

Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy

2015-2016 Policy Agenda

Our Mission: Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy strengthens the collective efforts of land conservancies and organizations dedicated to the conservation of Michigan's environmentally and economically significant lands. Heart of the Lakes provides leadership, innovative ideas, and advocates for smart public policy for the benefit of our communities and for generations to come.

Heart of the Lakes anticipates focusing on the following state and federal policy priorities in the 2015-2016 legislative session in addition to emerging issues core to our mission and in the interest of Michigan land conservancies:

- Provide policymakers with information on the economic, social and environmental value of Michigan's land-based resources; and land conservancies' role and partnership capacity in protecting them.
 - Meet with a minimum of 15 incoming legislators within the first 3 months of their term, including leadership, pertinent committee members, and others to introduce Heart of the Lakes and advocate for our conservation policy agenda.
 - Conduct at least one Land Conservancy Day per year—provide training, briefing on issues and the opportunity for members to meet with their legislators in the Capitol.
 - Encourage Heart of the Lakes members to contact their legislators to educate them on the work of land conservancies as well as advocate specific conservation policies.
- Assist Michigan land conservancies in exploring land protection strategies that access greater local, state and/or federal funding for land protection and related benefits, such as water quality
 - Work to better position conservancies for funding for land protection/water quality work (e.g. Clean Michigan Initiative/319 Funds)
 - Explore/evaluate opportunities to assist with or educate members regarding wetland mitigation
- Protect the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) and ensure revenues from the development of state-owned minerals are dedicated to conservation purposes.
 - Develop a joint platform and campaign with key state conservation groups on the future of revenues from state-owned minerals, including raising or eliminating the constitutional cap on the MNRTF
 - Advocate for swift passage of appropriations legislation for MNRTF grants to ensure funds are distributed quickly
 - With partners, work to identify sources to help fund the local match share for MNRTF projects

- Generate novel approaches to state funding streams for farmland preservation and continue to advocate for federal Farm Bill funding allocation for Michigan projects.
 - Identify and pursue dedicated state funding mechanisms for the State Agriculture Preservation Program to fund local Purchase of Development Rights programs and to support the Farmland and Open Space Program (PA 116)
 - Develop case studies/case statement for farmland protection as a rural economic development tool to present to decision-makers
 - Explore new local match sources so that local farmland protection programs are able to take full advantage of federal farmland protection funding

- Support advocacy efforts on federal issues that directly impact Michigan land conservancies
 - Advocate for enhanced federal income tax incentive for conservation easement donations
 - Expand federal estate tax incentives for landowners
 - Advocate for full Land and Water Conservation Fund allocation.

- Ensure that Michigan land conservancies and permanent land protection efforts are supported by public policy.
 - Ensure that land conservancies remain eligible for real property tax exemption
 - Explore opportunities to strengthen land conservancy relations with Michigan Township Association and other local government associations

In addition to the above state and federal priorities, there may be instances where local policy issues may create opportunities for model policy that will be of statewide importance or precedence to land conservancies and land conservation. In those instances, Heart of the Lakes will determine what role is appropriate and needed to take.