

# Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy

## 2011-2012 Policy Agenda

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**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 policy priorities in 2011-2012 in addition to emerging issues core to our mission and in the interest of Michigan land conservancies:

- Provide policymakers with information on key conservation issues; 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 20 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.
  - 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 federal funding for water quality protection.
  - Communicate with congressional delegation stressing importance of Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding to Michigan
- Continue protection of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust fund and explore continued or new application of future oil and gas revenues to conservation purposes.
  - Work with the new administration and MNRTF board and staff to offer recommendations as a new strategic approach to improve the efficacy of the Trust Fund is developed.
  - Advocate for swift passage of appropriations legislation for MNRTF grants to ensure funds are distributed quickly
- Generate novel approaches to state funding streams for farmland preservation and continue to advocate for federal Farm and Ranch lands Protection Program funding allocation for Michigan projects.

- Work with Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan Farm Bureau, and legislators to reintroduce PA116 reform bills if the current HB 4158 and 5218 are not signed into law in 2010
  - Explore new funding mechanisms for the State Agriculture Preservation Program to fund local Purchase of Development Rights programs
  - Explore new local match sources so that local farmland protection programs are able to take full advantage of federal farmland protection funding
- Support Land Trust Alliance 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 \$900 million Land and Water Conservation Fund allocation.
- Ensure that Michigan land conservancies remain eligible for real property tax exemption.
  - Advocate for passage of legislation that appropriately clarifies subsection 5 of the General Property Tax Act (MCL 211.7o), but does not limit property tax exemption for conservancies to that section only.