



# Protecting our Natural Infrastructure

## Michigan's Network of Land and Water

Michigan's 4.5 million acres of state lands, in addition to local and federal public lands, provide us with a bounty of recreational opportunities and scenic views as we travel the state. These lands are deeply embedded as part of the recreational landscape and cultural heritage of Michigan.

All Michigan citizens deserve access to our lakes, rivers, fields and forests. Steps should be taken now to secure strategic connections between these lands and waters. Linking the state's natural infrastructure will provide long term benefits: ready access to recreational users, continuous habitat and corridors for wildlife, increased biodiversity, secured water quality, and a protected agricultural base.

## Biodiversity, Connectivity, and Statewide Health

Biodiversity is defined as the number or variety of species in an ecosystem. Maintaining high biodiversity is important for ecosystem health. Each plant and animal plays a role in the function and process of life. Protecting the ecosystems that these organisms live in protects our quality of life.

Providing connectivity between suitable habitat across a landscape allows organisms to move between populations and spread genetic diversity, increasing the "fitness" of the species as a whole. When suitable habitat becomes fragmented, populations are challenged to migrate, challenged to maintain their genetic diversity, and challenged to survive long term.

Ensuring a network of healthy lands and waters that support the state's biodiversity will ensure fit plant and animal populations and the ability for each to carry out its unique role in maintaining overall ecosystem health and thus, our quality of life.

## Michigan Land Conservancies: Playing a Vital Role

Protecting a network of important lands and waters now will ensure our best chance at success in the future of Michigan's abundant land based resources.

Through strategic conservation planning and relationships with landowners and partners, conservancies are working to protect large, connected areas of forest, grassland, wetland and shoreline where high biodiversity exists.



# The Opportunity is Now: Michigan's Conservation Investment

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## Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) is a constitutionally protected fund providing financial assistance to local governments and the State for the conservation of lands and development of public recreational opportunities. The MNRTF is supported by annual revenues from the development of state-owned mineral resources, largely oil and gas.

Due to the May 2010 record oil and natural gas lease auction, the MNRTF is anticipated to reach its \$500 million cap in 2011, causing revenues to begin flowing into the State Park Endowment Fund (SPEF) to pay for operations, maintenance, development, and land acquisition in state parks. Once the SPEF accumulated principal reaches \$800 million, revenues will begin flowing into the General Fund.

## A Strategy for Michigan

Strategic discussions must take place to determine the way in which additional funds will be expended. We must ensure that Michigan leverages this important investment and opportunity to assess how future revenues could help to drive a statewide conservation strategic plan.



## Recommended Actions

### Build a statewide conservation vision

How do we want Michigan to look in 20, 50, 100 years? We must determine the conservation and policy actions needed now to achieve that vision and how to develop it along with a fundamentally new business plan for the state.

### Call for an investment strategy for natural resources

Michigan needs to develop an investment strategy for the long-term preservation of our natural resources, which are critical to the economic future of our state. As the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund approaches its endowment cap and oil & gas revenues begin to flow into the State Park Endowment Fund, now is an opportune time to develop strategies to ensure future revenues support conservation. Heart of the Lakes aims to work collaboratively with other conservation organizations and the new administration to seek opportunities to leverage these funding sources for continued and expanded conservation and recreation opportunities.