

2023-24

Environmental Priorities Snapshot

**Nine essential policies for protecting
Michiganders and the places we love**

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Lansing, MI | Detroit, MI



**MICHIGAN
Environmental
Council**

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE.



FORWARD

You've probably noticed that over the last decade we've experienced extreme weather and impacts from the climate crisis that have redefined our experiences as Michiganders. As those changes continue to negatively affect our communities and environment, we have a shared responsibility to enact bold policies that protect our people and preserve this place that we love.

The Michigan Environmental Council has driven a statewide environmental agenda for more than 40 years. We represent nearly 100 environmental and conservation organizations from every corner of the state. The Environmental Priorities Snapshot reflects a shared vision for Michigan's future, one in which every individual can thrive, and our environment is sustained for generations to come. Inside this document you'll find nine significant projects that, with the support and leadership of decision makers, can put Michigan on a path to combat climate change, protect our health, and become a thriving, resilient state.

Bold environmental and climate action simply means protecting Michiganders and the places we love. As we launch the 2023-24 session, the opportunities to create lasting protections are abundant. Climate change isn't slowing down, and our land, water, and air will continue to feel the impacts. That means we as Michiganders will too, unless we turn those opportunities into action.

Conan Smith
President & CEO





CLIMATE & ENERGY

Affordable, Healthy Homes

OVERVIEW

The policies included in the Affordable, Healthy Homes proposal would provide funding and program support to improve the quality, energy efficiency, and safety of affordable and low-income housing; and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions from buildings.



KEY POLICY POINTS

- Allocate \$100 million to create and pool resources into a whole-home retrofit program to improve quality, safety, and energy efficiency of existing affordable and low-income housing.
- Allocate \$30 million to fund workforce development initiatives to attract, train, and retain contractors for weatherization and home building projects.
- Ensure energy efficiency of new housing by introducing a bill to reform the state's uniform building construction code adoption process that would remove the seven-year cost test and require the state to adopt the new international codes every three years.

DAMAGE REPORT

- Michigan's minimum wage, as of 2023, is \$10.10/hour, but the wage needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market value is \$18.55/hour. Over 60% of Michiganders make less than \$20/hour, which means over half the state's population is spending more than they can afford on housing costs.
- Nearly 40% of Michigan's residential housing units were built before 1960, which results in ongoing costs related to rehabilitation and maintenance, and higher energy costs. A recent analysis showed that utility costs add about 25% to housing costs, which negatively impact our vulnerable populations the most.
- As of 2019, Michigan's buildings accounted for almost 18% of the state's total greenhouse gas emissions, the third highest-emitting sector after the power and transportation sectors. Most of these emissions are from using fossil fuels to heat and to cook with.

CLIMATE & ENERGY



Comprehensive Climate & Energy Reform

OVERVIEW

Michigan's fight against climate change took a huge leap forward in November of 2023 as the legislature approved landmark legislation advancing renewable energy generation, helping consumers save energy at home, and creating the foundation for a just transition to clean energy. The six-bill package moved Michigan well beyond the policy status quo and what any major Michigan utility has proposed in its current long range energy plan



KEY POLICY POINTS

- Establish a 60% renewable energy standard by 2030 and a 100% carbon-free standard by 2040.
- Increase Michigan's electric energy waste reduction standard to 2% and the gas energy waste reduction standard to 1.5% and incentivize electrification of buildings.
- Expand the purview of the Michigan Public Service Commission so it can regulate utilities for climate and prioritize equity and affordability.
- Include reforms that remove over-burdensome bans and restrictions to renewable energy growth, allow community solar, and remove the cap on small-scale solar.
- Require utilities to set affordable rates for low-income customers.

DAMAGE REPORT

- From flooding to scorching summer days to more air pollution, Michigan is already experiencing the negative impacts of the climate crisis. But state decision makers can still take action to stave off the worst outcomes.
- Michigan families pay the highest electricity rates in the Midwest. Clean, renewable energy — like wind and solar — is more affordable than coal and natural gas, but utility companies continue to rely on these polluting, expensive fossil fuels.
- Electric power production is the second largest contributor to Michigan's greenhouse gas emissions, but it's also where the most cost-effective climate solutions exist and where the state needs to move fastest to cut emissions.
- Michigan's particulate matter pollution from power plants has dropped 73% since 2005 as the state transitioned away from coal-fired power plants. If we ensure the closure of our state's remaining coal plants by 2030, that figure is expected to rise to 96.4%. Particulate matter pollution can result in decreased lung function, increased asthma levels, increased coughing, difficulty breathing, and more.



WATER

Statewide Septic Code

OVERVIEW

Michigan is the only state in the nation without a uniform code addressing the installation and inspection of septic systems. As a result, over a hundred thousand failing septic systems in Michigan each year release close to ten billion gallons of raw sewage into our soil and waterways, putting Michiganders' health at risk. Human waste pollution in our waterways feeds the growth of toxic algal blooms across our state.



KEY POLICY POINTS

- **Establish a statewide code and inspection system** to ensure failing systems are identified and fixed before they harm human health and damage our waterways.
- **Include assistance for struggling homeowners** to help them fix failing or soon-to-be-failing septic.
- **Provide funding for the administration of a statewide septic inspection program** and allow for local governments to adopt more stringent standards than the state minimum if needed.

DAMAGE REPORT

- **An estimated 20–27% of the state's septic systems are failing** and are discharging billions of gallons of untreated wastewater.
- **Nine thousand miles of Michigan streams exceed water quality values for Total Body Contact** because of high *E. coli* levels (a bacteria found in human and animal waste).
- **Spilled untreated septic waste contributes to the overgrowth of algae in water**, causing toxic blooms that make water harmful for people and pets, damages our natural environment, and leads to beach closures.

WATER



Part 31 Rulemaking Restoration

OVERVIEW

Nearly two decades ago, changes were made to Part 31 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA) which prescribes rules for water resources protection in the state. Because of this change, EGLE is unable to update or issue many rules to better protect state waters, leaving Michigan out of compliance with federal standards in some cases and in others, unable to adequately protect human health.



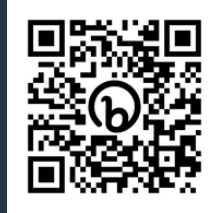
KEY POLICY POINTS

- **Reinstate EGLE's ability to promulgate rules under Part 31 through legislation.**
- **Establish numeric standards for Total Phosphorus (TP) and Total Nitrogen (TN) in ambient surface waters once rulemaking ability is restored.** These nutrients provide the fuel that promotes the rapid growth of Harmful Algal Blooms.
- **Adopt standards, once rulemaking ability is restored, that recognize updated technology to aid local health departments in issuing beach closure decisions more quickly when *E. Coli* levels are at action levels.**

DAMAGE REPORT

- **Bioaccumulative Chemicals of Concern (BCCs), such as PCBs and mercury, accumulate in aquatic organisms once entering surface waters.** Currently, EGLE is unable to update the definition of what is considered a BCC, even as new chemicals come under investigation and scientific knowledge advances.
- **Chemicals containing PFAS and PFOA are not subject to specific requirements applied to other polluting materials** to ensure proper storage, pollution incident prevention plans and required reporting of accidental releases.
- **Michigan is currently noncompliant with federal floodplain requirements** and lacks the ability to update floodplain maps, potentially risking participation in the National Flood Insurance Program.

Our members in action



The Michigan Environmental Council represents nearly 100 environmental and conservation organizations from every corner of the state, each who drive critical work in our communities every day. This document was developed collaboratively with our members and reflects a shared vision for our state.

Discover our members by visiting bit.ly/mec-members or by scanning this QR code.



Make Food Not Waste's Chef Shanel hosted a "Waste Not" cooking class, a virtual event where participants follow along to create a delicious dish that minimizes kitchen waste.



MI Interfaith Power & Light helped a Lansing church go solar, making it the second in the state.



MI Recycling Coalition secured a \$1.8M grant for a comprehensive recycling education program.



Detroit Bird Alliance hosted a field trip at Kensington Nature Center where participants got to see a variety of birds up close, including Pileated and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Tufted Titmice and Red-winged Blackbirds.



West Michigan Environmental Action Council advocated to #DefendOurClimate, opposing extreme budget cuts in GOP funding bills.



Friends of the Detroit River celebrated the opening of Uniroyal Promenade.



Bees in the D partnered with Lincoln-King High School for an on-campus bee hive.



Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice brought attention to environmental justice at the TED Countdown hosted in Detroit, a forum aimed to champion and accelerate solutions to the climate crisis.



Healthy Pine River received a \$31,400 grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy to do reach out to and educate communities throughout the watershed.



Volunteers with the Clinton River Watershed Council canvassed winter stonely populations along the Clinton River and its tributaries.



HEALTH & JUSTICE

Polluter Pay

OVERVIEW

Michigan taxpayers should not be responsible for cleaning up after corporations who contaminate our land, air, or water, but regulations fail to hold polluters accountable. We must ensure that industry is stewarding our state and taking complete responsibility for pollution so that our communities and precious natural resources are safeguarded.



KEY POLICY POINTS

- **Reinstitute strict liability** so that if a corporation was responsible for contaminating our land, air, or water, that corporation would also be responsible for cleaning up the mess they made.
- **Stop chemical pollution of our land, air, water, and homes by banning the use of chemicals of concern** in products and processes.
- **Require companies to undertake full and robust cleanup of chemical spills.**

DAMAGE REPORT

- **From 1990 to 1995, Michigan had the strongest “polluter pay” law in the nation, but after it was gutted,** funding for corporate pollution cleanup has suffered, putting the responsibility of cleanup on taxpayers, instead of polluters.
- **Today, more than 24,000 contaminated sites across Michigan continue to go unaddressed,** resulting in toxic chemicals such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), dioxin, and TCE (a known carcinogen) leaching into our waterways, lands, and bodies.
- **Pollution is not contained in one place.** As it enters our interconnected bodies of water, it pools in our groundwater and travels across the state, contaminating entire ecosystems and communities.

HEALTH & JUSTICE



Cumulative Impacts Assessment

OVERVIEW

Heavy industry in Michigan has long taken its toll on our environment and residents alike. The concentration of such industry in Black and Brown communities adds significant economic and health stressors to already vulnerable populations. These compounding effects are known as cumulative impacts. We propose adding a cumulative impact assessment to select permitting processes to protect frontline communities from further exposure and harm.



KEY POLICY POINTS

- **Require EGLE to take cumulative impacts into account in air quality permitting.**
- **Delineate overburdened community zones using MI Environmental Justice Screening Tool data** and ensure this database is regularly updated.
- **Require enhanced upfront community engagement before facilities are proposed in overburdened communities,** including the preparation of cumulative health impact assessment by the applicant and accessible public hearings.
- **Enable EGLE to establish stricter permit conditions that protect overburdened communities,** including the ability to deny permit applications.

DAMAGE REPORT

- **Detroit is home to over 280 polluting facilities and 68 Superfund sites.** Children living in communities with a significant number of polluting facilities are five times more likely to experience asthma related hospital visits.
- **Children in Detroit are 50% more likely to suffer from asthma** than their out-state counterparts.
- **In 2023 the American Lung Association ranked Wayne County among the 25 worst counties for air quality in the U.S.**
- **Also in 2023, the Upper Peninsula experienced its first air quality alert for any contaminant.**





TRANSPORTATION

Transportation GHG Reduction

OVERVIEW

Our transportation sector is one of the largest contributors to the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that are driving climate change. To avoid the worst impacts of climate change we must reduce GHGs from transportation by increasing public transit and non-motorized transportation options, switching to electric vehicles and ensuring we track how our road projects contribute to or mitigate climate change.



KEY POLICY POINTS

- Enact legislation that requires MDOT and county road commissions to determine the total GHG emissions from a future transportation project.
- Encourage MDOT to determine as part of any future road project if that project is suitable for enhancements that reduce lane miles, improve safety, increase mobility, contribute to economic development, promote efficient land use, and/or reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution.
- Require MDOT to take into account the climate goals outlined in the MI Healthy Climate Plan.
- Secure funding for MDOT to hire a climate specialist that analyzes MDOT projects and overall contribution to emissions.

DAMAGE REPORT

- As of 2019, Michigan's transportation sector accounted for almost 28 percent of the state's total GHG emissions, the second highest emitting sector after the power sector. Transportation emissions are primarily due to the combustion of petroleum products such as gasoline and diesel in light-duty vehicles and freight trucks.
- Currently, MDOT is not required to inventory its' GHG emissions when engaging in a road construction project.
- Currently, MDOT doesn't have a set staffer who is tasked with all things GHG-related at the department.

WASTE REDUCTION



Michigan Bottle Deposit Law Reform

OVERVIEW

Michigan's 1976 10-cent deposit law has significantly reduced the number of pop bottles and beer cans littering our roadways and beaches. Modernizing this highly effective program to include more containers and improve convenience for consumers will help ramp up Michigan's recycling rates and reduce pollution of our land and water.



KEY POLICY POINTS

- Expand the accepted containers in the program to include all beverage containers under one gallon, including water bottles.
- Require beverage bottlers to use a minimum percentage of recycled content.
- Establish universal redemption sites that accept any clean container with a deposit, regardless of where that container was originally purchased.
- Increase accountability by requiring the Attorney General and Michigan State Police to enforce sanctions on non-participating return retailers.

DAMAGE REPORT

- Michigan's bottle deposit program ranks first in the nation and ninth in the world in efficiency and effectiveness, but it only covers half of all modern bottles and cans that should be eligible for the program.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more than \$200 million in bottle deposits went unclaimed due to declining returns, representing money that should be back in the pockets of Michiganders.
- More than 22 million pounds of plastic pollution end up in the Great Lakes every year, according to the Rochester Institute of Technology. And, it never really goes away. Instead, it just breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces known as "microplastics."





Michigan's Critical Dunes

OVERVIEW

Michigan is home to some of the most beautiful and globally rare freshwater dunes, but we lack robust protections for these iconic natural wonders. We need legislative action to safeguard our dunes so that they can continue to serve as important coastal habitats, protect our coastline from the effects of climate change, and showcase “Pure Michigan” to the world.



KEY POLICY POINTS

- **Restore Critical Dunes Act protections** to better evaluate the impact of development proposals and prohibit structures lakeward of the dune crest.
- **Strengthen protections for sand dunes from mining activities.**
- **Move away from coastal armoring that only amplifies the impacts of erosion** and instead advance solutions that use natural features like native vegetation that will better help fend off high water in the long run.
- **Implement setbacks for all development along the Great Lakes.**

DAMAGE REPORT

- **Michigan is home to 300,000 acres of freshwater dunes, the largest collection in the world.** These dunes are living, evolving ecosystems that provide substantial protections to the built environment from the impacts of climate change.
- **Lake levels are expected to keep rising as our climate continues to change,** putting critical dunes at even greater risk.
- **In 2012, the Critical Dunes Act was gutted,** making it easier for developers to permanently alter the dunes.
- **No permit is currently required to excavate up to 250,000 tons of sand,** even for commercial purposes, within the Critical Dunes Area.

THIS IS OUR MOMENT.



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