



A Coalition of Organizations Protecting Michigan's People and the Environment

AWARD HONOREES

Honoring unsung heroes

Top environmental awards go to river steward, policy expert

Author, historian, activist: He's advised governors, led coalitions, run MEC, and authored some of the most authoritative and insightful



Dave Dempsey

accounts of Michigan's environmental history. Now Dave Dempsey's work on behalf of the Great Lakes and the Mitten State are recognized with MEC's *Helen & William Milliken Distinguished Service Award*. Dempsey, a former MEC policy director, took his inspiration from a special morning on the shores of Lake Superior. Read about him on Page 4.

Boots in the River: Decades of tireless volunteer work maintaining and improving Michigan's storied blue-ribbon trout streams have earned

Bob Andrus the respect of his colleagues and the gratitude of those who fish and play on streams including the Au Sable and Manistee. It has also earned him MEC's 2013 *Petoskey Prize for Grassroots Leadership*. Learn more about Andrus and his "Boots in the Water" crew of river rats on page 6.



Bob Andrus

Success! State budget includes \$1.25 million to help keep Michigan kids safe from lead dangers



Tina Reynolds

More than \$1 million to help keep Michigan children safe from lead poisoning was included in a budget bill signed in June by Governor Rick Snyder. The allocation was a direct result of advocacy and education efforts by the Michigan Alliance for Lead Safe Housing (MIALSH). MEC is part of the coalition's core leadership team.

The money, \$1.25 million, will be used in the 2013-2014 budget year. Advocates expect the Department of Community Health (DCH) to use the funds to address the backlog of homes waiting to be made lead safe, and for nursing and case management support for affected families.

See **Keep kids safe from lead dangers**, page 14



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PURPOSE

Founded in 1980, MEC is a coalition of over 60 environmental and public health organizations with more than 200,000 individual members. For 33 years, MEC has provided a voice for the environment at the State Capital. In addition to serving as a clearinghouse of environmental information, MEC develops public policy, educates elected officials and the public, and provides training and support to member organizations.

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QUOTABLE

“We have the ability to eradicate lead poisoning entirely in Michigan. This bipartisan budget agreement is a step in that direction. This funding brings us closer to the day when no children are lead poisoned.”

—Tina Reynolds, MEC health policy director, on securing \$1.25 million in the state budget for lead poisoning prevention

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From ruin to recovery: MEC awardees carry the torch for conservation through good times and bad



Chris Kolb

Much of Michigan's past prosperity was built on the exploitation and destruction of our natural resources. Late 19th century deforestation created lumber barons and great wealth for some. The aftermath left a ravaged landscape and horribly degraded land and water. Out of this destruction, Michigan's first conservation leaders emerged.

The industrialization of Michigan also devastated air and waterways with unchecked pollution that fouled rivers and poisoned the air. It contaminated broad swaths of land, many of which still sit idle. These crises spurred a new environmental movement that reached a high water mark in the 1970s when many key environmental protections were adopted nationally and in Michigan.

As our air improved and our waters were cleaned up, the urgency for action and vigilance receded. In

fact, the 1990s saw a disheartening rollback of the environmental gains of the previous decades. Today, we still feel that pushback in the debate over the ownership of public lands, wetland regulations, and diminishing protection for critical ecosystems, including our globally unique freshwater sand dunes.

The valuable protections wisely adopted by previous generations—which have effectively protected Pure Michigan—are being chipped away one piece at a time.

What's more, we are failing to properly enforce the laws we have. Funding shortfalls for the Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Natural Resources are part of the continuing assault on environmental protection and public health. It is interesting to note that those who want to weaken the rules often cite our cleaner air and water as reasons

we no longer need those rules. In fact, a healthier Michigan was made possible by the same protections they are dismantling!

Make no mistake, we are still paying for the short-sighted practices of the past. The Great Lakes are riddled with contamination hot spots, a host of invasive species and mercury pollution. Polluted brownfields block revitalization of many of our urban areas. Destruction of wetlands has led to flooding and erosion. And sand—an ecological desert—continues to filter into our blue-ribbon trout streams from bad road crossings from the 1950s and 60s; to name just a few of many examples.

Dave Dempsey, this year's *Helen and William Milliken Distinguished Service Award* honoree, detailed this destruction and the individuals who

See **Carry the torch**, page 8



Bell ringers! Environmental successes won in recent weeks

In each issue of the *Michigan Environmental Report*, we celebrate accomplishments by MEC and member groups.

Get the lead out

MEC, through its leadership role in the Michigan Alliance for Lead Safe Housing (MIALSH), helped secure \$1.25 million in state funding for lead poisoning prevention and abatement in a bipartisan budget signed by Gov. Rick Snyder. Years of educational outreach to legislators and their staffs helped lay the groundwork for this important funding. Several legislators were moved to support the funding after personal meetings—arranged by the coalition—with families and others affected by the scourge of lead poisoning.

Budget buoyed

Heartening state budget news took place on several fronts in June. First, Gov. Rick Snyder's general fund proposals for the departments of Natural Resources and Environmental Quality withstood attacks and remained largely intact. Funding was secured for Amtrak's Wolverine (Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac) service which is a federally designated high-speed rail route. And a hunting/fishing license fee restructuring will provide money to hire more than 40 additional conservation officers to patrol Michigan's woods and waters.

Dunes intact

A developer's plan to ram a quarter-mile road through a township sand dune sanctuary near Montague was denied by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in May. MEC testified against the road, which in an Orwellian snippet of wordsmithing was called a "driveway" by the applicant. The state's Critical Dunes Act was weakened by legislators in 2012 to make it easier for developers to build on the globally unique freshwater dunes that grace Michigan's shores. The weakened law survived its first test. There will be more.

Runner up

The Michigan Environmental Council earned an honorable mention (runner up) in the 2013 *Detroit Free Press* Green Leaders contest. Entering in the nonprofit category, MEC was nominated by Gov. William Milliken, who wrote that MEC was "the most knowledgeable, effective and fair" environmental advocacy group in Michigan. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy took top honors among nonprofits.

Dave Dempsey: Author, historian, policy expert and steadfast defender of the Great Lakes

The sound was like thunder. Bass-heavy, ground-shaking booms at rhythmic intervals. It lured Dave Dempsey from his sleeping bag one fine summer day in 1981. What he found mesmerized him and forever guided his career path.

“It was a backpacking trip at the Pictured Rocks (in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula),” Dempsey recalled. “I got up before everyone else at the campsite. The waves were pounding against the base of the bluff. The view over Lake Superior, the waves, the rocks...I thought ‘I want to make sure people 500 years from now can have this same experience.’”

And so young Dave Dempsey set out to protect his Great Lakes. He became an environmentalist. And a conservationist. And an advisor to the governor. And historian. And author. And a policy advisor to Great Lakes governors and premiers. And a mentor. And... well, you get the picture.

That impactful body of work is why Dempsey is the 2013 recipient of the Michigan Environmental Council’s *Helen & William Milliken Distinguished Service Award*, bestowed annually on a person who has made extraordinary contributions to protect Michigan’s natural resources.

MEC President Chris Kolb said Dempsey has the rare ability to tear into the minutiae of complex environmental issues, while never losing sight of the important big picture.

“Dave Dempsey is the unique leader who is able to move effortlessly from talking about the arcane technical details of an issue, to explaining in vivid and powerful terms why that issue is so critical to the quality of life for the generations that come after us,” said Chris Kolb, MEC president. “Dave’s contributions through his public policy advocacy alone deserve our recognition and gratitude. However, when you add his authoritative chronicling of Michigan’s environmental history through his books, it’s

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Dempsey, right, banding baby eagles in Minnesota’s Voyageurs National Park with eagle researcher Dr. William Bowerman. Bowerman collects serum and analyzes for contaminants that help decipher environmental trends.

clear he has made a special, positive, and lasting impact on our state.”

Early eye opener

Young Dempsey was living on \$6,000 a year as a freelance writer when those Lake Superior waves altered the course of his life. Not long after that morning, a fledgling environmental coalition named the Michigan Environmental Council came calling, and Dempsey took the job. He dealt with lawmakers, sat through committee hearings and testified for and against the environmental bills of the day.

“It was a quick eye opener,” Dempsey recalls. “I was so idealistic and naïve. It surprised me that so many lawmakers were just simply not interested.”

Meanwhile, Governor James Blanchard was under attack by conservationists who were upset with

his administration’s seeming indifference to Michigan’s natural resources. The governor needed direction, and in July of 1983 he called on young Dempsey.

For the next six years, Dempsey guided Blanchard’s environmental policy, starting the state’s “first real toxic cleanup program,” helping establish protections from Great Lakes diversions through the Great Lakes Charter of 1985, and navigating the turbulent waters at the intersection of politics and policy.

Gov. Blanchard said Dempsey’s guidance was invaluable, and continues to be: “For several decades, Dave Dempsey has been a dedicated advocate for Michigan’s environment and for strong environmental protection laws. From negotiating our Great Lakes Charter, to becoming an accomplished author, Dave has been a wonderful steward of our great natural heritage.”

Dempsey is pleased he made a difference. But he is no longer naïve enough to believe it’s permanent: “A lot of the significant things we did back then are now under attack. Like the sand dune conservation act. It’s a reminder



Ruin & Recovery was Dempsey's first book.

that there are very few permanent victories in conservation.”

Move to Minnesota

Dempsey was out of a job after Blanchard was defeated by Gov. John Engler in 1990, but quickly was hired to lead Clean Water Action's Michigan chapter. In 1994, he rejoined MEC as policy director where he stayed for a decade.

In 2004, he moved to Minnesota where he freelanced and worked for Conservation Minnesota. He married Jennifer Morris in 2008, and lives with her in Rosemount, MN. He has two stepchildren, Caroline, 16, and Katie, 21.

In 2010, he was tapped by Lana Pollack, U.S. chair of the International Joint Commission (IJC), to be a policy advisor on all things Great Lakes. It was a reunion—Dempsey and Pollack had worked together while Pollack ran MEC from 1996 through 2008.

Under a 1909 treaty, the IJC regulates shared water uses between the U.S. and Canada, and recommends solutions and policy changes to protect those waters. It has special responsibilities under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, last updated in 2012, to assess the progress of the two nations in protecting the Lakes.

It was while Dempsey was at MEC that he wrote the first of his eight books: *Ruin & Recovery: Michigan's Rise as a Conservation Leader*, published in 2001.

Dempsey said he wrote the book to “restore my idealism” during a period where Gov. John Engler rolled back and weakened many of the environmental protections of the previous two governors—William Milliken and Blanchard.

Seven books followed (see sidebar). They include more keen historical analysis of Michigan's environmental history, a photography book, a biography of Gov. Milliken and a fictional Great Lakes thriller.

The historical books contain a common lesson. “Ruin and recovery come in cycles,” Dempsey explains. “When it appears lawmakers are unwilling to do the right thing, people must stay strong and organize. There is always support for good environmental policy.”

Dempsey is part curmudgeon, part Pollyanna. With no apologies: “I'm still idealistic enough to believe one or two people can make a big difference. And that keeps me going.” ■

Dave Dempsey, author

Dave Dempsey has authored or co-authored eight books. We endorse them all, but particularly suggest *Ruin and Recovery* as a must-read for anyone wanting to understand Michigan's fascinating environmental history. Here they are, chronologically:

***Ruin & Recovery: Michigan's Rise as a Conservation Leader*, 2001**

Examines the cycles of exploitation and the ensuing conservation movements that follow throughout Michigan's history. From extensive logging at the advent of statehood to relatively recent river pollution, the book illuminates how policies are created in response to crises, and the battles it takes to implement strong measures to protect Michigan's natural resources.

***On the Brink: The Great Lakes in the 21st Century*, 2004**

Social and political examples are used to demonstrate the vulnerability of the Great Lakes system on many different levels. In response to these threats, the book emphasizes that solutions must be multidimensional and creative.

***William G. Milliken: Michigan's Passionate Moderate*, 2008**

Governor Milliken's strengths and weaknesses as a politician as well the historical context of his career are examined. Held up as an icon of decency who shunned extremism and worked for consensus, Milliken served for 14 years and established a strong environmental protection legacy.

***The Waters of Michigan*, co-authored with David Lubbers, 2008**

Michigan's most valuable resource, water, is examined through the photographic lens. This book urges us to realize the beauty and importance of this great asset and to treat it as such.

***Great Lakes for Sale: From Whitecaps to Bottlecaps*, 2009**

Focusing on the issue of water diversion as a threat to the health of the world's greatest freshwater ecosystem, this book answers many questions about conservation, raises alarms about potential threats to the Great Lakes, and empowers citizens to take positive action.

***Superior Shores: A Novel of Conservation*, 2010**

The fictional battle between a Chicago developer who wants to develop the Lake Superior shoreline and a conservationist who wants to protect its beauty takes surprising twists.

***Ink Trails: Michigan's Famous and Forgotten Authors*, co-authored with his brother Jack Dempsey, 2012**

With impressive research, this book uncovers secrets, myths and anecdotes about some of Michigan's most famous—and some unknown but wildly interesting—writers.

***The Great Lake Sturgeon*, co-authored with Nancy Auer, 2013**

An examination of the legendary sturgeon and its effect on the ecological and commercial atmosphere of the Great Lakes.

—Compiled by Mathieu Gervais, MEC

Bob Andrus: Tireless champion for Michigan's cold water trout streams

When MEC President Chris Kolb called Bob Andrus to tell him he'd won MEC's *Petoskey Prize*, Andrus took the call standing waist-deep in the Holy Waters section of the frigid Au Sable River.

That figures.

For Andrus and the hundreds of other volunteers who carefully steward, repair and maintain Northern Michigan's nationally renowned trout waters, the river is a virtual second home and a labor of love.

Andrus is quick to point out that he's just one of many who keep this unique endeavor rolling. Any one of the others are deserving of the award, insists the soft-spoken retiree.

But it was Andrus' own buddies who pulled together an exhaustive nomination detailing Andrus' long-time leadership role and his "Boots in the River" volunteer coordination.

AWARD HONOREE



PHOTO COURTESY DETROIT FREE PRESS

Andrus with Homer, a 23.5" brown trout he caught in the Au Sable River in 2005.

So, it is Andrus who earns the Michigan Environmental Council's *Petoskey Prize for Grassroots Leadership* in 2013. The prize is bestowed annually on an individual whose commitment, creativity and courage have inspired

others to safeguard Michigan's air, land and water for future generations. Winners receive \$5,000 for the Michigan environmental organization(s) of their choice.

Andrus was nominated by MEC member group Au Sable River Watershed Committee with support from groups including Michigan Trout Unlimited, Huron Pines, and the Au Sable River Property Owners' Association.

The compilation of Andrus' volunteer efforts is nearly as thick as the Grayling phone book: beaver dam removals, stream temperature monitoring, construction of trout spawning riffles, cedar plantings on riverbanks, insect surveys, invasive species removals, past chair of Michigan Trout Unlimited, a founder of the Au Sable River Watershed Restoration Committee, and more.

Slightly built, wiry, and with a shock of white hair perpetually hidden underneath a ballcap, Andrus moves deliberately and purposefully as he arranges logs, saws timbers, shuttles vehicles and stalks the river, directing volunteers.

At 68 years of age, he's as active as a man 20 years his junior. A couple years ago, he went on a three-week hike along the Continental Divide. By "hike," he means remote backcountry backpacking: sleeping in tents and carrying every pound of essential gear on his back.

He credits the river for keeping him young. And he returns the favor in spades.



From his riverside dock, Andrus can watch anglers and paddlers drift by on the Au Sable's revered Holy Waters stretch downstream from Grayling. Only no-kill, flies-only fishing is permitted on the stretch.

Historical challenges

It is almost certain that the Au Sable and Manistee rivers would not be the renowned trout streams they remain today without the efforts of volunteers who remove logjams, restore habitat, plant cedars to shade the cool water, and monitor biological indicators like insect hatches.

Some of the challenges they wrestle with are historical screw-ups that we are still paying for. Sand—a “biological desert” says Andrus—is still washing into the streams from hastily constructed road crossings built during the past century. Residual sand from the I-75 highway construction in the early 1960s still trickles through the Au Sable’s tributaries. Depressions in the riverbed called sand traps are maintained, and the sand periodically removed.

The challenges change with the times. Unchecked waste from 1970s sewage plants choked the river with nutrients, fueling weed growth that sucked life-giving oxygen from the water. Modern environmental rules for discharges helped return the rivers to health.

Credit to Milliken

Back then, government had a strong conservation role in proactively managing Michigan’s trout waters. Andrus credits former Gov. William Milliken with setting up watershed advisory councils throughout Michigan to address pollution and habitat loss throughout the state in the 1970s. When the councils disbanded, much of their work fell in the laps of volunteer groups, who continue to carry the torch today.

“Twenty, 30 years ago a lot of this stuff was done by government agencies,” said Andrus. “Now it’s being done by the public.”

On one spring day this year, a convoy of six pickup trucks rambled away from the Wakeley Bridge Canoe Landing as Andrus pulled in. Jim Anderson, volunteer and retired Michigan National Guard Brigadier General shouted, “We’re going to get that other tree and tie it to your boat trailer.”

Andrus nodded. They talked logistics. Andrus was driving Anderson’s truck. They needed to retrieve Andrus’ truck from Anderson’s house, and the boat trailer from Andrus’ place. Then tie the tree to the trailer and move it to one of the habitat projects. The tree might end up lashed to other logs and strategically positioned in the river to create habitat.

Oh, and Anderson left Andrus with no gas in the truck. “I noticed that,” deadpanned Andrus. “Thanks a lot.”



A sharpened log will be utilized by volunteer river crews to create fish habitat and structure on the Au Sable.

Getting the bug

Andrus grew up in a farming family outside of Saginaw. He went to Michigan State University and did a tour of duty with an infantry aviation unit during the Vietnam War before returning to college to earn a teaching certificate.

But it was the summer between high school and college where he found his ‘eureka moment.’ Working as a canoe guide at a Boy Scout camp, he was introduced to the Manistee River and its storied trout population. “I sat there and watched the trout rising on the river and I thought to myself ‘wow.’ It didn’t take long to get the bug.”

Seduced by the river, Andrus moved to Grayling and began a public school teaching career in Grayling. He raised three children to adulthood—Ian, 35, who lives in Grayling; Kelsey, 26, of Evart, MI; and Austin, 25, of Denver. He also mentored hundreds of other young Grayling students—many who now volunteer on the river.

He’s lived for 25 years in a log cabin-style home tucked in the woods east of Grayling, steps from his beloved river. A wooden walkway leads down to the Holy Waters section of the Au Sable where Andrus can sit on the dock and watch anglers and canoeists drift by on the current.

He estimates he spends 1,000 volunteer hours a year working on river projects. In any given year, others may equal or exceed that commitment. But no one’s done it so consistently, year-in and year-out, for the decades Andrus has.

“Watershed groups, advocates and leaders come and go as quickly as the snow on an early spring day,” wrote Samuel Prentice with the conservation group Huron Pines in a nominating letter. “However Bob Andrus has fished, experienced and protected this watershed for more than a quarter of a century. Understanding that watershed protection is...certainly worth fighting for to keep this premier cold water system a top fishery in the nation is why Bob Andrus is the epitome of grassroots leadership.” ■

Carry the torch

— continued from page 3

enabled the restoration in his book *Ruin and Recovery*. We now reap the benefit of their work, from the reforestation of our landscape to our award-winning state parks; from the nation's strongest bottle return statute to the cleaning up of the Great Lakes.

It was the citizen leaders of Michigan's conservation and environmental movements who saved our state from destruction by short-sighted political leaders. And it is citizen leaders who MEC honors each year, bestowing the *Milliken Award* and the *Petoskey Prize for Grassroots Leadership*. This year's honorees exemplify the qualities we seek in the individuals we have hon-

ored and will continue to honor in years to come.

The *Helen & William Milliken Distinguished Service Award* recognizes individuals who show outstanding leadership, enduring commitment and extraordinary public service in protecting natural resources at the local, state and national levels. The *Petoskey Prize for Grassroots Leadership* is given annually to a person whose commitment, creativity and courage have inspired others to safeguard Michigan's air, land and water for future generations. This issue of our newsletter highlights the efforts of our honorees.

Dave Dempsey's distinguished career includes decades of impactful work both from within and from outside the political arena. He was an early director of the Michigan Environmental Council in the 1980s before a lengthy stint as environmental policy advisor for Gov. Jim Blanchard. He also led Clean Water Action's Michigan office before moving to Minnesota to continue working on Great Lakes issues. He has authored or co-authored eight books about the Great Lakes.

Currently, he works with former MEC President Lana Pollack at the International Joint Commission, which provides research and policy expertise to help oversee the health of boundary waters between the United States and Canada.

Petoskey Prize recipient Bob Andrus is a tireless champion of Michigan's blue-ribbon trout streams, investing thousands of volunteer hours to coordinate and execute vital protection and restoration efforts on the Au Sable and Manistee rivers and their many tributaries.

The retired Grayling schoolteacher and the "Boots in the River" crew of dedicated river stewards are unsung heroes in restoring and safeguarding the fishing waters that have made Michigan a destination for fly fishermen across the nation.

Both Andrus and Dempsey insist there are others more deserving of this year's awards. And, indeed, it is always difficult to honor merely two. Countless others are fulfilling the legacy of Michigan's past conservation and environmental leaders. They also deserve recognition.

Though the smokestacks are cleaner and the water clearer, there are still huge environmental threats facing us and a continued drumbeat to roll back the gains we have made. Michigan became a conservation and environmental leader through repairing the damage we had done, i.e., the ruin and recovery. It was through the tireless efforts of citizens that the recovery was achieved.

The real test for us will be whether we can, over the long term, establish a true conservation heritage—one that recognizes the keys to high quality of life and our economy and policies that protect the natural assets and public health of our state, our region and our communities.

A torch has been passed from yesterday's leaders to today's generation. The question is, who is willing to pick up the torch and run with it like never before?

Today's environmental challenges appear huge and daunting, but so did the challenges of the past. A past generation rose to the occasion. Can our generation rise to meet its challenges? Our two honorees, as well as our past recipients, have set an example and blazed a path to a better, stronger and cleaner environmental future for the rest of us to follow.

Thank you, Dave and Bob. ■



Michigan's forests were once devastated by unchecked logging. They've been restored in large part through careful stewardship and sustainable practices. The cycle is one of several themes throughout Dave Dempsey's *Ruin & Recovery*.

*In Memoriam***Helen Milliken: Redefined the role of Michigan's First Spouse with tenacity, humility**

There's a darn good reason that the state's top environmental honor is not simply called the *William Milliken Distinguished Service Award*.

It is properly called the *Helen & William Milliken Distinguished Service Award* in recognition that both the former governor and his wife made their own substantial legacies in protecting Michigan's natural resources during the course of their careers. The award is presented annually by the Michigan Environmental Council.

Helen, who passed away in late 2012, was honored in June during a memorial service in Traverse City. MEC President Chris Kolb, who attended the service, said it is bittersweet that the 2013 *Milliken Award* will be presented in the absence of one of the award's namesakes.

"Helen Milliken was a forceful, steady voice speaking on behalf of Michigan's natural resources and other important issues like equal rights for women and the arts," said Kolb. "We are humbled to be able to present the *Milliken Award* in her name to perpetuate her legacy in this one small way."

At a time when Michigan first ladies typically were seen and not heard, Helen Milliken redefined the role in a more vocal—and cerebral—way. She campaigned for the ill-fated women's Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution; railed against the blight of billboards on Michigan's landscapes; challenged oil drilling in the pristine Pigeon River Country; and was a champion of the arts and the state's natural beauty.

She pursued all these causes passionately, but

with the quiet and soft-spoken nature borne of humility: "Her voice was like soft music," said longtime friend and colleague Joyce Braithwaite-Brickley at the June 3 memorial service. "No matter how annoying things became and no matter how disappointing people could be...she was never given to ranting or raving...." She "opened hearts, changed minds and adjusted to changing circumstances herself."

Braithwaite-Brickley recounted Helen Milliken's forceful, yet low-key approach to pursuing positive change in the public arena—a stage that she did not choose for herself, but that came with the job of being "the governor's wife."

"I look back on so many years with Helen and all the contributions she made in all of her state and national endeavors, the quiet way she always stepped aside when accolades were given, the supreme pleasure she got from our escapades."

"Helen didn't really want to be the only woman at the public table," Braithwaite-Brickley continued. "She wanted all of us there. She went out of her way to be a mentor, to encourage young women in particular. She was, inexhaustibly, an influence greater than she ever knew."

Longtime political journalist Tim Skubick called Helen Milliken "...a female trailblazer of the best kind," writing in a column about the memorial service that, "The laughter and tears this day only serve to underscore that the State of Michigan was blessed to have her...you can't disagree that she was a class act and single-handedly rewrote the book on how to be an independent First Lady." ■

"She went out of her way to be a mentor, to encourage young women in particular. She was, inexhaustibly, an influence greater than she ever knew."

MEC steps up to chart a vision for Michigan's "Big Wild"

Brad Garmon appointed to Pigeon River Country Advisory Council

The Pigeon River Country State Forest has for decades been the crucible for conservation in Michigan. It's the focus of heated debates and hard-won compromises about how to manage a place—and by extension, a state—rich in both stunning natural beauty and precious natural resources.

Like the cold, swift trout streams that rise from its highlands, critical natural resource policy challenges and solutions tend to spring from the forest and flow beyond its boundaries.

The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) is where the forest's representative stakeholders each make the case for their vision of its future, and the Michigan Environmental Council (MEC) now has a new face on that council. With it comes a fresh opportunity to promote thoughtful, forward-looking policies for the forest and for public lands throughout Michigan.

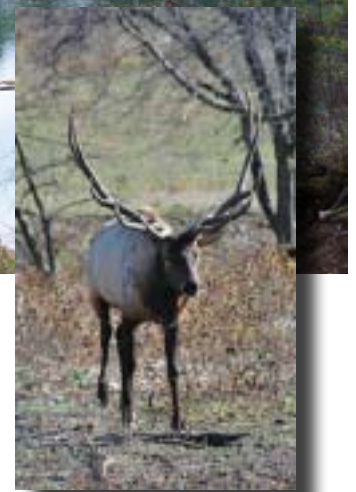
Brad Garmon, MEC's director of conservation and emerging issues, was appointed to the 18-member PRCAC in the fall and began serving in January. He replaces Bob Hess, a retired Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist who recently stepped down from the PRCAC after serving on behalf of MEC for nine years.

Hess said Garmon's understanding of both Lansing politics and Michigan's rural communities will be a big asset to the Pigeon River Country.

"I was really happy when Brad was appointed because I think it gives



The Big Wild, with its spectacular natural resources and signature elk population, was the subject of years of contentious litigation and public debate over the proper role of oil and gas development. It combines accessible roads and campgrounds with rugged hills and ice-cold streams that aren't for the faint of heart.



MEC a wonderful opportunity to get more familiar with the Pigeon and some of the issues up there," Hess said. "It will be good for the Pigeon to have MEC more involved."

The advisory council provides input on managing the Pigeon in the form of recommendations to the DNR director. It was created to uphold the Concept of Management the DNR adopted in 1973 after years of contentious litigation over oil and gas issues. The goal is to forever safeguard the forest's wild character.

Wild elk and rugged hills

And wild it is. Over 106,000 acres, the Pigeon is the largest contiguous area of public land in the Lower Peninsula and home to one of the biggest wild elk herds east of the Mississippi River. Located about 20 miles northeast of Gaylord, the forest has just enough roads, campgrounds and hiking trails to make it an inviting weekend destination, but with rugged hills, deep woods and ice-cold streams that beg visitors to roam longer and explore further.

Among the most famous explorers of the Pigeon was Ernest Hemingway. Writing about “the pine plains beyond Vanderbilt” in 1919—the year the state forest was established but before reforestation efforts hid the scars of clear-cut logging in the Pigeon—Hemingway told a friend, “that ... Country is the greatest I’ve ever been in.”

Conservationist P.S. Lovejoy, the architect behind the Pigeon River

State Forest’s creation and coiner of the “Big Wild” nickname, was perhaps the Pigeon’s most passionate spokesperson. His vision of a rugged and unspoiled public natural area deeply informed the Concept of Management and remains the guiding ideal behind state management of the forest.

“Don’t we all want, yep for, need, some considerable ‘getting away’ from the crowds and the lawn mowers and

the tulips? Isn’t that the yep for the Big Wild feel and flavor? I claim it is,” he wrote.

Lovejoy wanted a truly wild forest. While maintaining the “Big Wild feel and flavor” is central to the advisory council’s purpose, several factors—most notably, oil and gas exploration and drilling in the 1970s—make that job a complex one.

Continued on page 12

A brief history of Pigeon River Country

1860–1910 Heavy logging leaves little but stumps in many northern Michigan forests, including the Pigeon. Unsuitable for farming, much of the Pigeon goes into tax delinquency and becomes state land.

1918 Seven elk are brought from western herds to Michigan and released near Wolverine.

1919 Following the vision of conservationist P.S. Lovejoy, the State of Michigan designates 6,468 acres in Otsego County as the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

1920s–1930s Thousands of acres are added to the state forest through purchases with fish and game funds and by tax reversion.

1970 A major oil discovery is made in the Pigeon River Country. Early exploratory drilling brings trucks, dust, noise, odors and a wide new road to the forest.

1971 The Pigeon River Country Association forms to work for stronger protections for the forest.

1973 Under pressure from the newly formed association and others, the DNR designates the Pigeon as a special management unit and approves a Concept of Management to protect the Pigeon’s woods, waters, elk and wild character. The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council is created to uphold the Concept of Management.

1976 As a result of the oil and gas controversy, the Kammer Land Trust Fund (now the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund) is created.

1979 Environmentalists win a Michigan Supreme Court ruling that bans drilling in the Pigeon.

1980 An agreement allows limited drilling and exploration in the southern third of the Pigeon.

1984 Frustrated with diversions of Trust Fund dollars to other uses, Michigan voters give the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund constitutional protection.

1989 Drilling and exploration is completed in the Pigeon; extraction continues from completed wells.

—Compiled by Andy McGlashen

The Big Wild — continued from page 11

Politics intrude

More recently, those complications have come in the form of policies that erode the flexibility of the state to quickly move to acquire strategic parcels of private land within the Pigeon—tracts with river frontage, prime elk habitat or other assets that make them a priority.

In 2012, the legislature exerted unprecedented control over the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. They stripped from the state budget the Trust Fund Board's recommendation to include a flexible pool of money specifically to help the DNR purchase privately owned "inholding" parcels that might pop up for sale within tracts of state land. The Trust Fund arose in 1976 as part of a compromise allowing oil and gas drilling in parts of the Pigeon. It uses interest from royalties on the sale and lease of state-owned oil and gas rights to purchase and improve public recreational facilities in Michigan.

"We need to place a priority on getting the important inholdings when we can to solidify the boundaries so we don't have parcels within the forest selling and getting intensely developed," Garmon said. "It's really frustrating when those key parcels pop up and we're not able to go and get them. It makes it harder and more expensive for the DNR to manage the area, and it compromises the wild feel of the place."

Without quick access to Trust Fund cash to purchase those smaller inholdings when they go up for sale, the DNR has to coordinate complicated and time-consuming workarounds, like seeking short-term grants from conservation partners to secure key parcels that might otherwise end up



Backpackers and solitary hikers can find peace and tranquility in the Big Wild.

as subdivisions. The grants, when they work, are typically repaid later by the Trust Fund anyway, but valuable opportunities are lost in the meantime.

"If it's a high-priority area, the landowners aren't going to wait to sell it to the state," said Hess, Garmon's predecessor on the advisory council. "A lot of people would love to have a private inholding in the Pigeon."

Case in point: While the Pigeon's managers were writing grant applications for the purchase of an 80-acre tract called the Bryce Trust that would have connected a fragmented section of the Pigeon's southern border, a private party bought the land.

Local understanding

Another recent policy shift impacting the ability to secure inholdings includes requiring a vote of approval from local elected officials before the state buys land in that jurisdiction. While the approach makes quick actions difficult, Hess said there is a bright side of the new local-approval policy. It provides an opportunity to meet with local officials and build a shared understanding of the Pigeon's value and the rationale for its unique management strategy that includes restrictions on horseback riding, off-road vehicles (ORVs) and other activities.

Scott Whitcomb, the DNR unit manager for the Pigeon who leads that community outreach, said it's understandable that communities near state forests might want to allow the full arsenal of outdoor activities to pump up local economies.

"But if in attempting to provide for the economic development you were to allow things like ORVs or additional mineral extraction, which would be detrimental to the wild characteristics of the forest, then we could potentially lose the very goals and objectives, the wild character we are managing for here in the Pigeon," Whitcomb said. "If we had the same land-use practices as the surrounding state forest land, we would lose some of the mystique that makes the Pigeon River Country special."

Whitcomb said Garmon adds a fresh perspective and long-term thinking to the advisory council that will be valuable in protecting the Pigeon's wild character.

"Brad has made an immediate impact in just a short time on the council," he said. "He brings a statewide land management perspective and recognizes the forest as being a special place among Michigan's public lands. I've also seen that he is a creative thinker and not afraid to challenge the status quo."

—By Andy McGlashen

MICHIGAN QUIZ

What do you know about the Big Wild?

Facts and history about Michigan's Pigeon River Country. Test your knowledge!

1 The Pigeon River Country State Forest is often referred to as the "Big Wild." Who coined that phrase?

- a. Aldo Leopold
- b. P.S. Lovejoy
- c. P.J. Hoffmaster
- d. H.P. Lovecraft

2 Elk disappeared from Michigan in the late 1800s, yet the Pigeon is home to the largest wild elk herd east of the Mississippi River. What's the deal with that?

- a. A handful of elk from Canada crossed the frozen St. Marys River and the Straits of Mackinac, and became established in the Pigeon around 1925.
- b. Seven elk from the western U.S. were transported to Michigan in 1918.
- c. Elk escaped from a game ranch in northern Michigan and became established in the wild.
- d. The elk never actually disappeared from Michigan. They bought Groucho Marx masks and blended into society for roughly three decades.

3 The Pigeon now includes about 113,000 acres. How big was it when it was established in 1919?

- a. 3,346 acres
- b. 6,468 acres
- c. 23,452 acres
- d. 72,228 acres

4 Three top-notch trout streams flow through the Pigeon River Country. Spoiler alert: One of them is the Pigeon River. What are the other two?

- a. Cheboygan River
- b. Sturgeon River
- c. Black River
- d. Elk River

5 According to the DNR, what's the best month for elk viewing in the Pigeon?

- a. April
- b. May
- c. January
- d. September

6 True or false: The coldest temperature ever recorded in Michigan, 51 degrees below zero, was in the Pigeon River Country.

- a. True
- b. False



7 What three counties does the Pigeon River Country fall within?

- a. Charlevoix, Cheboygan and Presque Isle
- b. Alpena, Montmorency and Oscoda
- c. Charlevoix, Cheboygan and Otsego
- d. Cheboygan, Montmorency and Otsego

8 Based on a 2010 estimate, about how many elk live in the Pigeon?

- a. 75
- b. 150
- c. 400
- d. 800

9 A satellite view of the Pigeon River Country reveals a handful of small, almost perfectly circular lakes. How did they get there?

- a. Freshwater springs bubbled up out of the ground.
- b. Pieces fell from retreating glaciers, formed round depressions, then melted.
- c. Acidic surface water ate away at the underlying limestone until the bedrock caved in.
- d. Babe the Blue Ox had his heart broken and cried giant teardrops, which remain today.

10 What's the name of the roughly 70-mile hiking trail that passes through the Pigeon and adjacent state lands?

- a. High Country Pathway
- b. Lovejoy Loop
- c. Shingle Mill Pathway
- d. Eric

Answers: 1-B; 2-B; 3-B; 4-B&C; 5-D; 6-A; 7-D; 8-D; 9-C; 10-A

Keep kids safe from lead dangers — continued from page 1

“This funding brings us closer to the day when no children are lead poisoned,” said Tina Reynolds, MEC’s health policy director and lead coordinator of the MIALSH coalition. “We have the ability to eradicate lead poisoning entirely in Michigan. This bipartisan budget agreement is a step in that direction.”

More than 6,700 kids in Michigan exceed the Centers for Disease Control’s reference level for lead, although the CDC says there is “no safe level” of lead in a child’s blood. Effects of lead exposure and poisoning include lowered IQ, permanent reproductive and nervous system damage, behavioral problems, lack of impulse control, aggression, lower academic achievement, and higher incarceration rates.

The budget appropriation builds on the work of the coalition last year, when \$2 million for lead programs was included in proposed budgets for Fiscal Year 2013. That funding made it all the way to Gov. Snyder’s desk, but was one of just three budget items he vetoed.

MIALSH is a statewide lead advocacy group formed to secure adequate and sustainable funding for lead poisoning prevention activities in Michigan. MIALSH has a diverse membership that includes public health agencies, lead service providers, lead-affected families, lead contractors and inspectors, DCH, environmental health organizations, and the landlord community among others.

MIALSH advocates for renewed state funding to make homes lead safe for children. In addition to MEC, its core leadership team includes representatives from the Detroit Lead Partnership, including CLEARCorps Detroit, as well as the Healthy Homes



Maria Ellena Gonzalez and her daughter Brisa Gonzalez came from Grand Rapids to lobby Lansing lawmakers during the March 6 Lead Education Day at the State Capitol. Brisa was poisoned by lead paint in her home at age 2.

Coalition of West Michigan, Michigan Council for Maternal & Child Health, the Michigan Department of Community Health (DCH), Lyke Thompson of Wayne State University, and Ecology Center.

MEC’s Reynolds serves as the lead coordinator of MIALSH. She organizes monthly conference calls that now are attended not only by core partners, but also representatives of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), doctors and nurses, health departments, and the Wayne County Prosecutor’s office. She also has worked to strengthen the coalition by adding new members and educating potential new allies. In each of the past two years, for example, Reynolds has addressed the annual meeting of Michigan’s certified lead professionals. Through this outreach, she has brought 23 new lead profes-

sionals and contractors on board this year to help make a “jobs” case for the coalition’s goals.

MEC has also led the coalition’s communications work. MEC interns developed a coalition website and worked with Reynolds on three content pieces on lead poisoning and policy solutions. Now active on Twitter and Facebook, Reynolds posts multiple times a week with relevant lead safe tips and stories to keep the coalition fresh, current and relevant. In early 2013, the coalition also launched a monthly online newsletter and worked with allies to inspire media coverage of the issue. Recent articles, including a major feature in *The Detroit News*, have emphasized the links between lead poisoning and low educational test scores, high incarceration rates, and other such negative outcomes for vulnerable children.

Thanks to all these efforts, MEC and our MIALSH partners have started to gain important traction in efforts to educate state leaders about the continued high incidence of lead poisoning in Michigan, the nearly foolproof effectiveness of programs to test high-risk children and abate homes, and the dramatic cuts in funding.

In addition to individual meetings with more than two dozen key decision makers in Lansing, the coalition celebrated National Lead Awareness Week in 2012 and 2013 with Lead Education Days in the State Capitol. In both cases, MEC supported and joined dozens of activists from Detroit and elsewhere in scheduling and holding meetings with key decision makers and their staff members. This year, two lead poisoned families participated in these visits and had a powerful impact on state leaders. ■

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