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VOLUME 75, ISSUE 2

Each Michigan Out-of-Doors magazine features one or two cartoons drawn by Michigan's-own Jonny Hawkins. I hope they make you laugh as much as they did us.

"It's a good day for panfish."

CONTENTS

STAFF REPORTS & MISC.

BASECAMP

Nick Green, Editor

WELCOME TO MICHIGAN OUT-OF-DOORS

MICHIGAN'S PREMIUM OUTDOOR JOURNAL

Folks talk a whole awful lot about being a hunter, angler or conservationist and what it means to them. However, I am not sure that the majority of folks genuinely bear the burden of what it means to our cohort as a whole and the next generation.

And while I appreciate that most people don't know the inside baseball that makes our outdoor pursuits tick, arming yourself with just a little bit of knowledge can make all the difference when conversing about hunting, fishing or conservation.

For example, I am not exaggerating when I say our way of life is under attack repeatedly in this column. I know it seems like I am beating a dead horse, but I am not that dense. The Humane Society of the United States, and similar anti-hunting organizations, have quietly started to gather public and financial support in Michigan to fight a wolf hunt.

About 10 people testified at the March Natural Resources Commission meeting against having a wolf or sandhill crane hunt in Michigan. Some even touched on the "atrocities" that are predator-killing contests.

Each of us likely has our own opinion on the latter, but the point isn't to pick and choose what parts of conservation, hunting or angling you choose to prescribe to and promote — the fact is that together we are strong, divided we are weak.

It doesn't take much brainpower to understand how anti-hunting rhetoric and propaganda spewed at the NRC meetings and legislative hearings are perceived by the general public. After all, hunters are our own worst enemies.

Rather than fighting over how many points a deer has, if we can keep 10 brook trout instead of five, if baiting should be legal or any other number of passionate subjects folks stake their flag upon, we should be focused on defeating a common enemy: anti-hunting organizations.

Hunters, in general, are tribal. And in no way am I advocating for you to expend less passion into your outdoor pursuits. I am asking you to understand that WE ARE ALL perceived the same way — no matter how hard of a pill that is to swallow.

It is our responsibility as a whole to be the change we want to see, to help educate the general public about conservation and its benefits, and to carry the message of conservation to hunters and anglers everywhere.

Editor Nick Green banded his first solo brood of woodcock chicks in April. This is just one of the many non-consumptive endeavors Green participates in for conservation.

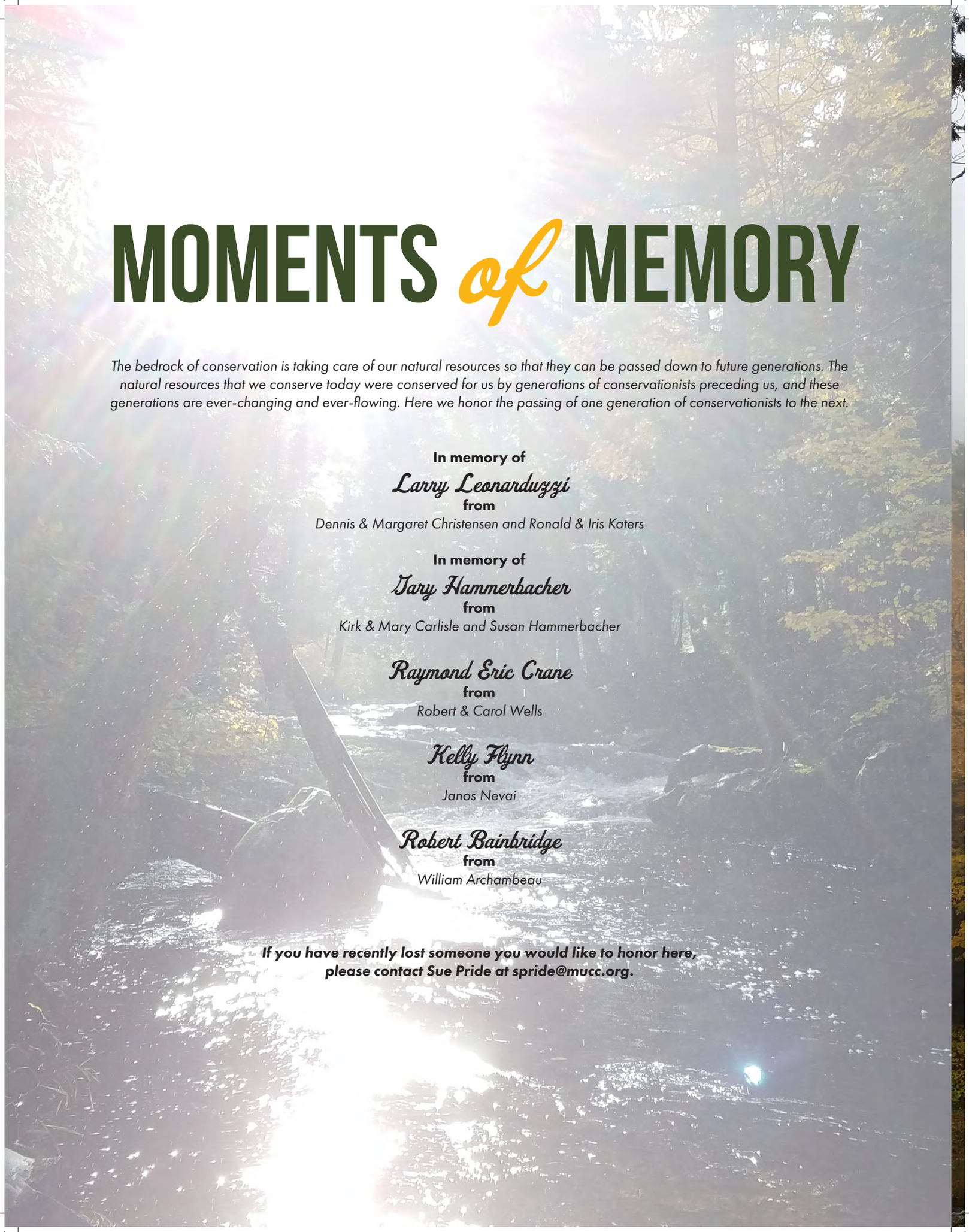
This issue is packed full of timely subjects that deserve further contemplation: can data help drive the building of bridges between consumptive and non-consumptive users; can our way of life continue to exist if we don't brand ourselves appropriately; and what's the next 100 years of the Department of Natural Resources' history going to look like?

Join us and take an introspective look at where we have been, where we could go and who we ought to be when we come out on the other side.

Per usual, I was sure to sprinkle in some entertaining features to keep you engaged. However, my hope is that you take away a deeper sense of ownership in your craft and all its intricacies after reading this issue.

As for me, I hear a trout rising. Forgive me if I slip away and try to coax it to hand.

Yours in Conservation,



MOMENTS *of* MEMORY

The bedrock of conservation is taking care of our natural resources so that they can be passed down to future generations. The natural resources that we conserve today were conserved for us by generations of conservationists preceding us, and these generations are ever-changing and ever-flowing. Here we honor the passing of one generation of conservationists to the next.

In memory of

Larry Leonarduzzi

from

Dennis & Margaret Christensen and Ronald & Iris Katers

In memory of

Jary Hammerbacher

from

Kirk & Mary Carlisle and Susan Hammerbacher

Raymond Eric Crane

from

Robert & Carol Wells

Kelly Flynn

from

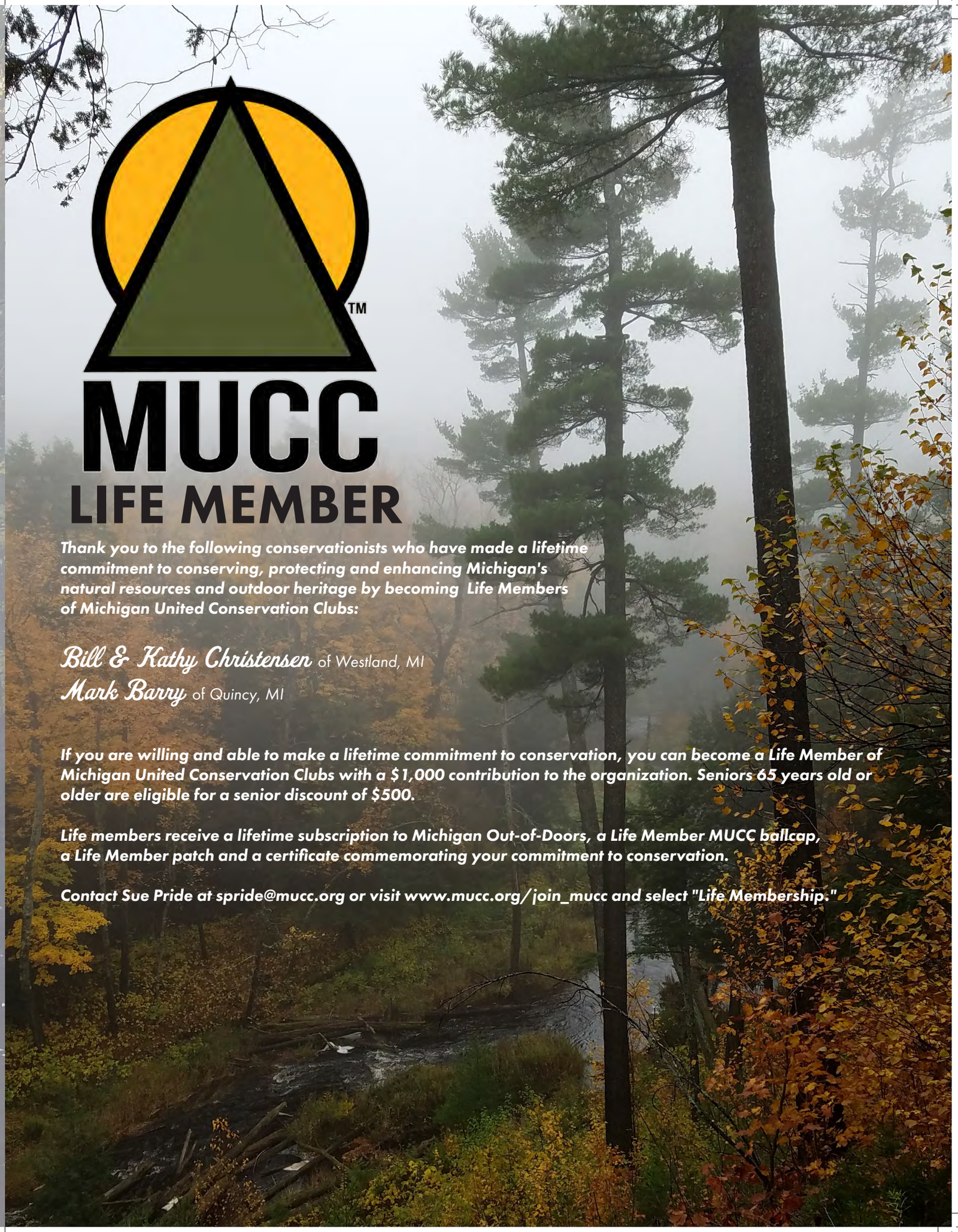
Janos Nevai

Robert Bainbridge

from

William Archambeau

If you have recently lost someone you would like to honor here, please contact Sue Pride at spride@mucc.org.



MUCC LIFE MEMBER

Thank you to the following conservationists who have made a lifetime commitment to conserving, protecting and enhancing Michigan's natural resources and outdoor heritage by becoming Life Members of Michigan United Conservation Clubs:

Bill & Kathy Christensen of Westland, MI

Mark Barry of Quincy, MI

If you are willing and able to make a lifetime commitment to conservation, you can become a Life Member of Michigan United Conservation Clubs with a $1,000 contribution to the organization. Seniors 65 years old or older are eligible for a senior discount of $500.

Life members receive a lifetime subscription to Michigan Out-of-Doors, a Life Member MUCC ballcap, a Life Member patch and a certificate commemorating your commitment to conservation.

Contact Sue Pride at spride@mucc.org or visit www.mucc.org/join_mucc and select "Life Membership."

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MUCC Since 1937
Uniting Citizens to Conserve, Protect and Enhance Michigan's Natural Resources and Outdoor Heritage
PO Box 30235 Lansing, MI 48909 | 800.777.6720 P | www.mucc.org

Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1937 by sportsmen's clubs from around Michigan to protect conservation from politics. Representing more than 40,000 members and supporters and approximately 200 affiliated conservation clubs, MUCC is the largest statewide conservation organization in the nation. MUCC members determine the organization's conservation policies through a robust grassroots process, which MUCC staff works to implement by working with elected officials, state and federal agencies, its members and the public. MUCC has published Michigan Out-of-Doors since 1947 and operates the Michigan Out-of-Doors Youth Camp in Chelsea, MI. Learn more about the full range of programs MUCC uses to advance conservation in Michigan and become a member at www.mucc.org.

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We. Are. Conservation.

Director's Desk

Spring has sprung all around and summer will be here before you know it, so what would it be without another season passing without hearing about wolf-related lawsuits? And this time, it is actually MUCC at the center of this newest controversy over my appointment to the Michigan Wolf Management Advisory Council representing conservation organizations. The DNR is actually being sued for appointing us as a conservation organization! While "conservation" is our middle name, it does give us a chance to dust off our resume and share with our members the conservation credentials of our organization.

Can we claim to know the internal motivation of all hunters, trappers or anglers? No. Does it matter? Probably not. Do you want to be a partner with our friends in agriculture, helping to manage species that can impact their livelihoods? Do you want to bring wildlife into balance with the available habitat and food sources to sustain them or increase habitat to sustain more wildlife? Do you want to ensure there is abundant recreational opportunity now and for seven generations from now? Do you enjoy the time spent with family, or is it being a larger part of the interconnectedness of the environment? Is it food, fur or fun? It is probably a mix of many of these reasons. But we are conservationists because the last thing that any of us want is to take more than our share, impact future generations or devastate a population.

The days of man-made boom and bust are over, despite what those who disagree with our endeavors seem to think. And we ought to be a little more cognizant of how we portray ourselves on social media and to the general public. But MUCC and its members are the epitome of conservationists — and most of us likely also hunt, fish and/or trap. Harvesting fish and game does not take away our conservationist credentials; in fact, the first "green" movement was clad in buffalo plaid, camo and waders. MUCC has been around since the time of the dust bowl in the prairies and put Michigan on the map as a national leader in public lands and habitat protection, fish and wildlife conservation and cleaning up legacy contaminants of the past.

In no particular order, here's a top 10 of major conservation wins MUCC has been a critical part of that have less to do with hunting and fishing itself, but benefit our fish, wildlife and public lands immensely:

1. Creation of Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund to fund public land acquisition and develop recreational facilities (and subsequent constitutional protection of these funds).
2. Led the citizen initiative to create the anti-litter Michigan Bottle Deposit law and defend it from efforts to repeal it.
3. Supported wetland protection legislation and protected its integrity many times since.
4. Played a critical role in advocating for the creation of the Recreation Passport.
5. Instrumental in the passage of landmark groundwater protection legislation.
6. Defended new Michigan law to protect the Great Lakes from ballast water discharge and protected its integrity from proposed rollbacks.
7. Joined several campaigns to reduce phosphorus loading into our freshwater from laundry detergent, dish soap, and fertilizers and also increase funding for conservation measures to reduce runoff.
8. Campaigned for years for federal assistance for Great Lake restoration and preventing invasive species like invasive Asian carp.
9. Contributed to the creation and development of more than 58,000 new conservationists through our Michigan Out-of-Doors Youth Camp since 1946.
10. Accumulated 17,000 volunteer hours on 80 habitat improvement projects led by MUCC's field programs, On the Ground and On the Water.

Yours in Conservation,

Amy Trotter

ON PATROL

In each issue of Michigan Out-of-Doors, we highlight some of the recent cases our brave Michigan Department of Natural Resources conservation officers handle. You don't want to find yourself on this list.

March 7 to March 20, 2021

Can't fish, big bear

CO Byron Parks was traveling on M 38 when he approached a bridge. There was a vehicle parked on the side of the bridge.

CO Parks knew that this part of the Firesteel River was closed to fishing, so he pulled over. As CO Parks walked down towards the river, he could see two subjects holding fishing poles.

The two subjects began walking further downstream, right past a "No Trespassing" sign. CO Parks continued to follow, eventually stopping, and just watching as both subjects started fishing. Moments later the two subjects started yelling, "Get out of here" and clapping their hands.

CO Parks knew the subjects could not see him, so he did not know who they were talking to. Then he heard the subjects yell, "Get out of here bear!" After about a minute the subjects stopped yelling and continued fishing. CO Parks then made contact. The subjects said there was a bear in the tree right where they were fishing, but they scared it off.

CO Parks then advised them of the multiple violations. CO Parks cited one subject for fishing on a closed stream and gave verbal warnings for the recreational trespass.

Don't burn when it's dry

CO Shannon Kritz responded to multiple grass fires in Menominee County over the weekend.

CO Kritz investigated each grass fire to determine the cause of the fires. Due to the high fire danger, one fire began when a spark fell from a chimney onto a field while the occupants were making maple syrup.

Another fire began while a subject was sighting in his rifle and he noticed the grass behind his target begin to smoke.

CO Kritz investigated a third fire where the subject stated that the fire started because they were burning a cardboard box and it blew out of a fire pit.

CO Kritz could see that the subject had a large pile of brush that they were burning on top of a fire pit with branches extending way past the borders of the fire pit.

CO Kritz explained that on top of burning yard debris during a restricted fire permit day, garbage needs to be burned in a legal container.

CO Kritz issued a citation to that individual for failing to prevent the spread of a fire. In each circumstance, local and state fire departments were able to respond quickly and put out the fires before any major structures were damaged or people injured.

'Fishing license, I don't need a fishing license!'

CO Cole VanOosten was on patrol in Mackinac County when he observed an angler with several tip-ups out. As CO VanOosten approached, he observed five tip-ups around where the individual was fishing.

When asked to see his fishing license the fisherman stated. "Fishing license? I don't need a fishing license."

The fisherman stated that the state had no power over him, and he could do whatever he wants. The individual admitted to having five tip-ups out as well as jigging a pole in another hole. The fisherman stated that he was part of a "non-treaty" tribe from Canada that did not sign the 1836 Treaty.

CO VanOosten informed him

that he was in the 1836 treaty area and had to follow state law unless a member of one of the recognized tribes of the 1836 treaty.

A license check determined that the individual did have a Michigan fishing license. When asked why he did not provide his fishing license the individual laughed and stated he always does that just to be difficult.

A citation was issued for fishing more than three lines, no name/address on tip-up, and failing to provide fishing license on demand of a conservation officer.

Hopefully he is getting help

CO Kyle Bader was dispatched to a trespassing complaint in Ogemaw County. The complainant stated two men were on his property climbing in his trees; one had a crossbow, and one had a rifle.

CO Bader arrived at the complainant's address to find him standing in his yard with a drink in one hand and an aluminum baseball bat in the other, staring up at the trees. The man was certain two young men were in the tree with weapons, and they might try to hurt him. After convincing the man to put the bat down and stand back, CO Bader checked all eight of the large oak and white pine trees in the man's yard and assured him there were no trespassers.

The man grew irate with CO Bader and threw his drink down as the CO left. In less than five minutes, he called 911 again reporting men in his trees.

CO Bader and Ogemaw County Deputy Viviano responded back to the man's yard, where he again had his baseball bat.

They convinced the man to put down the bat but could not convince him there was no one in the trees. The man grabbed a chain saw and said he was going to cut down the tree.

The officers divided his attention and removed the saw from the area. The man made physical threats to whomever was in the trees, as well as to both officers. CO Bader and Deputy Viviano decided the man needed to be evaluated by medical staff. He was detained and turned over to Ogemaw County EMS Authority.

You can't outrun 'em

CO Kyle McQueer was patrolling Barry County when he observed a vehicle driving recklessly behind him. The driver tail-gated him, conducted an improper pass, and continued at a high rate of speed.

CO McQueer conducted a traffic stop and the vehicle initially pulled over and stopped. After several seconds, the driver accelerated and fled at a high rate of speed.

CO McQueer called out a vehicle pursuit with Barry County Central Dispatch and pursued the vehicle at a safe distance for approximately 10 minutes until the driver was out of sight.

CO McQueer followed tracks in the road to a location where the driver lost control and hit an embankment. The driver then fled on foot before he arrived. After a perimeter was set up with the MSP and the Barry County Sheriff's Department, an MSP K-9 unit followed a track until it ended at a pool shed behind a house.

While searching the shed, an MSP trooper grabbed a grill cover to move it and subsequently grabbed the suspects head underneath. The suspect was lodged at the Barry County jail for Flee and Elude, Resist and Obstruct, Driving While License Suspended, Reckless Driving, and an alcohol violation. The suspect also had four confirmed misdemeanor warrants out for his arrest.

Breaking the law

CO Chris Holmes was on patrol in the City of Kalamazoo when he overhead radio traffic of a shooting that just occurred in a city park. He had driven by the park earlier and made note of a vehicle that looked suspicious. He relayed this vehicle information to the local police and stayed in the area.

A short time later another shooting was reported, and the vehicle described matched the vehicle he observed in the park.

He patrolled closer to the area of the second shooting and observed the same vehicle he saw at the park. He followed the vehicle and notified the city police of his location.

The suspect then started to drive erratically in an apparent effort to evade him so he attempted a traffic stop. The suspect fled at a high rate of speed and drove recklessly through several intersections crowded with pedestrians.

CO Holmes immediately terminated the pursuit and called out the vehicle description and direction. A short time later, the same vehicle was located abandoned near a school and a K-9 officer was called.

A local officer stopped a subject on foot nearby who also happened to be on the phone with the 911 dispatch center trying to report the abandoned vehicle as stolen.

A K-9 officer tracked from the abandoned vehicle door directly to the subject out with the officer. A loaded high capacity MP5 rifle was located in the vehicle along with spent casings.

The subject was arrested on several felonies including the Flee and Elude and weapons offenses.

These reports are randomly pulled from the DNR Law Enforcement Division's bi-weekly reports.

OTG

ON THE GROUND

MICHIGAN UNITED CONSERVATION CLUBS

Improving Michigan's Public Lands Since 2013

Impacts

3,143
Acres Improved

3,138
Volunteers

14,784
Volunteer Hours

57
# of Projects

MUCC's award-winning On the Ground (OTG) program has been hosting volunteer wildlife habitat improvement events across Michigan since 2013. Volunteers participate in a variety of wildlife habitat projects on public land and are provided an opportunity to engage in hands-on conservation while learning about wildlife habitat needs.

More than 3,100 volunteers have improved fish and game habitat through weekend projects that involve building brush piles for small game, removing invasive trees, restoring grassland habitat through native flower and grass plantings, hinge-cutting trees for deer and snowshoe hare, installing wood duck boxes, regenerating aspen stands, performing river clean-ups and planting a variety of trees for wildlife food and cover.

OTG had a successful spring field season filled with brush-pile building and native tree plantings on public land across the Lower Peninsula. While there are currently no events scheduled for the early summer months, we are beginning to schedule our late summer and fall habitat events. Planned events will include grassland habitat restoration, native tree and shrub plantings and hunter access trail improvements. Please monitor MUCC and OTG websites and social media for updates about the program and details regarding upcoming wildlife habitat events.

For more event details and to register for upcoming events, please visit www.mucc.org/on-the-ground or contact Habitat Volunteer Coordinator Makhayla LaButte at mlabutte@mucc.org or 517-346-6456.

'Forever Chemicals' in the Au Sable River

By Drew YoungeDyke
National Wildlife Federation

The drive up US 23 along the Lake Huron shoreline is like a trip back in time to the glory days of Northern Michigan lakeside cottages and motels for working-class Michiganders with extra money and time to spend. A faded mural proclaims Oscoda, Michigan as "Paddletown, U.S.A.," a town where the Au Sable River exits the Huron-Manistee National Forest and flows into Lake Huron. A town where you can boat in the Great Lakes, fly fish the Au Sable River or swim in idyllic, inland Van Etten Lake.

It's also a town that once supported Wurtsmith Air Force Base, which operated from 1923 to 1993. The airbase had a fire-training area and used firefighting foam both to put out fires and for training. In recent decades, the dangers of these firefighting foams have become more widely studied. They contain a group of chemicals known as PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) — nicknamed the "forever chemicals" due to their failure to break down in the environment over time — and linked to a range of human health effects, including cancers and reproductive harms.

The former airbase and its fire-training area abut the Huron-Manistee National Forest and a wetland complex called Clark's Marsh. Clark's Marsh includes three ponds improved by Ducks Unlimited projects and boasts excellent wildlife habitat for waterfowl, birds and deer, as well as warmwater fish like bluegill and pumpkinseed. However, the PFAS contained in the firefighting foam used at Wurtsmith Air Force Base leached into the soil, where it continues to leach into Clark's Marsh and through it to the Au Sable River.

PFAS testing has resulted in consumption advisories for the fish in the ponds and the Au Sable River and for white-tailed deer within a 3-mile radius around Clark's Marsh. In 2018, one deer was found to have high levels of PFOA (perfluorooctane sulfonic acid): one of the

Left: A 'Do Not Eat' advisory is relayed through signs surrounding Clark's marsh and the property adjacent to the Wurtsmith Air Force Base. Above: PFAS is often visible as foam floating on Clark's Marsh and the Au Sable River. While all foam is not necessarily PFAS, visitors to the area are encouraged to avoid all foamy substances they see on or near the water. *Photos: Courtesy of the National Wildlife Federation*

chemicals in the PFAS family.

Tess Nelkie is an avid fly angler, board member of Anglers of the Au Sable, a retired teacher and owns the Nordic Sports shop in East Tawas, which sells fishing clothing, paddling gear and rents cross-country ski equipment. I joined her and her husband on the Au Sable River, just outside of Oscoda, in March to hear how PFAS contamination and both fish and deer consumption advisories have impacted both the community and the outdoor recreation that draws people to it.

"If you were to start at the headwaters, you've got a narrow trout stream with wild brook trout, and as you come down here, we have steelhead and Atlantic salmon," Nelkie told me as we were standing thigh-deep in a beautiful stretch of the Au Sable River within the Huron-Manistee National Forest.

"PFAS came here from the former Wurtsmith Air Force base. When they were putting out fires, they used firefighting foam which had PFAS. It went into the ground, which went into the groundwater, and now those plumes in the groundwater are moving around the area," Nelkie said. "It moved into an area called Clark's Marsh that directly flows into the Au Sable River. And then there's another plume that directly touches the Au Sable. And through PFAS, we now have 'Do Not Eat' mandates for certain resident fish because they are contaminated with PFAS, and it's unhealthy for human consumption."

Almost on queue, a patch of foam floated past us on the river. PFAS accumulates in foam on the water, though not every patch of foam is PFAS. In waters near the base, though, foam accumulates at the water's edge wherever the wind blows it: in the fallen cedars at the edges of the ponds in Clark's Marsh; along riverbank lunker bunkers in the Au Sable; on the public park beach at Van Etten Lake, looking apocalyptic amid the foreground of empty children's swing sets and a public water drinking fountain next to a warning sign about the foam.

The Air Force recently proposed an interim remedial action to install additional filters to catch some of the PFAS leaving the base in the direction of Clark's Marsh. Still, community members contend that this proposed action doesn't address the full scope of the PFAS contamination leaving the former base and that the Air Force didn't include community input through a Resource Advisory Board in formulating its plans.

Additionally, representatives from the Air Force recently stated that they did not have to design the remedial measures to comply

with Michigan's more protective standard of PFAS clean-up. It's left a bitter taste in the mouth of the community which once embraced the base.

"The difficult thing is that people don't even know — at a scientific level — what the Air Force is presenting," Nelkie said. "It seems like they're trying to get out of prolonged, any kind of clean-up here. Recently, they released a remedial plan, and the remedial plan said it did not have to meet the Michigan standards for PFAS and PFOA."

Gov. Whitmer sent the Air Force a letter at the end of March invoking her authority under the federal National Defense Authorization Act to require adherence to Michigan's stronger PFAS remediation standard through an amendment in the 2019 bill sponsored by Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.).

"The communities around Oscoda that have been knowingly-exposed to toxic PFAS from the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base for over a decade deserve assurance that clean-up will meet the highest standards," said Mike Shriberg, Great Lakes regional executive director for the National Wildlife Federation. "This added layer of accountability for the Air Force is a critical step in helping to restore trust and transparency in the clean-up process and ensure that people, wildlife, our land and water are the priority."

Beyond the administrative wrangling — the plans, the agencies and the laws — it still comes down to the water. The community wants clean water and the natural resources that go with it. That's what Tess Nelkie wants to see.

"Make it so people can eat fish again. Make it so people can eat deer here. Make it so people don't have to worry here that when they shoot a duck or if they're hunting that they have to worry if they're poisoning themselves by eating the wildlife," Nelkie said.

Tess Nelkie looks at the Au Sable River between casts. Nelkie is an outdoor recreation business owner who has been affected by PFAS contamination in Clark's Marsh and on the river. *Photos: Courtesy of the National Wildlife Federation*

Ducks Don't Like

Invasive Species

Remove vegetation and mud from boats, gear, trailers and dogs.

Remove plugs and drain water from bilges, ballast tanks and livewells.

Allow boats, trailers and gear to dry before reuse in new waterbodies.

Great Lakes RESTORATION

MUCC

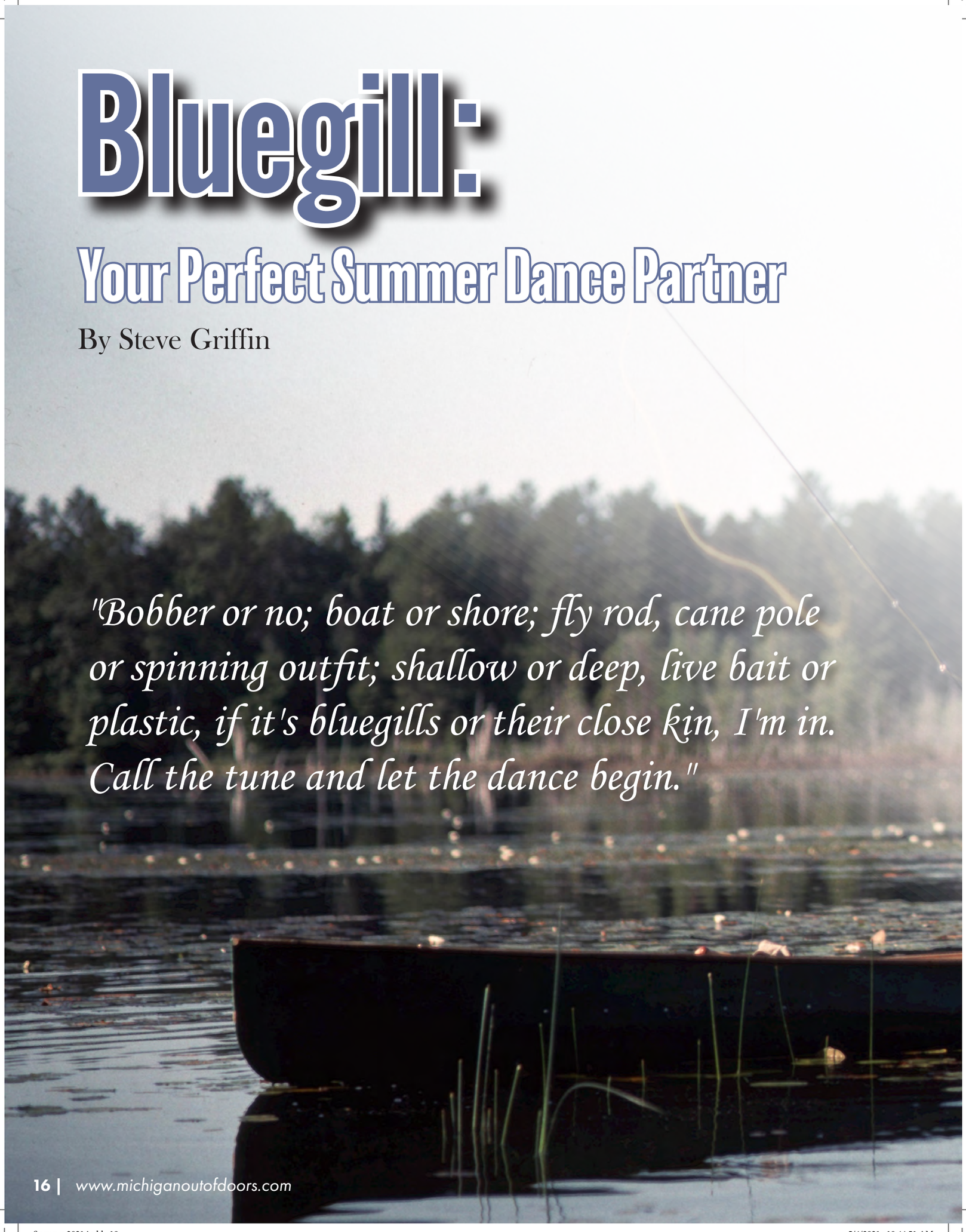
CLEAN BOATS CLEAN WATERS

Do Your Part to Prevent Their Spread

Bluegill:

Your Perfect Summer Dance Partner

By Steve Griffin



"Bobber or no; boat or shore; fly rod, cane pole or spinning outfit; shallow or deep, live bait or plastic, if it's bluegills or their close kin, I'm in. Call the tune and let the dance begin."

What was your first 'keeper' fish? What fish species provided your first bonanza, catches seeming to come one after another, as fast as you could unhook and rebait?

Later, which species might lure you to assemble pricey gear, scout locations, watch the weather and master intricate tactics, all in hopes of catching one long, wide and broad, maybe a personal best — that you then might well toss back?

Add more clues — brilliant markings, stubborn barroom scrappiness, statewide geographic distribution, generous creel limits, indisputable tastiness — and your likely answer is the Michigan bluegill.

Okay, the Michigan bluegill and some of its cousins.

Because we're often well into our fishing careers — I'm still sorting this out decades into mine — before we start drawing the lines between some of our favorite members of the sunfish family, particularly the bluegill, pumpkinseed sunfish and green sunfish.

I was relieved, in fact, when Addie Dutton, a fisheries biologist in the DNR's Bay City-based southern Lake Huron unit, confessed that distinguishing among the three can be difficult, especially since they can interbreed and produce hybrid offspring with features of both parents.

But generally, bluegills will have a black 'ear patch' on their gill plate, pumpkinseeds an additional red spot there (similar to redear sunfish, another close cousin, that swims in some Southern Michigan lakes) and green sunfish a shape longer and narrower, more like a bass.

Anglers will argue ID, but few seem to care. These particular sunfish (other relatives include black bass, crappies, rock bass and others) are far more similar than they are different, and I don't much care which one's at the end of my line, as long as it's pan-shaped and scrappy.

I don't even really care which time of year it is, although the warm months create an extraordinary time.

Summer bluegill fishing, you see, is like dancing: Everyone has their favorite tune and technique for cavorting with this willing partner — whether it's a fly-rod popper on the surface, a garden worm or wax worm dangling beneath a bobber in shallow water or a cricket or plastic baits. Summer is a celebration of bluegills — our perfect fishing dance partner!

Even small bluegills can hold a big place in an angler's heart and family tradition. On the east side of our city, a park surrounds a pond created by highway construction. When my daughter Elizabeth was small, it was full of bluegills, and many a school day ended, or summer day unfolded, with a trip to its then-rickety fishing dock. We'd engage greedy bluegills, almost all less than 5 inches long, with wax worms on teardrops beneath small bobbers. Action often extended beyond our combined attention spans.

Maybe we'd keep a dozen fish. I've joked that I used an Xacto knife to fillet them. But with a quick dusting in pancake batter and cornmeal and a two-side swim in hot oil and a puddle of catsup, the potato-chip-sized fillets capped a great outdoor adventure.

Those were shallow-water bluegills, fun with splashing antics and short-line handiness. But come mid-summer, if big bluegills are your goal, you might think about fishing deep.

Long gone now are the shallow-water bonanzas of spring and early summer, when plate-shaped male bluegills tended nesting beds and attacked anything nearby. You might find small(ish) bluegills in the shallows now, and sometimes the big guys come up to the surface to feed. But for steady hot-weather action, it's better to work deeper waters.

Brian Weber, a Gladwin County resident, told me he likes fishing in waters 12 to 15 feet deep — just deeper than the main weed beds. Despite the bluegill's known dietary reliance on small insects and worms, Weber most often baits a small jig with a one-inch Gulp minnow, especially in chartreuse. Other colors work, as do other small grub baits or even a live red worm. But jig-and-chartreuse is his mainstay.

"I hate using split shot," said Weber, explaining that the extra weight on the line makes it easier to miss the bite of a 'gill, as we drifted on a Northern Michigan impoundment. "But if that's what it takes to get the bait in front of the fish…"

In midsummer, it often is.

Bluegills often seem to stratify by size, and the biggest fish are the furthest down. You want to plummet the food past the greedy small fish, down to the big ones.

So this day, Weber pinched on a pretty good-sized shot and dropped the bait overboard, watching his fish-finder to keep the jig just off the bottom as he used the wind and an electric trolling motor to ease along on the deep side of the weed beds.

Weber's cooler top is marked at seven inches, his personal bluegill minimum. He keeps a small block of ice in it and a clicker nearby to tally fish toward the daily limit of 25.

Before long, the ice block was fish-covered and the clicker busy.

One must love deep water and big bluegills.

And one can make a mission of pursuing trophy bluegills. The late DNR fisheries biologist Ray Shepherd did.

Immersed as he was in all kinds of fish and fishing, he confessed a particular affection for bluegills.

"I can only hope my next outing will be just about halfway between my first summer bluegill dance and my last!"

He'd keep some fish shorter than nine inches but release all longer than that — not only strong genetically but experts, he said, in keeping small-bluegill numbers lower. He also jaw-tagged bluegills he released in hopes of learning more.

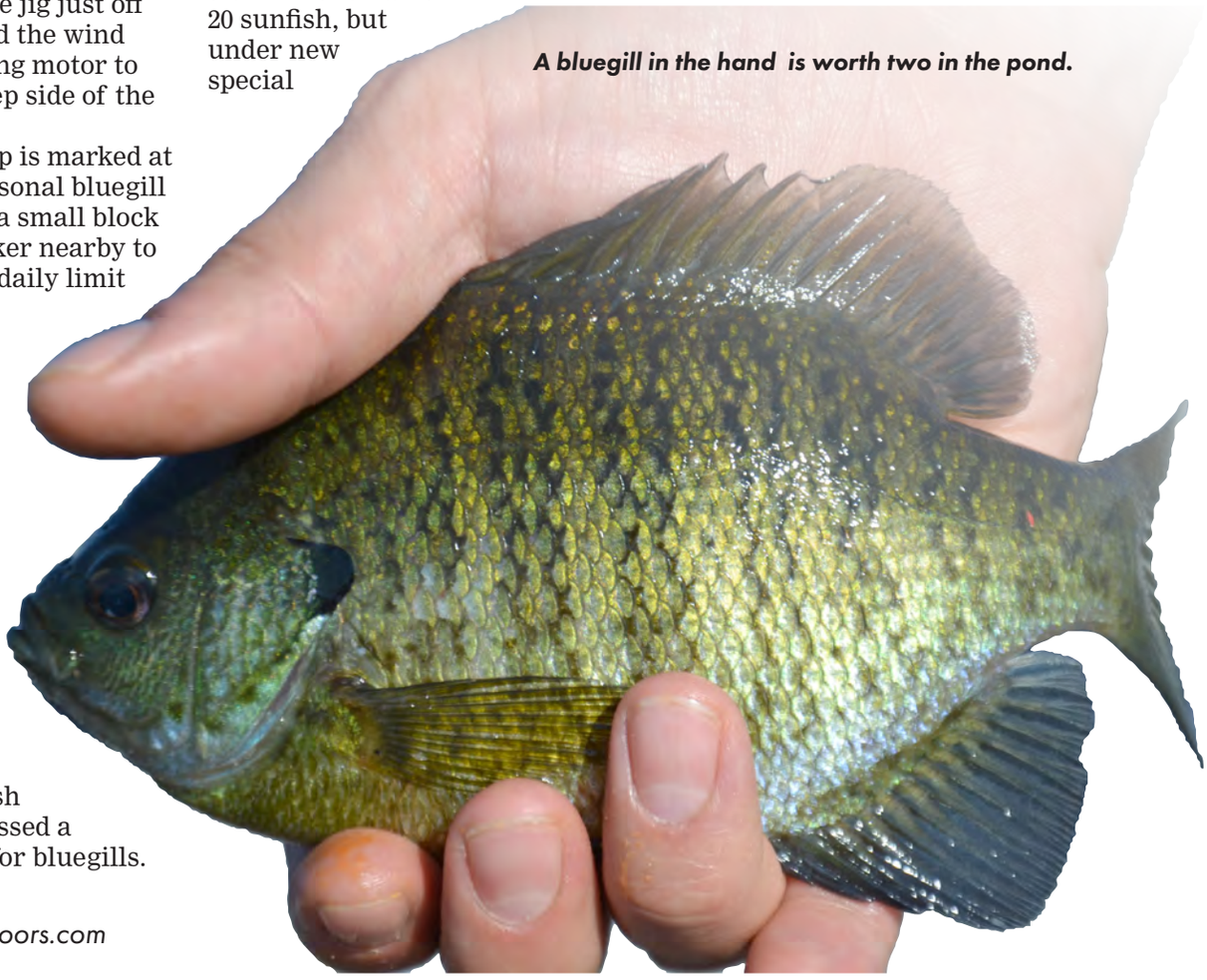
Michigan has long had a generous combined daily limit of 25 bluegills, sunfish, pumpkinseeds and rock bass. Nearby states have been experimenting with reduced limits, though, in an angler-encouraged effort to boost fish sizes.

The general Minnesota possession limit remains 20 sunfish, but under new special regulations on 94 lakes, each day anglers can keep only a reduced number as part of that total: from five sunfish on some lakes to 10 sunfish on others to five each bluegills and crappies on others, yet. More than 50 other lakes already had reduced sunfish creel limits.

"Sunfish grow slowly," said Minnesota fisheries biologist Dave Weitzel in a news release, "about an inch per year, so a large sunfish can be more than a decade old. It's critical to protect these large fish from excessive harvest because they aren't easily replaced."

In Michigan, Wakeley Lake near Grayling takes conservation a step further: on this roughly 100-acre lake within a National Forest walk-in area, you're welcome to fish for a relatively short season (June 15 – August 31) for abundant bluegills, bass and pike — artificial lures only and immediate release of all fish. It's one of just a handful of public waters in Michigan with similar rules.

I have fished Wakeley before



A bluegill in the hand is worth two in the pond.

federal ownership and afterward. We lugged in belly boats and carted canoes, tossing poppers, dry flies and nymphs at bluegills that grew big and battle-ready.

The biggest problem at Wakeley might be distraction. An angler who elsewhere could shrug off a jet ski's wake, a baby's cry or any other eyeful might well lose focus on the fish when a loon calls or an eagle soars. The scenery and the paddling are as good as the bluegill fishing, and that's fine, indeed.

A friend whose property includes a private lake has adapted a version of Ray Shepherd's conservation approach. He's instituted a slot limit on bluegills, keeping only sunfish longer than 8 inches but shorter than 9.5.

Okay, so it hurts to slip your first-ever, better-than-10-inch bluegill back into the water. But, not so much somehow on the second or third, especially when you're amassing a pail of keepers that will produce solid fillets. You can know those big throw-backs are going to breed, guard nests and keep those nine-inchers coming!

My friend, incidentally, meets his 'gills first in early spring in a dark-bottomed lagoon offshoot of the lake where he claims hyperbolically that every fish in the lake comes to enjoy early-warmed water and abundant food. He gets bites on nearly every cast with plastic baits. As summer unfolds, the action moves out into the main lake, and he switches to worms and other live bait in deeper water.

Still, as in most bluegill lakes, one can enjoy continued success from the shore and in the shallows — admittedly, with relatively smaller fish.

We were wading wet in sneakers and jeans, and the fish were smallish but the action steady when the late Bob Philip, then plant manager of Midland-based Scientific Anglers, invited me to join him fishing the stump-filled shallows of a local lake. We tossed hairy bugs and noisy poppers toward the stumps and scattered weeds, rewarded with bluegill action as good as anywhere. There was no guilt in keeping a dozen for a fish fry.

The red patch on the black ear flap identifies Elizabeth Griffin's catch as a pumpkinseed.

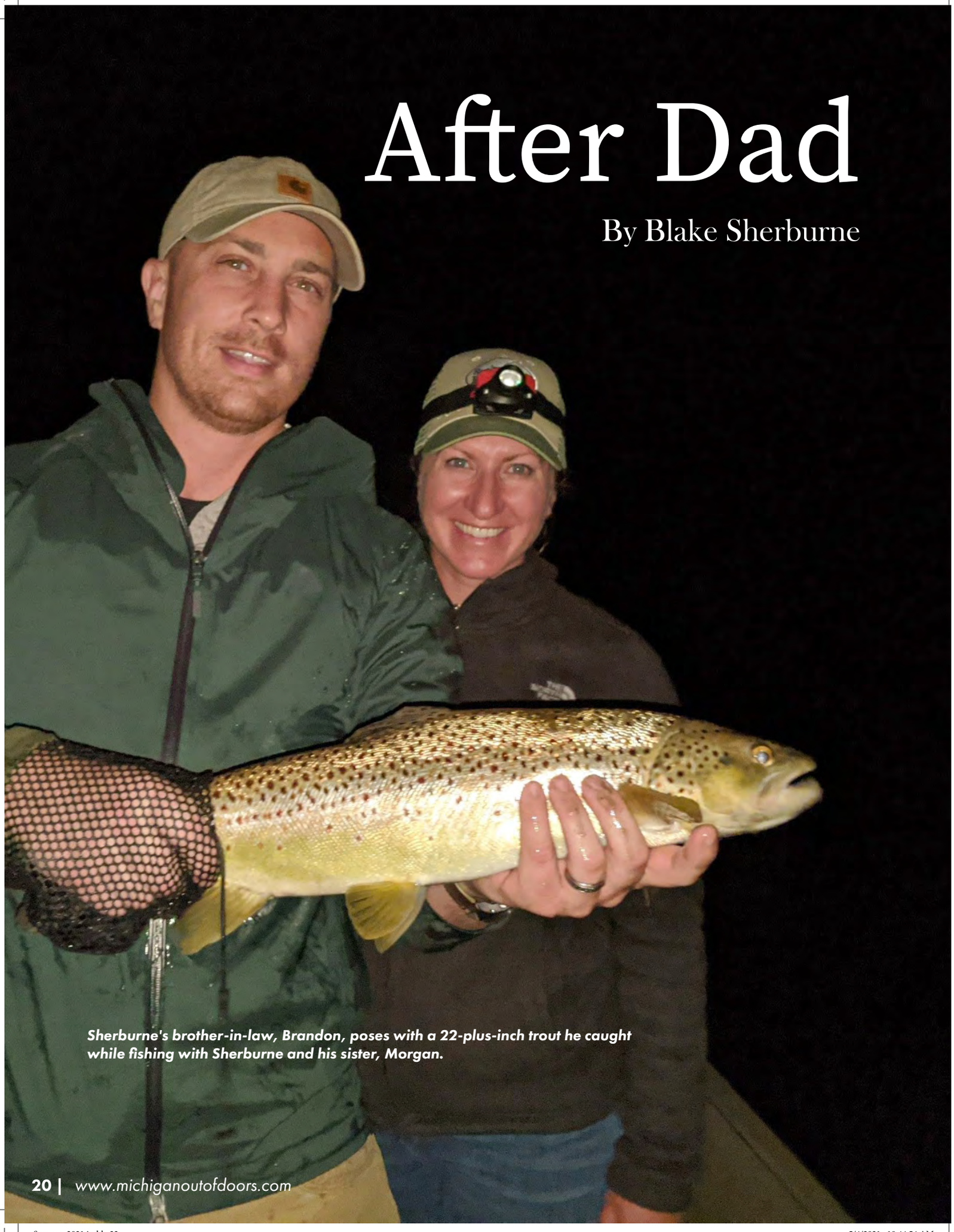
I couldn't help but chuckle as I thought about fishing with the man who oversaw the manufacture of some of the world's best freshwater and saltwater fly fishing tackle, who chaired the Michigan Council of the conservation group Trout Unlimited — and we giggled and gobbled the delicious fillets of a scrappy species found almost everywhere in the state.

Fish biologist Addie Dutton says she loves to fish for bluegills, particularly with a fly rod offering a little spider or floating ant. "But if I want to catch some for a meal, I use a spinning rod and worms from a leaf pile along my driveway. No bobber. I'm on the no-bobber side of the debate," she said. She mainly fishes from a boat or kayak.

Bobber or no; boat or shore; fly rod, cane pole or spinning outfit; shallow or deep, live bait or plastic, if it's bluegills or their close kin, I'm in. Call the tune and let the dance begin. I'll bring the batter and the oil if we can keep some. And I can only hope my next outing will be just about halfway between my first summer bluegill dance and my last!

After Dad

By Blake Sherburne



Sherburne's brother-in-law, Brandon, poses with a 22-plus-inch trout he caught while fishing with Sherburne and his sister, Morgan.

I spent every night of last Hex season on the river. I also spent every night of last Hex season on the river without my dad. Now, he is still with us, thank goodness, but after our annual trip to Grand Marais and just before we started hitting the river hard looking for big bugs, he was sidelined with a blood clot in one of his legs. A quick trip to the doctor ended with him on blood thinners and an order to keep his leg elevated for weeks — those same weeks we would typically spend staying up too late chasing big brown trout and waking up too early to work at the Christmas tree farm.

I have mentioned before in this column that Hex season is high church in my family. If one is a dry fly angler in Northern Michigan, this time of year will not be missed. The editor of this magazine has even written about his introduction to fly fishing when he worked for us and finally decided he needed to figure out why dad and I showed up to work for those three to four weeks in late June and early July looking like ghosts. Everything gets put on hold — even sleep.

My own wedding was scheduled around the Hexagenia Limbata emergence. My dad has fished nearly every night of The Hatch since the early 70s, and I have been with him nearly every one of those nights since I was about eight years old in the late 80s. The summer of 2020, when we all were desperate for any escape from lockdowns and COVID-19 hysteria, saw my dad laid up at home, clutching his cell phone, waiting for me to send him pictures from my nightly excursions.

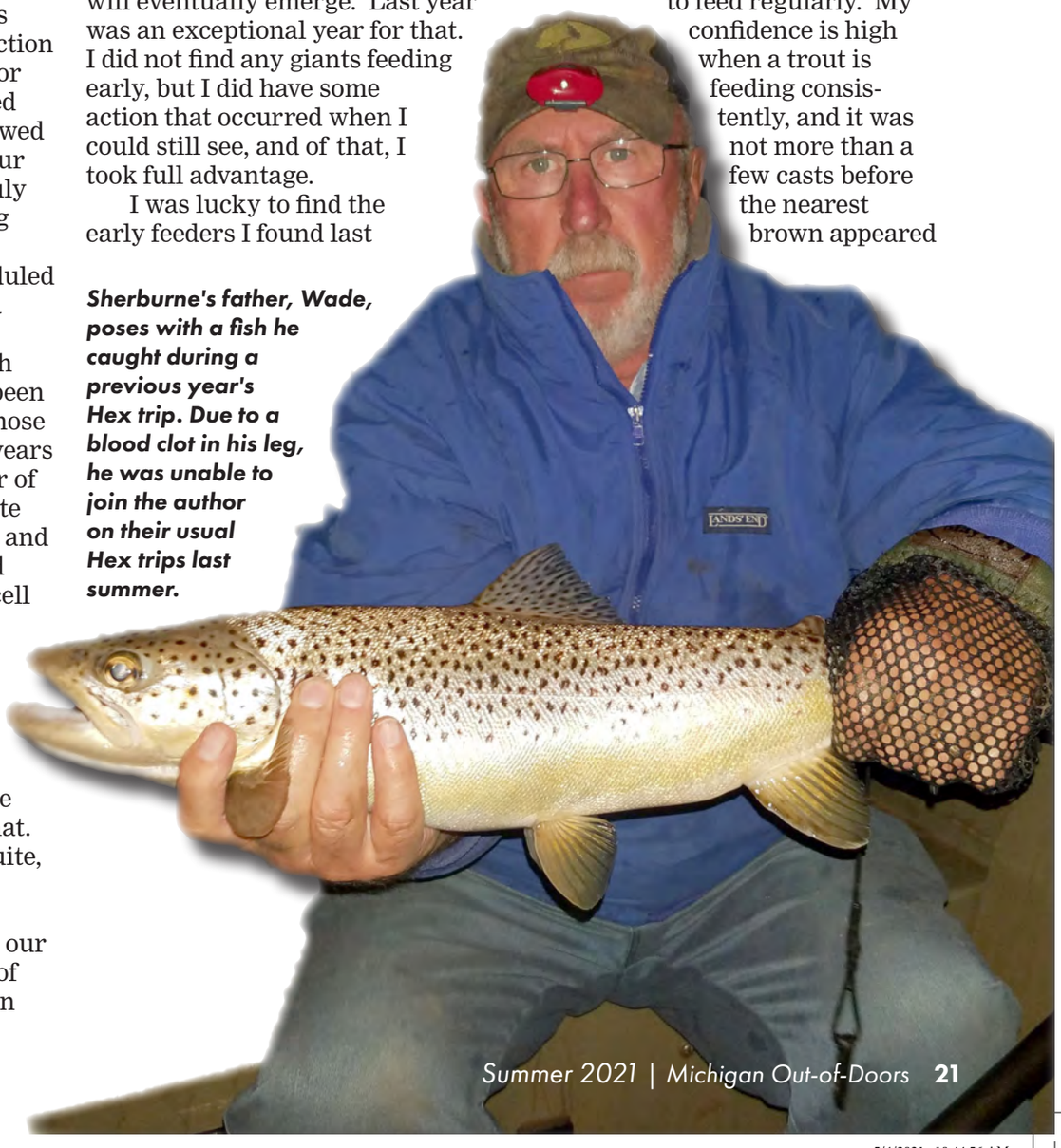
Handling the boat, from hook-up in the late evening to putting it away at the end of the night, has been my job since I was about 14. I was used to that. What I was not prepared for, quite, was the absence of a net man.

We do not find that all that many fish feed on small flies in our area. We think it is a function of a relatively low trout population

"He and I have fished together for far more than 30 days a year, some years approaching a 100, for at least 35 of my 39 years."

combined with a relatively high abundance of food. The river is near-choked with all manner of protein. Suckers, crayfish, baitfish and larval stage aquatic insects abound. The few trout that inhabit our sections of the river do not need to feed on the surface except during the Hex hatch; so, we figure, they do all of their feeding subsurface until the giant mayflies make their appearance. We do, however, experience some epic gray drake hatches, and occasionally, we will find a good trout feeding early on small dries on nights that the Hex will eventually emerge. Last year was an exceptional year for that. I did not find any giants feeding early, but I did have some action that occurred when I could still see, and of that, I took full advantage.

I was lucky to find the early feeders I found last year. We have spots we check for fish feeding before dark, and these browns were feeding in a spot we had not found fish in before. I happened to see a nice fish roll on the surface while I was cruising by, so I set up and waited to see what would happen. It was not long before the few drakes that were in the air started hitting the surface and drifting by me and three good fish started feeding within casting distance. I tied one of dad's old standbys, a black Wulff, on the end of my 6-pound Maxima tippet while the three trout set up and started to feed regularly. My confidence is high when a trout is feeding consistently, and it was not more than a few casts before the nearest brown appeared



Sherburne's father, Wade, poses with a fish he caught during a previous year's Hex trip. Due to a blood clot in his leg, he was unable to join the author on their usual Hex trips last summer.

The author's lifelong friends, Ben Ream (left) and Ken Mlcek (right), pose with one of Ream's first Hex fish.

under my dry fly and took it with conviction.

We find that browns taken after dark do not really seem to fight all that hard. I think the darkness keeps them from really charging and pulling the line. They seem to dive deep and bulldog more than run, and that makes them much easier to land in the dark. We rarely have to chase any, even the two-plus-footers that we are really pursuing.

When they take in the daylight, the fight is considerably different, and this fish was no slouch. I did not have to pull anchor and chase it, but it really did not want to come to the boat. I let the fish tire itself while I readied the net and started to work it back upstream. I was just starting to figure out how I would net it with one hand while fighting it with the other when the hook pulled and I started to curse my dad's good name, hoping his ears were burning where he was posted up in his chair, clutching his phone and watching the Tigers.

I sat back in my seat to see if any of the brown's compatriots started to feed again and noticed that the hook of my size- 14 black Wulff was bent out nearly straight. I am sure my dad's ears were burning at that point. A net man would have had that fish in the boat, and we would have been moving on, looking for the next one.

No more fish appeared at that spot that night, and the Hex hatch was sparse. My night was over with no fish to hand, but it was a good reconnaissance evening as I had found a few fish for subsequent trips.

The next night found me at that same spot, waiting for one of the two good fish that were left in that location. Shortly, a brown started feeding and with a new dry fly with a hook that looked a little better than the last one, I had my first fish of the season in the net and subsequently into the cheap cooler we use for a redneck livewell. We have found that a cooler filled with fresh river water gives a great place for a landed trout to revive. The trout we get to hand spend a couple minutes in the cooler where they do not have to fight the current and quickly they are ready to be dumped, rather unceremoniously, back into the river where they will hopefully live to gain a few inches and pounds before we catch them again. It is much easier on the fish and on the fisherman as compared to trying to hold them steady in the current over the gunwale or to get them facing upstream in the net.

While dad was not able to fish with me last year, I do not lack for fishing companions. There is the ever-present Kenny, who I have mentioned in my columns before and a relative newcomer to fly fishing, named Ben, and my sister and her husband.

Ben is another lifelong friend of mine. Our fathers were best friends in high school, so I like to say that we have been friends since our dads were kids. He has always

The author's sister, Morgan Sherburne, poses with a brown she caught during a Hex trip.

been a fisherman, only recently intrigued by fly fishing and even more recently by what we do after dark. Last year was his first year on the Hex hatch, and with a little coaching and cajoling on when to set the hook, we were able to get him a great brown. Kenny jabbed a great one, too, and my sister and her husband were up from Southern Michigan each weekend to join me in the boat. Her husband got a great fish, too, one that was moving to feed, covering about 25 feet of a great seam that we know well.

Even though we know the location well, a moving fish can be very difficult to feed in the dark. Sometimes, we will find one that is eating in certain spots while it is moving, almost like it is rounding the bases after a home run. Those fish, one can time, or at least one can set up on, say, third base, and cast to that spot consistently until both one's imitation and the fish end up in the same spot at the same time. My brother-in-law's fish was not one of those. It would produce a knee-quaking rise off the bow of the boat and then five minutes later, it would rise again off the stern, and then rise again in another spot, sometimes so quickly that it seemed that a fish could not cover water that fast and there had to be two, other times so slowly that we almost gave up on it and moved on. We spent two nights on that fish before I finally had my sister and her husband fish at the same time to cover more water. This does not often work as two people casting in the dark leads more to snarls than caught fish, but my sister and her husband worked well as a team, and the 22-inch brown finally took Brandon's spinner Hex pattern, and it was finally ready for its close-up.

All told, I spent 25 nights in a row on the river last season. My sister was present for a few, and I spent a couple with Kenny and Ben. The rest I spent alone. We all put good fish in the net while dad sat home and waited for pictures. The first words out of his mouth in the morning when we met at work were, "Well, how'd it go last night?" He and I have fished together for far more than 30 days a year, some years approaching a 100, for at least 35 of my 39 years. A childhood injury that has finally caught up to him has kept him off the water more than he would like in recent years, and last year's blood clot completely ruined his Hex season, and in a way, mine. I know he will be on the water with me every night this season, but I have seen the future, and I do not like it. My own son is five and my daughter is three, and soon they will be able to join us. But, for the love of Pete, dad, keep your ducks in a row. I need someone to run the net for me this year.

LEGENDS *of* CONSERVATION:

Patty Birkholz

January 28, 1944 - May 3, 2018

By Alan Campbell

Purple Patty.
That was the nickname given to and embraced by Patty Birkholz, a member of the Michigan Conservation Hall of Fame and the Michigan Environmental Hall of Fame.

Birkholz, the daughter of an Allegan County farm family, lived up to her sobriquet in both how she dressed and how she performed her duties during six years in the Michigan House of Representatives and eight years in the state Senate. She died following a short battle with cancer on May 3, 2018, at the age of 74.

"She worked in real bipartisan fashion," offered Birkholz's former campaign manager Amanda Price of Holland, who eventually claimed her own seat in the State House. "She worked not only across the aisle but with business and stakeholder groups to get a consensus. It wasn't just Republicans or Democrats. For a big piece of legislation, everyone was invited to the table to work things out beforehand."

Purple is the color given to states or political districts that are somewhat evenly split between the GOP and Democratic Party, which are symbolized by the colors red and blue. Given her bent to "play the middle" on important environmental legislation, it would seem natural that Birkholz's nickname was derived from her style of politics.

Not so, according to Sally Durfee, who served as chief of staff and legislative director to Birkholz. "She liked purple; there was no getting around it. Her staff started to ask how many days in a row she would go wearing purple, and word spread. Eventually, other legislators would gift her anything they found purple — flowers, coffee cups. One time she got a pair of shoes," Durfee said.

Meanwhile, Birkholz spread her "purple" message — that good policy, especially good environmental policy, led to good politics. It's a theme many politicians of today get backward, according to Bob Wilson, an environmental law professor at Michigan State University who helped craft bills as counsel to the state Senate Natural Resources Committee. Birkholz chaired the committee during part of her Senate terms.

"It didn't matter if it was another senator, a House member, a governor or a special interest group, she rose above the politics."

Sticking with a color swatch, Wilson characterized Birkholz as a "green Republican."

"She shared a lot of the same values as other members of the caucus but was greener than most," Wilson said. "It didn't matter if it was another senator, a House member, a governor or a special interest group, she rose above the politics. Contrast that with the incredible partisanship in Washington and Lansing today. I'm just ticked by the way people are so aligned with a political policy that they can't concentrate on good public policy."

Birkholz started her environmental advocacy in her own neighborhood, serving on the Saugatuck Township Parks Commission, Township Board and as Allegan County treasurer. She was president of the Saugatuck Dunes Friends of the State Park.

In 2010, a 291-acre portion of the 1,000-acre Saugatuck Dunes State Park was renamed the Patricia Birkholz Natural Area. That's high praise for someone still on her professional ladder.

Consensus worked through Birkholz

Working from the political middle to its edges, Birkholz authored and shepherded a steady stream of conservation-minded policy through the state Legislature that today benefits Michigan residents who enjoy the state's freshwater, whether from a tap or boat launch. Included are:

Patty Birkholz led a grassroots effort to ward off a developer who had purchased land adjacent to Saugatuck State Park. Development plans were thwarted by an agreement reached with the Land Conservancy of West Michigan.

• Birkholz played a cornerstone role in the creation of the Great Lakes Compact of 2008. Short-term, it built a fortified front against efforts of arid Western states to solve their water deficiencies by diverting freshwater from the Great Lakes. Long-term, the compact created a governmental body from which lakes Michigan, Superior, Huron, Erie and Ontario can speak their needs to contiguous states, provinces and federal governments. The international law was signed on behalf of America by President George W. Bush.

Wilson uses the compact as an example to students on how the boundaries of governments can be breached on behalf of the environment.

"At a time when we're reaching increasing threats from global climate change, we can reach international agreements to protect our national resources," Wilson said.

• The Recreation Passport seen on nearly one-third of license plates in Michigan was on life support after Birkholz had gained Senate approval. The state House gutted the law, which under a different Senate sponsor might have spelled its doom when the Michigan State Park system was desperate for funding.

The year was 2009, and the Great Recession was in solid command of Michigan's economy. While the concept was relatively simple, measuring its likelihood to overcome economic chaos was complex. Vehicle owners would be allowed to pay $11 toward the Michigan State Parks system during their license plate renewal process, eliminating the long-used sale of daily and annual passes at park entrance points. Would enough Michiganders sign up?

The over-under was about 15 percent, Wilson recalled. "Fortunately, we exceeded expectations, and now we're close to 30, 31 percent who agree to purchase the Recreation Passport. We can use the money because of decaying infrastructure, and we're getting more income every year. MUCC (support) was a big part of that," he said.

• Electronics recycling was rare before 2010 when Birkholz helped author and pass a state law that worked with manufacturers and big box stores to divert everything from televisions to printers from landfills. A statewide electronics recycling program was born.

• Even post-mortem, Birkholz was having an impact. A new law streamlining approvals for large groundwater withdrawals had all the characteristics of a partisan effort in its first form. Trout Unlimited balked. But the agricultural community was caught in the crosshairs as farmers faced a myriad of red tape when trying to irrigate crops. A compromise was needed.

Gov. Rick Snyder signed a bill into law months after Birkholz's death that fixed a broken system previously administered by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to review water well applications.

"Sen. Birkholz built the foundation for where we are now, and I want this work to stand on her shoulders," state House sponsor Aaron Miller (R-Sturgis) told M-Live.

• Wetlands protection, renewable energy requirements and land-use regulations were also tackled in Birkholz-led legislation.

Accolades heard from both sides

In the state Senate, Birkholz worked closely with Democrat Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor) and was relied upon by governors Jennifer Granholm, a Democrat, and Rick Snyder, a Republican.

"Patty was a leader who understood the intersection of people, policy and politics," Snyder said. "She authored many significant laws that continue to this day, including Michigan's water withdrawal statute and the passport for Michigan State Parks and Recreation Areas. She was a consensus builder and a major leader in the passage of the

Great Lakes Compact."

"Patty firmly believed in the importance of Michigan's environment for current and future generations, and it showed in the devotion to her work while in elected office and long after," Snyder said.

Liesl Clark, who now heads the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, worked closely with Birkholz. Clark represented Democrats in providing opposing party analysis of proposed bills.

"Her death is such a loss. Her approach to legislating is exactly what we need in Lansing and Washington now," Clark said.

Birkholz never retreated from a policy of requiring a one-week wait after wording on proposed bills was finalized before allowing a vote. "That allows for stakeholders who may not have been aware of additional information in the bill. It speaks to inclusiveness and respecting opposing opinions," Clark continued.

Birkholz's personal life reflected the values she brought to public office — commitment and devotion. She is survived by her sons Brent (Meredith Ridl) and Eric (Dr. Laurie), both of Saugatuck, and Jason of Hawaii; and granddaughters Hayden and Anna.

"Her family meant so much to her. She cared deeply for (them), and her community. Her commitment to community was amazing," Clark said.

After term limits precluded her remaining in the Legislature, Birkholz was appointed director of the Office of the Great Lakes and Michigan representative to the Great Lakes Commission by Snyder. President Barack Obama appointed her to the National Sea Grant Advisory Board.

Her chair sat empty at the Sea Grant meeting 11 days after her death when it was announced that a letter had been sent to the Birkholz family "to let them know all the work she's done, how much of a wonderful role model she's been and how generous she was with her time," according to minutes.

Former Michigan Out-of-Doors television host Bob Garner said naming Birkholz a conservation legend checks off a lot of boxes, but the biggest one won't be found in laws or policies.

It's the "niceness box."

"She was just a nice person. That counts, and it should count even more in politics," Garner said.

Such insight helps explain why Birkholz considered a state law allowing a mother to surrender her newborn child safely instead of abandoning it as her greatest legislative accomplishment.

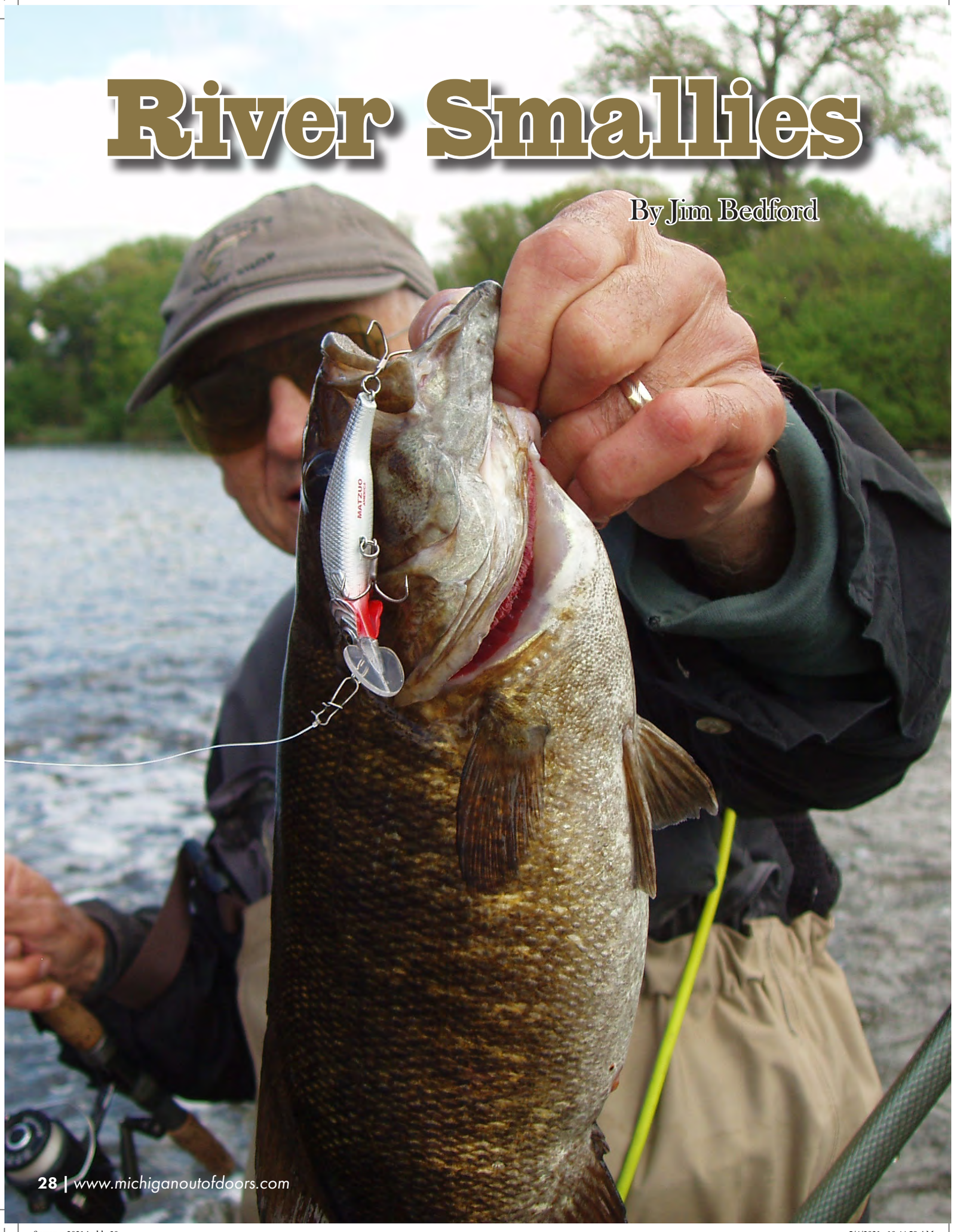
Her esteem for civility was reflected in her farewell address upon retiring from the Senate.

"The best takeaway that I have is the lesson my mother taught me as a very young child," she said. "We are all God's children, and we should treat others as we would like to be treated."

Patty Birkholz carved out a legend as a conservationist while representing constituents in her community of Saugatuck, within her State House and Senate districts, and throughout the Great Lakes. Some 210 acres within Saugatuck Dunes State Park have been set aside as a natural area in the name of Patty Birkholz.

River Smallies

By Jim Bedford



Michigan has become a destination state for smallmouth bass, especially in waters associated with or connected to the Great Lakes. Lake St. Clair probably tops the list for trophy smallmouth bass fishing in Michigan, but find some shallow, rocky areas of both Lake Michigan and Lake Huron and you will find good numbers of smallies. Many of our large lakes in the northern part of the Lower Peninsula are also loaded with trophy smallmouth bass.

However, it is our large cool-water rivers that bring these great game fish to the angler. No large, high-powered boats are needed, and you are never very far from flowing water filled with smallmouth bass. We'll describe some of the best rivers, but first, let's talk tactics.

While most people think trout when it comes to fly fishing, the smallmouth bass is probably an even better fly-rod fish. In fact, I like to think that river smallies are the ultimate quarry with a fly rod. These fish live in broad, firm-bottomed rivers where casting room is seldom a limiting factor. Smallies prefer moderate depths of 3 to 6 feet near the cover of submerged logs and large rocks. Usually, you will find them where there is moderate current, but they will move into the faster riffles to look for food. They feed on minnows and a variety of aquatic insects and other invertebrates. Probably their favorite prey is the crayfish, and imitating these crustaceans with a streamer should be at the top of your fly selection plan when you hit the river.

While your four-weight trout rod will work fine for smallmouth, a six-weight is a better choice for casting bushy streamers.

The six-weight line is not needed to battle and land the bass, but it will make it much easier to reach the holding water in some situations and punch your fly to the fish when the wind is blowing. A floating line coupled with a sinking leader works best when fishing nymphs and streamers.

At times, a weighted fly or the addition of a baby split shot or two will be needed to get down to the fish. A fluorocarbon tippet will also help in getting the fly deep as it is denser than water. In most situations, a 3X or six-pound test tippet will do the job.

Additional advantages of the fluorocarbon tippet material are its invisibility in the water due to its similar refractive index to water and its abrasion resistance.

Smallmouth bass also come to the surface, especially in the evening. While they do rise to hatching insects, especially the late summer white fly emergence, there is seldom the need to match the hatch. Fishing a popper or large deer hair fly and waking or swimming it on the surface will draw the smallies to the top for splashy takes.

For anglers using conventional baitcasting and spinning gear for river smallmouth bass, it is time to lighten up a bit.

Usually, there is no need to horse these fish out of thick vegetation. River smallmouth put up a great battle, but usually, you have room to battle them. Crankbaits that imitate both minnows and crayfish are great lures. Tubes are also great smallmouth lures, but any jig dressed in feathers, hair or plastic will attract these fish. The real thing also works well for these fish, especially when the water is on the dingy side. Take a page out of the steelheader's playbook and use a float when presenting your crawler, minnow or crayfish.

We are absolutely blessed with many top-notch smallmouth bass rivers. The majority of these streams are located in the southern half of the state, putting them close to most of Michigan's inhabitants. Clear water is important for good fly and lure fishing. While some of our offerings do rattle, vibrate or smell, it is still very important for the bass to be able to see the lure or fly.

The rivers and sections of rivers we will describe tend to

Tony Pagliei with a fly-caught smallmouth. Smallmouth bass are voracious feeders and will strike a lure or fly with intensity on the top of the water or subsurface.

Tony Pagliei with a fast-water, fly-caught smallmouth bass. Six- or seven-weight fly rods are preferred for smallmouth bass to help punch the fly through the wind.

be clear in the summer, absent a heavy downpour.

While you can be successful with visibilities of 1.5 to 2 feet, your chances that the bass are seeing your offering are much better when you can see detail on the bottom in three or more feet of water.

The Huron River stands out as a prime smallmouth bass fly fishing stream in Southeastern Michigan. The reach between the chain of lakes at the Washtenaw and Livingston County line and Ann Arbor is one of the river's longest free-flowing sections. The river is broad in this reach, with gravel riffles alternating with boulder-strewn pools. The upper end of this stretch will stay clear after a rain because of the chain of lakes.

In the middle of the reach between Mast Road in Dexter and Delhi Road, there are special catch-and-release regulations for smallmouth bass. Access to this reach of the Huron River is good, with three Metroparks on the river and a number of road crossings.

Another good Southeastern Michigan smallmouth river is the Shiawassee. The river is wide and rocky from Owosso to Chesaning and remains clear unless we have fairly heavy rainfall. Numerous road crossings give you lots of access to the Shiawassee River. Henderson Park on Henderson Road, about five miles north of Owosso, offers additional access and is in the center of a magnificent stretch of smallmouth bass water. Two other tributaries of the Saginaw River, the Cass and Flint rivers, also have good populations of smallmouth. These rivers are more affected by rainfall, but during dry periods they can offer good fishing.

Moving back to the south, the upper Kalamazoo River, including both its South and North Branches, offers very good fishing for smallmouth bass. The branches have stable flows and are very slow to muddy when it rains. When fishing upstream from their confluence in Albion to Concord on the North Branch and Homer on the South Branch, you will need a stealthy approach because of the clear water. Downstream from Albion, the mainstream offers good smallmouth bass fishing wherever it is not impounded. Even with the addition of the Battle Creek River, the broad, rocky Kalamazoo continues to be quite wadeable at normal summer flows. The river retains this characteristic below Comstock and Kalamazoo but floating it starts to become a better option for covering all the water. The Kalamazoo River becomes more enriched as we go downstream, and below Comstock and the Morrow Pond, the result is more turbidity due to biological activity. But during low water periods, the river remains quite fishable and a great place to catch a good-sized river smallie.

While the St. Joseph River is home to a very good population of smallmouth bass, especially in its lower reaches, it is its tributaries that offer the better fly fishing for bronzebacks. The Prairie, Fawn and Rocky are all relatively small, clear rivers that empty into the St. Joseph River in the county of the same name. The Fawn is especially good above and below US-12, and I have had good success for larger smallmouth in the Prairie River below Burr Oak. The Paw Paw River joins the St. Joseph River near its mouth and is its largest tributary. The river flows through sandy soils and remains clear unless we get heavy rain.

Smallmouth are present from its namesake town to its juncture with the big river but probably the best bass water for fly and lure anglers is found between Watervliet and Lawrence.

Michigan's longest river, the Grand, and several of its tributaries offer wonderful lure and fly fishing for smallmouth bass. The mainstream is adversely affected by moderate to heavy rainfall, but during most of the summer it will be fishable. The prime stretch for the fly rodder and spin caster is the one between the dam at Fitzgerald Park in Grand Ledge down to Portland. The water stays remarkably clear here except for runoff events making it easy for you to read the water and for the bass to find your plug or fly. There is lots of access at bridges and in the Portland State Game Area. Good smallmouth fishing can also be found below the Webber and Lyons Dams, but the river is more turbid at these locations due to biological activity in the Webber Dam impoundment. The rapids in Grand Rapids are also full of smallmouth bass, but usually, the visibility is less than two feet in the summer, even if the river is low, so fly fishing can be tough.

The Red Cedar, Looking Glass, Flat and Thornapple rivers are the Grand River's best tributaries for smallmouth bass on the fly or light lures. While the Red Cedar is really becoming built up, you can access the river at road bridges between Okemos and Williamston and find good fishing for smallmouth. The lower half of the Looking Glass, from US-27 all the way to Portland, is the best for smallmouth bass.

Deep holes and runs are not very numerous in the Looking Glass, so covering lots of water either floating or wading from bridge to bridge will pay dividends. The Flat River is probably the best Grand tributary for fly fishing. It stays clear when it rains and the smallies are plentiful. The prime water to fish is between Greenville and the mouth except where the river is impounded. Much of the river is in either the Lowell or Flat River State Game Areas, and there are lots of road crossings for additional access.

The Grand's largest tributary, the Thornapple River, is well-known for its smallmouth bass fishing. Too much of this fine river is impounded, but you will find very good fishing for smallies in the reach between Nashville and Caledonia. Most of this stretch is a free-flowing, hard-bottomed stream except for several small impoundments and the natural widening of the river called Thornapple Lake.

Michigan is blessed with many more miles of smallmouth rivers than those mentioned here in the southern part of the state. So if you don't live close to one of those described, you probably are close to another. Good streams further north in the Lower Peninsula include the Pine and Chippewa Rivers that flow into the Saginaw, the middle reaches of the Muskegon River and the Thunder Bay River. In the Upper Peninsula, try the Menominee River near its falls and rapids and its Sturgeon River tributary and the lower sections of the Cedar, Ford and Escanaba rivers.

Remember that smallmouth like rocky water of medium depth and moderate current. Younger bass in the 8- to 12-inch range are almost always active, and they will quickly let you know if you've found a good piece of smallmouth water. Walleyes and channel catfish also prefer similar habitat and will frequently be bonus catches when you are fishing for smallies.

The DNR fisheries biologists for the rivers you are interested in fishing in can help pinpoint good stretches. Their phone numbers are listed by watershed in the Michigan Fishing Guide that you receive with your license.

Smallmouth will readily strike plugs or swim baits presented subsurface or on top.

Beating the Boys

By Emily Hansen

Northern Michigan artist finds outlet, inspiration in angling

Given this is my first article for Michigan Out-of-Doors, I feel an introduction is in order: I was born and raised in Northern Michigan. Specifically, I was brought up in Benzie County, or as my dad likes to call it, "God's Country." I would always laugh when he said this as I was growing up because I never understood what he meant.

Now, I completely understand and agree with him. The Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes are right in my backyard, and the rivers in this area are heaven on earth. That's where you can find me most days: waist-deep in the river, praying for a float to drop.

I have been fishing with my dad and brother since I was young. My earliest angling memories consist of catching sunfish off the pier in Frankfort, and I'll never forget the first time I out-fished them both. My older brother Logan would tell you I'm lying or have a bad memory, but it was a significant moment for me.

Being good at such a male-dominated sport felt great and still feels great! Having an older brother, I've always been trying to keep up with the "boys." Fast forward to recent years, and there's been nothing more satisfying than having my dad net my steelhead for me and getting to see how proud it makes him.

Steelheading has become an absolute obsession for me the past three years. It took me two years of steelhead fishing before I was even successful, so I am still learning with each cast and each fight. Lately, I've been fortunate enough to fish with some fantastic anglers like Brady Stasa, a steelhead/salmon guide on the Manistee River. I learn something new from every person I fish with.

Having an open mind and being ready and willing to learn is crucial to being a successful angler. You have to be ready to adapt to so many different scenarios like weather, water conditions, time of year, etc. Fishing always keeps me on my toes, and as soon as I feel like I'm starting to get dialed in, the

Aside from being an avid angler, Hansen is also a watercolor artist and uses her talent to promote river clean-up events.

seasons change.

Growing as an angler has been such a rewarding experience. When I really got into fishing three-plus years ago, my idea was to catch trout, take photos, release them and then use the photos as references for my paintings. As a watercolor artist, it seemed like such a great idea at the time, but now I fish WAY more than I paint.

Three times a year, I organize waterway cleanups and offer my paintings as prizes to selected participants. If you're interested in participating in a clean up of your favorite recreational spot on the water for a chance to win some of my art, follow the "Our Precious Waters" page on Facebook for updates and information on how to get involved.

As an angler, I realize the impact we have on the environment — from the fishing line to the plastic beads we use. When the salmon start to run, it is more apparent than ever that our water systems are in trouble. On my local rivers, it's been a trend lately for folks to leave their trash wherever they please. It's so disheartening to see. As anglers, we've got to change this — somehow, someway, if we want to keep enjoying fishing for years to come! If the area you're fishing doesn't have a trash receptacle, pack your trash out with you. When I hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2012, I had to carry my trash with me for a week at a time before I could dispose of it safely. There is never an excuse.

"As an angler, I realize the impact we have on the environment — from the fishing line to the plastic beads we use."

My preferred method of fishing is using a centerpin rod and reel setup to target steelhead. If you've never center-pinned, I highly suggest giving it a try. It's an absolute riot fighting the fish without a drag. Also, the drifts you can float with a centerpin are far superior, in my opinion, to a spinning reel, but I won't start breaking down gear or you'll be reading all day.

Starting in late April or early May, I switch gears from centerpin/float fishing the rivers for steelhead and prepare for king salmon. When I'm not lucky enough to hop on a friend's boat to troll the big lake, I grab my homemade PVC rod holders and head to the beach. Surf fishing is such a great way to fish for fresh kings before the fall salmon run. I still have a lot to learn about this specific style of fishing. Hopefully, by the time you're reading this article, I'll be out on the water catching kings and learning.

I pride myself on being a catch-and-release angler; however, I will keep one or two king salmon a year. Their skein is wonderful for curing and tying spawn bags. I like to be self-sufficient, and I enjoy tying them myself. Also, there's nothing better than fresh king salmon in the smoker.

Hansen will pen a regular column for Michigan Out-of-Doors moving forward. We look forward to joining her on her adventures and watching as she grows as an angler. We are also excited to feature her unique artwork in the issues to come.

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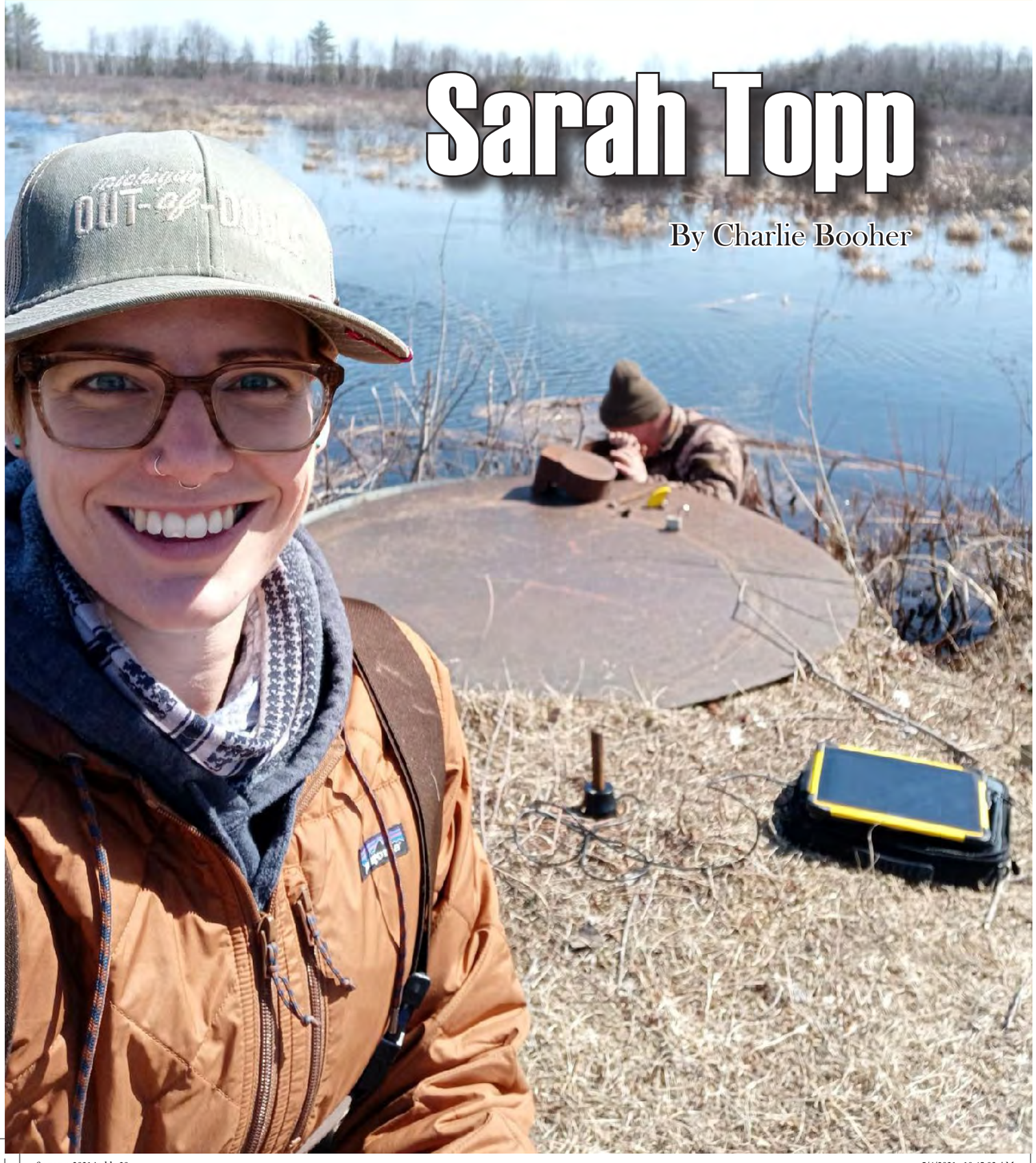


Sarah Topp

By Charlie Booher

Conservationist reflects on time outdoors, careers that have shaped who she is

In response to Alan Campbell's Legends of Conservation column, the Michigan Out-of-Doors editorial staff sought to highlight individuals who might someday make their way into those pages. The Rising Stars in Conservation column seeks to introduce readers to the next generation of natural resource conservation professionals, sharing their experiences, their voices, their ambitions and their outlook on the future of the field. Leaders today look different, hold different positions and have been trained differently than traditional conservationists and they are worthy of an introduction.

Certain places around this great state seem to disproportionately produce conservationists — places so unique or so carefully protected that they beg folks to care about them. People who spend time in the Porcupine Mountains, learn to swim along the shores of Lake Superior or who experience wilderness for the first time in the Pigeon River Country, under the mentorship of those who love the outdoors, tend to care for and steward those places themselves. However, it also takes a certain kind of person to dedicate their life to this cause. Sarah Topp grew up stomping around the Pigeon River Country State Forest and cut her teeth as a conservationist and an outdoorswoman in Hemingway's "Big Wild." That time built a strong foundation for her career in wildlife conservation and natural resource management.

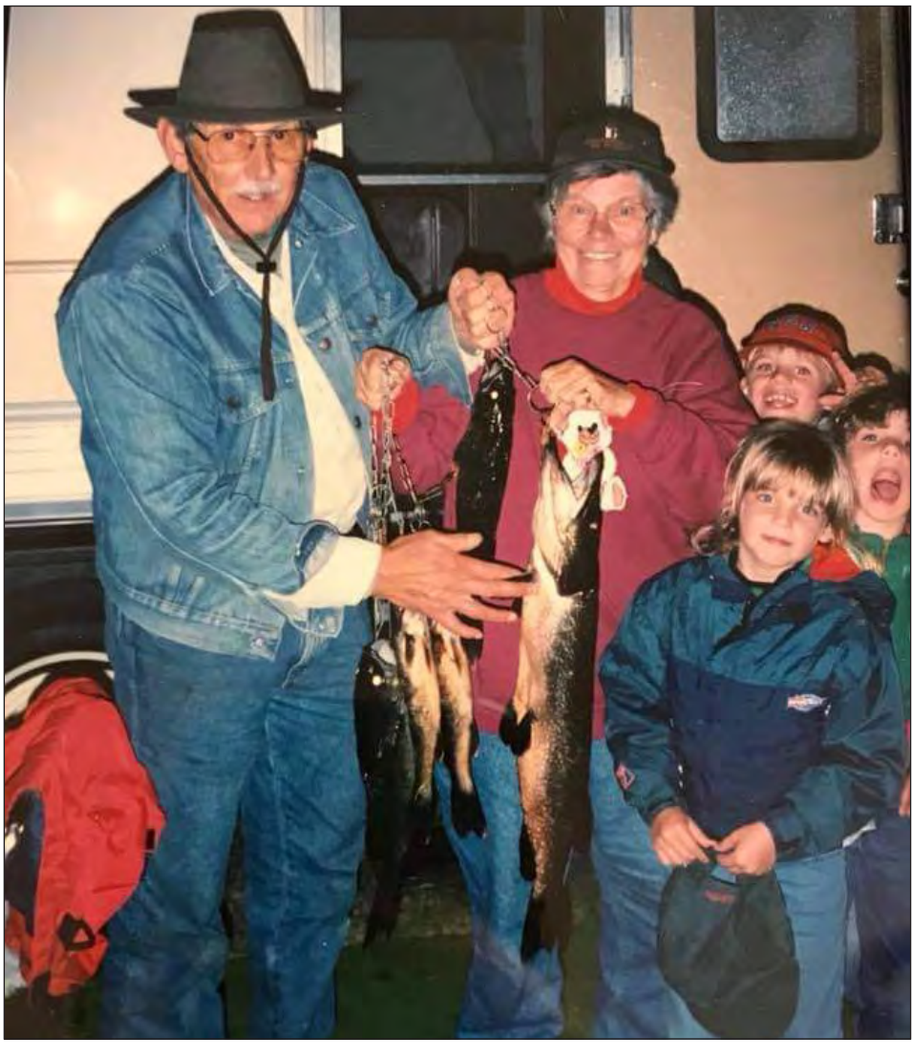
Today, Topp spends her days in the woods and waters of the Western Upper Peninsula and Northern Wisconsin. Still, her roots in Michigan run deep — and through Michigan United Conservation Clubs and the Huron Pines Americorps program.

Growing up in Gaylord, Topp gathered inspiration from the large swaths of public land that were just outside her backdoor.

"The time I spent outside hunting, fishing and paddling really made me who I am today, especially the time in the Pigeon River Country," Topp said. "It's such a special place and so different from other pieces of public land in Michigan because of the back-country experience. If it weren't for my parents and my siblings, I wouldn't have had nearly the same experiences in the outdoors, nor the drive to protect those places."

Hunting with her dad and siblings and angling with her grandparents only increased her passion for the outdoors and drove her to spend most of her free time in the backcountry. In her final years of high school, Sarah knew that she wanted to pursue a career that would have her outside and allow her to share her passion for the outdoors with others while also improving those places.

"I always thought that I would be a wildlife biologist or conservation officer," Topp said. "But after spending time in classes, I realized that I wanted to help connect people with wildlife and that there is more to conservation than science or law enforcement. Learning about all of the different opportunities was pretty



overwhelming for me because there were so many options and ways in which I could pursue conservation as a career."

Biology degree (wildlife management) at NMU

Topp started going to college by running cross country and track at the University of St. Francis in Joliet, IL; however, the suburban sprawl of the Chicagoland area left quite a bit to be desired. So far removed from the wild places of Michigan, Sarah transferred to Northern Michigan University (NMU) and pursued the remainder of her degree program. Her classwork in Marquette offered far more exciting opportunities for research and fieldwork, including studies on wildlife crossings and elk population dynamics.

"It was incredible to be just 10 minutes away from doing any of the many outdoor activities that I love," Topp said. "It was an awesome place to spend a few years, and I am so glad that I had that experience before starting as a professional."

Sarah started her professional career here at Michigan United Conservation Clubs as a member of the Huron Pines Americorps program. In those early years, she helped to jumpstart the award-winning On The Ground program and was eventually hired full-time to coordinate the program.

"Bringing people together under the common cause of conservation was so special to me," Topp said. "It was incredible to experience Michigan's public lands in this way — I got to see so many interesting places and, eventually, help improve them for the public. This time in my life clarified my passion for wildlife and wild places."

After a few years in Lansing, Topp headed back north to coordinate the Huron Pines Americorps program in Gaylord — the same program that initially brought her to MUCC. Topp spent the next two and a half years coordinating the program and mentoring more than 60 young people through their term of service.

"Moving back 'up north' did include a challenging shift in work," Topp said. "I went from working outside almost every day to being behind a desk most of the time, but I had a huge passion for the program and loved work that was being done with this huge group of young people."

Today, Sarah works just across the border in Marinette County, Wisconsin as a county conservationist for the county's Land Information Department, the equivalent of Michigan's county conservation district program. However, her home is in the Western Upper Peninsula, so she makes a daily commute across the border and helps Wisconsinites with issues of private land conservation.

Like many others in the field, Sarah's commitment to conservation extends far beyond her day job. She regularly volunteers with the Michigan Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) and serves as a leader of Artemis Sportswomen, a National Wildlife Federation program.

As the vice chair of the Michigan Chapter of BHA, Topp works closely with the staff of

Sarah Topp (third from left) poses with a group of women who partook in the first Michigan BHA Women's Cast and Blast Weekend.

that organization to coordinate members and volunteers around a variety of causes. From picking up trash at local state game areas to coordinating outdoor skill-building events, Sarah does her best to stay actively involved in this arena. Her real passion is teaching other adults how to hunt — particularly women and members of the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer+) community.

"I first started working to offer events for people in these groups because I received overwhelmingly positive feedback on social media," Topp said. "When I posted on Facebook to see if there would be interest in this, people came out in droves, frequently saying that they were interested in taking part in these activities with like-minded people. That comfort is so important when dealing with something like hunting where you're truly dealing with life and death. Community is so important for conservation."

As hunters and anglers decline in numbers, Topp sees the need to recruit new faces to the activities that she loves — and she continues to do so on her own and with organizations like BHA and Artemis.

According to the Artemis website, these sportswomen and conservationists "do more than hunt and fish. We have an obligation to give as well as receive and to embody an inclusive culture. The complete sportswoman can skin a deer, land a burly brown trout, navigate in the wild, and she knows her game commissioners and politicians, knows wildlife laws, defends all wildlife, advocates on their behalf, and teaches others these skills." Sarah fits right in and has helped situate the staff of Artemis in dealing with issues specific to Michigan and the Western Great Lakes more broadly.

However, all of these efforts are not without their challenges. Topp described her difficulties in finding high-quality employees and stable employment of her own.

"This field is really challenging," Topp said. "There are a lot of people competing for jobs that come with a really great lifestyle, but not always the best pay or benefits. It's hard to build a career, no less a family, without this personal and financial security."

For those looking to pursue a career in this field, Topp offers this:

"Don't narrow yourself into one area/topic of conservation — be a generalist and work to know a little bit about a lot of things. Volunteer if you can and get to know the people who work in this arena," she said. "Let yourself flow with the opportunities that are available and continue to apply for work as it comes up."

In the near future, Topp hopes to start up an Americorps program of her own as she continues to serve organizations that aim to conserve the natural resources of the Great Lakes State. We are lucky to have conservationists like Topp who care deeply about our state and the wild places that we so love to explore. While the cheeseheads may get to benefit from her expertise for now, it's obvious that her work and her passion for the land will always continue to benefit the outdoors of the Great Lakes State.

Humane Society of the United States attacks MUCC, hunters, conservationists

By Nick Green
MUCC Public Information Officer

Clearly distraught and frustrated, Molly Tamulevich, Michigan director for the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), took cheap shots directed towards conservationists at March's monthly NRC meeting.

The March Natural Resources Commission (NRC) meeting included public comment from nearly 30 people, including Tamulevich. Roughly one-third of those comments centered around anti-hunting agendas and included common rhetoric used to disparage conservationists.

After propagating several absurd claims — including a Michigan wolf hunt is "scientifically unsupportable" and would cause "social chaos" in pack structures — Tamulevich aimed her sights at Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC).

"I am absolutely opposed to the DNR's decision to appoint the Michigan United Conservation Clubs to the wolf advisory committee as the representation of a conservation organization," Tamulevich said. "Their designation as the representative for conservation organizations across the state of Michigan is misleading."

MUCC Executive Director Amy Trotter said conservation is the organization's middle name.

Tamulevich also implied that hunters and anglers are not conservationists during her testimony. Her comments and implications highlight a gross misunderstanding of what conservation is and means, Trotter said.

"After having worked for more than a decade in the conservation arena, it is clear that anti-hunting organizations are becoming more clever with their messaging and more disconnected from reality," Trotter said. "Once they figure out the facts aren't on their side, they quickly turn to emotional pleas and use terms that evoke strong negative connotations."

Tamulevich went as far as to note what she believes to be strong "conservation" organizations, including the Detroit Zoo and Audubon Society — both of which share anti-hunting sentiments and have helped funnel countless dollars into Michigan to fight against hunting and trapping.

Audubon Society and the Detroit Zoo were active strategists and visible supporters of the "Keep Michigan Wolves Protected" ballot committee in 2014 that fought against the state's management of wolves and MUCC's advocacy to establish a durable delisting for the species.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is recognized internationally as one of the world's foremost frameworks for conserving and managing wildlife — with hunters and anglers bearing the majority of the cost. The Model is hallmarked by the use of sound science in setting policy regarding wildlife management, and it is often credited with saving some of North America's most iconic species from the brink of extinction.

Set in opposition to European models of management, the tenets of the North American Model democratize wildlife and codify all species as public resources to be managed for the collective benefit of all citizens. The Model was operationalized through policies like the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, which contributes more than $1.1 billion into conservation programming annually. These funds, generated through excise taxes on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment, are then matched by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses.

The vast majority of the Michigan Department of Natural Resource's (DNR) revenue for all wildlife conservation — impacting species like white-tailed deer and wood ducks to karner blue butterflies and gray wolves — is generated through these funding mechanisms.

HSUS claims "94% of wildlife conservation funding is unrelated to hunting of any type." However, this is not supported by state-legislative appropriations data and is patently false here in Michigan.

Michigan hunters directly contribute more than $40 million annually through license sales, which is leveraged with federal and non-profit funding from a variety of hunter-led organizations, to manage and improve wildlife habitats benefitting all species — game and nongame. In fiscal year 2017, the non-hunter-generated, nongame-related revenues totaled about $285,000 — a drop in the bucket compared to hunter-generated conservation revenues.

In line with the tenets of the Model, Michigan has convened a wolf management advisory council to examine the best available science on the matter and to update the state's wolf management plan.

MUCC's Fight for Conservation

Since 1937, MUCC has united citizens to conserve, protect and enhance Michigan's natural resources and outdoor heritage. As a grassroots, member-driven

organization, conservationists from across the state submit and help develop MUCC policy at the state and federal level. You can join the organization by visiting mucc.org. Use the code WOLF to receive 25 percent off when you join today.

Never mind the laundry list of conservation achievements like the bottle deposit law of 1976 or the implementation of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund that MUCC has helped to accomplish, the organization's most meaningful work in the conservation arena has shaped and continues to shape the processes by which sound scientific management decisions are made.

In 1996, MUCC was an integral part in helping to pass the Michigan Wildlife Management Referendum (Proposal G). Passing with almost 70 percent of the vote, the referendum granted the NRC the exclusive authority to regulate the taking of game in Michigan. It also requires the commission "to the greatest extent practicable, to use the principles of sound scientific management in making decisions regarding the taking of game."

In 2014, MUCC helped champion the Scientific Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act across the finish line. This statute further reaffirmed the NRC's duty to implement sound scientific management and is the catalyst for the wolf management debate currently happening.

MUCC has consistently worked to insulate the appointment of the DNR director from the politics of the day. For nearly 90 years (until 2010), the appointment of the DNR director was under the purview of the NRC — a bipartisan body with a commitment to working with biologists and stakeholders. The organization's stance, similar to one of MUCC's founding principles in 1937, is to keep politics out of the management of our natural resources.

In 2019, MUCC members passed a resolution calling for staff to advocate for implementation of criteria for NRC commissioners. This criteria includes appointing members from multiple areas of the state, those with a background in fisheries and wildlife conservation and those with varying recreational experiences.

Furthermore, MUCC's award-winning On the Ground program has improved more than 3,000 acres of public land, engaged more than 3,000 volunteers and accrued almost 15,000 volunteer hours. The program's aim is to create a public land stewardship ethic that betters wildlife habitat and bridges the divide between consumptive and non-consumptive use of the resource.

MUCC also operates Michigan Out-of-Doors Youth Camp each summer. Since 1946, more than 58,000 young conservationists have attended the MUCC camp and seen their first star, paddled their first canoe, shot their first .22 rifle, and learned about water ecology and the importance of hunting, fishing and trapping to the conservation movement.

Take Action

There is no better time than now to become an active part of conservation in Michigan. NRC commissioners want to hear your voice and your opinions on wildlife and natural resources issues that matter to you.

Please visit the NRC's website regularly to view upcoming agendas and past meeting minutes. Meetings are held virtually the second Thursday of each month. If you are an MUCC member and have interest in learning more about NRC processes and how to form effective testimony, please email MUCC Policy Coordinator Ian FitzGerald at ifitzgerald@mucc.org.

Since 1937, MUCC has united citizens to conserve, protect and enhance Michigan's natural resources and outdoor heritage — and we do so from Lansing to Washington D.C. Please join us today by visiintg mucc.org. Use the code WOLF to receive 25 percent off when you join.

New DNR Wildlife Chief: Can Data Help us Find Common Ground?

By Chris Lamphere

New DNR Wildlife Chief Jared Duquette sat down with Michigan Out-of-Doors to outline his philosophy, goals, plan for moving forward

Minutes into a wide-ranging conversation with the DNR's new Wildlife Division Chief Jared Duquette, it became clear that data, scientific evidence and discussion all are integral parts of his decision-making process.

That's not too surprising, considering Duquette's professional background; but it goes back even further than that, to childhood.

Growing up in the St. Charles area on 5 acres of countryside, complete with a pond for catching frogs, Duquette said he took the traditional pathway to become an outdoorsman — under the tutelage of family members who were avid deer hunters.

Although Duquette had a passion for the outdoors throughout his youth, he said a single moment made him realize he wanted to make that passion the focus of a future profession. When he was about 10 years old, Duquette remembers watching a television show featuring a scientist who was tagging sharks for the purpose of collecting information about their behaviors. From that moment, Duquette said he knew he wanted to pursue a career that combined the rigor of scientific research with his love of nature.

With that goal in mind, Duquette attended and graduated from Central Michigan University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resources, then went on to obtain a Master of Science degree and Doctor of Philosophy degree in Wildlife Ecology and Management from Ohio State University and Mississippi State University, respectively.

Before the Michigan DNR hired him on as wildlife division chief, Duquette worked in seven other states (Ohio, Arkansas, Louisiana, California, Wyoming, Illinois and Colorado) where he researched a number of wildlife-related topics — from bovine tuberculosis and chronic wasting disease to predator-prey dynamics, among

others.

Given his experience, Duquette has a lot of ideas on how to tackle some of the most pressing issues of the day, and while the challenges are all unique, his approach usually begins the same way — by collecting and analyzing the data, then consulting experts in the field.

CWD and bovine tuberculosis management

CWD presents a big dilemma for deer management: it has the potential to devastate the health of Michigan's deer herd while at the same time affecting hunter retention and recruitment efforts.

A conflict between CWD management and hunter retention and recruitment efforts occurs because of the preference many hunters have in wanting to see a lot of deer in the woods when they're hunting, Duquette said.

"One of the hardest challenges to deer management is working to eliminate diseases, like CWD, while keeping deer density at a level that maintains satisfaction of most hunters," Duquette said. "Deer management is about trade-offs, including the public understanding that to maintain a healthy herd for the long-term requires weighing a lot of opinions on deer with what is best biologically and environmentally."

Communicating the imperative to thin the herd in certain places (notably around urban centers, where hunting pressures generally are far less powerful than rural areas) and prevent deer from congregating at a single food source will be important moving forward, Duquette said, even if it means that hunters may not see as many deer in the woods as they're used to.

It also will be important to dispel myths about CWD that may be dissuading some people from hunting deer, Duquette said.

On top of CWD is continued management of bovine tuberculosis transmission in deer. Although CWD and bovine TB are notably different diseases, Duquette said the DNR is working on common ways to manage and reduce the spread of both.

Ultimately, impressing upon the public and hunters how important they are in managing the deer population, not just over a handful of years but over decades, will be one of Duquette's goals.

Does all this mean that hunters in the Lower Peninsula will eventually be able to hunt with bait at some time in the future?

Duquette was hesitant to offer a prediction on this question, adding that he'd need to look more closely at the research and talk to experts on the subject before he'd be comfortable saying one way or the other.

Hunter attrition and community engagement

Obviously, reversing the trend of declining hunter numbers in Michigan is a key objective of many conservationists and DNR officials, including Duquette.

With the drop in hunter participation driven largely by Baby Boomers getting older and less active in the woods, Duquette said getting more young people involved will be essential moving forward.

Duquette said it has become

Below: DNR Wildlife Division Chief Jared Duquette has worked in eight states, doing research on a number of topics. Here he is pictured with a pronghorn fawn. Left: Duquette is pictured positioning a bear that was sedated for research purposes. Duquette researched predator/prey dynamics during his tenure in other states.

DNR Wildlife Division Chief Jared Duquette is pictured kayaking on the Middle Fork River.

apparent based on survey results and other data that younger hunters have different values than their predecessors when it comes to natural resources. Members of the Gen X, Gen Z and Millennial generations are more likely to value things such as sustainable food harvesting and the experience of connecting with the outdoors over traditional value systems that view the outdoors as a resource existing primarily for the benefit of mankind, Duquette said.

"Shifting the narrative" to make younger generations more comfortable participating in outdoor activities will be especially important in 2021, which follows a year in which hunter numbers increased for the first time since they started declining in the 1990s.

Duquette said the DNR would need to learn more about their motivations to hunt to keep these hunters in the woods. Doing so will allow the DNR to cater messages to various groups and frame natural resources as a relevant feature of their lives worth preserving.

Part of that retention will also include efforts to get hunters to try out different types of game species and methods — something that Duquette acknowledged will be tough, given how set in their ways many hunters are and because many seasons overlap with one another.

One idea is to reinvigorate the classic gateway strategy that moves a fledgling hunter from the initial safety concepts to small game and then to larger game and more complicated hunting methods (such as using a tree stand or turkey call), to finally becoming a mentor to someone else.

"The idea is to cross-pollinate some of these things," Duquette said. "To broaden the type of hunting people do."

Duquette said he'll approach the issue from the point of view of a business looking to expand customer engagement — not just of those who already are hunting in the woods but also of the 94% of Michiganders who aren't, notably from groups that are historically under-represented in the hunting community, including women and minorities.

"What's relevant to them?" Duquette said. "How do we get them outside? From a business point of view, we need to develop programs to meet that need, instead of the other way around. We need to go to the public instead of forcing them to come to us."

Dealing with criticism

Any wildlife chief will inevitably encounter opposition to and criticism of their decisions from individuals and stakeholder groups, especially when those decisions affect many people and change traditions that have been part of the Michigan landscape for decades.

Duquette said public opinion generally falls along a bell curve, with the majority of people's opinions fitting into the largest bulk of the curve and fewer numbers of outliers trailing off at both ends. "I'll be looking for that common interest — the middle ground — the silent majority that sometimes is overlooked," Duquette said. "That's where the overlap is."

While listening to the general consensus of the people of Michigan will be a part of the process that Duquette goes through in making decisions, other factors also will have significant weight.

"We're charged as public servants, stewards of natural resources," Duquette said. "I'll have about 10 million constituents to listen to with a spectrum of interests. To make the best decision I can, and to justify that decision, I'll have to collect all the evidence I can in a way that is very fluid, and in a way that can be very nimble."

Duquette plans to use several strategic public input methods, such as surveys and focus groups, that allow the DNR to understand how to engage more of their constituents in wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation.

"We already know public values toward wildlife are changing nationally and in Michigan, and understanding these trends will help us maximize relevancy of the wildlife conservation and recreation in the public eye," Duquette said.

Antler point restrictions are an example of a DNR policy that receives quite a bit of backlash and scrutiny from hunters.

Duquette said APRs is a topic that tends to polarize people into two camps rather than along a bell curve like many other natural

resource-related topics.

"It's very personal for hunters," Duquette said. "It's hard to find common ground. That's why we based APR decisions on a percentage of support among hunters."

As for future decisions related to APRs, Duquette said he'll be relying heavily on the three years of data they'll have collected by next year about the practice, in addition to statistical models highlighting its potential impact on CWD spread and other factors.

Duquette said data (not just related to APRs but for any other topic) might lead to decisions that are unpopular to some individuals and groups but ultimately have to be made for the betterment of the state's wildlife, ecosystems and other natural resources.

"You don't go into research with any presumption," Duquette said. "That's what research is for (to help make decisions in an unbiased manner)."

"To make the best decision I can, and to justify that decision, I'll have to collect all the evidence I can in a way that is very fluid, and in a way that can be very nimble."

Working with other departments

Wildlife management may at times have goals that conflict with the objectives of other state departments, including the DNR's own Forest Resources Division.

Through some initial discussions with Forest Resources Division Chief Jeff Stampfly, Duquette said they are beginning to recognize where each of their respective goals are similar and how both departments can achieve optimal results.

For Duquette, that means setting priorities for species and habitats (especially on Game and Fish Fund- or Pittman Robertson-purchased lands) and spelling out those expectations in a way that is adaptive to a variety of inputs, including broad public sentiment, economic realities and habitat management, among others.

"We need to keep having those conversations," Duquette said. "And to make sure our staff are working together to add value to the conversation."

DNR Wildlife Division Chief Jared Duquette is pictured conducting morphometric measurements on a bobcat.

Fish on! Charter industry, coastal communities ready for a big catch this summer

Sponsored by the Michigan Wildlife Council

Michigan's charter fishing industry is on course for a big summer as tens of thousands of anglers seek adventure – and tasty fish – on the Great Lakes.

"Phones started ringing off the hook early this spring and bookings are way up," said Bill Winowiecki, president of the Michigan Charter Boat Association. "People have been locked up so long because of COVID and want to safely get outdoors and have some fun."

That's welcome news for charter boat crews – and more than a hundred Great Lakes ports in Michigan that rely on fishing to reel in visitors. That's because the economic impact of a strong charter fishing industry goes way beyond the price of the outing.

"We estimate three-quarters of all charter customers in Michigan are out-of-towners," said Daniel O'Keefe, a Michigan Sea Grant extension educator. "So when they come for their excursion, they stay in hotels or campgrounds, they go to restaurants to eat, and they go shopping. That's an incredible ripple effect on local employment and Michigan's economy statewide."

The Great Lakes – Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario, along with their connecting channels – form the largest surface freshwater system on earth. Michigan sits at the heart of that system with more than 3,200 miles of Great Lakes shoreline on four of those lakes – more than any other state in the nation.

In 2020, more than 65,000 people went charter fishing on the Michigan waters of lakes Michigan, Huron, Erie, Superior and the St. Clair system. Although the number of trips was down over previous years due to COVID precautions, all

Charters are a great way for small fry to catch fish. Source: Watta Bite Charters

that angling still means big revenue for Michigan. In an average year, charter fishing generates $27.1 million in economic activity in coastal communities, according to Michigan Sea Grant estimates.

But that's not where fishing revenue stops.

More than 1.2 million anglers purchased Michigan fishing licenses last year, generating millions of dollars for wildlife conservation and management by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

"In fact, it's fishing and hunting license sales – not state taxes – that are the primary way Michigan pays to protect endangered species, improve wildlife habitat and keep our natural resources healthy," said Nick Buggia, Michigan Wildlife Council chairman.

But before the Michigan Wildlife Council was formed in 2013, many Michiganders were unaware of the important role sportsmen and women play in preserving Michigan's outdoors.

Over the last six years, the council has conducted a public awareness campaign to explain the many ways that scientifically based conservation and wildlife management practices – including regulated hunting and fishing – are essential.

"Anglers and hunters play a huge role in ensuring Michigan's great outdoors will be here for generations," Buggia said.

That's a lot of fish

Because most folks don't have the boats or equipment for the "big

water," experienced and novice anglers alike rely on licensed charter captains to provide the tools and expertise needed for a fishing excursion.

And, if you're lucky, a tasty catch.

"It's just so much fun when you see an 8- or 10-year-old kid reel in a lake trout. Their eyes just light up and they're so darned proud of themselves," said Winowiecki, who also owns Watta Bite Charter Fishing in Glen Arbor.

In order to better manage Michigan's fisheries, Great Lakes charter captains are required by law to report their catches to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The DNR uses that data to make scientifically based decisions about how to manage the Great Lakes, 11,000 inland lakes and tens of thousands of miles of rivers and streams.

"More than 200,000 fish were caught (harvested plus released) on charter trips last year on Michigan waters of the Great Lakes," said Donna Wesander, a DNR fisheries technician staff specialist who tracks charter fishing data.

Lake trout, walleye, yellow perch and smallmouth bass made up the largest percentage of catches, Wesander said.

Those results are enhanced by the state's fish hatching system that annually produces tens of millions of fish for stocking in Michigan's public waters.

"There's natural reproduction, but we also do a lot of fish stocking. It's really about finding the right balance, so the lakes have the food base to sustain those populations," Wesander said.

Two-thirds of all charter trips traditionally take place on Lake Michigan. But each lake has its own unique fishery – with plenty of folks eager to get out on the water and drop a line.

"Fingers crossed for a really strong fishing summer," Winowiecki said.

Michigan Charter Fishing: Economic Impact

74% – Out-of-town customers

$27.1M – Total economic impact

523,875 – Employment hours generated

Branding: Why it's important, relevant to hunters, anglers

By Russ Mason

Physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach once declared "the world is framed above by an eyebrow and below by a moustache." The old boy was ahead of his time; perceptions can be everything, especially when it comes to cultural concerns. Emotional filters and predisposing beliefs lead to different interpretations of the same facts.

When it comes to hunting, hunters typically see themselves as conservationists. That view isn't shared necessarily by the general public. Non-hunters often see hunters as a drag on sustainable wildlife populations. Consider the following quote:

"The 06 Legacy, a national group based in Michigan, alleges DNR Director Daniel Eichinger broke state law by appointing hunting advocates to positions on the Wolf Management Advisory Council that are reserved for agricultural and conservation interests (underline is mine)… Amy Trotter (President of Michigan United Conservation Clubs) fired back in a press release, calling the lawsuit an attempt to "shift the narrative around what conservation is and the integral part hunters play in the conservation arena." (Bridge Magazine, April 2021)

The point is that anti-hunters often conflate protectionism with conservation. Likely intentional, these groups portray hunters and hunting as threats to conservation. Considering that the most common hunting photographs depict successful hunters with dead animals, it's not hard to imagine why anti-hunting messages frequently hit home.

Many would agree that hunting has an image problem and that hunters haven't done enough to correct it.

The good news is that, despite substantial efforts by anti-hunting advocates, most non-hunters are neutral to mildly positive in their attitudes towards hunting, so long as game harvest serves some broadly acknowledged beneficial purpose (e.g., for food, or for disease or population management). Assuring that this majority view stays the same (or possibly improves) is less a function of 'education' than it is the development and implementation of effective marketing and branding campaigns.

Companies once assumed that sales were a function of product quality and performance. That assumption no longer holds. Today, most companies offer equally good products. Instead, purchase preferences depend on the effectiveness of marketing that creates positive emotional attachments between goods and consumers. Branding is the principal way these attachments are formed.

As implied by the "ing," branding isn't so much a thing as it is an action (e.g., Nike exhorts, IBM solves, Sony dreams).

Imagine that hunting is a product. Likewise, consider hunters as the direct consumers of that product and the general public as consumers of hunting's indirect ecological and economic conservation benefits. Because hunters, by and large, are already hooked, the target of greatest opportunity are the vast numbers of non-hunting users of natural resources (e.g., birders, mountain bikers, hikers). The need is for the branding messages that resonate with these other groups.

It's worth reflecting that when hunting is described in the media, it's usually touted as a "control" or a "management" strategy (and occasionally as a healthy source of protein). While these descriptions are all technically correct, the messaging is more likely to resonate with hunters who already know the background story. A different approach might be more effective in messaging to the general public. Suppose hunting was associated with positive action verbs more likely to catch on with non-hunters: words like conserves, protects, grows or saves. Colorado's Hug A Hunter and Hug an Angler campaigns come close. Both efforts emphasized that hunting and angling license revenues protect and improve the outdoors for everyone. Opinion surveys suggest that Hug a Hunter/Angler caused seismic shifts in public attitudes and galvanized it against anti-hunting ballot initiatives.

"Suppose hunting was associated with positive action verbs more likely to catch on with non-hunters: words like conserves, protects, grows or saves."

Important to remember is that branding is less a statement or a value proposition than it is an interesting, entertaining or aspirational interaction. Whatever is (or resembles) thoughtful face-to-face communications are best. Electronically, the goal is to provide an interactive experience with the shortest possible interval between consumer contact and agency response.

Last but not least, no one source of information touches every segment of the public. What that means is that successful branding is multimedia, including print, radio, television, billboards and social media, all using the same visuals and messages repetitively (the professionals call this brand discipline). The point is to engage consumer consistently with the same message in as many ways as possible with the aim of building trust.

Because the messages for the general public are not the same as those hunters want to see (I enjoy hunting and fishing articles as much as the next person), perhaps the biggest challenge is for the hunting community to come together and to become overtly conscious about the images we portray. Required reading that will help is How to Talk About Hunting: Research-Based Communications Strategies. This extremely readable addition to the NRA Hunter Skills Series should be required reading for anyone interested in maintaining hunting traditions and preserving hunting opportunities for generations to come.

Humans have hunted for almost 2 million years, and more than 11 million Americans continue to hunt today. In addition to providing numerous cultural and ecological benefits, hunters contribute the bulk of state-based funding for wildlife conservation in the United States. Additionally, every fish and wildlife agency across the United States is legislatively mandated to manage and provide opportunities for hunting. Despite these facts, legal, regulated hunting remains vulnerable to the volatile nature of public opinion. The future of hunting and an integral portion of conservation funding in America depend on cultural support. This means that wildlife professionals must use language that resonates with non-hunters and those unfamiliar with hunting.

Adapted from "How to Talk About Hunting" published by the NRA

30x30: What you ought to know

By Charlie Booher

Since the rise of conservation biology in the mid-1980s, environmentalists and conservationists have grappled with the impending decline of biodiversity.

It is a fact that there are fewer species on the planet today than there were just 10 years ago — and that's a problem for a whole host of reasons. From medicine to agriculture, our society depends on diverse, interlocking, often invisible systems to keep pace with innovation. The world as we know it has been built from the complex array of life that exists around us. Many see the decline of these species as the result of human expansion and see it as the responsibility of this generation of people to rectify these harms. However, as with many issues, how folks are trying to achieve this is quite possibly as different as the people who present them — varying widely in experiences and values. Despite these different approaches, some solutions tend to rise to the top of the pile as the most viable or publicly supported. Each of these approaches is worth our serious attention.

Some individuals believe that the best way to maintain biodiversity and rich, abundant ecosystems is to conserve that land or those waters in perpetuity. Lately, the call has been to do this to 30 percent of the lands and waters in the United States by the year 2030. What "conserve" means in this case tends to be in the eye of the beholder and doesn't always mesh with conventional definitions of the word, which typically revolve around the "wise use" of a resource. This often comes in the middle of a fully-preservationist approach where a resource isn't touched at all and an abuse of a resource. While some see this lack of definition as a negative and see great potential for harm in these proposals, others see a chance for a watershed moment for progress in the conservation community.

Renowned biologist and conservation researcher E.O. Wilson famously prescribed a means for biodiversity conservation in his book Half Earth. He proposes that we, as humans, put away — self-isolate from — half of the earth's area to allow wildlife and wild places to flourish. This, of course, raises far more questions than it does present answers to our current crisis: what lands ought to be protected? How should they be protected? Can they still be used for some purposes like hunting, fishing or paddling? Who might be entrusted with their care? And, perhaps most importantly, why should we pursue such an ambitious endeavor? It would be far easier to make changes to the ways in which we as humans occupy the lands that we currently inhabit than to crowd ourselves into half of the space we have now.

All of these questions have arisen in response to a wave of initiatives that have cropped up in state capitols across the country, as well as in the White House. These different 30x30 initiatives aim to 'protect' 30 percent of the lands and waters of the United States, or a given state, by the year 2030, but each of them does it in different ways. However, none of this means that hunters or anglers should push against this proposal. In fact, if done thoughtfully, 30x30 projects could provide additional access to lands, improve wildlife habitat and welcome new faces into the world of conservation. However, hunters and anglers must continue to be involved in these conversations and be sure their interests and perspectives are not excluded from these efforts.

At the federal level, President Biden signed an executive order to "direct the Interior Department to outline steps to achieve the President's commitment to conserve at least 30% each of our lands and waters by the year 2030." However, this order is still in the planning phase and is still open for comment and discussion. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the research arm of the

Department of Interior, only 12 percent of lands are "permanently protected," and roughly 23 percent of America's oceans are "strongly protected." If the goal is to increase these measures, it will be critical for conservation leaders to closely examine what these metrics actually represent — and ensure that these lands are being used wisely.

Many members of the hunting community are worried that they could be barred from their favorite piece of U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management parcel. While this is unlikely to happen, it could be the case that motor vehicles could be banned or permanent infrastructure (e.g., bathrooms, parking lots, visitor centers) could be scrapped. It's also critical to examine what activities are permitted in specific ocean conservation areas. For example, certain marine conservation zones still allow for certain types of commercial fishing — which includes some techniques that are far more harmful than others. While it might be appropriate for a small, hook-and-line commercial fisher to operate in these zones under certain regulations, we ought to look more closely at where large commercial trawls may operate. It is also critical that we consider whether or not recreational anglers are allowed to fish in these waters, given their small impact on overall fish populations.

For the waterfowlers, fly anglers and trappers out there, it will also be important to remind leaders and planners that there are many areas between land and water that deserve our attention — wetlands, riparian zones and moving waters. None of these ecosystem types have been explicitly mentioned in materials on the federal 30x30 initiative.

Additionally, planners have only scratched the surface of the role of private lands in this proposal. Making up nearly 60 percent of the U.S. land base, an initiative of this magnitude cannot be completed without the involvement of individual and corporate landowners. Further, the Interior Department would also require the cooperation of states, tribes and municipalities to gather enough lands and waters to make a conservation initiative of this size happen.

If this plan also intends to sequester atmospheric carbon, as outlined by other executive action, it's critical that planners work intentionally to incorporate management regimes into the 30x30 initiative. For example, harvesting timber at a certain stand-age, with certain replanting techniques, can sequester far more greenhouse gas emissions than simply leaving a system alone indefinitely — an approach often pushed by proponents of biodiversity conservation. This doesn't mean that the goals of biodiversity conservation, atmospheric greenhouse gas sequestration and hunter access are mutually exclusive, but rather that they require broad stakeholder involvement to achieve. This level of collaboration is difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish when proponents of these plans don't communicate effectively.

Finally, nobody seems to be able to answer the age-old question — how are we going to pay for it? With state and federal agency budgets strapped for cash, certain private land conservation programs having been veritably raided in the 2018 Farm Bill and a great deal of money already being spent on land management, budgeting is likely the most critical aspect of this program. Without a robust and sustainable budget, this whole thing is likely to be dead in the water. I think we will all be very curious to see how the Department of Interior and other agencies propose to make this plan work, whether this comes through

existing, emerging or yet-to-exist investments in conservation.

As our leaders work through these questions, I encourage you to keep an open mind and continue to think about the massive complexities of this issue and remember how quickly things can go sideways.

In California, a legislative resolution on 30x30 would have likely restricted angler access to a massive amount of state waters and could have banned hunters from some public lands. This was not how 30x30 advocates intended to start this push, as a group of conservation organizations worked quickly to quash the top-down proposal. However, I would argue that California's failure was borne more out of the process than policy — the legislators didn't speak with the right stakeholders, didn't get the correct input and produced a policy that wouldn't work for a lot of people. It should serve as a lesson for developing future proposals rather than a detraction from the broader movement.

A 30x30 resolution is currently on the docket of the Michigan House Natural Resources Committee; however, this approach

"In fact, if done thoughtfully, 30x30 projects could provide additional access to lands, improve wildlife habitat and welcome new faces into the world of conservation."

is measured, and the sponsor is currently working with conservation organizations of all stripes to ensure that the implementation of this plan would take the right approach. Personally, I think it's a pretty good idea, but I also recognize that there are a whole host of needs that our public lands must meet to keep conservation, and our economy, moving in the right direction.

For more information on this issue, please visit www.huntfish3030.com, a coalition of conservation organizations working together to ensure the voices of hunters and anglers are included in this conversation. These organizations are gathered around this cause:

"We support 30 by 30 policies that are not merely aspirational but that recognize existing management levels/actions that currently afford protections and work to identify additional conservation needs and actions through an objective, science-driven, stakeholder-engaged process to determine the appropriate level of management actions necessary to meet biodiversity conservation goals.

Furthermore, we support 30 by 30 policies that recognize hunting and fishing as well-managed and sustainable activities that are in harmony with other management goals. Maintaining the sense of connection to our abundant resources and unrivaled natural beauty that these activities provide is essential to ensuring we have natural resource and biodiversity stewards for the next century, just as we have had in the past."

To impact this vital issue through MUCC, please visit our website and get involved in our conservation policy board.

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Early-Season Teal

By Nick Green

It seemed my eyes had just shut when the irritating sound of my alarm woke me. I never sleep on opening eves — ever. And the teal opener is no exception. The anticipation of what is to come takes hold of me, and I have learned to embrace it rather than fighting it.

The 3 a.m. wake-up call is nothing new to a duck hunter. We pry ourselves from warm beds with our four-legged best friends in hopes of hearing that whistle overhead at first light. We do it day in and day out because it is a part of what makes us whole.

My friend Abe and I loaded my lab, Annie, into the truck and headed for one of our local state game areas where teal can be found with a bit of work. We met my coworker, Shaun, and were motoring out from the launch about 4:15 a.m.

The warm air and warm water comforted me; I knew it would only be a matter of weeks before nightly temperatures dropped, my breath would become visible and I would trade my light, T-shirt under layer for long underwear. Although I loathe the heat most of the year, I don't mind it teal hunting — it is part of the experience.

We set the blocks out in no particular order — teal don't seem to mind much anyway. They are going to either swing through like little rocket ships and give you a passing shot or they are going to bomb in — there isn't much in-between.

Shortly before what would be normal shooting light if it was the regular season, wood ducks and mallards started to fill the sky. The whistle of wings seemed close enough for me to grab the ducks as they skirted over our heads to look at the spread. Some landed but more flew away.

Annie's excitement was building as little whimpers resonated from her blind. Teal shooting light is at sunrise or one half-hour after normal shooting time for ducks in the regular season. We watched hundreds of ducks, cormorants, egrets and an eagle wake up as the sun peaked over the eastern horizon.

About three minutes before

shooting light, we had a group of six teal dive into our decoys. Most duck hunters know this moment of panic and excitement on opening day — will these ducks hang around long enough for the shooting time bell to ding?

Quietly, we loaded our shells as the clock struck 7:04 a.m. I tried to whisper to Annie to keep her calm and quiet. We counted down the shot, and seconds later, four ducks lay belly up. Annie leapt from her stand marking the beginning of our 2020 season.

Teal Season in Michigan

For those who haven't hunted teal, it is a special treat. These early migrators are fast and small. Couple that with early-season jitters and poor shooting, and the recipe is rarely ever in the hunter's favor.

September 1 marks the opener of early goose season and teal season. Teal prefer shallow mudflats where they can dabble for vegetation and aquatic insects. Generally, they fly low and much more erratic than other ducks. They usually tip the scales at about 1 pound.

Teal will occupy lots of different bodies of water during their early pilgrimage. Many hunters will venture to Saginaw Bay, arguably one of the best teal strongholds we are blessed with in Michigan. However, hunters don't need a Bay boat and a 150-horse-power motor to find these small rocket ships.

I have harvested and hunted teal on small, wooded ponds, shallow river oxbows and inland lakes. It is all about finding shallow vegetation and then looking for some birds hanging around. Scouting the week before the season pays huge dividends when trying to set up on these fickle birds.

Scouting

Teal can present frustrating challenges when scouting. First, hunters need to be sure they are identifying teal and not juvenile or molting wood ducks. Looking for the baby blue patch on bluewings or trying to catch the subtle green speculum tucked away on a greenwing when they are cupping in for a landing can help hunters be sure they are after the right quarry. Also, look for a white ring around an eye — a dead giveaway that what you are looking at is a hen wood duck, not a teal.

The author looks on as his lab, Annie, makes the first teal retrieve of the 2020 season. Photo: Abraham Downer Left: The author's lab, Annie, stands proud after retrieving a bluewing teal on opening day. Photo: Nick Green

Look for flocks of small ducks. Usually, wood ducks won't be in migrating groups during the teal season and tend to hang around in groups of two to six. Teal have usually started their migration and will be in groups as big as three dozen or as small as eight or 10. Wood ducks will have a white underwing; teal have a light-brown underwing.

One of the biggest identifying factors that helped me early on differentiate between woodies and

Teal prefer shallow mudflats where they can easily dabble for aquatic vegetation. Michigan waterways are full of this habitat; hunters just may have to do some searching to find exactly which locations teal prefer. Photo: Abraham Downer

teal was their flight pattern. Wood ducks, at least in my experience, tend to fly at a medium height — they don't fly as high as mallards, generally, but higher than divers or teal. Teal will come screaming towards your decoys at 10 feet above the water regularly.

Teal also do lots of twisting and turning when they fly. They are acrobatic ducks that can change direction in an instant. If you're unsure about what your target is, don't pull the trigger. Let the ducks land, and be sure to identify the ducks as teal. After a few hunts, you will start to key in on what teal do in the air, their small stature and be able to start identifying them from greater distances on the wing.

Probably the most frustrating part of scouting for teal happens the morning after you have found birds. Oftentimes, the birds you found the day before have vanished. Teal are sensitive to cold fronts and photoperiods. This is normal and if you have found a good spot, check it again after a cool night to see if more teal have moved in.

Decoys

My friends and I are not obsessive over our decoy spreads. Generally, we put out around 18 early-season teal decoys, six geese and a spinning-wing decoy. Using hen mallards (almost all ducks are brown in early September) also works well. If you are contemplating only one purchase for teal season and already have a half dozen to a dozen hen mallards, buy some floater geese. For some reason, I find early-season ducks like to land near goose decoys.

Spinning-wing decoys (Mojo or Lucky Duck make a good product) work well in the early season to catch ducks' attention. I prefer to use a Mojo with a remote so I can turn the decoy off if we hear or see geese — geese will flare away from the spinners sometimes.

Setting decoys is an art that I still have not mastered. For beginners, try to keep the wind at your back or at least have a crosswind. You want the decoys to be on the downwind side and to try and land the ducks just short of your decoys. Teal, given their small size and flying behavior, don't seem to be as affected by the wind, and rarely ever have I had one perfectly land into the wind like some of the bigger ducks will do. It is good practice to try and keep the wind at your back, though.

We generally set our decoys in family groups of four or six. We will have three or four pods of ducks with a pocket in the middle about 25 yards from our blind. The hope is that they will land in that pocket.

The Hide

The quickest way to ruin a good hunt is a bad hide. Some folks put on ghillie suits and paint

their face — and I presume they are successful. I have found that wearing camouflage similar to your surroundings and staying still works well for teal and early-season ducks that haven't been pressured.

In some of our spots, I do take a panel blind in and set it in front of us. However, just backing up into the brush and sitting still has also worked well in those spots. Wearing a ball cap and keeping your head tilted down and scanning the sky just under the brim of your hat is another good way to keep birds from seeing your face — a dead giveaway to birds in the sky that something isn't normal.

With all of the technology that has gone into duck hunting clothes and camo the last decade, there are jackets, waders and shirts that span from cheap to ridiculously expensive. When I take new hunters in the early season, they generally wear deer hunting camo, and that works just fine.

The Harvest

If only one point comes through from this piece, let it be this: know what you are shooting at. The quickest way to end Michigan's teal hunting season will be if hunters continually harvest wood ducks mistaking them for teal.

If you are unsure, let the ducks decoy. Look for small ducks in groups flying erratically. And try to spot the baby-blue or green speculum on teal when they bank for a landing.

Take your time if the ducks are on the water. Taking a duck on the water is sometimes frowned upon, but if I have done my job right (scouted, put out decoys and hid well), I consider it a success to land them. If you are going to harvest a duck on the water, shoot lower than you initially think — two-thirds of the duck's body is underwater.

Pass shooting can also provide exciting teal hunts. Teal's tendency to group up can make it tough to pick out a single bird. However, try to pick the lead bird in a flock, take your time and follow through. Be mindful of your lead, too, if the teal aren't close.

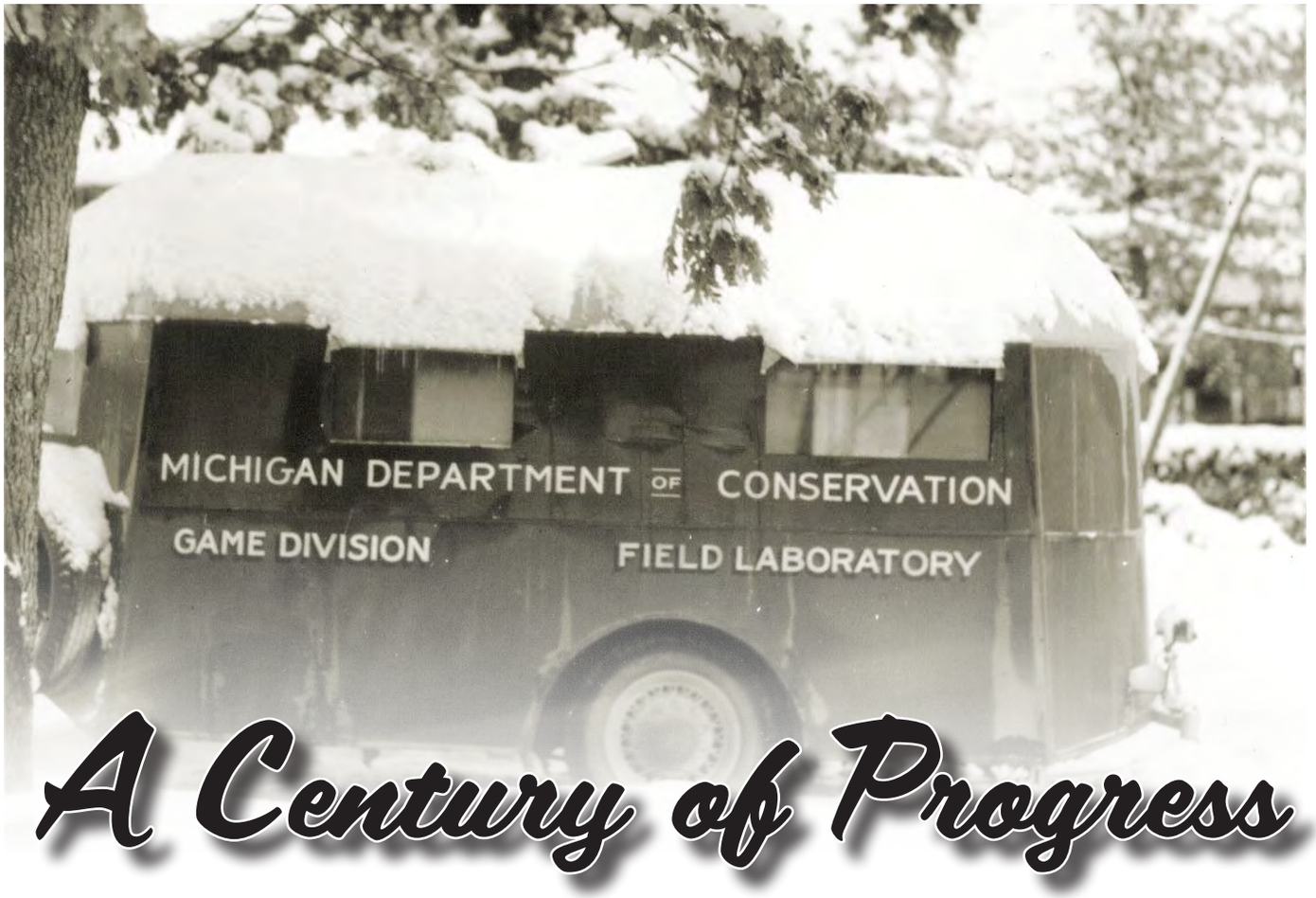
Putting it all Together

"You can't shoot 'em from the couch" is the old saying. And that's true in teal season.

Scout beforehand, practice good waterfowl etiquette when other hunters are present and blend in with your surroundings. Before you know it, your plate will be filled with delicious teal. Don't forget to pluck and save the teal legs — one of the best wild game meals I have had was buffalo teal legs braised on the stove and then quickly pan-fried to crisp up the skin.

Good luck, and shoot straight.

The author poses with his lab, Annie, after a successful teal hunt in Southern Michigan.



A Century of Progress

Success of DNR programs shifted department's mission from saving natural resources to sustaining them; what sort of changes are in store for the next 100 years?

By Chris Lamphere

Throughout the last 100 years, the Michigan DNR has undergone a subtle yet significant transformation. DNR Director Dan Eichinger said the department was formed amid a public outcry for professional management of resources that were on the brink of disaster following years of unchecked exploitation.

That focus gradually shifted to the sustainable management of those very same, heretofore threatened resources.

"The Michigan DNR story is coincident with the modern conservation story," Eichinger said. "Over the years, we've seen that mission grow and change, evolve and expand."

Will the department continue to evolve in the next 100 years to meet the challenges of a new era? Directors past and present say there is no question that it should and no reason to believe it won't.

The Four Rs

For Eichinger, the early history of the DNR can be summed up in two words — restoration and recovery.

Highlights of this history include the following: restoration of turkeys, white-tailed deer, Kirtland's warblers, migratory birds and countless other terrestrial animal species; recovery of forests and wetlands throughout the state damaged by industrial logging and other forms of resource extraction; and restoration of various aquatic species in lakes, streams and rivers degraded by overfishing and pollution.

"It's been a really good, impactful run," Eichinger said. "Looking back 100 years, we can say that we did it: the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation worked."

That success has come largely thanks to robust support from the public and numerous conservation groups in the state, including Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Michigan Trout Unlimited, Pheasants Forever and others.

"Most states might have one or two organizations like that,"

Opposite Page: A trailer belonging to the Michigan Department of Conservation is shown covered in snow. Left: Pictured in this photo from 1906 are Arctic grayling harvested in Michigan. The last Arctic Grayling on record in Michigan were taken in 1936.

Eichinger said. "There are dozens in Michigan. We have some of the most engaged and energized partners in conservation here. It's a really unique phenomenon."

As for the direction of the department during the next 100 years, Eichinger has another two words that also happen to start with "R" — relevancy and resiliency.

To remain relevant moving forward, Eichinger said the DNR has to engage with more people and in different ways than they had in the past. Eichinger believes this to be among the DNR's most pressing challenges.

"We need to grow that tent of champions who prioritize (the outdoors) as a value," Eichinger said. "We can't take it for granted that they will."

As for resiliency, Eichinger said the department will need to continue adapting to and addressing issues that pose profound threats to the environment and wildlife. They include climate change, invasive species and diseases.

For inspiration on how to address these challenges, Eichinger looks to the past.

"To remain relevant moving forward, Eichinger said the DNR has to engage with more people and in different ways than they had in the past. Eichinger believes this to be among the DNR's most pressing challenges."

Notes from Directors Past

David Hales, 1988-1991

As we enter the second century of the DNR, it seems to me that the mission is essentially unchanged — the mission of the DNR is to protect Michigan's future, and to do so by building an active and pervasive conservation ethic among all citizens.

At many levels, the specific challenges have evolved and the institutions have changed, but the underlying dynamics are the same. The issues we face come from human choices, and in the best of all worlds so do the solutions.

Ultimately, Michigan's future depends on clean air, clean water, productive land and healthy life. Every day, every institution, every corporation and every citizen will make choices, and with those choices we will write the future on the face of our state.

Enabling all of us to make the wise choices is the mission of the DNR.

Michael Moore, 1995-1996

I spent my career in the DNR from the late 1950s until the mid-1990s. The mission and role of the DNR changed greatly during those years when substantial environmental responsibilities (primarily air and water quality) were added to the agency during the 1960s. That changed again when the DEQ was created in 1995.

From my standpoint, the most important achievement of the department over the years was taking the largely abandoned cut-over, exhausted and burned-over lands and creating with loving care the 4-million-acre productive state forest system.

The DNR provided outstanding forest management, including reforestation, timber management and protection from fire, insects and diseases over 100 years. The state forests not only provide access to public lands for such recreational pursuits as hunting, hiking, camping, mushroom-picking and snowmobiling but is a major economic contributor through managed timber sales and critical habitat for wildlife.

As we look to the future clearly, climate change will be the major mission for the DNR and society as a whole. I suspect increased wildfires will result from increased temperatures, perhaps increased precipitation will contribute floods and rising lake levels. Action will be needed to reduce the threats to property and life.

In the 1960s, fisheries division chief Howard Tanner introduced chinook salmon into the Great Lakes — a wildly successful initiative that has paid untold economic dividends for several decades.

As Eichinger points out, however, this program wasn't an immediate success; Tanner had to go back to the drawing board after the initial salmon strain didn't take.

"Success was not self-evident," said Eichinger, who imagined those frustrating moments of "true terror and despair" could well confront contemporary DNR officials as they navigate complicated problems in coming years.

For his part, Tanner — who later served as department director from 1975 to 1983 (when restoration and recovery still were chief among DNR priorities) — was fairly confident that some strain of salmon would thrive in the Great Lakes: they had an abundant food source in the form of alewife and water temperatures were within their preferred range, among other indicators.

Tanner's confidence stemmed from 12 years working in Colorado, where he became an expert on salmon and developed close relationships with several fisheries directors in nearby states.

"It was pretty much a sure thing, as far as I was concerned," Tanner said. "It was a good fit."

Other bright spots during Tanner's career with the DNR include the introduction of a new strain of turkey that can now be found throughout the state and his role in helping to create the Natural Resources Trust Fund.

While those are impressive accomplishments, Tanner said the progress they made in "interjecting some law enforcement" into the state's environmental regulations is probably the most significant achievement the department made during his tenure.

Before he took over as director, Tanner, who today is 98 years old, said many companies were much more laissez faire about how they disposed of wastes. For instance, some pumped liquid wastes into the cellars of abandoned buildings or contracted with third parties to absolve themselves of any responsibilities.

Tanner and his staff worked to stop these practices and hold companies accountable for the damage they did — a legacy he hopes will be preserved.

With some thoughts from the old and new guard as a preamble for the remainder of this story, read on to learn more about the department's decade-by-decade milestones, interspersed with some comments from other past directors about the centennial anniversary and where they see the DNR headed in the next 100 years.

John Pepin, deputy public information officer for the DNR, assisted in distilling down the department's most impactful achievements for this timeline.

The 1920s

The Michigan Legislature formed the Michigan Department of Conservation in 1921 as part of a government realignment of several duties that had been previously performed independently.

In 1927, a resident trout fishing license was established. Residents were charged $1 to fish for trout, while nonresidents had to buy a general license for $1 and a trout license for $3. Funds from these fees supported fish hatcheries and the distribution of fish into lakes and rivers. Meanwhile, efforts to improve trout stream habitat were undertaken across the state.

The 1930s

In 1931, the Michigan Department of Conservation newsletter was started as a way to communicate with the public, showcasing natural resource topics and efforts of the department. The newsletter eventually developed into a magazine that was published for nearly 60 years, winning several national awards.

The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson Act) was passed in 1937, creating a funding model to pay for wildlife management in the U.S. Funds from a federal tax on firearms and ammunition are distributed to states based on a formula, and can be used to buy and improve wildlife habitat and public facilities.

In 1937, the Michigan United Conservation Clubs formed to oppose the idea of the governor choosing future department directors as opposed to the Natural Resources Commission.

MUCC Executive Director Amy Trotter said they wanted the position to be chosen by the NRC to prevent the director from becoming influenced by political considerations over natural resource considerations.

While MUCC and others successfully prevented this shift for decades, in 2010, Gov. Jennifer Granholm, by executive order, gave the governor power over future DNR director appointments.

Trotter said MUCC remains in favor of the position being chosen by the NRC; the difficulty lies in enacting that sort of change since the DNR is in the executive branch, along with the governor's office, and fairly insulated from acts of legislation.

That being said, MUCC and the DNR have enjoyed a positive relationship over the years, even if they sometimes don't agree on certain issues, Trotter said.

"We're definitely supportive of a well-funded agency," said Trotter, who added that the department's role in maintaining the infrastructure to fund conservation-related efforts — through fees, license sales, land purchases by the Natural Resources Trust Fund, and other mechanisms — have made a huge positive impact on quality of life in Michigan.

During the next 100 years, Trotter sees the department taking on more of a "people management" role — figuring out how people want to interact with the outdoors and providing that level of interaction for them.

In 1985, efforts were made to relocate moose from Canada to Michigan by helicopter, with more to follow two years later. The "moose lift" strengthened Michigan's moose population, which had been dwindling after habitat loss and unregulated hunting.

The 1940s

In 1944, the Michigan Legislature set aside funding to increase recreation in the southeast part of the state. As a result, 10 state recreation areas and the Porcupine Mountains State Park in the Upper Peninsula were established.

In 1949, the U.S. and Canada developed a collaborative effort to combat sea lampreys, which invaded the upper Great Lakes during the 1920s, destroying valuable Great Lakes fish, including whitefish and lake trout.

1950s

The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson Act) was passed in 1950, creating a funding model to pay for fisheries management in the U.S. Funds from a federal tax on fishing equipment are distributed to states based on a formula and are used for management and restoration of fish or activities that support water recreation.

In 1954, wild turkeys were released in Allegan County, helping

to re-establish this species in Michigan. Through habitat loss and unregulated hunting, the birds had been eliminated from landscapes across the state by the 1900s. Over the next decade, turkey numbers increased, allowing for the establishment of Michigan's first modern turkey hunt in 1965.

The 1960s

After the number of people using Michigan state park camping facilities increased 200% during the previous decade, the state passed Public Act 149 of 1960 — the state Motor Vehicle Permit and Bond Authorization Law. The following year, the state implemented the first motor vehicle entry fee at Michigan state parks. It cost $2 for an annual pass or 50 cents for a day pass.

In 1965, the authority of the Michigan Department of Conservation expanded with several commissions moved under the auspices of the department, including the Water Resources Commission, Mackinac Island State Park Commission and Waterways Commission. In 1968, the name of the department was changed to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to reflect broadening responsibilities.

The 1970s

The Michigan Environmental Protection Act was passed in 1970, which created legal protections for Michigan's environment and natural resources. It created an "environmental common law" and permitted legal actions to take place for the "protection of the air, water and other natural resources and the public trust … from pollution, impairment or destruction."

In 1972, the Michigan Legislature passed the Wilderness and Natural Areas Act, which provided for the protection of state wilderness, wildlands and natural areas. A year later, the state's Nongame Wildlife Fund was created to increase funding for non-game fish and wildlife species, which has led to the recovery of several species. The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, which was to provide a permanent funding source to purchase land for resource protection and public recreation, was created in 1976. The "Bottle Bill," or 10-cent deposit on returnable beverage containers, was also implemented the same year through the work of MUCC and the legislature. Additional legislation was passed during the decade to protect wetlands and sand dunes.

Rebecca Humphries 1995-1996

(comments paraphrased from a telephone interview)

In a nutshell, former DNR Director Rebecca Humphries sees the department's history as an arc starting at non-renewable and ending at renewable.

Before its formation, Humphries said reckless exploitation of the resources led to overlogging and increased risk of forest fires, major loss of topsoil and extinction of a number of terrestrial and aquatic species, such as the Arctic grayling.

Like many natural resources departments throughout the country, the Michigan DNR started at a time when the science concerning habitat and wildlife management was still being developed but that didn't discourage nascent conservationists.

"The Michigan DNR took a leadership role in applying good science and managing resources properly," Humphries said.

From its inception, Humphries said the DNR presided over a number of species restoration efforts and grew into a staunch enforcer of environmental law.

A shining example is the recovery of white-tailed deer populations, which at one time were so depleted that seeing a deer in the wild was considered uncommon, Humphries said.

Gradually, that focus has shifted from restoration to sustainable management — a trend that Humphries hopes will persist.

"I hope it continues in the direction of sustainable management and access to the public," said Humphries, who described the creation of the state park system and the state's purchase of private lands to be preserved for public use as a period of "renaissance."

"People have to value our natural resources and understand them, which is why they need to be kept as part of the day-to-day operations and decision-making process of the department … Michigan has tremendous natural resources that are part of our heritage. We need to continue to invest in them for future generations … it's too important for the state not to do so."

Rodney Stokes, 2011-2012

I think the DNR's mission has not changed a great deal in its 100 years of existence.

The department was created in 1921 with the purpose to maintain the state's natural resources. During the last 100 years, the department and its people have done a very good job of carrying out that mission.

In addition to maintaining, the department has protected, managed, allowed for the use and enjoyment not only for current residents/visitors but also for future generations. It is the use and enjoyment part that, in my opinion, is where the change has taken place over the past 40 to 50 years.

Our forest, wildlife areas, state parks and recreation areas are being maintained and managed for use and activities that were not envisioned when the department was created over 100 years ago. The ability of the department to manage these areas for the multiple and conflicting uses is a testament to the professional and dedicated staff within the department. This is made possible primarily by the department's ability to manage and acquire land for the varied use of Michigan's diverse public. The department real estate or land holdings make all of this possible.

I see the department's ability to assemble tax reverted land, acquire recreational lands, and environmentally-sensitive land (wetlands, sand dunes, Great Lake shorelines, etc.,) as the seed corn for all of its programs. The passing of the legislation that created the Michigan Land Trust Fund (now the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund) enhanced this even more.

Over the next 100 years, I would like to see the department develop a better connection with our urban areas and their residents. I feel it is imperatives to get urban residents, young people, and people of color more involved in the department's programs and mission.

The department has the investments in and around our urban area (cities) via: state parks and recreation areas; Southern Michigan game areas; and the Detroit Outdoor Adventure Center to make this happen.

Partnering with organizations such as MUCC, Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, school districts, National Parks Service, National Forest Service, etc. is another way to get these groups involved. Doing so would only help enhance the department's mission but also assist in funding it as well.

The 1980s

In 1985, efforts were made to relocate moose from Canada to Michigan by helicopter, with more to follow two years later. The "moose lift" strengthened Michigan's moose population, which had been dwindling after habitat loss and unregulated hunting. The result was a self-sustaining moose population in the Upper Peninsula. Efforts were also undertaken during the decade to restore peregrine falcons and pine marten populations.

The 1990s

In 1991, the Kalamazoo to Grand Haven railway was designated as the first linear park in Michigan. Today, Michigan has more designated rail-trail miles than any other state.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality was created in 1995 by executive order, transferring environmental regulatory programs from the DNR to the newly created department. Today, the agency has been renamed the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy.

The 2000s

In 2001, the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries was created to combine and coordinate state efforts to preserve, promote and protect Michigan's heritage. Responsibilities from this department would later become assigned to the DNR.

Lake Superior's stocking of lake trout was ended in 2006 after fisheries biologists documented evidence of natural reproduction exceeding historical levels. The use of lampricide to combat sea lamprey aided the comeback of lake trout in Lake Superior greatly. Michigan had been stocking lake trout since the 1950s following overfishing and

damaging impacts of sea lamprey.

The 2010s

In 2015, Michigan's Iron Belle Trail was dedicated to highlight Michigan as "The Trails State." A planning process ended up designating 1,204 miles of hiking and 828 miles of biking routes connecting Belle Isle and Ironwood.

In 2019, the Kirtland's warbler was removed from the list of threatened and endangered species after decades of cooperative efforts to restore nesting habitat and reduce predation. This was a significant conservation victory given that at one time, it was said the entire remaining population of the species could fit into a bushel basket. In 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisted the gray wolf, which has also proven to be a very successful recovery story for Michigan.

In this picture from March of 1966, officials with the Michigan Department of Conservation stock a lake with fish.

Keith Creagh 2012-2018

(comments paraphrased from a telephone interview)

Effective management of natural resources benefits not just direct users of those resources but also everyone else in society, in the opinion of former DNR Director Keith Creagh.

"People will tend to gravitate to areas of outstanding natural resources," Creagh said. "It's a vision that is bigger than any one individual. The DNR works on issues that touch everyone, every day. If you tell me an issue, I can tell you a DNR solution or intersect to that issue."

Creagh said he saw firsthand how local, unbiased DNR experts were able to help communities deal with contentious disagreements that had been simmering for years.

"When a relationship is established around an outdoor theme, officials in small communities found they could discuss other tough, fundamental issues," said Creagh, who pointed to the Belle Isle state park project as an example of such a unifying project that faced doubts and criticism initially.

The DNR's role as a peacemaker between divided factions is just one example of how the department was able to transcend its original mission and become an indispensable part of the larger society.

With the department's role lately taking on more of a sustainability focus, Creagh said forces it will have to contend with in coming years are the increased demand on natural resources and the ecological shifts that are constantly occurring due to invasive species, zoonotic diseases, climate change and other factors.

"This will continue to require scientific expertise," Creagh said. "With the general questioning of science that is occurring at this moment, the department's credibility will hinge on outreach. What I found was that occasionally people were mad at the DNR but they still loved their local officials. It will be incumbent to maintain and enhance that local credibility."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Habitat 101

By Jared Van Hees

Jared Van Hees is a passionate habitat manager and Michigan landowner with a strong drive to educate others. He is the founder of Habitat Podcast and a habitat consultant to private landowners across the Midwest. He has a bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship from Central Michigan University and is an avid sportsman who spends time introducing his young family to the outdoors.

Planting food plots for the first time can be intimidating. I always thought I needed all this extensive and costly equipment to plant a food plot.

My Grandpa, dad nor I have ever owned a John Deere tractor, a nice rototiller to turn the ground up or a large drop-spreader to spread fertilizer and lime. The first food plot I ever planted was with hand tools I found in the garage and utilized sweat equity. Years later, I now own an ATV with some pull-behind implements, but you don't even need that to plant a successful food plot on your hunting ground. In this article, I am going to tell you the easiest & cheapest way to plant your own fall food plot. It can be done using minimal equipment while also considering the health of your soil. We will also cover when and where to place this attractive wildlife buffet so that you can enjoy the fruits of your labor this season without over-pressuring your whitetails.

Often, when a hunter or habitat manager wants to plant their first food plot, they find an original opening in the brush or the woods. This is common because it's the most accessible place to start. Why would you want to cut down a bunch of trees when there is a clearing down by the creek? Sometimes this works, but it can backfire quickly if a couple of things aren't considered.

The first thing to think about that many people overlook is food plot location. Why is location important? The location of the food plot itself isn't truly the important part. The imperative part is the access you take to the tree stand near the food plot, or in other words, how you enter and exit the plot when hunting. Deer, for the most part, are tolerant to a little bit of human pressure. And I truly mean "a little." The less our deer herd knows when we are on the property, the better. Minimizing human intrusion is the first priority on my ground.

If a new food plot is in a setting where a hunter must walk past bedding areas, thickets or anywhere deer frequent, this is counterintuitive. Even if you do this right, and deer don't see you the day you hunted, they will still smell your boot tracks after dark, that night or the next day.

Leaving human scent in "their area" is an obvious no-no, so let's plan to avoid it at all costs. Let's focus on placing your stand or blind in a safe-to-get-to area and bring the deer to you. We can do this with an easy, attractive food plot while maintaining low human intrusion. I stress location first because this is one of the most common mistakes I see on client land plan consultations.

After the location is thoughtfully considered and picked out, it's time to celebrate! One of the hard parts is over, but we are not out of the woods yet. Next on the list is making sure we have the No. 1 ingredient at hand — sunlight. The way I determine this is simple: I stand in the center of the new food plot and look up.

If there are any branches in between the sky and me, then the trees need to go. A closed canopy will give you poor results in a hurry due to lack of sunlight. Inside corners of agricultural fields

Easy Spray-and-Pray Food Plots

or old pastures are great places to start due to ample sunlight already being available.

Now that location and sunlight have been discussed, let's get to food plotting. I call this planting technique the spray-and-pray broadcasting method. To plant this straightforward, do-it-yourself plot, you will need the following: a backpack sprayer with Roundup, a seed broadcast spreader and rain.

Yes, that is all. The backpack sprayer is filled with water and a proper dose of a non-selective herbicide called Glyphosate, commonly known as Roundup. Be sure to read the label carefully. This is going to terminate the current plant growth in your new food plot area and get you ready to plant. There are two reasons for spraying Glyphosate. The first reason is the get rid of any of the plant competition that will be competing with your new seedlings.

Using Glysophate (commonly known as Roundup) to create a thatch layer helps weed out competition and provides a seedbed for plantings.

If you don't terminate the existing vegetation, your new plants won't stand a chance against grasses or broadleaves competing and shading them out. The second reason is to create a thatch layer on the ground. People commonly refer to the dead and dying plant matter from our herbicide treatment as thatch or a mulch layer. This is another key ingredient to our recipe. You can mow or weed whip down the new plot area prior to spraying if the vegetation is 6-feet tall, but two to three feet of dead plant matter is perfect to start.

This thatch layer is going to be how we bury our seeds. As the existing vegetation dies, it will slowly fall to the ground and form our thatch. You may be wondering when you should spray the Glyphosate? For fall food plots, I tend to spray once in mid-July and follow up with a second Glyphosate application a few weeks later. You could spray earlier in the year as well to control the height of your thatch. Either way, this two-part spraying will give you a competition-free seedbed for planting.

The next thing I want to cover is seed. The types of seed that work best for this application are small-sized seeds like clover, brassicas and grains. Since those seed types don't require a deep planting depth, they work perfectly for this spray-and-pray food plot. I like using an annual and perennial mix of clover, so you have some excellent spring germination as well. I also like to add some brassicas and rye grain to my planting. This creates a diverse mix which deer prefer and soil loves. My supplier of choice is Killer Food Plots in Muskegon, MI. They are local, full of knowledge, have very high-quality seed and can also walk you through

This is the annual and perennial clover mix the author uses on his property.

planting. No matter who your seed supplier is, be sure to specify that you are using the spray and broadcast method to plant. This method requires an increased seeding rate vs conventional planting or no-till drilling. After a few weeks, you should see some growth. If you have any bare spots, I would recommend a follow-up broadcasting, also called overseeding, of winter wheat and rye grain, at 50 pounds per acre. This second broadcasting of grains will fill in any blank spots you have and provide additional, young tender plants that your deer prefer.

The last step is an important step: broadcast the seed just before a heavy rain. Seed broadcasters range from inexpensive small green handheld units from the home improvement stores to spreaders you can strap to your chest and hold more seed. Either way, find what works for you. I am partial to the Solo plastic chest-mount spreaders, but Earthway makes an excellent bag spreader, too. The part we don't want to miss about this step is the heavy rain. I like to plant between mid August and Labor Day weekend.

If you see a good, heavy rain in the forecast, this is where the praying comes in. Pray that the forecast holds true, and be sure to get out there and spread your seed the day before or even hours before the rain. This heavy rain event is going to plant our seed for us.

It will wash the newly-broadcasted seed down through the thatch layer and onto the soil. Once the seed reaches the soil and forms the seed to soil contact we are looking for, we are set. The previously-mentioned thatch layer, now on top of our seed, acts as if we buried the seed in the dirt. This thatch layer will protect the seeds and young seedlings from predation and the hot summer sun while retaining moisture in our soil for them to grow.

One additional step I would recommend is to perform a soil test. You can find soil tests, or places that can help you with soil testing, online.

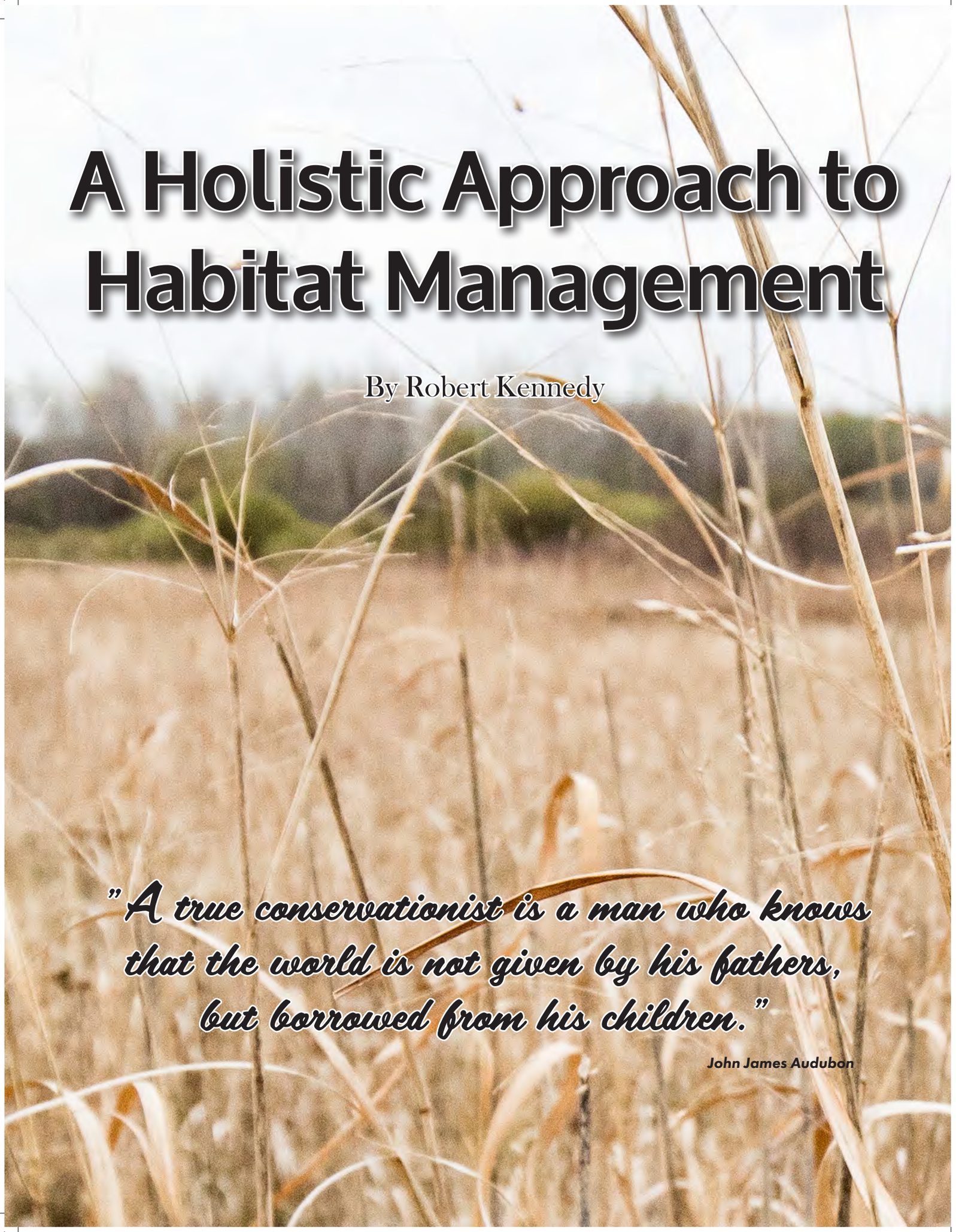
Studying the test results and using the recommended amounts of soil amendments and fertilizer can really improve the growth you see in your planting.

In summary, you can have your own food plot this fall with a couple of small pieces of equipment and without a costly tractor. There is usually more than one way to skin the cat, and the spray-and-pray broadcast method is something worth trying. Mother Nature doesn't always play along, but I promise you will learn something new each time you venture out to become a better habitat manager. A little time, luck and sweat equity could put your target buck in front of your stand this October.

A Solo broadcast seeder and Killer Food Plots clover mix pair together great for the spray-and-pray method.

A Holistic Approach to Habitat Management

By Robert Kennedy



"A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children."

John James Audubon

Advocating for change starts with us as individuals — not by our voice, but rather the actions we take to effect positive change around us. We are the only species on this earth that can comprehend the complexities of nature, the science of balance and the needs of wildlife. With that knowledge and the capabilities of making changes in the harmony of nature, we must use that power entrusted to us to give more than we take from the landscape.

Nature conservation, at its core, is to maintain nature's ecosystem, and those that practice the simplified moral philosophy understand that we are an integral part of that maintenance. Our role can be easily simplified to a weighted scale of prosperity and destruction, where we are the fulcrum in the balance of that scale. Trying to decipher the needs of an entire ecosystem can be daunting, but let's not overthink things that could keep us from trying to take any action on our own.

There are three items that all animals need: food, water and habitat that provides them cover and protection from the elements. According to a report from 2017, the USDA states that 43.7% of forest lands (excluding agricultural lands) are in private ownership. With this knowledge, we know that a large portion of responsibility for taking care of the land and wildlife lies in the hands of private owners. Even with the smallest parcel, we can give wildlife one of the three things they need.

Food for wildlife varies, but it boils down to vegetation. Bees need nectar from plants to make honey for their survival, whereas the plants need bees to breed and prosper. Prey populations like herbivores and some omnivores need plants for survival, which ties into carnivores' needing a healthy abundance of prey species for their continuation of life. Without our assistance, the food chain becomes cyclical and volatile, sometimes resulting in eliminating one animal or plant species altogether.

Our actions can positively impact vegetation. Vegetative food can be provided in a few simple ways: food plots, woody browse and natural regeneration. We can manipulate all three food sources with a little hands-on work and a touch of sweat equity.

Food plots have been growing in popularity for the last few decades and are becoming second nature in a hunter's vocabulary and habitat plan. The sole purpose of one is to attract animals by planting annual or perennial vegetation. It's predominantly advertised with hunting strategies in mind, but establishing one gives more to wildlife than hunters ever take.

Undertaking the task of planting a food plot can be viewed as intimidating depending on the target size of the plot, but if we compare it to that of a garden growing in the woods, it can help remove some of the intimidation behind it. Keeping it simple — for plants and gardens to grow, they need sunlight, nutritious soil and water to thrive. Watering food plots is primarily done by Mother Nature, but creating sunlight and boosting the health of the soil is something we have more control over.

Sunlight can be provided to the ground by removing the tree canopy, and improving soil health can be done using fertilizers, both organic and inorganic. For smaller-sized food plots, much of this can be done with hand tools. With a weekend of hands-on action, we can establish one-quarter acre of clover that can yield nearly 1 ton of food for the local animal populations. Even though the size may be modest, the result has a

significant positive impact on the environment.

There is a plethora of information on how to plant "the best" food plot, but keep in mind a food plot isn't an end-all solution for providing sustenance. However, it could be the best solution depending on the landscape; a diverse, edible environment generates more functionality for Animalia dietary needs. An assortment of vegetation is optimal for attracting wildlife; therefore, the availability of woody browse and natural regeneration can produce a larger impact on the ecosystem than a standalone food plot.

In general terms, woody browse includes buds, twigs, bark and leaves that are present on perennial and evergreen trees, as well as shrubbery. A deer in city limits eating bushes around the suburban houses are a prime example of woody browse. Another example could be the girdling of trees where rabbits and other small mammals eat the bark around the tree's base in search of its nutrients.

Where woody browse food sources are strictly garnered from the consumption of tree parts and shrubbery, natural regeneration of vegetation is applicable to trees, grasses and broadleaf weeds, alike. Simply put, natural regeneration occurs when new growth happens due to surrounding tree and plant competition diminishing.

Illustrations of natural regeneration in wooded landscapes are witnessed when trees are removed, releasing light to the forest floor. The new sunlight naturally generates growth in the young, stunted trees and promotes the establishment of supple seedlings. Not only that, but the trees that are cut will also naturally produce new browse from the stumps or hinged trees.

For grasses, broadleaves and generally weedy areas, regeneration can occur from both forest thinning and the magic of fire. The most common method of generating new growth of grasses and broadleaves is to perform prescribed burns on previously established weedy areas. The springtime burns of the dead and matted vegetation expose soil to sunlight and encourage growth in the same manner that removing tree canopies does.

Similarly, mowing mature weedy areas in the late summertime to strengthen young regrowth can have the same effect as prescribed burns. Yet, we must remain diligent on the timing of mowing and not remove cover habitat away from young hatchlings, fawns and vermin. With proper timing, palatable grasses and broadleaves will be made available for the inhabitants and can be just as attractive as a well-manicured food plot.

Secure cover for wildlife at times can have a negative scenic appeal to the human eye. Many of us like the appearance of well-groomed pastures and mature stands of timber, which probably has to do with our biological tendencies of organization and

control over the appearance of the world around us. Sadly, wild creatures don't always see things the same way we do when it comes to cover. Not to say manicured grasslands and mature stands of forests are a complete waste, but habitat diversity creates life's wellspring that animals desire.

Deer, upland birds and smaller wildlife all need a place to find sanctuary from predation and inclement weather. Security and cover are especially beneficial to critters for nurturing and raising their offspring. Without the required shelter, animal populations will vacate the area in search of what they need to prosper or they'll die from the lack of habitat.

Grassland habitat is continuously being lost through land development, but it is one of the easiest things for us as conservationists to implement and encourage. A 10-foot by 100-foot strip designated to grasses gives nearly a quarter acre of cover to an assortment of creatures. Upland birds will use it as nesting cover and as a food source for the bugs it attracts. Deer will use grasslands for fawning and thermal cover in the cold months. Songbirds will use it to build nests, and other animals such as rabbits and vermin will use it as protection from predation.

Creating grassland cover can be accomplished by planting a mixture of native cool- and warm-season grasses, letting nature reclaim areas open to the sunlight or practicing prescribed burns to promote natural regeneration. As mentioned, burning dead grasslands in the spring supports new growth and establishes a food source, but it also encourages competition between plants to grow to new heights for the needed cover later in the year. Simply put, with or without our assistance, if there are areas able to cultivate grasslands — we should encourage its establishment in the environment.

Another means of creating cover for the wild populace is developing a diverse timber stand. Having a variety of different age timber scattered throughout the ecosystem is what is desired. The most common practice to achieve this type of variety is to remove a population of mature, even-aged trees, which is generally achieved through selective logging practices.

Harvesting mature trees releases the light to the ground, which invigorates the rebirth of fauna and establishes secure habitat and food. Leaving the discarded treetops and trunks also forms an immediate cover for all living things in the area. Many wild creatures will use the horizontal tree trunks lying on the ground as wind blockers and secure resting places. In downed treetops, turkey nests can be present, ruffed grouse will have new drumming logs and rabbits will find protection from the snow. Even though discarded tree parts from harvesting might not be appealing to the eye for us, the local population of wild creatures will find it fundamental to their existence.

A utopia would not be complete without water. Without it, wetlands would cease to exist, migratory bird populations would lose their homes, aquatic species would perish and all terrestrial animals would leave in search of the water they need to drink. Undoubtedly, water can be recognized as a cornerstone of survival and wildlife prosperity.

If a water source doesn't exist on the domain, creating one can be done on a small or large scale. In some cases, providing large water sources can be difficult, but supplying a small water source is better than nothing at all. Small watering holes made using buried stock tanks or hand-dug pits lined with clay can serve all the water needs animals have. With these methods, we can easily establish drinking water, but we are unable to provide a wetland habitat.

Heavy machinery or excavating companies are needed to establish wetland habitat — making it a large-scale operation. Though, when we establish wetland habitat, it creates drinking water for terrestrial animals and we also fabricate the habitat needed for aquatic species. Large, designated wetlands can be difficult to implement in certain areas, so attempting to

create smaller renditions may be called for. Renting a small backhoe for a short time could assist in moving enough soil in several different locations to create some wetlands. Small ponds the size of a pick-up truck could be dug, and connecting ditch work between the basins could all be made over the course of a weekend.

In some cases, there can be state funding to establish wetlands on the property. Michigan's Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) has a Wetlands Reserve Program that assists with the implementation on private property. The labor and finances for establishing the wetland are provided through the program at no cost to the landowner, but there are stipulations for the property to qualify. Also, be sure to check the permitting process governing your piece of land before altering wetlands, diverting water or creating ditches.

Normally, the size of the parcel will dictate how much we can assist it in becoming a wildlife paradise. With that in mind, where one property might not be able to host a wetland, it may be able to host a small watering hole. Similarly, one tract of land may not be able to accommodate a diverse wooded forest, but a small grassland could be established.

With only scratching the surface on what we could do to encourage the health of wild animals, there are plenty of actions we could take to improve upon the landscape that we have dominion over. Where applicable, providing one of the three necessities is important, but other options don't require property ownership. Working with local hunting cooperatives to monitor huntable populations, joining local conservation clubs, volunteering our time to assist in habitat projects on public lands and trash clean-ups, and donating to one of many conservation-minded organizations are all actions that we can take to make sure the wild populations will continue to prosper on the land and water around us.

Where there has been inflicted damage on wildlife, we can quickly reverse it with compassion and action. We are the fulcrum in the balance of nature, and reconnecting ourselves to our moral responsibility is critical for the well-being of all wild things. Taking action today, no matter the size, aids the natural resources around us and encourages earthly prosperity for future generations.

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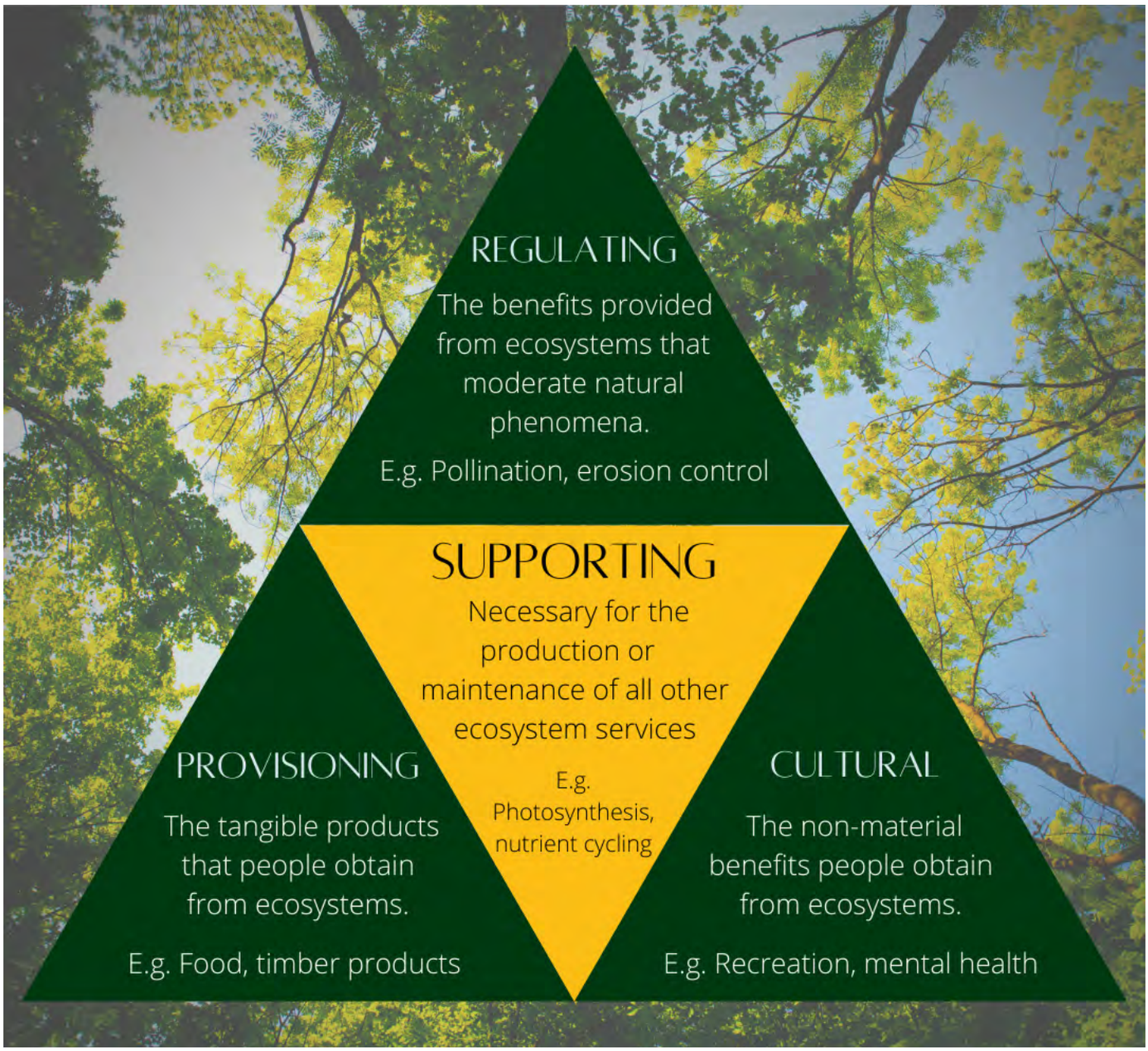
MICHIGAN ECOSYSTEMS



AT YOUR SERVICE

By Makhayla LaButte

It's difficult to imagine Michigan with decimated forests, a collapsing Great Lakes fishery and waterways and wetlands choked with pollution, but this was once a sad reality. Throughout the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, the young state of Michigan was shrouded in a cloud of ecological destitution that impacted fish and wildlife populations, human health and the state's economy.

Thankfully, Michigan's ecosystems have proven resilient time and time again, and after a conservation awakening took hold of the state during the late twentieth century, Michigan has emerged as a national example of natural resource health and abundance. That is not to say that there is not still work to be done but instead that our growing investment in our natural resources is beginning to yield significant dividends. The success of conservation efforts in Michigan is worth celebrating, and so are the countless ecosystem services that result from the restoration of lands and waters across the state.

Debris build up near Sanford Dam after a 100-year flood caused a dam failure and severely damaged one other dam.

Complex Systems

Seemingly little more than a complicated term to describe different habitat types, "ecosystems" are actually complex networks of biotic (living) and abiotic (nonliving) components of the environment. Using this term acknowledges the interactions between living organisms and the nonliving elements of their environment.

Michigan is home to productive terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems that include forests, grasslands, coastal dunes, wetlands and freshwater lakes, rivers and streams. Of course, there is broad diversity within these ecosystems based on the unique landscape, soil type, and species composition. These characteristics help classify ecosystems into specific subtypes.

In addition to being home to the fish and wildlife we love, Michigan's ecosystems also provide an assortment of services that protect natural environments, sustain human life and contribute significantly to our state's economy. Such services can be categorized into the following four groups: provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting services.

Sought-after Services

The detailed breakdown of all services provided by the ecosystems mentioned above has filled many textbooks and academic journals over the years. As our knowledge of ecosystems expands with research, more and more services are being added to the list. As a result, restoring degraded terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems is being prioritized more frequently. Forests are no longer just managed for timber products, and wetlands are not just managed for waterfowl. Grasslands provide far more than just aesthetically pleasing grasses, and flowers and freshwater ecosystems in the Great Lakes state are set to become national treasures as our global climate continues to fluctuate.

Some of the most essential regulating services provided by ecosystems in Michigan include, but are not limited to, purification of air and water resources, flood and erosion control, pollination, detoxification and decomposition of wastes and soil creation. Supporting services in the form of nutrient and water cycling and photosynthesis are also a product of healthy ecosystems.

We have experienced the value of these critical ecosystem services first-hand in Michigan in recent years.

In May of 2020, during the flooding that battered Mid-Michigan, it's hard to imagine that things could have been much worse. After a historic rainstorm

Michigan's forestry industry provides billions of dollars worth of raw goods to consumers each year.

resulted in ten thousand residents being evacuated, hundreds of millions of dollars in property and road damage and the destruction of one dam and severe damage to another, the forests and wetlands within the Saginaw Bay watershed were the last thing on many people's minds.

But even amidst the chaos and swollen rivers, wetlands and forests in areas like the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge and the Shiawassee River State Game Area were ready to help mitigate the catastrophic amount of damage that was occurring from the more than 20 billion gallons of water that breached the two dams upstream. According to a 2020 Bridge Michigan article on the topic, a 1,000-acre portion of recently-restored wetland within the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge took in approximately 3.25 billion gallons of water from the floods within 30 hours of opening up their water control structures. This likely saved many more homes, businesses and infrastructure from damage in Midland and Saginaw counties. What's more, the water being stored in these wetlands and surrounding forest ecosystems along the rivers helped filter out a significant amount of chemicals and other toxins that were undoubtedly in the floodwaters.

Based on surveys conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan has lost more than 50% of its wetlands since Europeans first arrived here. As rain events like those seen in 2020 become more frequent and less predictable, the restoration of wetlands will likely emerge as a far more affordable option than rebuilding communities and infrastructure.

In addition to regulating services like flood control, the cultural services of Michigan's ecosystems are also being experienced by more and more people. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Michigan has seen a surge in people that are interested in outdoor recreation. Whether it is to connect with nature, pursue wild game and fish to feed their families or simply get some fresh air and exercise, more Michiganders are turning to the outdoors than ever before. The pursuit of outdoor hobbies spans across all ecosystem types and is expected to continue to grow even after the pandemic subsides.

Putting a Price on the Priceless

Some ecosystem services that have been harnessed by humans for production purposes already have a price tag attached to them. These services, known as provisioning services, refer to direct benefits to humans that can be derived from the land or water — frequently, these are described as commodities. For example, in Michigan, the forest products industry is a multi-billion-dollar sector of the economy. This industry provides timber, paper, telephone poles, furniture and many other products.

Freshwater resources are also critical to many sectors of Michigan's economy. From Great Lakes fisheries to lakefront home values, healthy aquatic ecosystems are worth a pretty penny. A 2019 study commissioned by Michigan United Conservation Clubs showed that the annual statewide economic impact of Michigan's 1.1 billion anglers and their associated purchases is $2.3 billion. The economic value of Michigan's ecosystems continues to surge when you add the food, drinking water, minerals, oil and natural gas that they provide.

But how do we quantify the value of other ecosystem services like regulating, cultural and supporting services? How can you put a price on intangible feelings, experiences or ecological processes that most of the population doesn't even know about, let alone understand? Even more importantly, should we quantify these services?

These are questions that have plagued researchers for decades.

Multiple models have attempted to quantify ecosystem services, but none have been deemed totally successful at encompassing the life-giving services associated with a healthy ecosystem. One frequently cited 1997 study by Robert Costanza and his colleagues concluded that worldwide ecosystem services are worth $33 trillion per year (approximately $44 trillion today), meaning these services are worth nearly double the world's gross national product. Although the study was criticized for a variety of reasons, for better or for worse, it successfully made the value of ecosystem services a topic of discussion.

While we may never reach a consensus regarding the monetary value of all ecosystem services, many governments around the world have utilized the idea to gain public or international cooperation with conservation efforts. When an ecosystem is disrupted by pollution, climate change or other forms of human destruction, incentives in the form of payments to governments or landowners to preserve or restore the desired ecosystem and associated services have been utilized on public and private lands.

Moving forward, it will likely be up to governments on the local and state level to prioritize healthy ecosystems in their region. Reversing centuries of damage is an expensive endeavor that requires extensive interdisciplinary collaboration, but the cost of continued neglect and degradation of ecosystems is proving to be far more catastrophic to our natural resources, economies and well-being.

Recovering, but Still at Risk

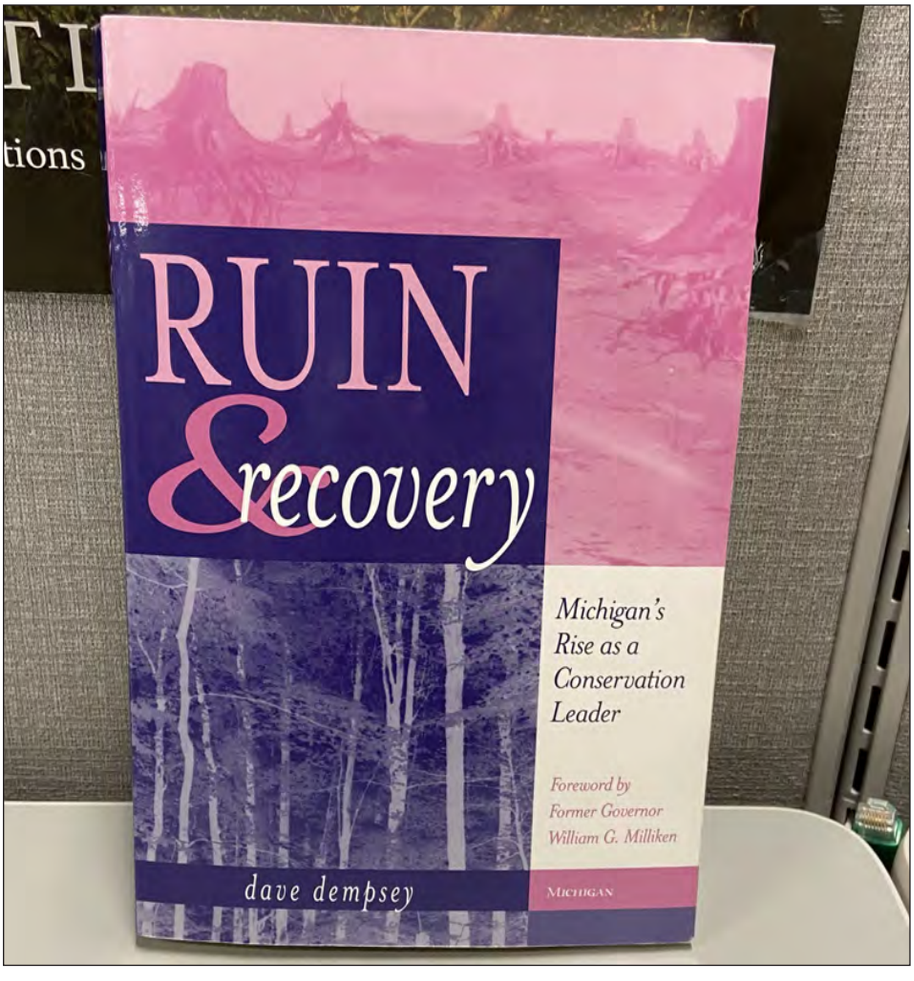
While a majority of Michigan's aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems are in far better condition than they have been since European settlement of the region and the natural resource exploitation that followed, we are still facing a suite of ecological threats old and new. These threats come in many forms and will challenge even the most resilient of ecosystems. Invasive species like Asian carp and pollution in the form of pesticide and fertilizer runoff and "forever chemicals" such as PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are but a few of the most imminent dangers faced by Michigan's ecosystems. In turn, they are also a danger to Michigan's residents and economy.

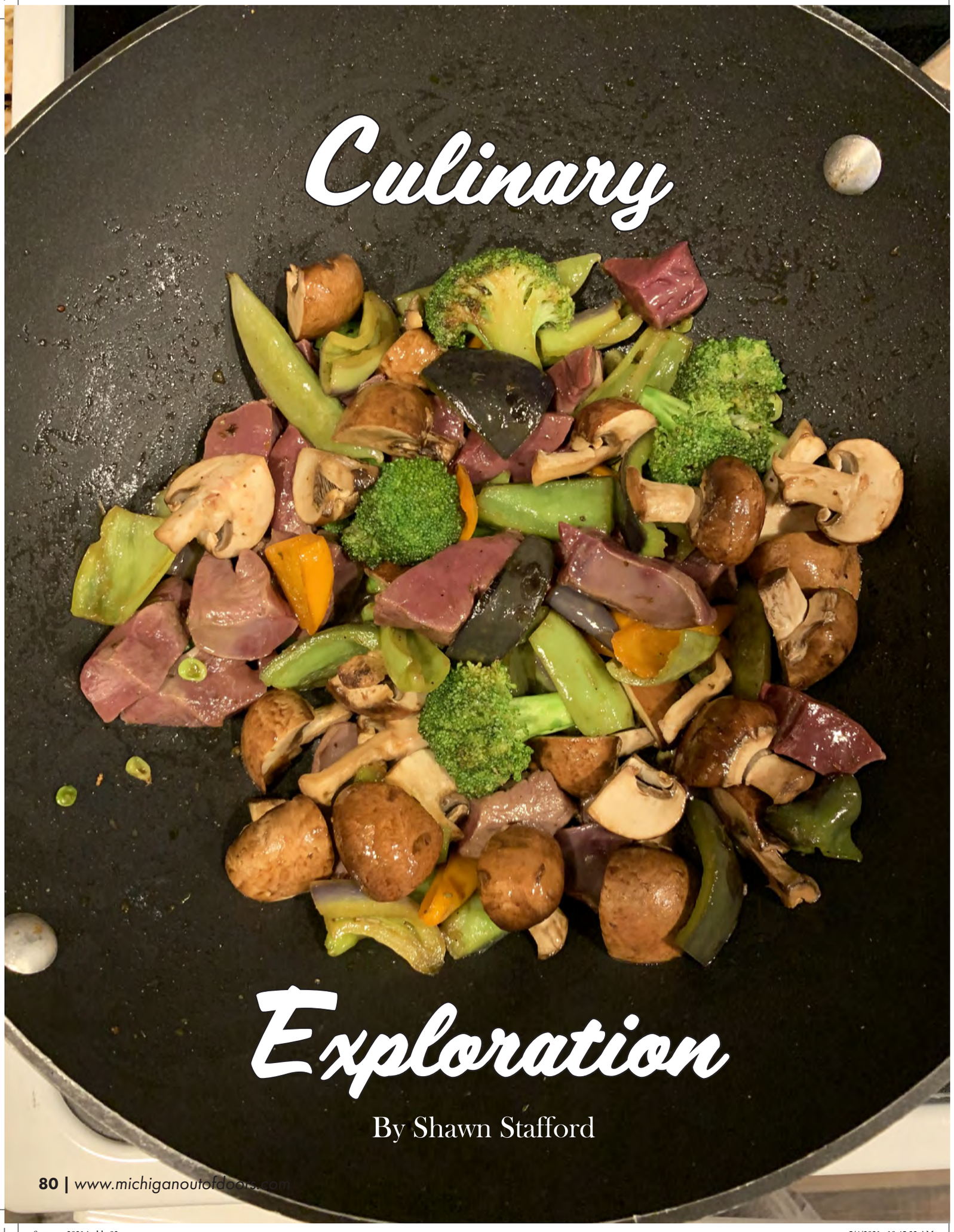
Population growth and climate change are exacerbating these threats as more and more ecosystems are fragmented and degraded and extreme weather events continue to pummel different portions of Michigan throughout the year.

In recent years, there have been an abundance of conservation victories worth celebrating and expanding. There has also been an increase in collaboration between conservation organizations, nonprofits and various government agencies as we all race against the clock to repair what our ancestors destroyed in the name of progress. As we begin to stitch ecosystems back together acre by acre, let us remember that fish and wildlife habitats are but one component of many we should be considering when restoring these lands and waters. By approaching these efforts from a broader perspective that takes into account ecosystem health and resiliency across connected landscapes, we will see results that simultaneously support human populations, fish and wildlife communities and the complex processes that occur throughout these ecosystems.

Dave Dempsey's Ruin and Recovery is a highly-recommended reading for a thorough explanation of Michigan's chaotic and inspiring conservation history.

Dave Dempsey's Ruin and Recovery is an excellent resource detailing Michigan's conservation struggles, successes and future.





Culinary Exploration

By Shawn Stafford

I've pondered the question as to why I hunt time after time. Regardless of how I cut it, I always return to the edible aspect of things.

There are multiple reasons I find myself in the woods and on the water throughout the year. The clarity, meditative benefits, mental challenge, test of physical stamina, family, friends, adventure, etc. all draw me in and bring great satisfaction that only some can understand. However, I can comfortably say if I couldn't eat what I hunt (or catch), I would have lost interest a long time ago. If not all interest, I certainly wouldn't be nearly as devoted to the sport, including the conservation thereof, as I am now.

With that, how many of you use your love for the outdoors as a catalyst to explore your culinary side? I can still remember 30 years ago and my dad frying some flour-covered bluegill and grilled deer steaks marinated in Italian dressing for 20 minutes with some friends — that was as good as it gets.

Fast forward through college and my early 20s when eating unspeakable foods was a standard-issue, I started to really focus on different animals, seasoning, and methods.

I'm no five-star chef, but I've learned a lot through trial and error.

One of the best things that happened (for more reasons than the following) was getting married and having a family. That has blessed me with four other taste testers with varying likes to try and appease. This process can be very challenging on any given night with such variable pallets, but when it comes to wildgame, when I go four for four, I know I'm on to something.

I've consulted numerous cookbooks, created my own concoctions, failed and succeeded. Like with anything, though, it should be about the journey. So far I've enjoyed it. I also have a lot more game to harvest and preparation methods to attempt.

The author's favorite post-hunt meal is one that is often wasted each deer season. Spending a little extra time pulling out the heart, liver and inner loins is certainly worth the effort. You can fry them with some onions, grill them, or even cook them over an open flame.

Our outdoor endeavors are sometimes shaped by what we hope to achieve, see or consume. For me, lean protein inspires all of my outdoor pursuits, and it drives me to plan, prepare and obsess over seasons and their quarry. My hunts don't end at the harvest, though — sourcing food for my family is an integral part of the hunt.

I've changed a few people's take on animals, surprised myself on others, refined dishes and, of course, have many I still want to try. An example that comes to mind is wild hog. When I was in Texas, many people would shoot pigs and just leave them or even gut shoot them so they would run off and die somewhere else. Granted, they have some population issues they are dealing with, but I couldn't believe they would leave such a fine piece of meat to rot. Prepping some brats and sausages for some of my Texas buddies made from wild hog left them flabbergasted.

Gar is another example of a natural resource commonly regarded as less than ideal table

With little effort, a rabbit can be broken down just as you would much larger game such as a white-tailed deer. With a canvas like this, the opportunities are endless. In this particular case, Nashville Hot was the chosen course of action.

fair. After catching one of decent size on a summer day, I saved it for the frying pan. That was a good decision. It was delicious and had a texture I had never found in a fish before.

Oftentimes, I'll hear people complain venison is too gamey for their tastes. I'd argue they weren't prepared the correct dish.

While planning a hard water excursion, I learned about the splake. The cross between a brook and lake trout is rumored to be more delicious than either of its parents! I'm dying to hit a smelt run and have yet to try bear meat. Those are only a few game species that come to mind, and I'm still exploring different cuts and recipes on the usual suspects, such as white-tailed deer and squirrel.

Not sure where to start? What's in the freezer would be the first question I would ask? Also, what time of year is it can help point you in certain directions. For example, I'm heavy into soups, stews and root vegetables with the cold temps and winter months. I tried my hand at pasties for the first time a couple of months ago with ground venison. Just two days ago, I went with a venison soup that utilized rutabagas for the first time.

Another recommendation I have is to keep the bones after butchering your kill. I will, at a minimum, keep the shoulder and leg bones from deer to make broth.

I'll also keep squirrel, rabbit, and turkey carcasses to throw in the pot as well. Having this broth is not only healthy for cooking but adds great flavor to many dishes. I'll even use it rather than water when making rice or quinoa to give a vibrant and delicious boost to an otherwise bland grain.

During the summer, many of my dishes will turn to grilled foods or those that complement vegetables coming out of the garden. Zucchini boats work well, stuffed peppers or mushrooms, stir frys or sausages and peppers all complement the hunter/gather lifestyle during warmer months.

Something I'd never even heard of until well later in life are fish tacos. Yes, they are a real thing and very, very good. With some shredded cabbage and homemade salsas of all types, tacos are a perfect pair for the day's catch. You can grill, fry, or smoke the fish, and it turns out wonderful.

I've also started to prep and freeze items to make weeknights go a little smoother. Use your ground wild game meat for meatballs, which can easily be thrown in with some tomato sauce for pasta night. Here is a nice hint, though, don't use conventionally processed

spaghettis. Try substituting spaghetti squash (my favorite) or zucchini noodles. I have some turkey meat that was leftover on the carcass that I boiled for broth. I collected the tender meat and froze it to be used in turkey pot pie or jambalaya.

Something new for me this year was cutting deer shanks for use in Osso Bucco. I'd have to say native Michigander Steve Rinella inspired me to try this dish. While I haven't put it to the taste test, I've got the bone-in shanks cut and ready when the time comes.

To sum up everything, most of us hunt to eat to one degree or another. I'm recommending that you embrace that concept and step up your game (meat). There is no wrong or right here, just a little effort to reach outside your day in and day out kitchen game. I didn't give any specific recipes in this article as there are an infinite number of them out there and readily available. I have some favorites, no doubt, but the point is to assess what's in your freezer and don't be afraid to try something. The outcome won't be any worse than throwing a dull, gamey tasting meal out in front of someone for them to choke down.

Who knows, maybe your cooking could inspire a new hunter to get involved or even an old hunter to get back into the game? Regardless, honor the animal and the hunt by using it for a delectable yet distinctive culinary endeavor. You may find you inspire yourself to get out there and partake in new and exciting adventures. You can thank me later.

With a little olive oil and the author's trusty cast iron skillet, Stafford was able to bring his Nashville Hot rabbit to life. This is the close-to-finished product from the preceding page.

This year, as the author's family gets busier and busier, he precooked wildgame meatballs and froze them. Any wild game meat will do, and of course they go great with your favorite pasta dish.

Pointless bird hunting: Bird hunters might want to consider getting a flushing dog

By Andy Duffy

I took notice of a dad and his daughter as I pulled up to the sporting goods store.

It was probably because they were hawking a litter of English springer pups.

I was looking for a springer pup. That was why I was in the parking lot to begin with. All the puppies were cute.

Yeah, picking out a puppy according to its cuteness isn't too bright. I know all the suggestions. A person should buy only from reputable, established kennels, look at the bloodlines, go hunting with the parents if possible and all the rest. Nobody ever advises anyone to pick out a pup based on the appearance of the seller.

Still, after noticing the pups, I looked over the papers the girl and her father showed me. They looked good. The pups tumbling playfully before me came with field-trial champions in their background. And, the dad assured me, the parents were good hunters. He was clear about one thing, though: The litter of pups belonged to his daughter, not to him. It was she I needed to do business with.

Anyway, the debate is as old as the hills. Is it more fun to hunt with pointing dogs or with flushing ones? The debate probably started when the ancestors of the first Bracco Italiano, a dog from a breed widely regarded as among the first of the pointing-dog breeds, paused for a moment before goading a European woodcock or a pheasant into flight.

I don't know why it paused; perhaps it had a previous encounter with a porcupine and didn't want the unpleasantness repeated. The Old World has porcupines, too. Or maybe it had come out at the wrong end of a meeting with a badger. Dogs can learn not to rush into situations. Perhaps the forerunners of our pointers paused to consider the scent they were encountering and searching their memory banks to recall details.

Mike Gnatkowski shot this woodcock after his Labrador retriever, Sam, flushed it for him. Although we might think of labs as being primarily waterfowl dogs, they are excellent in the uplands, too.

Regardless of how the behavior originated, breeders began breeding for that pause, and pointing breeds developed. Now everyone is in a dither about whether flushing dogs or pointing dogs are better. The consensus

seems to be that sophisticated folks, the aristocrats among us — those who drink champagne and dine on caviar — use pointing dogs. Those who swill beer and eat hot dogs use flushing dogs. If that's true, call me a no-account lowlife. I hunt with a flushing dog. But it hasn't always been that way. Devolution is real.

When I encountered thsoe cute puppies in the parking lot, my pointing dog, a German shorthair that had been a steady performer for years, had just passed away. She went unexpectedly during the dog days of summer and left me with no heir apparent. I didn't want to go into the upcoming bird season with no dog. I knew, though, that if I bought a pointing dog, it wouldn't be close to being a finished project that fall. And I didn't want to let a young pup develop bad habits. I believe in getting a pup to the woods young, but I think we can put off some of the more rigorous training until a dog is older. So, I didn't want to go into the fall with nothing but a young pointer.

But what if I just bought a pup from a flushing breed, I wondered.

We expect less of our upland flushing dogs. They just rush in and goad a bird into flight. A bad behavior in a pointing dog is an asset in a flushing dog. If I bought a flushing breed, I could have a legitimate hunting partner that fall. That is what I told myself anyway, and that is what I did.

A lot of people think of Labrador retrievers when they think of getting a flushing dog for upland work. Labs, though, are just the tip of the iceberg. Besides retrievers, a whole bevy of flushing breeds exist. We have Boykins, English springers, American water spaniels, cockers and probably many others. My dad used to hunt pheasants with a beagle. Some people use collies. I knew I liked English springers, though.

My first real experiences with an English springer came when I was still dating the gal who later became my wife. The country was in the throes of a recession. My girlfriend's father, laid off from his regular job, was working at a gas station back when attendants still pumped gas for customers. An English springer showed up at the station. Nobody had any idea who it belonged to and, at the end of the day, my future father-in-law brought the dog home with him. He called her Lady.

After a couple of months, the dog's owners showed up and reclaimed her. Later, though, the dog was back at my future in-laws. The dog's original owners, a young couple, were moving to an apartment and couldn't take the dog with them. They wanted my girlfriend's parents to have her. They asked my future in-laws to call her by her original name, Thena. I always wondered, though, if my father-in-law misunderstood and the dog's

He might be wearing a Pheasants Forever cap, but Matt Hildebrand of Evart indubitably has a woodcock that the author's English springer flushed.

The author's English springer, Lily, eagerly hunts woodcock, grouse and pheasants. She flushed this woodcock last fall.

name was actually Athena. And I liked that thought. It made sense that a young, romantic couple might name their bird dog pup for the goddess of war. And Thena appeared full-grown to my father-in-law as if she had just sprung from the head of Zeus, too.

Anyway, Thena was an excellent dog. My in-laws never let me take her out hunting. But I got to see her in action around the house. She was eager to please, she had excellent manners and she was highly intelligent. When my wife and I started our family, Thena was great with our children, too. So, when I decided to buy a flushing dog, I began looking for an English springer. That is the story behind my encounter with the pretty teenager selling the litter of pups in the parking lot of a sporting goods retailer.

I picked out a pup and my wife wrote the gal a check. The owners of the sporting goods store must have been willing to accept the two-party check from her. A while later, anyhow, she walked out of the store with an armful of clothing. I figured the pup I bought paid for her school clothes that year.

I named the pup Thena, after my in-laws' dog. She was liver and white, too, just as the original Thena had been. And she became everything I could have hoped for. She was just a 12-week-old gamboling pup when bird season began, but she hunted eagerly. She was rambunctious and wild. She was also intelligent and intensely loyal.

She passed, and I wanted another English springer. I went back to the sporting goods store, a place where dog owners often go to sell their pups. That time, I found Lily, a black and white springer. There was no bubbly teenager to sell her to me but a nice family with a couple of young children.

And Lily has been another winner. She has all the incredible assets that Thena did. Lily loves to hunt. She's relentless in trying to find birds and goad them into flight. She is eager to please, and she's tremendously loyal.

Many English springers form a special attachment to one person. They like the other family members, but they love their special person. And Lily has done that with me.

Some people call springers Velcro dogs. That appellation is probably apt. Lily follows me around the house. When I walk to my office and fire up the computer, she follows me down the hall and lies outside my office. When I go to the kitchen to cook lunch, she lies at my feet. When I go to the bathroom, she tags along.

Lily has separation anxiety. Whenever she knows I'm about to leave the house, she begins looking disconsolate. She doesn't perk up until she is convinced she can go along. And she's tenacious on birds.

Anyway, it is relatively easy to train a flushing dog for upland work. You'll want to train it to hunt close to you. You don't want a dog to put birds up outside of shotgun range. You can get a dog afield on a check cord to encourage it to hunt close. You'll also want it to cast. Casting just means working in a back-and-forth pattern in front of the hunter. We can encourage a pup to cast by walking in a zig-zag pattern across a field. The dog will begin to emulate our movement. Those interested in field trial work will want to teach their dog to respond to hand motions. If you can do that, go for it. And, of course, a polished dog will be steady to flush. That means it will sit when the bird takes off. When a dog chases a flying bird, the hunter sometimes cannot get a shot without endangering the dog. Get your dog to be steady if you can. Lily still isn't steady, and it has cost me some shots. Maybe I'll do a better job of training my next dog. Still, my dog is a joy to have afield.

How do pointing dogs and flushing dogs compare at finding birds?

It depends on the dogs, of course. Last fall, though, I took Lily to a veterans' hunt at a pheasant preserve.

The veterans' hunt is a special hunt for veterans and law enforcement personnel the preserve owner hosts each autumn. Lots of dogs are needed, of course, so the preserve owner puts out a call for dogs and handlers in the weeks leading up to the event. Lily and I accompanied a couple of groups of hunters during the weekend.

During the first hunt Lily went on, she was afield with a brace of rangy, well-trained German shorthairs. The shorthairs ranged far and wide and pointed a bunch of birds. Being pointers, of course, they could cover a lot of ground and, when they found a bird, would wait for the shooter to arrive to flush it.

We don't want flushing dogs to encounter birds beyond gun range. Lily hunted close to me just as she should have. In comparison to the pointers, she found few birds. The ones she put up, though, she put up in gun range. When she started acting birdy, I would let one of the veterans know. When the bird went up, the veteran could get a shot.

The second day of the hunt, I took Lily afield with a wirehaired pointing griffon. It must have been Lily's day. Either that or she just worked the part of the field where the most birds had been planted. Anyway, she flushed a bunch of birds. Although the griffon masterfully worked the birds it did find, Lily was responsible for getting more birds in game pouches. I guess if the story has something we can take away, it is this: Pointers and flushers all can make great bird dogs. They just hunt differently. We need to understand that. We might want to make our dog selections based on the personality of the various breeds, too, and what our personal preference is and the dog that is available when we're looking for one.

Anyway, if those who hunt over pointing dogs comprise the aristocracy of the bird hunting cadre, my devolution is complete. I'm committed to flushing dogs, now.

I love my springer. And if anyone reading this decides they want an English springer and finds a gal who would be in her early 20s and her father now selling a litter of them in the parking lot of a sporting goods store, tell them I said hi. That dog turned out to be one of my favorites. And it helped get me through a fall when it looked like I might have to go pointless. Alas, I did — but, we still managed to knock down a few birds.

Close-working flushing dogs are great in the grouse woods. The author's dog Lily put up this grouse for David Stoutenburg of Cadillac.

Shouting 'Pull' is For the Birds!

By Jack Ammerman

I remember many pleasant birthdays, all accompanied by the mandatory chocolate cake topped with thick chocolate fudge frosting and then that frosting topped further with walnuts. I've undoubtedly received some very thoughtful and much-appreciated gifts throughout my life, but this year's gift has to be the best ever. My wife purchased an automatic clay pigeon thrower and seemed as excited to give it to me as I was to get it. One usually feels really good when receiving a gift of some sort. It tells your inner soul that you are appreciated and thought of. That was not what I thought as the contents of this present revealed themselves to me. My thoughts went directly to how fast I could get this thing assembled, coupled with the idea of how fast I could get it "up North" where I could use it. The answer to both those questions was 12 hours and 20 minutes! When the sun rose the next day, I was northbound with my new automatic clay pigeon thrower.

I stopped on the way up north to buy a couple of boxes of 12-gauge shells and was shocked that the ammo shelves were absolutely bare. I knew there was an ammunition shortage, but I had assumed that calibers like 9mm, .223, .45, .22 and the like were the hot commodities. This major sporting goods store had NOTHING to offer! I only had half a box of shotgun shells with me (along with the oddball loose shotgun shells that always seem to fill my truck's side door pockets!) Through no choice of my own, I would make do with what shotgun shells that I had.

There are many makes and models of automatic clay pigeon throwers on the market. I am now the proud owner of the Champion

Workhorse Electronic Trap Thrower. I cannot compare it to any other electronic model available, as my clay pigeon throwing has been limited to using a plastic hand thrower and then eventually to an upgraded spring-loaded device that appeared to have the capability to chop your legs off at the shins if you slip up when setting it for a throw.

The Champion Workhorse Electronic Trap Thrower was easy enough to assemble. It took me about 20 minutes to attach the legs, the spring, the safety circle and then, finally, the magazine. The manual was pleasantly specific in which metric open-end wrenches to use, but I found that using an adjustable crescent wrench was much less complicated than searching for and collecting the specific wrenches.

A 12-volt battery is needed to power this compact gadget. The manufacturer recommends a deep cycle battery, but unless you intend on a full day's worth of scattered shot, just about any 12-volt battery will send your clay pigeons sailing through the air.

The Champion Workhorse isn't too heavy to lift, weighing in at 32 pounds. I dread carrying the car battery more than I do the electronic thrower. For this reason, I loaded both into the back of my Polaris Ranger and headed to my food plot, which is was my trap field for the day! After parking the Polaris, I realized that I might not need to take the Champion Workhorse out of the bed of the side by side at all. The thrower was pointed toward the driver's side already, and I saw no reason to move it until I envisioned an errant clay pigeon smashing into the Polaris's windshield. I positioned a couple of cinder blocks to stabilize the legs and connected the battery.

The magazine will hold 50 standard clay pigeons (108mm standard or 110mm international). By stepping on a foot pedal that is attached to a 25-foot cord, the Champion Workhorse will throw

a clay between 55 and 75 yards, depending on the launch angle that you have set.

With my best friend and trusty Labrador Retriever at heal for safety's sake, I test-fired the first bird. The clay pigeon thrower sent a clay sailing skyward as beautiful as any I'd ever seen. I wished that I had my shotgun in hand as I watched the orange Champion clay pigeon land as softly as a blue-winged teal landing at the outer edge of the decoys. What I hadn't anticipated was that I was not the only one watching the clay disc land in the distance. My retriever, Echo, was locked on and shuffled nervously, waiting to be sent. I didn't know if he could even return a full clay, but I sent him anyway. It made him happy, and that makes me happy. After an extended hunt in the area of the fall, Echo started expanding his circle. I realized that there wasn't much scent on the clay pigeon and it was orange to boot — a color that dogs see as a grey that does not stand out. I walked out and helped him locate the fallen "bird," and we walked back to the electronic thrower together.

With the press of my right foot, I sent another bird skyward. My shot rang out and the pellets scattered, but the clay remained intact and landed as soft as the previous one. The next try was different, but only to the effect that I stepped on the pedal and forgot to step off as I shot, which culminated in a second clay pigeon being flung unexpectedly behind the first (I missed that one too)! I was 0-3 but undaunted. Impressed with how easy this was, I reloaded three rounds and tried again. Success isn't always measured in how many clays you break. I only hit four clay pigeons out of twelve in this outing. I was not disappointed, however, reminding myself that if I were pheasant hunting, I would have been two over my limit for the day!

I belong to a local association that offers trap and skeet. Although an electronic trap thrower cannot match their professional throwers, it offers me the opportunity to shoot whenever I want — whether I am alone or with friends. Although it is much more fun to shoot clays with friends by my side, there's something to be said for enjoying the time with my dog. While my friends would razz me when I missed (as I would certainly dish it out to them,) Echo has yet to voice his disappointment with my wing-shooting skills. I purposely neglect looking at him after a clean miss, though, as I know that the "look" he gives me speaks volumes.

The Champion Workhorse Electronic Trap Thrower runs less than $250. There are a handful of other manufacturers that offer a similar electronic thrower for about the same price. Although that's a steep price to pay, the convenience of having it will pay off handsomely. I expect my wing shooting skills will greatly improve soon, as long as the well in my wallet doesn't run dry.

As one of my relatives told me recently, "That price of the thrower is nothing compared to what you are going to spend on a box of shotgun shells these days!" Perhaps next year's birthday present can be a case of 12-gauge number 7s in 2 ¾!

Hunting in State Parks, Rec Areas

By Shaun McKeon
MUCC Education Director

The slogan "public lands in public hands" resonates with many of our readers. These same readers and many others throughout Michigan take pride in their public lands and are intimately familiar with many public areas where they hunt, fish, trap and recreate. However, as more people have taken to the woods and waters over the last year, some people have begun seeking new areas to explore and continue their passions. The Parks, Recreation and Trails Committee at Michigan United Conservation Clubs decided to take some action and highlight different areas where hunting occurs throughout the state.

According to the DNR, Michigan has 4.5 million acres of state-managed public land (12% of the state) with the majority (3.9 million acres) being state forests. Depending on where you live, you may be familiar with the state forest systems. If you live in the southern Lower Peninsula, you are probably more familiar with the system of state game areas (SGAs). There are more than 100 units in the game and wildlife system covering more than 340,000 acres. These areas are specifically purchased using revenue from hunting and trapping licenses and are designed for hunting, trapping and wildlife watching.

While most hunters and trappers know about the state game areas and others are familiar with Hunter Access Properties (private land open to restricted public hunting), two other big chunks of state-owned land are open to hunting and trapping. These often-overlooked parcels include state recreation areas and state parks.

There is a bit of a gray area surrounding hunting in parks and recreation areas, but a quick search of DNR regulations adds some clarity. According to the DNR website, "all state recreation areas are open to hunting unless designated closed. All state parks are closed to hunting unless designated open."

On the surface, it would seem that recreation areas are open to hunting and state parks are closed to hunting. This is mostly correct. However, the key phrase in both of the above sentences is "unless designated closed/open."

Many state parks have areas where hunting is allowed, and there are places in recreation areas that are closed to hunting. Two examples come to mind: The Waterloo Recreation Area is open to hunting, except for an area encompassing the Mill Lake camp/cabins, the Eddy Discovery Center and the Cedar Lake Outdoor Center, as

well as some of the higher volume traffic areas of the recreation area and campgrounds. On the other side, while Sleepy Hollow State Park is closed to hunting, there are designated areas within the park where hunting is allowed. In both cases, the statute requires these areas, whether open or closed to hunting, to be clearly marked with signage. It is also a good idea if you are visiting a new park to stop into the park headquarters or speak with one of the rangers to help them clarify where the designated open/closed boundaries are.

Over the last several months, the DNR has been conducting a review to ensure the accuracy of the boundaries. The idea behind this review is to help increase the accuracy and to help clarify the data for digital access on the mi-hunt platform. During this review, there were also some additional lands recommended to be open for hunting in Fort Wilkins State Park and Van Riper State Park.

You can find this information on the DNR website, which has the Wildlife Conservation Order, with the listed boundaries for all of the parks and recreation areas. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/02WCO2021_SP_SRA_ChapterVIICorrections_ACTION_718043_7.pdf

State Parks and Recreation Areas are open to hunting under certain circumstances. Generally, recreation areas are open to hunting unless otherwise marked and state parks are closed to hunting unless otherwise marked.

THE CAMPFIRE

Michigan Out-of-Doors Youth Camp set to return after year off in 2020

By Max Bass
MUCC Camp Director

2020 was a strange year for everyone. For us here at the Michigan Out-of-Doors Youth camp we were unable to open camp for the first time since its inception in 1946. Now that 2020 has come and gone, we are so excited to be opening our property to campers again in just a few short weeks. This summer to continue to work within the guidelines from the state, we have transitioned from our traditional residential camp to a day camp program. This is not a permanent change, but rather just a temporary change to keep our campers, their families and our staff safe.

Our day camp will still be at the Cedar Lake Outdoor Center in Chelsea, MI. It will run for six weeks with each week having a slightly different theme. As always our program will stay focused on outdoor recreation and conservation education. Regardless of the theme for the week, our campers will spend their time at camp doing a variety of outdoor activities such as hiking, fishing, boating, swimming, archery, riflery, arts and crafts and so much more. The unique themes of our weeks will drive the focus of the other activities throughout the week. Our campers will be divided into three age groups, 5-8, 9-11, and 12-14. All of our campers will need to come to camp each week with a packed lunch, a swimsuit, and a sense of adventure. Camp programs will run Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with an early drop-off and latepick-up available. Below is

a list of each week and its theme.

Week 1: Conservation Connection (6/28-7/2)
Week 2: Fishing (7/5-7/9)
Week 3: Wilderness Survival (7/12-7/16)
Week 4: Conservation Connection (7/19-7/23)
Week 5: Forests (7/26-7/30)
Week 6: Wetlands (8/2-8/6)

To protect our campers, their families, and our staff from COVID-19 we will be following all of the best practices required by our licensing through the state of Michigan. We will be keeping campers in small groups, outdoors and masked up as much as we possibly can.

Registration for our weeks has been filling up fast, so if you are interested in getting your camper out of the house and into the outdoors this summer do not delay! You can find all the information about our program and how to register right on our website, www.mucccamp.org.

Unfortunately, due to our shift from a residential camp to a day camp, we will not be able to offer Hunter Safety Education as part of our camp programming this summer. If you know a camper that wanted to take a hunter education class while at camp and now cannot, please email our camp director at mbass@mucc.org. Max and our education director Shaun McKeon, will be potentially offering a weekend Hunter Education class at the end of the summer for campers that were not able to take it this year. Let us know if you might be interested.

Our camp program is run by a phenomenal team of educators, lifeguards, and maintenance staff. Our staff is extensively vetted and trained to ensure the best possible experience for our campers. We are currently still looking for Conservation Educators and a Facilities Manager. If you know someone who loves being outdoors and likes working with children

send them our way. They can send a resume directly to our camp director, Max Bass, at mbass@mucc.org. We offer housing, a weekly stipend, and one of the best summer jobs out there.

We also wanted to take this opportunity to give a big thank you to the team that keeps camp in tip-top shape. Robert Borchak, Paul Sand and the rest of our volunteer facilities committee work so very hard to keep the Cedar Lake Outdoor Center in good shape. Without their tireless support and work, we would not be able to call the Cedar Lake Outdoor Center our home.

Camp is right around the corner and we cannot wait to have the Cedar Lake Outdoor Center filled with laughter and happy campers. We will see you out there!

Voluntary youth fishing licenses signed into law

By Nick Green
MUCC Public Information Officer

Voluntary youth fishing licenses will once again be available after House Bills 5002 and 5003 were signed into law.

Introduced by Representatives Howell (R-Lapeer) and Brixie (D-Meridian Township), the tie-barred bill package reinstates a voluntary youth fishing license that costs $2. Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) supported and testified in front of legislative committees regarding the bill package along with Mark Stephens and John Hesse, representatives from MUCC affiliate Fishin' Michigan.

When the restructuring of licenses within the Michigan Department of Natural Resources occurred in 2013, the previous voluntary youth fishing license was nixed in an effort to reduce the number of licenses offered. The restructure did bring in an additional $12 million of revenue to the department.

Many youth fishing programs feature components of fishing ethics and conservation. Becoming a conservation steward by buying a license is oftentimes a pillar of youth fishing curriculum. Without the voluntary license available, instructors had no way of helping to instill license-buying behaviors in Michigan's future anglers.

"Part of being an ethical hunter or angler is giving back to the resource and helping to manage it through license purchases," said MUCC Executive Director Amy Trotter. "Programs and initiatives that instill a conservation ethic in our youth have always been at the forefront of who MUCC is."

All of the money collected from angling licenses is placed in the Game and Fish Protection Fund — the primary source of funding for fish stocking, management, enforcement and education. Each licensed angler is included in the formula to receive Michigan's apportionment of federal Dingell-Johnson funding, so these voluntary licenses increase the official count of anglers in Michigan.

HB 5002 and HB 5003 passed the Michigan House in January of 2020 and passed the Senate in mid-December. Gov. Whitmer signed the pair of bills on Dec. 31, 2020.

"Having a physical fishing license can be the proudest thing a kid owns, and while this reinstated voluntary license won't solve any funding issues within the department, it has the potential to create more lifetime anglers," Trotter said. "These bills encourage kids to fish responsibly and get outdoors, and MUCC supports that endeavor."

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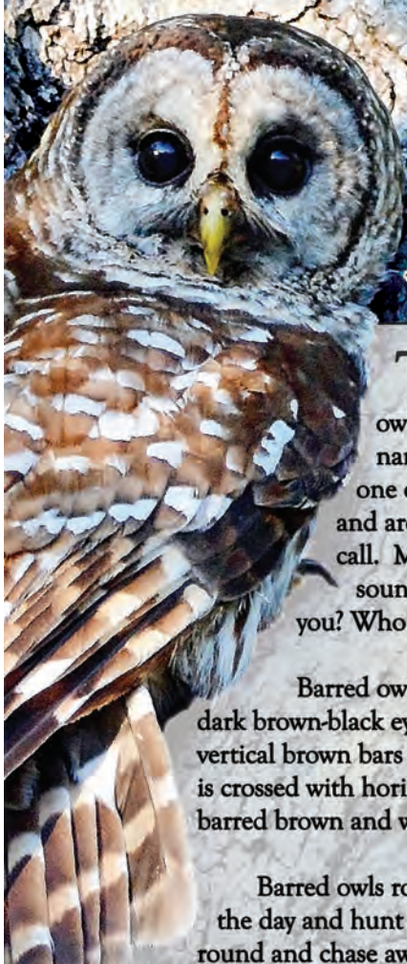

The Barred Owl

The barred owl is one of the more common owls you will find in Michigan. The scientific name for a barred owl is Strix varia. They are one of the larger owls you will find in Michigan and are very vocal. They are best known for their call. Many people would say the barred owl call sounds as if the bird is asking, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you aaalll?"

Barred owls are mottled brown and white overall, with dark brown-black eyes. Their underparts are mostly marked with vertical brown bars on a white background, while the upper breast is crossed with horizontal brown bars. The wings and tail are barred brown and white – this is where they get their name.

Barred owls roost on branches and in tree cavities during the day and hunt by night. These owls are territorial all year round and chase away intruders by hooting loudly. They are even more aggressive during nesting season (particularly the females), sometimes striking intruders with their feet. Pairs probably mate for life, raising one brood each year. Their nests are preyed upon by other large owls and hawks, as well as weasels and raccoons. Their most dangerous predator is the great horned owl, which eats barred owl eggs, young owls and occasionally adult owls!

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MUCC

One Last Cast

By Nick Green, *Editor*

Russ Mason's piece on branding really struck a chord with me — and maybe it's because my profession is a hybrid of journalism and public relations or that I just care too much about what people think. Either way, how we sell ourselves and our lifestyle is much more about how we appear to the general public as opposed to the derivatives from hunting we receive personally.

What I mean is that the non-hunting public, who are in the majority by an overwhelming margin, really don't care why you think posting a picture of your 8-year-old child with their first deer on a tailgate is important. To some of "those people," that is blood lust at its worst — through the hands of a child.

However, what if you posted that picture of your daughter or son with their first deer and the post was accompanied by more pictures that detailed the processing, consumption and family bonding surrounding the endeavor?

Thinking about how we brand ourselves and tell our story will be crucial to ensuring our heritage as hunters, anglers and trappers remains forever enshrined in the hearts of Michiganders.

Not posting that grip-and-grin shot of your son or daughter, grandchild, or niece or nephew is not what I am necessarily advocating for. I am just asking that we put a little more effort and thought into presenting more context surrounding that memorable moment.

For example, posting pre-hunt and post-hunt photos add context that those scrolling by can't glean from your photo of a deer on a tailgate. Adding a thought-out description of the day, event and harvest also helps people understand that our outdoor endeavors aren't just one moment in time — they are a process that defines who we are as conservationists.

More important, in my opinion, is posting pictures of the unsuccessful hunts. Post pictures that tell the story of a day afield that didn't end in a harvest. As we all know, those days happen much more frequently than the days we are successful. Continuing to share these memories, right alongside the memories of harvests, will help the non-hunting public understand that there is much more to who we are than just blood, gore and death.

My friends and I have made it a point to post and share stories about the dishes we prepare utilizing our locally-sourced protein. We host wildgame nights for our non-hunting friends to come over and enjoy the food we have prepared. And while our conversations don't directly tie to hunting during these dinners, it is obvious that our friends take away a deeper appreciation for our craft and will certainly be back to the table the next time we invite them over for squirrel wings, duck tacos or pickled venison heart.

This photo tells a story: Chuck Langstaff and his brittany, Jenny, bond before a day of woodcock banding with the author. Langstaff mentored Green during his first year woodcock banding, and they shared countless hours afield talking about dogs, life and conservation.

At the end of the day, social media is and will be hunters' best friend and worst enemy. Never before in human history have we been able to share information with folks around the globe at such a fast rate.

So be cognizant of what you're posting, tell the story if there's a story to tell and add some photos other than a grip-and-grin shot if you remember to take them. Together, we can start to show our non-hunting friends the value of hunting.

Yours in Conservation,

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OUR HISTORY

Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) is the largest statewide conservation organization in the nation. With more than 200 affiliated clubs and 40,000 members, MUCC has represented millions of conservationists since 1937. Whether it's the halls of the Capitol or on your favorite stream, MUCC is the insider for your outdoor traditions.

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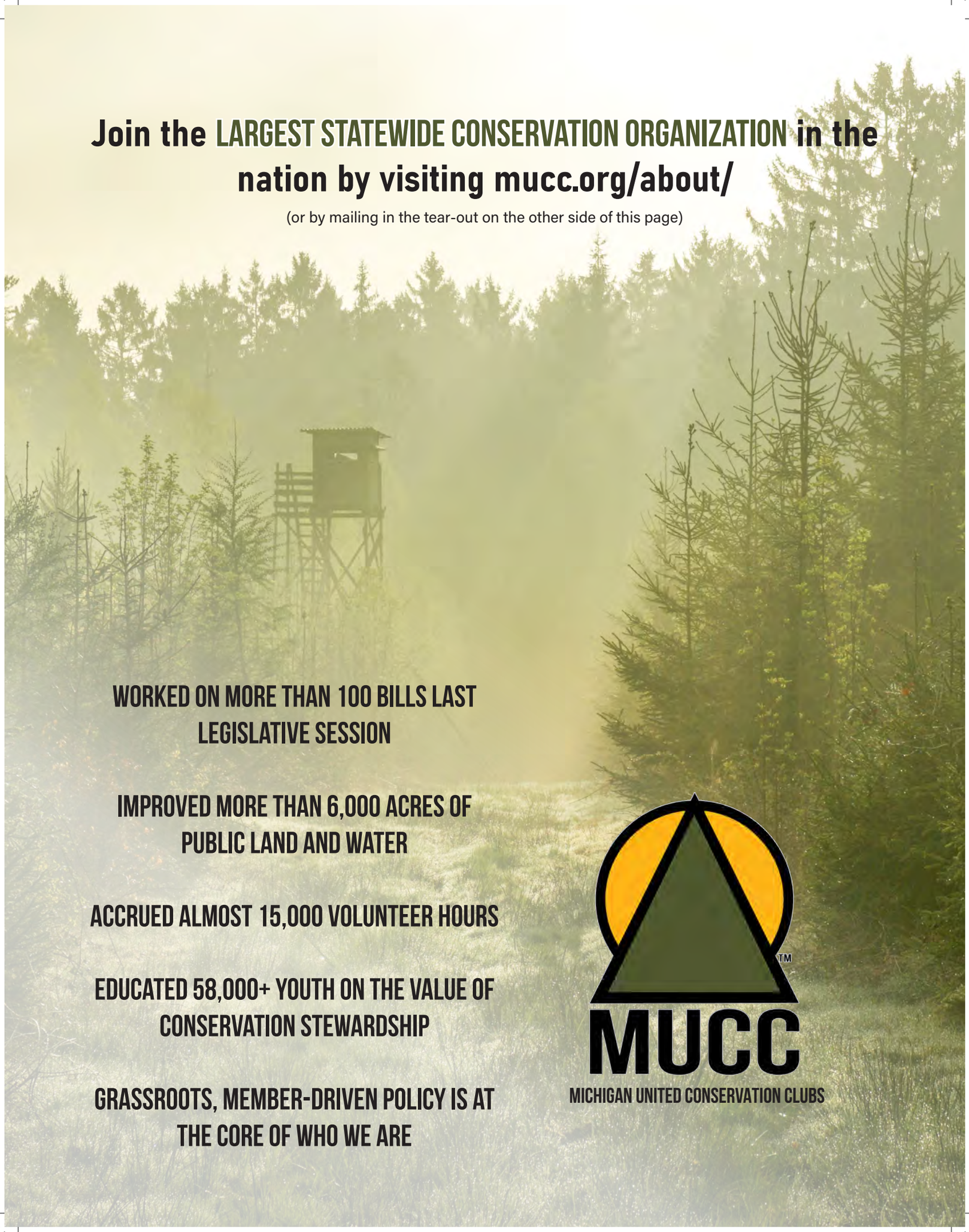

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