



# MICHIGAN LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

**Date: February 1, 2021**

**To: Members of the House Committee on Transportation**

**From: Hallie Fox, Legislative Aide | Nicholas Occhipinti, Government Affairs Director**

**Re: Support for increased, sustainable funding for Michigan's natural resources**

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Chairman O'Malley and Members of the House Committee on Transportation:

From the sandy white shores and clear blue waters of Lake Michigan to the towering red pines in the Hiawatha Forest, Michigan is blessed with an abundance of natural resources and high quality outdoor recreational opportunities that generations of Michiganders have come to cherish.

Legislation like HB 5408-5410, together with our current surplus of state and federal funds, gives Michigan a real opportunity to invest in these beautiful natural spaces, address over \$250 million in backlogged infrastructure projects, and preserve our natural heritage for future generations to enjoy.

**Michigan's state parks, public lands, and recreation areas support an abundance of economic activity for local communities.** Michigan is home to more than 100 state parks, recreation areas, and scenic sites totaling over 305,000 acres - of which 257,000 acres are open for hunting. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, these natural areas host over 25 million visitors, directly support 232,000 jobs, and bring in over \$26.6 billion to the state's economy annually. Investments in public lands and recreation areas are critical to support local economies across the state.

**Michigan's public lands also serve as a critical haven for rest and reprieve** - a place where we can get away from the demands of daily life, unplug from the constant deluge of information in the digital sphere, relax, and reconnect with ourselves and nature. In 2020, millions of Michiganders took advantage of our state's abundant outdoor areas as the COVID-19 pandemic drove people towards nature. Since the height of the pandemic, the DNR has seen a 30%, sustained increase in state park visitors (up to 35 million). Enhancing these public spaces with additional investments will improve park experiences for visitors, bolster public wellbeing, and meet residents' increased demand for outdoor recreation.

**HB 5408-5410 provides an opportunity to increase sustained investment in state parks.**

For the past several years, Michigan's recreational passport system has proven to be an effective funding stream for Michigan's state parks. Since its outset, 24%-33% of all



Michiganders participate in the program each year, raising roughly \$30 million per year in revenue. HB 5408-5410 will improve the current recreational passport system and encourage more participation in the program by moving to a system based on the 'opt-out' model. While the proposed system's impact on total revenue is unknown, it could result in an annual, sustainable increase in funds for state parks.

**Michigan's "great outdoors" needs a scale investment to maintain world class status.**

While the recreational passport system has helped sustain Michigan's public lands, the DNR has documented the need for 561 priority renovation and upgrade projects, estimated at a cost of over \$273 million within the Michigan State Parks System (not including state waterways, Belle Isle Park, or railway systems.) Furthermore, the DNR has stated "the amount of annual funding available to support basic infrastructure needs [at state parks] continues to fall far short to adequately address the backlog of maintenance, repair, and improvement projects" (FY 2020 Capital Outlay Budget).

With our state's current, one time surplus of state and federal funds, Michigan has a real opportunity to invest in our state parks, address the existing backlog of projects, and create a framework that secures sustainable funding for our outdoor spaces; and **there is strong, bi-partisan interest in funding Michigan's Outdoors Now.** Already, Governor Whitmer has proposed a \$400 million investment for state and local parks using American Rescue Plan dollars. Senate Republicans have proposed a \$1 billion investment (SB 702-704) to secure long-term funding for the State Parks Endowment Fund, state and local capital infrastructure, and UP Outdoor Recreation associations.

**The time is now to capture this special moment in our state's history and use it to act as stewards of the land for generations to come.** HB 5408-5410, and other investments, are necessary to keep Michigan's world class natural areas great.

On behalf of our members, Michigan LCV urges a "YES" vote on the legislation.

Respectfully,

Hallie Fox  
Government Affairs Legislative Aide  
Michigan League of Conservation Voters