

February 20, 2013

Dear members of the Natural Resources Committee,

I would like to urge you to reject Senate Bill 78, which would remove key protections for biodiversity and threatened species in Michigan.

I was born and raised in Michigan, and many of my fondest childhood memories are of camping in the northern Lower Peninsula with my parents. On those trips, I felt as though I entered another world. In place of the landscape I was familiar with, the houses and yards of a mid-sized town, I was surrounded by a landscape full of living things: trees great and small, countless species of plants in the underbrush, and a multitude of birds that I could always hear but rarely see. The strangeness and diversity of nature let me know that I was only a small part of the living world. I found the experience humbling, but also exhilarating. On the rare occasions when I caught a glimpse of a red fox or an eagle hunting over the lake, I knew that the world had given me a precious gift.

Senate Bill 78 asks the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to consider economic values alongside its mandate to protect state lands. I fully agree. I have worked as a farm manager and as an agricultural researcher, and I have constantly tried to balance economic concerns with responsible management of the land. But in removing protections for biodiversity in Michigan, SB 78 compromises our economic health and natural wealth. Biodiversity is the backbone of the forests and wetlands that clean our air and water. It is essential in agriculture, where diverse communities of organisms help to control pest outbreaks and recycle nutrients in the soil. Biodiversity *is* an economic value, and by preserving biodiversity we can help to maintain the prosperity of our state.

I could present a long list of facts about the value of biodiversity in Michigan, and I am sure you have already seen many such lists. But that is not my main reason for writing this testimonial. Instead, I am writing because of my experiences camping in the Michigan forest as a child. I want my own children to be able to experience that same sense of wonder, and to know that the world is alive and beautiful. On my shelf, I have a book with illustrations of most of the plant species found in the eastern United States. I do not want that book to become a historical relic. I want to leaf through it with my children, and say “all of these plants are out there somewhere, and if you look hard enough, you might find them!”

Again, I urge you to protect Michigan’s biodiversity and reject Senate Bill 78. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alex Smith
M.A. Ecology
Ph.D. student, Crop Science, Michigan State University

634 S. Francis Ave.
Lansing, MI 48912