



May 16, 2018

The Honorable Gary Howell, Chair
Michigan House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources

Dear Representative Howell,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Public Land Management Strategy legislation. As the sportsman's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife, there is no issue more important to Backcountry Hunters and Anglers than our shared public lands.

We appreciate the progress that has been made on the most recent revisions of these bills. For instance, it is only fair to place the same burdens on disposing of our public lands as we place on acquiring it as far as notice requirements. We applaud the diligent work of the organizations that have been at the table in working to improve this legislation. However, we have to evaluate legislation based on whether it improves or diminishes access to public land to hunt, fish, and recreate in all the different ways Michigan citizens do.

Perhaps tying the local veto only to situations when the Legislature fails to appropriate sufficient funds to pay Payments in Lieu of Taxes, as required already in statute, would make sense, if we didn't apply a local veto provision later in the same legislation in counties with greater than 40% public lands. While the purported benefit of the legislation would be to approve the 2013 DNR Managed Public Land Strategy and lift the Land Cap, this provision essentially makes the Land Cap permanent in counties with greater than 40% public land, which can be lifted on a situational basis by local government. Outdoor recreation in Michigan is a \$26.6 billion industry. Allowing a handful of local officials to put piecemeal roadblocks in front of the infrastructure necessary to sustain and grow that industry – public land – is poor public policy.

We also think it poor policy from a practical standpoint to require legislative approval of an updated DNR Managed Public Land Strategy every five years. We're only now getting to the 2013 strategy – in 2018 – and only handcuffed with provisions like those mentioned above which make the lifting of the Land Cap illusory in many cases.

While there are several more provisions within this legislative package which could diminish the quality of Michigan's public land portfolio, there are a few more which we would like to address specifically.

The berm removal process outlined in Senate Bill 302 is unduly burdensome for protecting Michigan's public land. Requiring a fully noticed public meeting for the DNR to deny a request to remove a berm or a gate which protects wildlife habitat from motorized damage seems – whether intended or not – to create a situation where the DNR will often simply remove the barriers when they lack the capacity to comply with the provisions of this legislation. While there are mild improvements in this substitute in not allowing groups to flood the DNR with multiple requests on the same gate or berm, it starts from the fundamentally flawed presumption that non-motorized backcountry and wildlife habitat is undesirable.

Our organization was founded to protect these wild public lands and we're the fastest-growing sportsmen's organization both nationally and here in Michigan because of the value that hunters, anglers and outdoor recreationists place in these areas. The DNR just finalized a forest road plan for the northern Lower Peninsula in which our members submitted hundreds of comments to keep certain areas protected from motorized damage. We don't believe that groups should be able to undermine that public process by using this legislation as an end-around it.

Also in SB 302, the provision preventing the expenditure of game and fish dollars for nongame species undermines the most important role that hunters and anglers like us play as conservationists. As a small fraction of the overall population, it's essential for hunters and anglers to maintain our support by the rest of the population. We maintain that support in large part by paying for the conservation of all wildlife, not just those which we pursue. Aside from lost grant opportunities and the basic premise that habitat benefits multiple species – both game and nongame – the public message this sends would be that hunters are selfish and will only pay for what they think benefits them in the short term. This runs contrary to the North American Model of Conservation, and as an organization of hunters and anglers, we want to conserve all species, and proudly pay more than our share to that end.

We want to see the DNR's Managed Public Land Strategy approved and the unnecessary and arbitrary Land Cap removed, but the conditions included in this legislation make the Land Cap permanent, with limited exception, and cement in place the cycle we've been on since the Land Cap was originally passed. While the substitutes offered today improve the legislation, these bills started from the flawed place of assuming that public land was a bad thing. Public land supports Michigan's \$26.6 billion outdoor recreation economy, our activities as hunters, anglers and outdoor recreationists, and habitat for the fish and wildlife we value whether we hunt them or not.

For these reasons, the Michigan Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers opposes HB 4475, SB 302 and SB 303 as currently written.

Sincerely,



Drew Young Dyke

Chair, Board of Directors

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Michigan Chapter

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