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An Insider's View on Conservation Funding in Michigan Exclusive Interview with Michigan DEQ Director Steven Chester

MLCV: How have recent budget changes in the state affected DEQ?

DEQ: The most significant budget change over the past 5 years has been the dramatic reduction in general fund support. We used to have 1/3 federal funding, 1/3 restricted funds (from fees and dedicated funding streams for cleanups), and 1/3 from the general fund. Now, only 9% comes from general fund support. There has been a 68% drop in total funding. Our only way to replace the funds now is to increase our fees. This means that DEQ has been forced to become more of a fee-for-service organization; an agency based on getting permits out rather than an agency taking a more holistic, integrated approach looking at compliance, monitoring, and enforcement.

MLCV: In a report that Michigan LCV put out this fall, "Losing a Legacy: Why Michigan's Magnificent Places are at Risk," we found that over the last decade, both DNR and DEQ have been the most disproportionately under-funded agencies in Michigan. How has this affected the agency in the long-term?

DEQ: The workloads at DEQ have gone up over the last few years, largely because of federal and state mandates. But, there has been no funding increase to go with the mandates. As a result, the number of staff has stayed steady, and even decreased--when it should be increasing to keep up with workloads. If you look at inflation rates, our budget should be 100 million dollars more than it currently is. This has been a problem that has been going on since 1996 or 1997.

MLCV: Have any programs been cut as a result?

DEQ: We have tried to cut programs in the past. My predecessor tried to cut the medical waste program to cut down on expenses. In order to cut the program, the legislature would have had to repeal the related law. But, they did not, and as a result, the agency got sued and we had to reinstate the program. We have also tried to eliminate some small, but important, programs because of the lack of funding. But again, constituency groups lobbied, and Congress would not repeal the mandates. This has had a major impact on the agency. Most significantly, we don't have the field presence to do as many field inspections, monitoring, and compliance programs as we'd like to be doing and as we should be doing.

MLCV: There has been talk that the Wetlands Program, under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, will be transferred to US EPA. Is this true?

DEQ: Only one or two states are currently authorized to administer the Wetland Program, and Michigan is one. This past fiscal year, DEQ sought fee increases because of loss of general fund support. The legislature has agreed to provide general funds to get through Fiscal Year 2008. However, if we don't secure funding for the Wetlands Program for FY 2009, we won't be able to administer it any more.

This is important from a conservation perspective because the DEQ has a better understanding of the state's wetlands than the federal government does. We protect more wetlands in the state than EPA would have the ability to, because we have on-the-ground presence that EPA would not have in Michigan. It's also important economically. By law, the state has to take action on the permits within a certain amount of time. The federal government has no time frame, so there is no guarantee that the permits will go through.

MLCV: What can people who care about our state's environmental health and natural resources do to help with the funding problem that the DEQ is facing?

- DEQ: 1. Become more informed on the funding limits that the agency is currently facing.*
- 2. Become an advocate. Communicate with your state legislators and tell them that you support state DEQ funding. The most important thing is to share your opinion with your legislators.*

MLCV: Many citizens are concerned about the seven new coal plant proposals in Michigan. What type of oversight or permitting by the DEQ will be required for these proposed facilities? How might budget implications impact the agency's ability to manage its responsibilities on this issue and any other new emerging issues the state now faces?

DEQ: We currently have a number of applications for air quality permits associated with the proposed coal plants. We have to review each application in accordance with state and federal law. We have no authority to make the fundamental decision of whether or not we need the plants. The only thing we can do is to review the individual applications to look for compliance with the laws. The public needs to understand that without a more holistic, integrated system analyzing the need for new coal plants, there is nothing we can do. What the public should do is insist on better planning, oversight and management through the legislature and the governor.

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New Year, Fresh Start! Thoughts from Lisa Wozniak, Our Executive Director



Lisa at Earth Tones 2007

Happy New Year! If you are like me, 2008 has been a long time coming! 2007 was an enormously frustrating year in the world of environmental policy and protection, and I couldn't wait to move into 2008. The Michigan LCV team is ready to roll up our sleeves and dive into essential work highlighting the Michigan legislature's track record. We're also very eager to play a big role in the 2008 elections.

If ever an elected body needed to be held accountable for their actions (or lack thereof!), it is the Michigan House and Senate. The budget debacle of 2007, which included an almost complete disregard for natural resources and public health protection and the purposeful raid of \$170 million devoted to the clean up of leaking underground storage tanks, is reason enough to be infuriated by the decision-making in Lansing. Add to that lack of legislative action on the critical issues of Great Lakes protection from large-scale water diversions and implementation of a Renewable Energy Standard, and it's no wonder opinion polls show the public approval rating of the legislature at an extremely low 18%.

Other decisions by elected and/or appointed bodies that made 2007 a year to leave behind include:

- The Michigan Supreme Court's decision to overturn 30 years of law in the Nestle vs. Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation case, obliterating citizens' rights to sue under the Michigan Environmental Protection Act;
- Michigan DEQ's decision to provide Kennecott Minerals Company with a permit to open the state's first metallic-sulfide mine in the pristine Upper Peninsula;
- The US EPA's decision to "negotiate" with Dow Chemical Company over clean-up details related to the highest dioxin contamination ever recorded in the country, which was found in the Saginaw River (EPA subsequently pulled out of the negotiations due to Dow's unreasonable demands, leaving the clean up in question at complete standstill).

Good riddance to 2007 and all the bad decisions made by our elected officials last year! Bring on 2008 and Michigan LCV's accountability and political plans, which will highlight our decision-makers records—via our 2007-2008 Michigan LCV Legislative Scorecard—and target some of the most important House races among the 45 open seats Michigan citizens will be asked to vote on this fall!

In addition, we have already begun building upon the one positive development in 2007: a new formal alliance between the state Leagues and the national League of Conservation Voters! These entities combined forces last year to form a single, powerful network whose shared mission is to advocate for sound environmental policies and elect environmental champions at all levels of government – from state capitols and county commissions to Congress and the White House.

I invite all of you to join us for what promises to be a very exciting year in Michigan environmental politics. From the Michigan Supreme Court to the State House in Lansing to the halls of Congress, we will work for clean water, clean air and healthy communities by electing pro-conservation candidates to office who will protect our majestic Great Lakes and natural resources.

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Earth Tones 2007!

Basking in the Afterglow

Back due to popular demand, Michigan LCV resurrected the successful musical fund raiser Earth Tones on November 20 at the Ark in Ann Arbor. Thanks to the great efforts of the Board, staff and community, the event introduced Michigan LCV to the broader community and brought our members together for a wonderful evening for an important cause.

Earth Tones 2007 was a rousing success, grossing three times as much as ever before! In addition to our amazing Host Committee, we had an exciting Silent Auction with items from many, generous local businesses including: ReCellular, Avalon International Breads, Conor O'Neill's Irish Pub, Shaman Drum Bookshop, Schokolad Chocolate Factory, Espresso Royale, Bivouac, Northwest Airlines, Arbor Brewing Company, Morgan and York, Underground Sounds, and local poet Keith Taylor. A big "thank you" to Doug Glancy for securing four UM football tickets, Congressman John Dingell for the lovely signed picture of the US Capitol and for the opening remarks, and most of all, to the talented and generous artists: Hawks and Owls, Josh Davis, FUBAR, Daisy May and Seth Bernard, and our MC, Chris Buhalis!

Thanks, too, to everyone who attended, contributed to, and otherwise supported Earth Tones 2007. Please know that we are beginning to plan Earth Tones 2008, so that this year's benefit can be bigger and better than ever before. We are delighted to note that Daisy May and Seth Bernard have already offered to perform again! If you are interested in getting involved in Earth Tones 2008, please give us a call at (734) 222-9650.



Congressman John Dingell



Josh Davis of Steppin' In It



Seth Bernard



Dave Keaney and Chris Buhalis



FUBAR



Daisy May



Hawks and Owls

Photos courtesy of Brad Garmon

Passing the Great Lakes Compact in Michigan

The Devil's in the Details

On a cold, windy afternoon in early December, a truly historic event occurred in Michigan. Committees in both the House of Representatives and the Senate voted to put the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement, otherwise known as the Great Lakes Compact, to a full floor vote. It has not yet passed, but we expect to see movement soon. As is true with any major piece of important legislation, however, the devil is in the details. It is yet to be determined how the Compact will be implemented in Michigan.

There is widespread agreement in Michigan that we must pass the Great Lakes Compact in order to protect the Great Lakes from the threat of large scale diversions. Already, other states have shown an interest in getting their thirsty hands on Great Lakes water. The problem will only get worse over time, especially as erratic weather patterns associated with global warming increase. Michigan, the Great Lakes State, has the most to gain by passing the Compact—and the most to lose if it fails. We need our elected officials to show strong leadership in Lansing by getting it right, so that all of Michigan's waters are protected.

Michigan LCV Education Fund is working with several statewide environmental groups as a part of the Great Lakes, Great Michigan Coalition (www.greatlakesgreatmichigan.org). This campaign is working to bring Michigan into compliance with the Great Lakes Compact by creating, introducing and passing supporting legislation that will:

- Prevent clearly defined adverse resource impacts to Michigan watersheds
- Define all waters of the state as a public trust
- Provide opportunities for community involvement in water-use decisions
- Include conservation measures to use water efficiently and protect Michigan's water resources



Although this set of bills is moving more slowly than we expected, Michigan LCV Education Fund is busy behind the scenes, pulling together stakeholder groups to collaborate with House and Senate work-groups and further develop legislation on water resource protection and use. We expect action on these bills within in the next few weeks.

Take Action! You can help see these bills become law by contacting your state legislators and asking them to support House Bills 4343 and 5065-5073. For more information on this campaign, visit www.MichiganLCVEdFund.org/issues/water.htm.

Peace Jam Slam!

Michigan LCV Workshop on the Great Lakes and the Legislative Process

Michigan LCV staffers taught 20 students ways to get involved with and influence the legislative process on October 13. Michigan LCV met with about 20 junior and senior high schoolers from several Great Lakes states at the 2007 "Peace Jam Slam" in Kalamazoo. Peace Jam is an organization that connects youth with Nobel Peace Prize Laureates to create projects that work towards peace and social justice.



Students from Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois pose with their letters

Michigan LCV was a perfect addition to Peace Jam 2007 as the theme was "Water: A Human Right". Topics covered included past and current Great Lakes issues and pending legislation, such as the Great Lakes Compact and the Great Lakes Restoration Act.

Michigan LCV staff also talked about how the legislative process works and where citizens fit in, including tips for being effective and strategies for working with elected officials.

At the end of the workshop, the students were asked to write personalized letters in support of the Great Lakes Compact to the elected officials of their choice.

Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency, & the Lack of Leadership in Lansing

Why Seven New Coal Plant Proposals Have Made it to the Table



In the spring of 2007, we were optimistic as a strong package of renewable energy bills and energy efficiency measures were introduced in the Michigan House of Representatives. We all know what happened from there, however-- the State's financial crisis and budget negotiations took over all conversations in Lansing. Unfortunately, those once promising energy bills are still not signed into law, and the legislature has not acted to address our state's need to invest in renewable energy.

More than ever, Michigan desperately needs our elected leaders to be strong and address our state's energy problem. Since the introduction of these renewable energy bills last spring, seven new dirty coal plants have been proposed in Michigan in order to meet future energy needs. This is without taking any steps to mandate higher efficiency across the board, which would greatly reduce the amount of current usage and future energy "needs."

The lack of meaningful legislative action, which would preempt any possible justification for this onslaught of new coal plants, threatens Michigan's future as a leader in addressing global warming. It also threatens our ability to competitively bring new, clean green jobs into

Michigan to revitalize our struggling economy. Plus, without lucrative employment opportunities for future generations and for Michiganders who have lost their jobs due to the continual decline of our manufacturing sector, the "brain drain" that plagues our state will only worsen—not to mention the added environmental degradation!

That's why Michigan LCV has joined forces with other organizations around the state to **say NO to new coal in Michigan!** To learn more about the campaign, visit our energy webpage at www.MichiganLCVEdFund.org/issues/energy.htm. Please join us in our efforts to stop the potential reckless construction of seven more, dirty coal-burning power plants in Michigan. Your help is needed and your voice will make a difference! Consider sending a letter to the editor of your local newsletter today, indicating that it's time for Michigan to take a stand against new coal plants. For tips on writing effective letters, please visit www.MichiganLCVEdFund.org/toolkit.htm.

Power Shift 2007

"80 By 50!" "We Want More!"

These were just two of the declarations chanted in front of the White House in November at a rally that took place during Power Shift 2007, the largest conference to date on climate change, with over 5,500 students and young activists converging on Washington, D.C., from every state in the union and several provinces.



The weekend was filled with workshops, panel discussions, and speeches from policy experts, scientists, activists, and politicians, including Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. The young people lobbied their Senators and Representatives and advocated for an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Two Michigan LCV staffers traveled to D.C. to present on the current status of energy legislation in Michigan during a regional breakout session with over 250 Michigan students. Michigan LCV Education Fund plans to continue working with students to implement climate change policies here in the state. We were completely inspired by the passion and commitment of all involved with Power Shift 2007!

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Please see the facing page for
the continued list

Green Business Spotlight Irwin Seating



Win Irwin, President

Editors' Note: After meeting Win Irwin, President and CEO of Irwin Seating Company late last fall, it became clear that this was a business that should be profiled in the Michigan LCV Newsletter. Mr. Irwin and his company are committed to environmental stewardship and sustainability in a way that is holistic, driven by the desire to do what is right for the health of our community and our natural world.

Irwin Seating Company is the world's leading manufacturer of public seating for movie theatres, auditoriums, arenas, performing arts centers, and convention centers. Their show room is remarkable (you should see all the beautiful seating they create!) and their products can be found throughout the world, from Festival Hall in Osaka, Japan, to Carnegie Hall in New York; from Cardinals' Stadium in Phoenix to UCI Cinemas in Lisbon, Portugal.

The company was founded in Grand Rapids almost 100 years ago under the name of Steel Furniture Company with five primary investors, including three Irwin brothers: Earle, Eber and Robert. In the 1930's, the Irwin brothers bought out the other investors and the name was changed to Irwin Seating Company. Earle S. Irwin was the Company President at the time. In the late 1940's, Earle's son William became President, serving in that role until his retirement in 1984, at which point his own son Earle S. (Win) was named Company President and serves in that capacity today.

With headquarters in Grand Rapids, Irwin Seating Company operates manufacturing facilities in Spain, Brazil, and China, with an additional North American facility in Altamont, Illinois. The plant in Grand Rapids occupies 450,000 square feet and employs over 600 people.

Lisa Wozniak, Michigan LCV Executive Director had the pleasure of talking with Win about his business, as well as with Ann Kuzee, Director of Human Resources, and Bill MacLeod, Director of Business and Sales Development. These conversations revealed Irwin Seating Company's depth of commitment to being responsible stewards, while also manufacturing an extraordinarily high quality product.

In 1990, under Win's leadership and vision, the company created an Environmental Leadership Team. This Team works to take the company above and beyond any mandatory compliances, achieving increased environmental improvements because they believe "it's the right thing to do". Some of Irwin Seating Company's laudatory voluntarily actions have involved transitions to:

- Dry/powder coating instead of wet coating, which emits a lot of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs).
- Energy efficient lighting.
- Low VOC top coating (they have reduced their VOC permit from 40 tons per year to two!)
- Water-based glues (non-hazardous).
- Using the same skids and crates for drop off and return of their product (which means no new/additional packaging needed).
- Energy plans that affect machine start up and shut down (which means no machines running when they don't need to be).



In addition, the company has experimented with using strap and blanket wrappings instead of traditional big boxes, reducing excess waste from cardboard and other packaging.

While companies across the country have begun recycling, purchasing green energy, and jumping on the green business bandwagon, Irwin Seating—under Win's dynamic leadership—has been out in front of most, making environmental improvements for years because they believe that sustainability and environmental stewardship is purely and simply a part of good business.

For more information on this outstanding business, visit www.IrwinSeating.com.

Where Do the Children Play?

A Film Review



MLCV Board Member and author Elizabeth Goodenough

One third of school children are overweight. Chronic illnesses caused by unhealthy lifestyles have now surpassed infectious disease as the major cause of death and disability in the U.S. This shift in health patterns may be directly related to changes in our communities related to the complete lack of coherent land use policies.

On November 29, Michigan LCV was proud to host the Ann Arbor debut of *Where Do The Children Play?*, a provocative documentary highlighting the importance of open, natural play spaces for children, which are increasingly threatened by land development, media induced adult fear, the rise of technology, the breakdown of community, and overly structured learning

environments imposed by parents and teachers. Over sixty people gathered together at the wonderful Leslie Science Center to watch the film and hear from both the film's Producer/ Director Chris Cook, and Outreach Director (and Michigan LCV board member) Liz Goodenough.

As the audience found, the film has four main topics: the current status of outdoor play; the effects of suburbanization; fears that drive children indoors; and the future of the play movement. Children from across Michigan—from Detroit and Chelsea to Beaver Island and Ann Arbor—were interviewed to explore their own play experiences, adding an integral emotional component to the film.

As hoped, *Where Do The Children Play?* brought the issues of play and the associated importance of metropolitan planning to the attention of prominent community members who attended the screening, including Ann Arbor Mayor John Hieftje, County Administrator Bob Gunzel, Michigan Environmental Council President Lana Pollack, and many others. The audience was deeply moved by Goodenough's message that the loss of play space for children has grave implications for the health and overall well-being of our future. It became clear to all there that evening that action is direly needed to reverse this trend.

In the discussion following the film, Michigan LCV Executive Director Lisa Wozniak raised the importance of future integrated land use planning, ideally mandated by the state and including all levels of local government, from city councils and township boards to county commissions.

Due to the power of this film, Michigan LCV intends to incorporate *Where Do The Children Play?* into targeted work across the state. Goodenough and Cook have provided us with an amazing tool to educate decision makers on the importance of funding parkland, conserving open spaces, and working for healthy communities in Michigan.

Christopher Cook is an Emmy-award winning producer, director, and writer who lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His documentary work has appeared on regional public television, commercial television stations, and cable stations such as the History Channel.

Dr. Elizabeth Goodenough is a UM Lecturer in literature and a Michigan LCV board member. Her books include Secret Spaces Of Childhood, Where Do the Children Play?: A Companion Study Guide, and Under Fire: Childhood In The Shadow Of War (forthcoming from Wayne State Press).

For more information or to order the film and book, visit www.MichiganLCVEdFund.org or www.michigantelevision.org/childrenplay.



Image from the film used with permission from Michigan Public Television

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Michigan LCV Needs Your Help! Important Survey Enclosed

The staff at Michigan LCV needs your help in determining which environmental issues are most important in the hearts and minds of Michigan citizens like you. Please take a minute to complete the short survey inside this edition of Michigan League Update and return it in our enclosed envelope. Your answers are very valuable to us!

NOTE: Each respondent will receive one of our wonderful Michigan LCV bumper stickers, shown above.

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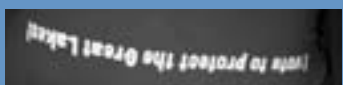
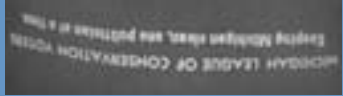
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