MICHIGAN
Policy Priorities
2021

The Nature Conservancy

Where We Work

Our Vision and Commitment

The Nature Conservancy, a global conservation organization, draws on a science-based, pragmatic approach to conserving the lands and waters upon which all life depends. In our vision, diversity of life thrives, nature is protected for its own sake and for the vital services it provides. These services support a strong economy, healthy communities and the enrichment of our lives.

In Michigan, from farms to freshwater, from wetlands to the Great Lakes, and from cities to forests, we seek tangible progress on the most pressing threats to our world today. The policies and management choices of our legislature, state and federal agencies and local partners have a direct impact on achieving the progress we all seek.

The Nature Conservancy's objectives include:

- **Protecting our Great Lakes and coastal communities,**
- **Advancing a low-carbon future,**
- **Improving how we manage our farms and forests and**
- **Safeguarding our fresh water.**

We are committed to finding solutions and working with our many partners to ensure that Michigan's lands and waters remain healthy and continue to provide for people and nature in a changing world. We look forward to the collaborative effort ahead as we strive to achieve these goals.

The Nature Conservancy

State Director, Michigan

Protecting Our Great Lakes and Coastal Communities

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Vibrant Great Lakes are vital to Michigan's economy and way of life. Stopping the spread of aquatic invasive species, maintaining and improving water quality and helping our coastal communities adapt to changing water levels will protect our Great Lakes and those who rely on them for their livelihoods and leisure.

Prevent Establishment of Aquatic Invasive Species in the Great Lakes

THE PROBLEM: Non-native aquatic species entering or leaving the Great Lakes displace and prey on native species, disrupting the Great Lakes' health, stability and economic use.

OUR GOAL: Stop harmful Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) at Brandon Road Lock and Dam, without burdening maritime commerce. Manage the ecological and economic harm imposed by established AIS.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Fund and construct the barriers at Brandon Road Lock and Dam in the Chicago Area Waterways System.
2. Advocate for further development, testing and installation of water treatment systems that prevent the transfer of all AIS between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River systems.

Improve Coastal Resilience

THE PROBLEM: Increasing precipitation and variability in lake levels make Great Lakes coasts susceptible to erosion. Hardened shorelines change natural features that perform important ecological functions and create habitats for fish, wetland birds and wildlife.

OUR GOAL: Encourage coastal communities and property owners to use nature-based infrastructure to improve coastal resilience to changing water levels.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Demonstrate how nature-based techniques can provide beneficial flood protection and erosion control to convince Great Lakes communities to improve their coastal resilience, especially in wetland areas, marshes and open water habitats.
2. Seek opportunities to encourage and to remove barriers for coastal property owners to employ natural infrastructure along their shorelines.

Strengthen Great Lakes Fisheries and Coastal Communities

THE PROBLEM: Michigan's fisheries and coastal communities have struggled as native fish populations have been diminished by non-native invasive species, degraded habitat and reduced water quality in the Great Lakes.

OUR GOAL: Promote healthy, diverse and productive Great Lakes fisheries that support the economic and recreational needs of coastal communities.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Demonstrate effective practices to re-establish native species and increase the stability of the food web in the Great Lakes.
2. Work with fish management agencies to identify locations and techniques to restore physical habitats and increase successful spawning in the Great Lakes and rivers.

Advancing a Low-Carbon Future

Nature is our ally in managing the impacts of a changing climate and abating the negative impacts of greenhouse gas emissions. Conservation, restoration and improved land management increase carbon storage and build environmental resiliency to the effects of a changing climate.

Lower Greenhouse Gas Emissions

THE PROBLEM: Rising global temperatures threaten our natural ecosystems and our way of life.

OUR GOAL: Collaborate with our federal and state policymakers to promote innovative technologies and adopt sensible strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to help our ecosystems adapt to a changing climate.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Encourage commercialization of emerging carbon-management technologies such as air and industrial capture, carbon use or carbon storage and work toward standardizing meaningful carbon accounting methods.
2. Promote the use of low-carbon energy and renewable power and provide guidance on how to lessen any adverse impacts to nature and habitats.

Increase Protection of Resilient Lands and Waters

THE PROBLEM: Changing climatic conditions degrade and fragment terrestrial and aquatic habitat for plants and animals, affecting their ability to adapt and survive.

OUR GOAL: Prioritize conservation of *resilient* lands and waters that will enable plants and animals to adjust to climatic shifts.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Work with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to prioritize climate resilience in their 2021 update of Michigan's public land management strategy.
2. Employ nature-based strategies, such as identifying and protecting essential core habitat and critical corridors, to help nature, wildlife and people better adapt to changing climatic conditions.

Use Our Forests to Capture Carbon

THE PROBLEM: With few financial incentives available to encourage sustainable forest management, we are not realizing forests' full potential for capturing significant quantities of carbon from the air.

OUR GOAL: Reduce greenhouse gases by increasing adoption of forest management programs designed to sequester carbon and develop markets to encourage landowners' participation.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Develop and adopt a carbon accounting standard to establish certainty to entities participating in the carbon offset market.
2. Use Michigan's State Forest System as a carbon bank to offset Michigan's carbon footprint and promote the state's resource-based economy.

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Improving How We Manage Our Farms and Forests

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Our working lands, farms and forests offer more than just than a resource-based livelihood in Michigan. By helping land managers advance their stewardship of our farmlands and woodlands, we will benefit from cleaner water, reduced risk of diseases and pests, increased weather resiliency and richer outdoor experiences.

Manage Forests Sustainably

THE PROBLEM: A lack of diversity in the age and species of trees in working forests creates greater risks from disease, pests and a rapidly changing climate, potentially limiting long-term carbon storage capacity.

OUR GOAL: Increase the commercial and ecological value of commercial-scale forests by assisting landowners with developing and testing management practices to increase species diversity, pest resistance and potential for carbon storage.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Update Michigan's Qualified Forest Program requirements for forest management plans so enrolled forestlands also meet certification requirements for the Forest Stewardship Council.
2. Stay vigilant on controlling and eradicating the spread of terrestrial invasive species and pests by fully funding the Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas and maintaining requisite inspections of nursery materials and the ban on transporting firewood.

Expand the Use of Healthy Soil Practices

THE PROBLEM: As an intensive use of land, farming can increase the flow of sediment and nutrients to rivers, lakes and streams and reduce the amount of carbon stored in soils.

OUR GOAL: Help farmland owners and managers integrate soil health and nutrient management practices into their farming systems to increase soil, nutrient and carbon retention.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Reward farmers for ongoing implementation of practices that reduce nutrient transport and increase soil carbon storage by modifying of publicly funded conservation incentive programs.
2. Partner with the agricultural community, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Soil Health Partnership program to increase the number of farm research plots to gather more conclusive data about the conservation practices' effectiveness.

Safeguarding Our Fresh Water

Improve Water Infrastructure

THE PROBLEM: Communities face many challenges in maintaining their aging stormwater, wastewater and drinking-water systems. Deteriorating infrastructure can decrease the quality of our freshwater lakes, streams and affect public health.

OUR GOAL: Find solutions to help water utilities address infrastructure needs fairly and equitably.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Recommend strong financial management practices for the state's water utilities so that they remain financially viable and assist them in designing equitable rate structures. Develop fiscally sound mechanisms for funding water infrastructure improvements.
2. Authorize local communities to establish regulatory entities to oversee and fund stormwater management services, assess user fees, and invest in and maintain infrastructure.

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Promote Healthier Privately Owned Water Systems

THE PROBLEM: Inadequately maintained individual water systems can impair the health of freshwater sources and affect the health of residents who rely on them. Maintenance of private drinking-water wells or septic systems may be deferred when costs exceed a property owner's ability to pay or by general neglect, challenging the health of our wetlands, lakes, rivers and streams.

OUR GOAL: All Michigan households are able to maintain their private-drinking water wells and septic systems so that they do not compromise our state's freshwater resources.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Adopt performance standards applicable statewide for onsite septic systems.
2. Work with policymakers to craft a mechanism that provides a path for owners to upgrade onsite water systems and avert adverse environmental impacts.

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Manage Water Withdrawals With Up-To-Date Data

THE PROBLEM: Large withdrawals from surface or groundwater sources have the potential to negatively impact our freshwater ecosystems. Decisions on withdrawals should be made using the most up-to-date technology, data and analysis to protect ground- and surface-water resources.

OUR GOAL: Use robust mapping and modeling tools that integrate hydrologic, geologic and geographical data to review withdrawal proposals. Confirm that Michigan's Water Withdrawal Assessment Program meets the standards outlined in state law and regional agreements.

HOW WE GET THERE:

1. Secure resources for the Michigan Water Use Advisory Council to develop a Michigan Hydrologic Framework and associated databases for use in water management decisions.
2. Establish a process for ongoing stakeholder review and recommendations to upgrade Michigan's Water Withdrawal Assessment Program.

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Protecting nature. Preserving life.

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