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Executive Summary

Michigan Hunter Recruitment and Retention Work Group Recommendations

January 2006

**A report presented to Director Rebecca A. Humphries
of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources**



Michigan Recruitment and Retention Work Group Members

Chuck Nelson, Facilitator, Michigan State University

Patricia Stewart, Chairperson, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Rob Anderson, Michigan Farm Bureau

Maury DeYoung, Sportspersons Ministries International

Jason Dinsmore, Michigan United Conservation Clubs

Jerry Hall, Natural Resources Commission

Ed Ingvarstsen, Hunter and Outdoor Enthusiast

Jerry Keck, Michigan Bow Hunters

Alan Marble, DNR

William Moritz, DNR

Dave Noble, Ducks Unlimited

Tom Oliver, DNR

Mike Parker, Pheasants Forever

Ben Peyton, MSU

Dan Potter, National Wild Turkey Federation

Rodney Stokes, DNR

John Wencley, Troy Public Schools

Gary Williams, MSU Extension

Steve Wyckoff, Ducks Unlimited

Hunting is not merely an acquired taste; the instinct that finds delight in the sight and pursuit of game is bred into the very fiber of this race (man). We are dealing, therefore, with something that lies very deep. Some can live without opportunity for this exercise and control of the hunting instinct, just as I suppose some can live without work, play, love, business, or other vital adventures. But in these days we regard such deprivations as unsocial. Opportunity for exercise of all the normal instincts has come to be regarded more and more as an inalienable right.

-Aldo Leopold

Michigan Recruitment and Retention Work Group Report and Recommendations

Perspective

Hunting is a tradition that has been in existence for more than 5 million years (Stanford 1999). In the United States alone, surveys show nearly 80% of Americans support hunting, although less than 10% actually participate. The economics of these statistics are astounding: some 18.5 million hunters contribute more than \$30 billion annually to the U.S. economy, supporting more than 986,000 jobs. Hunters underwrite—to the tune of \$1.5 billion annually—conservation programs benefiting all Americans who value wildlife and wild places (National Shooting Sports Foundation 2005).

Michigan has long enjoyed a strong hunting heritage. For almost one hundred years hunting has provided a tool for sound wildlife management, and has been the key link to educate citizens about the environment and the cornerstone of funding for Michigan natural resource conservation. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2002), hunters boosted Michigan's economy in 2001 by spending \$490 million in the state.

There were more than 865,000 licensed hunters in Michigan in 2002. The total number of Michigan licensed hunters has remained relatively static over the past 40 years. However, the proportion of hunters in the Michigan population has declined from an average of 10.1% in the 1960s to an average of 8.7% during 2000-2002 (Frawley 2004).

To reverse this trend, new hunters, especially non-traditional hunters, must be brought into the shooting and hunting sports. This will strengthen the funding base for conservation, include the increasing diversity of society and preserve Michigan's hunting heritage. One path to follow is enhancing social support systems for new hunters (Wentz and Seng 2000) by connecting the novice with a mentor who

understands and can explain the relationship between hunting and the natural world. As Aldo Leopold noted, this "...reminds us of our dependency on the soil-plant-animal-man food chain and of the fundamental organization of the biota" (Leopold 1949:178).

Besides a decline in the proportion of Michiganders who hunt, there has been a shift in Michigan hunting away from species that can be hunted by younger hunters with firearms toward deer hunting. As Frawley (2004) notes:

- Hunting in Michigan has become increasingly focused on deer hunting.
- At least 91% of license buyers purchased a deer hunting license.
- In 2002, 62% of the deer hunters purchased only a deer hunting license—compared to 51% in 1968.
- In contrast, a smaller proportion of small game hunters purchased only small game licenses in 2002 than in 1968.
- A major drop-off in hunting participation appears to occur between the late teen years and early 20s.
- In 1968, 45% of small game hunters purchased only a small game hunting license—compared to 16% in 2002.

The Mission

The Hunter Recruitment and Retention (HRR) Work Group was established in January 2005 by Director Rebecca A. Humphries of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Director Humphries charged the work group to review existing data, including Governor John Engler's Hunting and Fishing Heritage Task Force Recommendations published January 1996, and develop an action plan by June 2005 that identifies 3-5 approaches to increase the number and proportion of Michigan residents hunting and to retain new as well as current hunters. She challenged work group members to think about key priorities, both in terms of individual roles and those of the organizations represented, and to work in a cooperative process.

The Work Group

The HRR work group was comprised of members from the university, governmental (DNR), educational, non-governmental (conservation and environmental groups), and hunting enthusiast communities. The group acknowledged the need for input and review by a broad range of stakeholders with a vested interest in and appreciation for hunting, and an understanding of science-based conservation management of Michigan's natural resources.

Group members:

Chuck Nelson, Facilitator, Michigan State University
Patricia Stewart, Chairperson, Michigan Department
of Natural Resources
Rob Anderson, Michigan Farm Bureau
Maury DeYoung, Sportspersons Ministries
International
Jason Dinsmore, Michigan United Conservation
Clubs
Jerry Hall, Natural Resources Commission
Ed Ingvarsten, Hunter and Outdoor Enthusiast

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Alan Marble, DNR
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Dan Potter, National Wild Turkey Federation
Rodney Stokes, DNR
John Wencley, Troy Public Schools
Gary Williams, MSU Extension
Steve Wyckoff, Ducks Unlimited

The Process

The group as a whole met five times. At the second meeting, it was the consensus to break into four sub-groups:

1. Access/Supply of Hunting Opportunity
2. Companion/Mentor Networks
3. Education/Public Relations/Outreach
4. Regulations and Enforcement

Each sub-group met several times in addition to the meetings of the whole, and was asked to define and identify barriers. The groups discussed obstacles such as a disconnect with and lack of appreciation for the natural world in today's youth (Louv 2004), urban sprawl and the loss of access to quality hunting habitat, lack of social support for young hunters, hunting age restrictions, list, discuss and evaluate current programmatic approaches to recruiting and retaining hunters, suggest 3-5 new, "doable" programmatic approaches, set measurable goals/objectives, and describe how to evaluate performance to meet measurable goals/objectives over a defined time period.

The groups were asked to identify barriers to hunting and prioritize their recommendations based on the following criteria:

- Overall feasibility
- Cost
- Impact
- Governance (Natural Resources Commission or Director's order, legislation, etc.)
- Evaluative capability
- Creation of social support system
- Accountability
- Mission fulfillment

The Sub-Group Recommendations

The three top priorities of each sub-group provide important guidance to developing final recommendations. These may involve integrating two or more recommendations into a more comprehensive approach to recruitment or retention. To implement such sweeping recommendations may involve legislation, incentives related to existing grant programs and forming of new coalitions among stakeholders. Following are the top three recommendations from each of the four sub-groups:

We hunt because we love it...Among nature pursuits, hunting and fishing connect us most profoundly with animals and nature...When we hunt we experience extreme alertness to the point of an altered state of consciousness.
-Dr. Randall Eaton

Access/Supply of Hunting Opportunity

1. Reinvigorate the public access program through increasing landowner payments, providing options meeting landowner needs for land management and security (e.g., small game hunting only, time of entry limits, etc.), multi-year leases and quality maps (similar to those used in KS and ND). The program would be funded by those who hunt in southern Michigan through a visible access stamp on their license.
2. Create a new "habitat stamp" similar to those in use in the plains states that provides funds to enhance wildlife habitat on private lands of willing owners, links to agricultural conservation programs and provides additional incentives to those enrolled in the Public Access program.
3. Better publicize the availability of public lands for hunting in southern Michigan and explore opportunities to open additional publicly owned lands to hunting such as MDOT properties.

Companion/Mentor Networks

1. Create and use opportunities to infuse shooting sports, hunting and related outdoor recreation into existing successful mentor programs, such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters or the emerging 4-H program.
2. Produce a Web site that can serve event sponsors and mentors as well as apprentices seeking information and opportunities for participation.
3. Collect information over time to track trends in hunting recruitment and retention. One approach would be to follow a panel of hunter safety students over time with a Web-based survey diary type of instrument on a secure system.

Education/PR/Outreach

1. Work with Michigan Recreation and Parks Association and local community members to incorporate hunting, fishing and camping programs into park and recreation programs.
2. Partner with the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board to give extra points to applicants who foster natural resource based recreation (e.g. hunting, fishing, camping, etc. integral to the DNR's core mission.
3. Work with the state Department of Education and other partners to develop K-12 environmental and outdoor education curricula that clearly identifies the role of hunting and hunters in conservation and environmental stewardship.

Regulations and Enforcement

1. Lower the minimum age from 12 to 10 for hunter safety certification and for all small game, waterfowl, and turkey hunting; and lower the minimum age from 14 to 12 for all big game hunting. It is imperative that language be included that states the youth must be under parental/legal guardian, "within arm's reach," or words to that effect.
2. Increase and expand access for hunters with disabilities.
3. Standardize and simplify the DNR hunting/fishing/trapping digests.

The Final Recommendations

Each individual group member was asked to select at least five top priorities from the 12 recommendations. Three final recommendations rose to the top:

1. Provide additional public hunting in southern Michigan.

Rationale: Southern Michigan has over 8 million people, and only 2% of public land (south of Bay City to Muskegon) is open to hunting (mostly state game and wildlife areas and portions of state park and recreation areas). In the 1970s, the Public Access Stamp program provided an 180,000 additional acres for public hunting (almost equal to the public land hunting opportunities). In 2004, this was down to less than 20,000 acres. Additional land for public hunting will enhance hunting recruitment and retention by facilitating the integration of hunting recreation in local and regional activities for southern Michigan residents and assisting the DNR in managing wildlife populations.

Approaches:

- Reinvigorate the hunter access program
 - Recognize voluntary landowner participation is the key
 - Learn from ongoing landowner study
 - Seek multi-year agreements
 - Higher annual payments for longer term agreements
 - Inform landowners of their statutory protection from liability through state recreational user statute (work through Farm Bureau and county conservation districts)
 - Meet owner needs for land management and security
 - May involve limiting species hunted, seasons, sporting arms
 - DNR meet regularly with access program participating landowners
 - DNR conduct survey of landowners every five years.

- Provide high quality maps similar to programs in ND, KS, etc.
- Explore ALL publicly owned lands for hunting potential
- Explore corporately owned lands for public hunting potential
- Showcase publicly owned hunting lands (especially in southern Michigan) in booklet format
- Fund through a mandatory hunter access fee for all hunting in southern Michigan
- Use current Public Access Program assessment data when available
- Explore increased lease payments
 - Highest rate for best habitat
 - Explore links with habitat restoration/enhancement partners/programs
- Explore a property tax incentive based system with farmers patterned after the successful Commercial Forest Act with forest landowners that provides more than two million acres of public hunting land in the Upper Peninsula and northern Lower

2. Provide opportunity for a wider spectrum of society to participate in hunting.

Rationale: Youth face an increasingly complex array of positive and negative leisure time choices. By the time they reach 12, many are so busy in non-hunting pursuits, often not involving parents, that they never start hunting and lack opportunities to maintain strong family bonds. Providing the opportunity to be certified through hunter safety training and hunt at age 10 will facilitate parental/guardian involvement in their children's leisure time through mandatory parental/guardian supervision in all youth hunting experiences, enhance safety by providing training to those at a receptive age, and strengthen respect for the environment among youth. The experience of other states with hunter safety training requirements that allow hunting at younger ages is positive

for safety, hunter recruitment and parental involvement. Also, providing a more welcoming set of opportunities is vital for adults with little or no previous hunting experience, individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, and women/girls.

Approaches:

- Reduce the age for hunter safety certification from 12 to 10
- Recruit and train additional hunter safety training instructors, especially females and persons of color
- Stress the inclusiveness of hunting as a form of recreation
- Enhance educational emphasis on the importance of conservation and the role of hunting in conservation
- Enhance educational emphasis on ethical hunting behavior
- Provide adult-oriented hunter safety courses
- Reduce the age for small game hunting from 12 to 10. All hunters in the field under age 17 must be directly supervised by a parent, guardian or responsible adult. Reduce the age for firearm big game hunting from 14 to 12. Youth ages 12-13 must be within arm's reach. Parents will be held responsible for ensuring proper supervision.
- Include entire family, not just targeted youth, in hunter recruitment/retention programs
- Cooperate with other states' hunter education programs through the International Hunter Education Association
- Develop parental guides/booklets and instructional sessions for parents/guardians of hunter education students

It is a vacation from the human condition...that submerges man deliberately into something of a religious rite and emotion in which homage is paid to what is divine, transcendent, in the laws of nature.

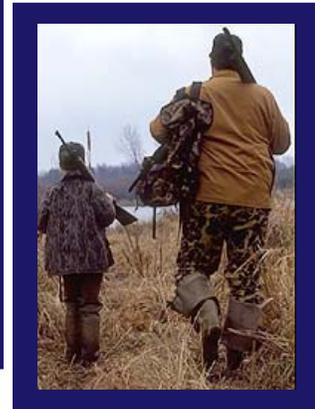
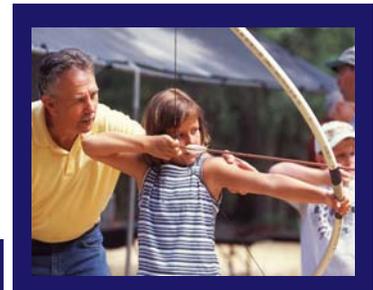
-Jose Ortega Y Gasset

3. Create and expand opportunities to infuse hunting and related outdoor recreation into existing and emerging mentoring programs.

Rationale: Many youth lack parents, parents with outdoor experience or the wherewithal to provide equipment or travel to enjoy outdoor pursuits such as hunting. Many youth-serving organizations provide critical mentoring to opportunities with caring adults such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and 4-H. In addition, many local park and recreation agencies have skilled youth mentors on their staff, a recreational land base and facilities which will support recreational hunting and a need to manage wildlife populations.

Approaches:

- Facilitate hunting opportunities through willing Big Brothers Big Sisters chapters
 - Provide hunter safety instruction for youth and mentors if necessary
 - Link participants with partners who provide access to hunting land, equipment
 - Facilitate hunting opportunities through willing county 4-H organizations
 - Link to existing and growing 4-H shooting program
 - Provide hunter safety instruction for youth and mentors if necessary
 - Link participants with partners who provide access to hunting land, equipment
- Better coordinate and publicize youth-related hunting events through conservation organizations, local rod and gun clubs, etc.
 - Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Michigan Duck Hunters Association, Whitetails Unlimited, National Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Ruffed Grouse Society, etc
 - Establish a Web site to clearly publicize and help coordinate mentoring opportunities for hunting to reach youth, parents, guardians, etc.



Hunting continues to renew us, give us humbling mortality insights, and provide hope for our next role escape. There are so very few things in our lives that yield these most precious of gifts: renewal, humility, insight, and hope. We must treat hunting with the same reverence we hold for our religions, our children, and the world's greatest works of art.

-Dr. Lee Foote, University of Alberta

The Action Plan

The following action plan is proposed:

Recommendation	When to Begin	Primary Partners	Measurable Goal	When to Complete Evaluation
1. Provide additional public hunting in southern Michigan.	Spring 2006	DNR, Pheasants Forever, Michigan Farm Bureau	Increase public hunting by 5 percent	Fall 2007
			Produce high quality maps showing public lands open to hunting	Summer 2007
2. Provide opportunity for a wider spectrum of society to participate in hunting.	Spring 2006	MUCC and other conservation groups	Support legislation giving parents/guardians control in all youth hunting experiences and reduce age requirements for hunting and hunter safety	Fall 2006
			Empower Natural Resources Commission with authority to set hunting age	Fall 2006
3. Create and expand opportunities to infuse hunting and related outdoor recreation into existing and emerging mentoring programs.	Immediately	DNR, Big Brothers Big Sisters, 4-H, Boy and Girl Scouts	Hunter safety program implemented in BBBS and 4-H	
			DNR Web site launched for mentoring hunting opportunities--pitch to media	Summer 2006
			Seek grants supporting education, outreach and recruitment	Spring 2006

External Reviewers

Chuck Connell, Children's Charters

Dave Dalton, Camp Wilderness

Dale Elshoff, MSU 4-H

Mark Hirvonen, Orion Hunters Institute

Bill Kendy, Commemorative Bucks

Lynn Marla, Becoming an Outdoors-Woman

Gary White, Hunter Safety Instructor

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First, it's clear that wildlife and habitat conservation is important to the sportsmen and women of America. But the reverse is equally true: sportsmen and women are of vital importance to successful wildlife conservation. These folks are a powerful voice for conservation and a powerful force in our economy as well.
- Steven A. Williams, Former Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Sub-Group Members

Access/Supply of Hunting Opportunities

Mike Parker
Rob Anderson
Ed Ingvarsen
Jerry Hall
Steve Wyckoff

Companion/Mentor Networks

Tom Oliver
Ben Peyton
Maury DeYoung
John Wencley

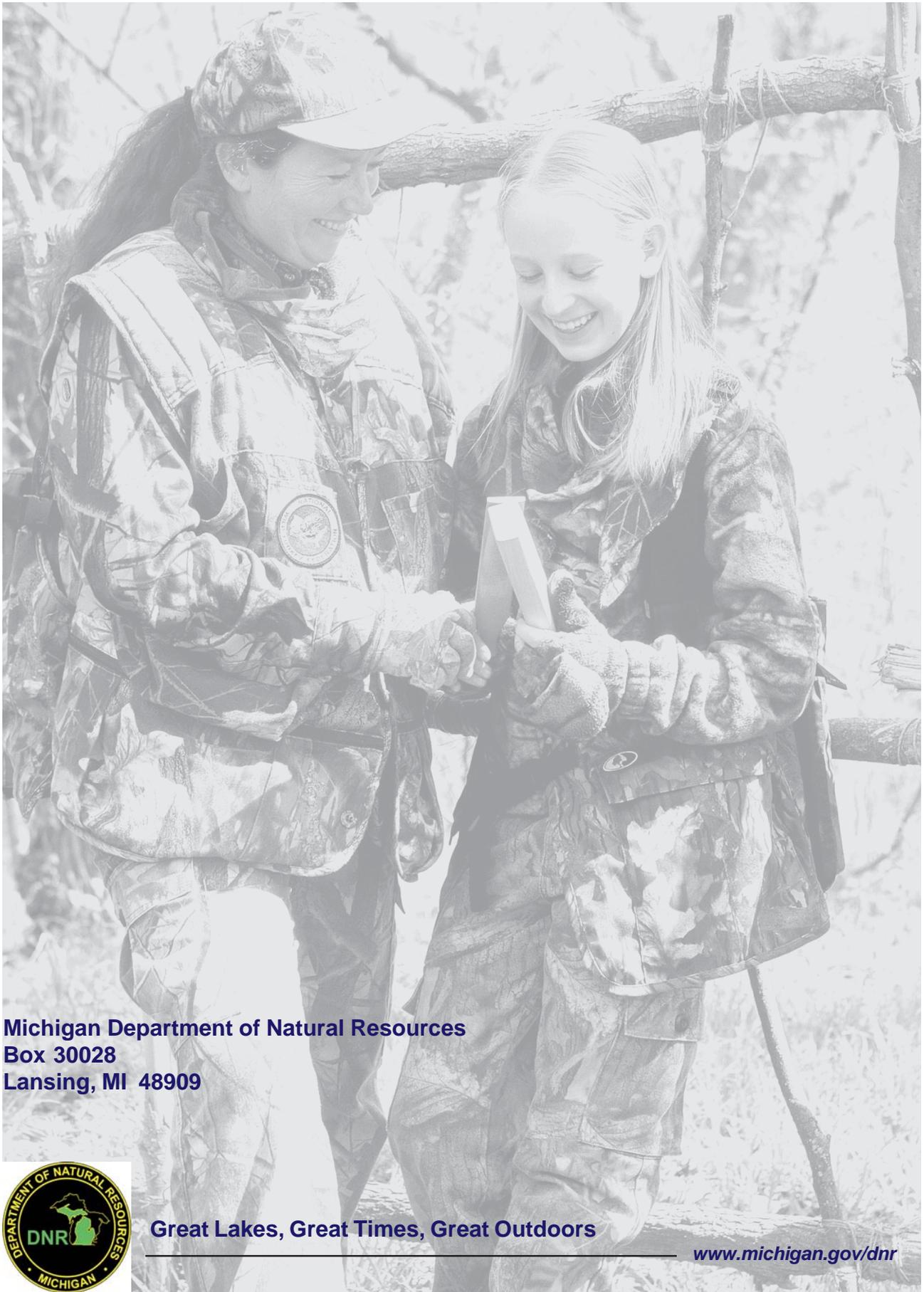
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Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Box 30028
Lansing, MI 48909



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