Perhaps we need our new president to put a call into Governor Granholm and explain a thing or two. In the interim, you can call Governor Granholm (517-335-7858) and tell her that our wetlands program should not be transferred to the federal government. ■

STAND UP AND TAKE ACTION

Our Natural Resources Are On the Chopping Block!

BY BILL KIRK & ABBY RUBLEY

Our elected officials listen to many individuals, organizations, and media outlets to educate themselves and make informed decisions. Some of these voices can be louder than others, but none is more effective than that of a voting constituent. After all, voters are the ones who hire lawmakers, and voters have the power to fire lawmakers.

Lansing can be an intimidating place to an inexperienced citizen, but it is critical to remember that the people who sit in the capitol offices are ultimately accountable to the people that voted to put them there. You don't have to be a lobbyist or a Lansing insider to walk into,

call, write, email, or fax a legislative office. It is your right as a Michigan citizen to have access to your Representative, Senator, and Governor.

Now, more than ever, it is critical that our elected officials hear from you, the voters. As the legislature begins to debate the State budget, they need to be convinced that funding the protection and maintenance of our natural resources is a necessity, not an option. Please take this opportunity to contact your legislators and Governor Granholm and make them aware of your concerns about Michigan's natural resources.

(Continued page 7)

Thank You to Our Most Recent Donors

Donations made between January 2009 and March 2009

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STAND UP AND TAKE ACTION

(from page 6)

To effectively communicate with lawmakers, you'll need to know your district Representative and/or Senator and how to contact them. Please visit www.michiganlcvedfund.org and click "Voter Resources" for links to this information. Once you know who represents you, you can visit their specific website to find their office address, phone number, fax number, and email. If you'd like to contact the Governor, you can access her info at www.michigan.gov/gov. Then the fun begins.

Whatever your preferred method of contact is, you can get in touch with your lawmaker and voice your concerns, questions,

approval, or anger, etc. While Michigan LCV recommends that interactions remain positive and constructive, the First Amendment always applies.

It is also very important to remember that you don't need to be an expert on issues or politics to make your voice heard. The Michigan League of Conservation Voters is dedicated to providing information to citizens that can help you hold our elected officials accountable for their actions. For more information on the most important environmental issues facing Michigan, please check out *The Michigan Environmental Briefing Book* avail-

able at www.michiganlcvedfund.org.

In addition, please visit www.michiganlcv.org for other resources, such as our *Michigan Environmental Facebook*, a guide to elected officials who have the collective support of the environmental community, and *The Environmental Scorecard*, which provides the voting records of our elected officials on environmental issues.

Finally, if you'd like to arrange a meeting with your legislator and would like Michigan LCV staff to assist in any way, please contact us at 734-222-9650 or info@michiganlcv.org ■

Green Business Spotlight: A3C Collaborative Architecture

BY MARK NEISLER

In today's economic climate, the people of Michigan are justifiably concerned about what the Recovery and Reinvestment Act means for them. While driving to a Crain's Detroit Business editorial board meeting recently, I had the opportunity to discuss this issue with Dan Jacobs, Senior Principal and founder of A3C Collaborative Architecture (www.a3c.com) in Ann Arbor.

I asked Dan how federal support would benefit his industry, and his short answer was that it will get "buildings in the ground and shovels turned". According to Dan, every project contracted—large or small—would provide meaningful employment for designers, skilled laborers, and suppliers, and produce a ripple effect on the wider economy.

A significant portion of the Recovery and Reinvestment Act could help property owners update buildings to be more energy efficient. Dan sees spin-off potential from such successful projects, whereby landowners considering upgrades could implement sustainable practices for their own economic benefit. From Dan's experience, "...Class A properties that are 'green' are achieving higher rentals [and] leasing faster..." than traditionally-constructed buildings. Moreover, the cost difference between building traditionally and building 'green' is very small (5%), and growing evidence of increased value is helping property owners overcome the hurdle of initial investments.



Dan suggested that recognition of a project's 'green' status often generates competition between ongoing and planned construction. He explained that property owners recognize this and have begun asking to be more environmentally responsible both in terms of buildings and roads, as well as alternative energy. This trend will predictably result in the mainstreaming of technologies currently considered "alternative".

Because the Recovery and Reinvestment Act emphasizes energy efficiency and rewards alternative energies and green building, it could be enormously beneficial to businesses dedicated to sustainability like A3C Collaborative Architecture. Given Dan's passion for environmental and social responsibility—he is an active member of the U.S. Green Building Council, volunteers for Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice and the Southeastern Michigan Sustainable Business Forum—we hope that the Recovery and Reinvestment Act monies reach A3C. To understand Dan's commitment firsthand, check out the A3C headquarters in downtown Ann Arbor, which was recently awarded the City of Ann Arbor Energy Efficiency Award and the Renewable Energy Award for its registered LEED-CI Gold Office Renovation and Urban Environmental (UrbEn) Retreat. I'm sure you will be as impressed as I was. ■

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