

MUCC Policy Action Report

March 21, 2008

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Senate Subcommittee Passes DNR's FY 2009 Budget

The Senate Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Appropriations Subcommittee passed SB 1106, the DNR's Fiscal Year 2008-09 budget appropriation, to the full Appropriations Committee last week with only a few substantial changes from the Governor's recommendations and the FY 2007-08 budget. The Senate recommendation moves the line item for Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILT), \$14.2 million, out of the DNR Budget and into the Treasury Budget. This does not result in any change in payments made to local units of governments that have state land, swamp/tax reverted land, and commercial forest reserves within their jurisdictions.

The only other substantial change from the Governor's recommendation is the addition of \$1.8 million of General Funds to support a grant to the Michigan Department of Agriculture, which will distribute the funding as grants to local conservation districts to provide services to private forest landowners. This funding was line item vetoed by the Governor in last year's budget.

In related news, the DNR has issued its monthly Fiscal Year 2008 budget and spend plan report for February. It can be found online here:

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-39002_11862_49123---,00.html

Promoting Michigan Tourism with Tobacco Money

Three bills were passed out of the House Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Natural Resources Committee to provide funding to promote Michigan's tourism industry in other out-of-state markets and to provide tourism business development opportunities. House Bills 5865-5867 would, generally speaking, allow for the refunding and refinancing of the tobacco settlement monies that would result in a projected \$60 million to the Pure Michigan ad campaign and other business advertising over two years.

HB 5867 will refinance existing state bonds at a lower tax-exempt interest rate to generate the funding. Under the bipartisan package, the Travel Michigan plans to spend a projected \$40 million on tourism promotion and \$20 million for business marketing. MUCC has expressed its interest in working with legislators, Travel Michigan, and the tourism industry to ensure that hunting, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation

would be promoted with this additional money. This would not only be a benefit to Michigan's lagging economy, but may also give a boost to hunting and fishing license sales and state park fees that are used to maintain our public recreation areas and for habitat and wildlife management.

VICTORY: DNR Rejects Twin Lakes Hunting Ban

As MUCC reported to you this fall (Policy Report 10-5-07, Michigan Out of Doors Magazine November 2007), there was considerable anti-hunting sentiment generated during the early waterfowl season around the Twin Lakes area in Muskegon County. The Dalton Township Board requested that the DNR close hunting on Twin Lake, Middle Lake, and West Lake, which township residents believe is too crowded with homes and other outdoor enthusiasts to safely allow hunting.

Thanks in part to the quick alert and action by MUCC members, the DNR has rejected the proposed hunting ban. No testimony or evidence of substantive incidents that would warrant a hunting closure was provided during the public hearing or through the DNR investigation.

There is no doubt that these user conflicts, either here or elsewhere, will come to surface again, especially if there is more unseasonably warm weather during early waterfowl season. However, MUCC is committed to keeping you informed as they arise and fighting for our sportsmen's heritage.

House Committee approves resolution to crack down on ballast water treatment

In a somewhat surprising move last Wednesday, March 12, the House Great Lakes & Environment Committee approved House Resolution 255 - sponsored by State Rep. David Law (R-Commerce Twp.) to encourage other Great Lakes states and the Canadian province of Ontario to follow Michigan's lead in regulating the discharge of ballast water by oceangoing vessels. In 2005, Michigan was the first state to bypass federal inaction on the invasive species problem when it enacted Public Act 33 to help remediate and prevent the negative effects non-native aquatic invasive species (AIS) have made on the fisheries, economy, and outdoor heritage in the Great Lakes Basin.

Rep. Law summed up the benefits of H.R. 255 in saying that "Michigan will continue to be vulnerable to the detriments of aquatic invasive species until either Congress or every state in the basin gets on board with these long overdue fixes to the current law."

MUCC supports H.R. 255 as another move in the right direction towards gaining serious attention to the recreational, environmental and economic damage that invasive species are wreaking on our treasured Great Lakes. While we continue to work with the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration and other active stakeholders to enact a broad-sweeping federal regulation on aquatic invasive species impediments, we applaud this type of advocacy directed to our neighboring states in hopes that they will follow Michigan's pioneering lead on this issue.

Bravo to Rep. David Law, Chair Rebekah Warren and members of the House Great Lakes & Environment Committee. Encourage your state representative to support H.R. 255 when it comes to the House floor for a vote!

Farm Bill 2007: Community Forest and Open Space Gives ACCESS

The Senate-passed version of the 2007 Farm Bill (which is still in conference committee) contains a new program that would be a great benefit to hunters, anglers, and trappers. As private land in Michigan has been subdivided and developed at a rate even higher than population growth, sportsmen and women increasingly have relied on public lands to provide access and opportunity.

The Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program would provide federal matching grants to local governments and qualified non-profit organizations to acquire forests and open spaces for local ownership and management. Lands purchased under this program would be required to maintain public access, consistent with the purposes for which the land was acquired, which can include hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Please contact Senator Stabenow and her Senate Agriculture Committee colleagues and ask them to ensure that the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program remains in the final version of the 2007 Farm Bill.

Wetlands Conservation funding needs your help!!!!

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) is a public-private partnership to protect, restore, and manage wetland habitats. This act was originally enacted in 1989 and was reauthorized by Congress in 2006 for Fiscal Year 2007 through Fiscal Year 2012. Since enacted, NAWCA grants have helped fund over 1,600 projects and conserved more than 23 million acres of habitat across the continent. NAWCA funding supports the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and for every \$1 of federal money allotted to NAWCA must be matched by \$1 or more from non-federal sources. Because this program is so effective, funds are often tripled or quadrupled at the local level. In the next couple months, Congress will be considering the proposed budget for NAWCA and make their recommendations the program's funding for fiscal year 2009. This year, President Bush has shown strong support again for this program, proposing an increase of funding to NAWCA with a budget of \$42.6 million. **Contact your Congressional members and Senators and tell them you support funding for NAWCA at the highest possible level in the upcoming fiscal year. This program is an effective conservation program that conserves wetlands, improves and restores habitat, and helps clean our waters. To contact your Congressional member, please call the Congressional Switchboard at 202-224-3121.** If you have any further questions or need help in contacting your Congressional members, please contact Resource Policy Assistant, April Bennett (abennett@mucc.org, 517/346-6472).

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. Please include your first and last name in the email.

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.