April 13, 2011

House Transportation Committee
Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee
Lansing, Michigan

Re: SB 168 / HB 4303

Dear Senators and Representatives,

The Michigan Environmental Council is a coalition of over 65 member groups located across the state of Michigan. Since our inception in 1980, we have been working with local units of government, watershed organizations and interested parties on protection of Michigan's remaining wetlands.

Wetlands provide a host of benefits to communities across the state -- such as fish and wildlife habitats, natural water quality improvement, flood storage, shoreline erosion protection, and recreation opportunities. As we continue to fill and drain our wetlands, their ability to provide those benefits and protect the Great Lakes are eroded. Across the state we have loss up to 50% of our wetlands, and in some counties that number is as high as 75%.

Although roadways provide a convenient ways to get from point A to point B, it is not without cost to our water resources. Roadways are a significant portion of our impervious surface that has been demonstrated to reduce water quality across the state. Also exempting them from wetland mitigation requirements would be a double blow to water quality.

In addition, the management of stormwater is a significant responsibility of local units of government – to both prevent flooding of residential and commercial areas. Controlling stormwater is a challenging part of the construction of many roadways. The loss of wetlands in these instances could result in more local flooding and require greater capital expenditures by local units of government to manage stormwater.

In most cases a "right-a-way" for transportation purposes is much larger than the existing road. Therefore, projects that expand the current footprint of a roadway can result in significant loss of wetland areas. Because of the impacts noted above, we oppose efforts to exempt road projects form wetland mitigation responsibilities.

Sincerely,

James Clift, Policy Director

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