

Michigan Environmental Council Policy Priorities 2017–2018

Refocusing the State of Michigan on Protecting Public Health

Following the Flint water crisis, it is clear that state government must refocus its attention on protecting public health and the environment. In the 2017-2018 legislative session, Michigan Environmental Council will focus not only on the priorities below, but on helping redirect the Michigan departments of Environmental Quality, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development, Health and Human Services, and all of state government to better protect Michigan residents and our natural resources.

Protect our shared waters

Budget constraints and a loosening of many environmental regulations have hampered the DEQ's ability to protect public health and our natural resources. Ensuring our residents have safe drinking water means protecting groundwater—the drinking water source for 43% of Michigan residents—and upgrading public water supplies. Combating growing algae blooms in our lakes will require better control of stormwater runoff, increased use of best practices by farmers, and adequate wastewater treatment. Deciding where to spend scarce resources will rely on collecting quality water monitoring data, both of conditions today and long-term trends. Among our top priorities in 2017 and 2018 are:

- Prevent nutrient loading from failing septic systems by adopting a statewide septic code and requiring septic-system testing when homes are sold.
- Identify a new source of funds for water quality monitoring, protection and remediation to replace current environmental bond funding, which will be mostly exhausted by 2017.
- Preserve and restore floodplain and wetland features that allow heavy rains to replenish aquifers, rather than discharging nutrients into waterways. Ensure that wetland mitigation banking regulations prioritize protection for existing public and private wetlands.
- Begin the process of decommissioning the 63-year-old pipeline under the Straits of Mackinac and determining what steps should be taken to protect the Great Lakes from a devastating oil spill in the future.
- Eliminate the risk to drinking water from the 7,000 abandoned leaking underground storage tanks in Michigan by examining each site to determine necessary action.
- Improve Michigan's award-winning water withdrawal assessment program by working to incorporate the latest and best available science and computer modeling technology.

- Enact regulations based on the University of Michigan Graham Institute study on high-volume hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, that protect the quality and quantity of Michigan's water from the impacts of fracking.

Move toward sustainable agriculture

With a new Director of Agriculture Policy at Michigan Environmental Council, we will work with renewed energy toward a more sustainable agricultural sector in Michigan. With nutrient pollution becoming more urgent each year, bee colonies dying and new diseases in livestock becoming more prevalent, we are at a tipping point in our modern agricultural economy. The time to move to sustainable agriculture is now. We will work on the following key policies:

- Expand adoption of agricultural best practices to reduce farm runoff.
- Address gaps in the regulations of large confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs).
- Develop a comprehensive plan to help address the loss of pollinators nationwide. With Michigan's diverse agricultural economy and monarch butterfly habitat, we are well-positioned to be a key state in increasing pollinator populations.
- Address the needs of urban agriculture through continued work with Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices advisory groups, communities and the legislature. Urban agriculture is proving a valuable and sustainable way to move many farming practices forward and improve the availability of healthy food choices for urban residents.
- Develop regulations for urban livestock operations, including recirculating aquaculture systems.

Enhance Michigan's public health

The Flint water crisis, groundwater contamination in communities like Ann Arbor and Oscoda, and air quality alerts in Detroit have made it clearer than ever that Michigan must do more to protect our public health and not leave vulnerable populations behind. We will continue to work to end lead poisoning in Michigan—with the proper resources, that goal is achievable. We will also work to improve children's health, outdoor air quality, access to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity.

End lead poisoning in Michigan by securing state funding to make homes lead-safe, educate residents about lead safety and identify and test at-risk children for lead poisoning. Priorities for our work through the Michigan Alliance for Lead Safe Homes include:

- Require universal lead testing for all children in Michigan, where today only 20% of kids are tested for lead exposure.
- Revise Michigan's Lead and Copper Rule to make it the most stringent in the nation and most inclusive of the public, and make Michigan's drinking water program a national model for excellence.
- Require a lead clearance for residential properties before they are rented or sold.
- Make lead poisoning prevention an essential local public health service so health departments in every county have the necessary mandate and resources.
- Make sure rental units where children are lead-poisoned are made lead-safe or not rented again, period.
- Support Flint families in securing all the resources needed for long-term health care and monitoring.

Through the Healthy Kids Healthy Michigan coalition's Healthy Food Access Policy Action Team, secure:

- Additional funds to expand the pilot 10 Cents a Meal program, which provides schools an extra 10 cents per school meal to buy more local, fresh foods for lunch trays.
- Additional partnerships and resources to complement our \$100,000 Health Endowment Fund grant to make Community Supported Agriculture shares affordable and available to food pantry recipients.
- \$6.5 million in seed money for the Michigan Good Food Fund. Low-interest loans will enable local corner stores and full-scale grocery stores to increase access to healthy, fresh food in underserved areas.

Advance transportation solutions

Numerous transportation projects are in the works across Michigan, and we have the opportunity to ensure that they come together to create a sustainable and connected transportation system. Michigan Environmental Council will

work with our member groups to build the system Michigan needs to compete in the new economy and provide all residents with mobility and access to opportunity. Key priorities throughout 2017 and 2018 include:

- Establish a diverse coalition to engage in issues around autonomous vehicle technology and shape policies, with a focus on potential impacts on the environment, current transit systems and underserved populations.
- Encourage transit providers across the state to work with autonomous vehicle and ride-share programs, rather than competing against them. Promote "First Mile/Last Mile" solutions with ride-share companies, prioritizing areas where it may be unsafe to walk to and from transit stops.
- Collaborate with biking advocates across the state to protect cyclists by improving legislation, promoting protected bike lanes and planning next steps for electric bikes in Michigan.
- Better connect our state by rail through continued work on the Coast-to-Coast passenger rail system and by supporting the work of others on the Ann Arbor to Traverse City and the Washtenaw to Livingston lines.
- Promote more investment in transit options statewide, including regional transit systems and advanced transit systems such as light rail and bus rapid transit.
- Strengthen policies on complete streets, placemaking and transit-oriented development.

Reinvest in our crumbling infrastructure

The Flint water crisis has brought new attention to the issue of failing infrastructure. The Governor's Infrastructure Commission report identified a \$4 billion annual investment gap for needed infrastructure upgrades with \$600 million for water alone. Michigan Environmental Council will have a particular focus on addressing the need for access to clean drinking water for all Michigan residents, whether they are on a municipal water supply or a private well. Potential areas of direct improvement to the protection of public health and natural resources include:

- Improve communication to residents regarding their drinking water and invest in communities to help remove lead service lines from their drinking water infrastructure.
- Help local governments to address combined sewer overflows and stormwater management by increasing the adoption of green infrastructure.
- Reach out to communities statewide to find out what they need to be more effective in working for clean drinking water.
- Work to ensure the state has adequate funding to address its infrastructure needs. This will involve exploring all funding options, from taxes, to user fees, to an infrastructure bond.

- Address the \$300 million backlog in deferred maintenance of our State Park facilities and woefully underfunded local parks in core cities.

Protect and celebrate Michigan's natural resources

Michigan is rich in natural beauty and ecological diversity, and these assets can help us build a more robust and sustainable economy. The outdoor recreation industry in Michigan is huge—larger than states with much stronger reputations for their great “outdoor lifestyle” such as Colorado and Minnesota. Michigan Environmental Council will work to ensure that people have the opportunity to enjoy our state’s natural resources, from local city parks to majestic dunes, rivers, forests and farmlands. We will also continue to challenge attacks on public lands and harmful exploitation of our forests and waterways for short-term gain, and will seek ways to drive more state investments into the long-term protection and celebration of our key landscapes and natural resources. Key priorities include:

- Protect access to Michigan’s public lands by lifting the legislative cap on the amount of land the state can own and ensuring the public has a role in deciding when state-owned public land is sold or deemed “surplus.”
- Become the first state east of the Mississippi River to establish a state Office of Outdoor Recreation to improve the quality of recreation experiences for all users.
- Support the acquisition of more public land in the southern Lower Peninsula, and invest in urban parks, waterfronts and connected greenways that provide underserved communities in and around our major cities with safe, convenient access to open space and natural resources.
- Add public lands that secure our rich biological diversity with habitats such as grasslands and wetlands.
- Improve timber management activities on state-owned lands to focus on forest health, greater diversity in age and tree species, and climate resiliency.
- Solidify long-term funding of state and local park and recreation agencies by expanding the Recreation Passport, protecting the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and making the use of the Michigan State Parks Endowment Fund more transparent.
- Hold any proposed sulfide-based mining operations to the highest environmental standards as outlined in state law, monitor oil and gas development on state lands and develop a comprehensive statewide minerals planning process.
- Provide greater protection and public access to Great Lakes coastal sand dunes through more state and local acquisitions, and push for greater regulatory protections for dunes that are threatened by private development.

- Nurture partnerships between land managers, local governments, recreation providers, and related businesses to provide unforgettable outdoor experiences, great maps and expanded world-class outdoor hiking, biking and water trails across the state, especially on State Forests and State Recreation Areas. Limit the damage to state lands from ORVs and other high-impact uses.

Work for better government

Though Michigan has been making many government reforms, it is clear that we can still do better. At Michigan Environmental Council, we recognize that an open government that is responsive to the concerns of residents is of utmost importance for the health of people and the environment. Following the Flint water crisis, Michigan must take steps to restore public confidence in government. To that end, top priorities in the coming session include:

- Support the environmental justice executive order by working to revamp DEQ’s public hearing processes.
- Implement a new Environmental Quality Commission to oversee the work of the DEQ.
- Open the Legislature and the Governor’s office to the Freedom of Information Act.
- Work to reform legislative term limits that undermine the development of strong leadership skills among legislators by opening up more flexibility in how the years are served.
- Follow 14 other states in creating an independent redistricting commission to reduce partisan influence on the designing of legislative districts and increase the influence of members of the general public.

Promote environmental justice

Environmental Justice (EJ) is built on 17 principles that affirm the sacredness of our earth and the people who inhabit it. The recent water crisis in Flint has put EJ in the forefront of our work throughout the state. EJ is part of all environmental issues, from protecting our air and water to having functional public transit and access to good, healthy food. Living in a clean, safe, and healthy community should be a basic human right. Michigan Environmental Council will pursue these priorities to help protect all citizens of Michigan:

- Develop a checklist to ensure EJ considerations are incorporated into government decision-making.
- Create EJ metrics for resident participation in the regulatory process.
- Restructure the state EJ Directive to meet current needs.
- Push for affordable water systems to ensure everyone has access to clean water.
- Increase air quality monitoring in the highest-risk areas.

- Repurpose blighted and vacant buildings and lots into livable homes or community green space.
- Drive forward regional transit plans and better multimodal transit policies statewide to improve access to employment opportunities and better housing.

Capture valuable products from Michigan's solid waste stream

Michigan Environmental Council will work to make as rapid and efficient as possible Michigan's transition from a landfill-first solid waste management approach to an emphasis on recycling, composting and other beneficial uses of valuable materials. Working to ensure that everyone in Michigan has access to affordable recycling and composting will support all recycling programs in our state. Key priorities to move Michigan forward include:

- Establish a new county planning system focused on encouraging regional plans instead of supplying landfill capacity. In addition, this system will require the planning area to set goals for waste utilization/conversion and tie that goal to any authorization to expand landfills.
- Create a new funding mechanism for all solid waste oversight, education, grants, and county planning.
- Develop a system for the perpetual care of closed landfills. Landfill owners must maintain trust funds to address problems, but only for 30 years after closure. It is clear that the DEQ has insufficient funding to care for these landfills, and 30 years is not sufficient to take care of all the post-closure needs of a landfill.
- Continue to defend the ban on landfilling yard waste, and block any attempt to allow yard waste back into landfills.
- Revamp composting regulations to discourage bad actors while allowing good businesses the ability to thrive and expand.
- Make Michigan a recycling leader with a statewide recycling rate of 50% by 2025.

Continue Michigan's transition to cleaner energy

At the end of the 98th legislative session, we helped pass new bills that expand our renewable portfolio standard to 15% by 2021, lift the cap on energy efficiency investments, and improve the financial incentives for utilities that significantly reduce demand for energy. The bills also improve how utilities do long-term planning through an Integrated Resource Plan, ensuring that they compare both generation and demand-management options to meet future demand. Our top priorities for 2017–2018 are:

- Increase efforts to lower utility bills by eliminating energy waste and decreasing peak demand in the summer.

- Continue to support solar energy projects at the residential and community level, especially by encouraging enrollment into net metering programs.
- Encourage robust public input on designing a fair solar tariff for self generation.
- Create low-income assistance programs that help families manage rising energy costs.
- Encourage municipal adoption of 100% renewable energy goals for cities across Michigan.

Combat climate change and mitigate its potential impacts

Every day, knowingly or not, the state and Michigan residents are reacting to climate change, be it a new invasive species, flood damage to homes and businesses, or infrastructure demands to handle greater variations in weather. Our 2017–2018 priorities will support efforts to minimize those impacts on public health and our natural resources:

- Implement strong efficiency and renewable energy policies at the state and local level immediately as part of a broader transition away from fossil fuels entirely by 2050 to avoid the worst consequences of climate change.
- Pass policies that encourage businesses and residents to increase efficiency and install renewable energy, reward them fairly for producing their own clean power and streamline the process for installations.
- Work with state agencies and support budget allocations that assist them in efforts to evaluate and prepare for potential impacts.
- Adopt state policies to support implementation and help fund preparedness projects for Michigan's communities that are most vulnerable to climate impacts.
- Work with the Detroit Climate Action Collaborative to support implementation of the Detroit Climate Action Plan, which includes preparedness actions like creating cooling centers to help residents cope with heat, and actions to reduce stormwater runoff.
- Connect communities that do not yet have climate action and resiliency plans with communities, organizations and resources to help with this process.



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