

## **MUCC Policy Action Report**

February 15, 2008

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### **DNR Monthly Budget Update**

In response to the expressed frustrations of MUCC and other conservation groups over December's \$10 million fund balance in the Department of Natural Resources Game and Fish Protection Fund (see December 21, 2007 policy report), the DNR has developed a plan to provide monthly budget updates to the Natural Resources Commission and the public.

These monthly budget reports will summarize the DNR's appropriations and plans for spending (by DNR division) for the current fiscal year which ends Sept. 30, 2008. They will be updated monthly, with explanations of any mid-year changes necessary due to legislative transfers, supplemental appropriations, Executive Orders, and revenue adjustments. More detailed division reports are planned for dissemination quarterly to the Natural Resources Commission.

The reports will be available at the following website (from DNR homepage: [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr), use left hand menu: "Commissions, Boards, and Committees" to "Natural Resources Commission" to "DNR Monthly Budget Report") or visit the following link directly: [http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-39002\\_11862\\_49123---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-39002_11862_49123---,00.html)

This will be a great resource for our groups to be able to get up-to-date information on the status of the DNR budget situation. MUCC will be tracking these monthly budget updates and recommend any needed future actions in our policy reports.

### **Help is on the Way! Bills on Ballot Proposals Introduced**

Senator McManus, Chair of the Senate Campaign and Election Oversight Committee, took testimony last week on Senate Bills 1086 and 1087 and Senate Joint Resolution K, which are designed to make it more difficult to put a question on a state-wide ballot.

Senate Bill 1086 amends the Michigan Election Law to allow a signature on a petition to last 210 days. Currently a petition signature is good for 180 days. Petition signature collectors have no time limit on collecting signatures, but the signature is only valid for 180 days.

Senate Bill 1087 also amends the Michigan Election Law to require a circulator of a petition be a registered voter in the city or township in which the petitions are being collected. Currently a signature collector must be a registered voter of the state, but not of the local unit of government where the signatures are being collected.

SJR K proposes an amendment to the State Constitution to require that in order to put a question on the ballot, signatures must be collected in at least three-fourths of the house districts of this state. In addition, sufficient signatures must be collected in each of those house districts equal in number to at least seven percent of those who voted in that house district for governor at the last preceding general election at which a governor was elected. Currently collected petition signatures must be greater than 8% for initiative and 5% for referendum of the total vote cast for all candidates for governor in the last preceding general election at which the governor was elected. No geographic distribution is required.

As the last election proved, an organization from outside the state can buy its way onto the ballot. SJR K will make it much more difficult for an organization from outside the state to hire petition signature gatherers because of the challenge of finding qualified gatherers in 81 house legislative areas. This language also ensures that the signatures cannot only be gathered in one area of the state. Petition signature collection efforts have tended to focus on southeast Michigan because of the ease of securing a population base sufficient to collect the required number of signature. With the proposed change, petitions would be required to be gathered in more rural areas of the state as southeast Michigan only has 47 house districts.

*Please contact the Senate Committee members Senators McManus, Brown, Jansen, Jacobs, and Barcia as well as your own Senator and ask them to support Senate Bills 1086 and 1087, and Senate Joint Resolution K. For contact information, please visit:*

*<http://senate.michigan.gov/SenatorInfo/find-your-senator.htm>*

### **Bear/Bobcat Participation License Bill on the Move**

Last week, the House Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Natural Resources Committee chaired by Representative Sheltroun passed HB 5331 (Walker), which would allow individuals to accompany others on a bear or bobcat hunt without a participation license, so long as the individual did not carry or use a firearm or own or possess the dogs used to chase or locate the animal during the course of the hunt.

This is an important bill that brings equity back to this form of hunting. It allows bear and bobcat hunters the ability to introduce youth and other people to this type of hunting as a spectator, without requiring them to hold a license if they are not directly participating. Currently, bear and bobcat hunting are the only forms of hunting that have an added participation license requirement, which may result in fewer people being introduced to this sport.

*Please contact your Michigan Representative and tell them to support HB 5331. For contact information, visit: [http://house.michigan.gov/find\\_a\\_rep.asp](http://house.michigan.gov/find_a_rep.asp)*

### **Conservation Wins: Mercury Re-listed As a Pollutant**

The United States Court of Appeals overturned a controversial plan from the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that would have failed to protect Michigan's citizens from the dangers posed by mercury emissions. In *State of New Jersey v. U.S. EPA*, the court decided that the federal government was wrong in delisting mercury as a hazardous air pollutant.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) had joined 14 other states in challenging the mercury rule and is currently developing a rule to reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent by 2015 from Michigan's coal-fired plants.

Coal-fired power plants are the largest source of mercury in the United States. Mercury from power plants settles in waterways and accumulates in fish. The Michigan Department of Community Health has a special health advisory in place for all inland lakes in Michigan due to mercury contamination. Mercury is known to cause neurological and developmental problems, particularly in unborn babies.

### **Multi-State Research Grant Will Focus on Deadly Fish Virus: VHS**

The Great Lakes Fishery Trust (GLFT) announced last week that they would make a \$750,000 grant to address viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS), a deadly viral disease in fish. Researchers from the U.S. Geological Survey's Western Fisheries Research Center, Michigan State University, and Cornell University have joined together to provide resource managers in the Great Lakes region with new tools and information to better understand, predict, and manage the threat posed by this fatal disease.

The research will compare the effects of VHS on important native and Great Lakes sportfish, including lake trout and Pacific salmon, and develop new and faster detection techniques which are key information gaps on this virus as identified by the Department of Natural Resources.

First identified in the region as the cause of a large die-off of freshwater drum in Lake Ontario in 2005, VHS is considered a serious viral disease of fish. Since that time, a number of outbreaks have occurred in the Great Lakes with the exception of Lake Superior where it has not been detected. While having no effects on humans, over 25 fish species have been found with VHS in the Great Lakes region. Significant losses among muskellunge, walleye, yellow perch, smallmouth bass, round gobies, bluegill, black crappie and gizzard shad have been seen during the period from 2005-2007. It is not known how VHS was introduced to the Great Lakes, or exactly how long it has been in the ecosystem, but the discharge of ballast water from ocean-going vessels is a prime suspect.

Within the Great Lakes region, movement of infected baitfish has also been suspected as the source of VHS that has been found in certain inland lakes of New York, Michigan and Wisconsin.

### **DNR Seeks Public Comment on Revised ORV Management Plan**

State recreation officials today announced the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, in cooperation with the Off-Road Vehicle Trails Advisory Board, has released a revised draft management plan for ORV use in Michigan.

Revisions to the plan were made in response to public comments on the initial draft plan that was presented to the public in August 2005. The plan provides strategic direction for management of ORV use on public lands administered by the DNR.

The substantive changes to the 2005 draft plan are the inclusion of actions the DNR will take to address illegal ORV use. This includes actions and recommendations from the ORV strategy task force that was established as a result of forest certification, which Michigan achieved from the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and Forest Stewardship Council in 2006.

The new plan also addresses other influences that have come into play since 2005, such as legislative boilerplate language regarding trail expansion and pending legislation concerning ORV operation on public roadways.

The revised draft plan can be viewed online by going to [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr), then clicking on the Recreation, Camping & Boating link to locate the ORV/ATV page.

Public comment on the revised plan, which may be submitted via e-mail at [DNR-ORVPlanComments@Michigan.gov](mailto:DNR-ORVPlanComments@Michigan.gov), has been extended until midnight EST, Feb. 25, 2008.

The DNR will present the revised draft plan to the Natural Resources Commission for information in April, at which time there will be additional opportunity for public comment. Final approval of the plan is scheduled for the NRC monthly meeting in May.

### **Yeast Could Be The Key To Ending Lake Invaders (summarized from Detroit Free Press, 2/11/2008)**

A Michigan company says it thinks it may have a promising solution to fight a huge Great Lakes problem -- invasive species dumped from the ballast of oceangoing ships. EcologiQ, a Troy firm, hopes a tiny form of yeast it has patented can rid ships of dangerous invasive organisms that lurk in their ballast tanks by starving them of oxygen.

Ballast water often contains bacteria, viruses and the adult and larval stages of plants and animals that can wreak havoc on our native aquatic ecosystems, as we have learned from the introduction of zebra and quagga mussels and numerous other invasive, non-native species.

The new product, BallaClean, works by removing the oxygen in a closed space or body of water and suffocating live organisms that could turn into unwanted invaders once released into the Great Lakes. The company is testing the product in hopes of getting it certified in various countries. The firm says it offers a smaller, simpler and cheaper solution for shippers than other methods on the market. Environment Canada has tested BallaClean and found that it does not harm the environment.

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**Updating our list for 2008:** If you would like to receive the policy report directly to your email address (or if you wish to be removed from this email list), please contact Amy Spray at [aspray@mucc.org](mailto:aspray@mucc.org).

*MUCC is committed to providing our members with up-to-date and accurate information on conservation policy issues from Lansing, Washington D.C., and around Michigan. If you enjoy MUCC's biweekly policy action report, please consider becoming a member and support our efforts to conserve Michigan's natural resources by remembering MUCC in your contributions and planned giving.*