



May 11, 2016

Senate Natural Resources

Re: SB 39 & 40

Dear Committee members,

The Michigan Environmental Council (MEC) is a coalition of more than 70 member organizations across the state, and we have long followed the conversation regarding public lands in the state. We thank Chair Casperson for engaging us in the conversation around these bills and the amount of work that has gone into these bills so far. MEC still has major concerns about the bill package, and would urge the committee members to oppose them at this time.

Though we still have numerous concerns about the bills, we would like to highlight just three of our top issues with the bill package. First, we have concerns with tying restrictions to purchasing land to payments in lieu of taxes (PILT). PILT payments must be appropriated by the legislature, and we view making those payments as a duty of the legislature, not the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Though we continue to support lifting the cap on public land acreage, tying the cap to PILT payments is not the appropriate way to go about it.

Second, we have major concerns regarding the provisions that limit land purchases based on percentage of public land owned in a township or county and with local approval of those purchases. State land purchases are based on statewide management decisions that should not be able to be vetoed by the local government. Though the DNR should consult with local governments on land purchases, the local governments should not hold veto authority over land purchase decision that are made based on a statewide management strategy.

Third, we have serious concerns about the addition of the definition of "conservation of biological diversity" and the changes that follow. These provisions are similar to SB 78 that was vetoed by the Governor following the 2013-2014 legislative session. We oppose any language that bars the DNR from managing for non-game species. Often these management decisions, though primarily for a non-game species, will have beneficial effects for game and other important species. These often will also benefit the user experience of public lands.

Though these bills have changed significantly since they were introduced, there are still too many concerns for MEC to change its position from oppose. We look forward to continuing to work with the sponsors and the committee toward lifting the cap on public lands in the state.

Thank you,

James Cliff
Policy Director

The ability to lift the cap on public lands is a critical issue for the state. It is a key component of the state's economic recovery plan and a vital part of the state's long-term strategy. The state's public lands are a valuable resource and a key part of the state's economic base. The state's public lands are a valuable resource and a key part of the state's economic base. The state's public lands are a valuable resource and a key part of the state's economic base.

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