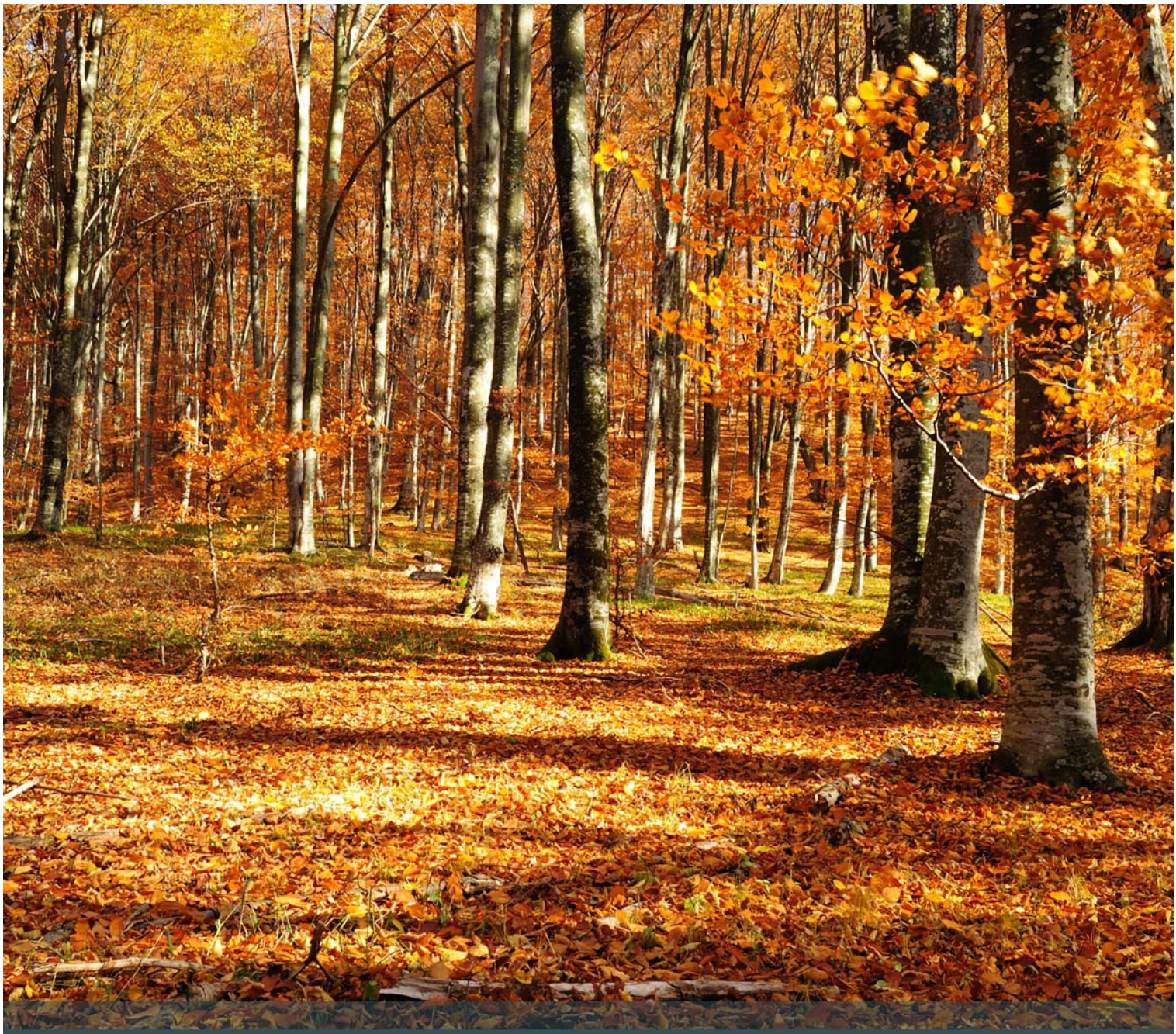

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

# Public Land Management Strategy

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In his Energy and Environment and State of the State messages, Governor Rick Snyder called upon the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to create a "strategy that protects the character and productive capacity of Michigan's wide array of natural resources assets for future generations."

In addressing this call, the 2013 Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Public Land Management Strategy (Strategy) provides a framework for the continued conservation, use and management of public lands. The Strategy provides goals, desired outcomes, metrics, and measurable objectives to protect Michigan's natural and cultural resources, provide outdoor recreation opportunities and foster the growth of resource-based industries. The Strategy and appendices (in greater detail) provide a comprehensive overview of DNR-managed public lands and their contribution to the state, answering the questions:

- Where are DNR-managed public lands located?
- Why does the DNR manage public lands?
- What values are tied to DNR-managed public lands?
- How are DNR-managed public lands managed now and how will they be managed in the future?

**Where DNR-managed public lands are located**

The DNR manages 4.6 million acres of public lands and 6.4 million acres of mineral rights. Of those, 2.4 million acres were acquired by tax reversion and are located primarily in the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula; 1.2 million acres were purchased (three-quarter of these acres were acquired utilizing game funds) and the remainder were acquired through gifts, court settlement, or from the federal government. Of the 4.6 million acres of public lands, more than 3.8 million acres are designated as state forests, 352,000 acres are designated as state parks or recreations areas, and 360,000 acres are in designated state game areas. State parks, state forests and state game areas all contain tax-reverted and purchased lands. These lands were acquired through deliberative processes that reflect state policy and public sentiment at the time. Twice in Michigan's history citizen committees reviewed the state's portfolio of tax-reverted lands to determine which should stay in state ownership and which should either be given to local units of government or sold.

**Why DNR manages public lands**

The DNR manages public lands to provide for quality outdoor recreation opportunities, protect ecological functions and natural and cultural resources and to foster land-based industries and local economies. State parks, wildlife areas and forests are managed for all of these purposes utilizing an ecosystem approach that is sustainable, diverse and adaptive. State forests, for example, are managed for reforestation, timber harvest, timber health, recreation, scenic beauty, water quality protection, mineral and oil and gas production, protection of unique places and natural processes. State parks provide recreation opportunities, protect and promote significant natural and cultural resources, and are also managed to support wildlife. In most cases, these activities complement

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each other. For example, timber harvest supports healthy populations of many wildlife species, and many people enjoy exploring trails because of our Pure Michigan natural resources. Likewise, state game areas provide not only excellent habitat and hunting, they are also used for wildlife-based recreation.

**What are the values associated with public lands**

DNR-managed public lands support a timber industry that generates $14 billion for Michigan's economy, are the backbone for Michigan's $17 billion tourism industry (six of the Michigan's top 10 tourist destination are managed by the DNR), are leased for oil and gas and mineral production and gas storage, and support hunting and fishing opportunities. Hunting and fishing, respectively, generate $1.3 billion and $2 billion for Michigan's economy, with much of that being driven by easy access to public lands.

DNR-managed lands also provide natural goods and services such as air pollution removal, water quality protection, wildlife habitat and storm-water management. A recent economic analysis produced for the state of New York found that every dollar invested in acquiring public lands provided a seven-dollar return in natural goods and services. DNR-managed public lands stabilize local property values and promote Michigan's quality of life. During the public outreach conducted during the development of this strategy, elected local officials, business leaders and the public all acknowledged the importance of public lands to their communities.

**How are DNR lands being managed**

The DNR manages state-owned lands to protect and enhance the public trust while providing for the use and enjoyment of those lands as outlined by the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. State parks, wildlife areas and state forests all have tactical management plans that are regularly updated. Currently, regional state forest management plans are being reviewed by the public. Other plans, such as the State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel report or the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, inform land management decisions.

**How will lands be managed in the future**

The strategy provides a framework for future management of DNR-managed lands centered on three goals: protecting natural resources, supporting land-based industries and local economies and providing quality public outdoor recreation. It identifies outcomes and measurable objectives for each goal.

Land Disposal

The strategy also identifies a new approach for ownership of DNR-managed lands which builds upon past initiatives to consolidate DNR-managed lands. The goal of the new approach for disposal and strategic acquisitions is to focus on achieving a portfolio of ownership that provides for quality recreation experiences, protection of Michigan's unique cultural and natural assets and fosters lands based industries and regional economic development goals.

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The DNR will identify lands for potential disposal from its entire portfolio under five considerations:

1. Parcels that are either

   a.) 200 aces or less and don't adjoin other DNR-managed public lands; or

   b.) Difficult to administer due to the irregular shape of their boundary.
   These lands have been identified and total approximately 240,000 acres.
2. Lands lacking public access.
3. Lands nominated by field managers because of concerns with management effectiveness and efficiencies.
4. Lands that were identified in previous consolidation efforts and unsuccessfully offered to conservation partners.
5. Large blocks of land would be made available for exchange with similar blocks of land for purposes of consolidating ownerships.

Conveyance of surplus parcels will be conducted in a manner that 1) provides for their continued protection of important natural or cultural resource or recreation values where warranted; 2) provides a means to purchase or exchange for replacement lands that enhance recreational opportunities, protect significant natural or cultural resources or improve the bottom-line for land-based industries; or 3) supports local economic activities or puts lands back on the tax rolls. These 240,000 acres will be reviewed by the DNR, local units of government and the public on a county-by-county basis utilizing criteria that recognize the metrics identified in this plan. Based upon the criteria, parcels will be placed into one of four categories: dispose, offer to a local units of government or alternative conservation owner, make available for exchange, or retain in state ownership.

Acquisition

Strategic acquisition of land in priority areas is a critical component of this new approach. The acquisition process needs to be flexible and efficient in order to ensure quality, strategy acquisitions. Acquisition will achieve the DNR's mission and desired outcomes by meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- Address the goals, outcomes and measurable objectives identified in the Strategy,
- Contribute to existing initiatives or plans such as trail corridor acquisition,
- Address user conflict.

Boundary Review

Better boundary alignment of state-managed lands to more closely reflect actual land ownership is a linchpin of the DNR's approach to smarter land management. Currently, there are approximately 1.9 million acres of privately owned lands scattered within DNR-managed boundaries. Under the existing management scenario, those private lands would seem a priority for acquisition. In reality, it is unlikely that most of these lands will end up in state ownership. Moving forward, the DNR will instead focus on the goal of reducing (by 1 million acres) the amount of those private land holdings. We will do this by shrinking (where appropriate) the boundaries of state recreation areas, state game areas and state forests – making it easier and more efficient to manage these areas.



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The remaining privately owned lands within the boundaries will be acquired only if they further the measurable objectives in the plan.

**Additional Key Actions**

Over the next six years, the DNR will focus regionally and act collaboratively, move aggressively to link facilities, become more data-driven, conduct integrated planning with regions, focus on quality of facilities and increase marketing. The DNR will continue to utilize technology to drive land management decisions and will seek continuous quality improvement in our technology systems to allow for the department, its partners and the public understand and participate in public land management decisions.

By refocusing ownership, measuring progress toward meeting desired outcomes and implementing measurable objectives, we will drive significant change in the oversight of DNR-managed lands and our own engagement model. This new way of management depends on collaboration and partnerships with local units of governments, regional planning organizations and other critical partners. This approach reflects today's strategic goals for public land management with any eye toward the immediate future, as well as the need to adapt to emerging trends and issues with public lands.

**Timetable for Implementation**

One to six months:

- Gain legislative approval of the Public Land Management Strategy to allow the land acquisition cap to be lifted.
- Meet with each of the ten MEDC Community Leadership Councils to present the assets and attributes of DNR-managed public lands and to facilitate continuing discussions and action on utilizing these lands for regional prosperity initiatives.
- Identify the gaps in the Belle Isle to Wisconsin trail and begin acquisition and development where needed.
- Review and tighten DNR management unit boundaries.
- Complete the DNR facilities inventory.
- Complete the DNR Comprehensive Trail Plan.
- Meet with the ten counties with the least percentage of DNR-managed lands to identify how to fulfill the measurable objectives identified in the Strategy as they related to these counties.
- Realign the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund criteria to reflect the goals and measurable objectives of the Strategy.
- Begin integration and implementation of the Blue Ribbon Committee on State Parks and Outdoor Recreation report, SCORP and Comprehensive Trails Plan.

Six month to one year:

- Begin disposal through sale, transfer or exchange, the lands from the original 240,000 acres identified as surplus. Ensure that disposal doesn't depress local land prices.
- Implement the new Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund criteria.

Year Two:

- Dispose of additional surplus lands through sale, transfer or exchange
- Target investment of Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund based upon the Strategy and results of collaborations with counties and MEDC Community Leadership Councils.
- Analyze the results of the DNR facilities inventory for most efficient use of existing and potential locations for customer service and staff support.

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# INTRODUCTION

Since before statehood, land in Michigan has been highly desired for its natural resource values – first for food and furs and then timber and minerals. Today, Michigan's public lands are prized for those same things, being managed for wildlife habitat, timber, oil and gas production, recreational opportunities and mineral development. Michigan's public lands contribute greatly to the state's economy, supporting tens of thousands of jobs, pouring tens of billions of dollars into local businesses and contributing to the high quality of life critical to the state's future economic prosperity. DNR-managed public lands also play a critical role in providing ecosystem goods and services such as air pollution removal, water quality protection, and storm water management. A 2012 Trust for Public Lands economic impact study of public lands in New York State found that every $1 invested in securing public ownership of lands provided $7 in economic value in natural goods and services. A similar return should be expected from DNR-managed public lands.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and the Public Trust Doctrine, the foundations that drive the acquisition and management of public lands, both rest on the principle that wildlife and, more broadly, natural resources belong to everyone. Managing wildlife and other natural resources for the common good would not be possible without public lands. In Michigan, the recognition that our quality of life is linked to the quality of our resources led to some of the earliest laws protecting our land and waters. It also led to constitutional requirements requiring the same attention by the Michigan Legislature.

> *"The abundance of public land in Michigan has a huge impact on our business. I've been in a lot of other states, and Michigan is blessed with public lands, especially for those that don't have access to private land. We notice an increase in traffic traveling north for firearm deer season opening day. The result is an increase of traffic going through our stores in Clare and Gaylord. And it's not just hunting and fishing – public lands also contribute to the sales of equipment for camping and canoeing."*
> – ***Jeff Poet, President, Jay's Sporting Goods***

While long, the road to modern public land management has always reflected the philosophy and policies of the times, as outlined in the History section of this document. Through time, lands were purchased and sold, boundaries were re-aligned and consolidated and public land management evolved with scientific advances and changes in the public's recreational pursuits.

The use of the state's land has changed over time, but certain fundamentals have not changed. Wildlife and fish require adequate habitat. Lakes and streams need undeveloped land for recharge areas and to filter pollutants. Forests and other plants need to exist at a level of abundance to pollinate, survive and thrive. While the DNR has the responsibility to respond to public demands for recreation and resources, it also has a duty to manage resources in a manner that reflects the realities of nature and the intricacies of the inner workings of living systems.

This Strategy reflects today's strategic goals for public land management with an eye toward the immediate future. It also remains flexible to adapt to emerging trends and

issues with public lands. Adaptability is vital because, as history shows, use patterns vary and land management will continue to change along with it.

## Reason for the Strategy

In his November 2012 “Ensuring Our Future - Energy and Environment Message,” Governor Rick Snyder called for a “public land management strategy that protects the character and productive capacity of Michigan’s wide array of natural resource assets for future generations.” He directed the state to become more strategic about the “what” and “why” of ownership of public land. He stated that public lands should protect the unique places that provide habitat or other natural resources. The Governor said the strategy needs to ensure that high-value recreation experiences are available and attractive, and that all of the lands owned and managed by the state further these goals. He tasked the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to complete the strategy by May 2013.

Protecting natural resources, providing outdoor recreational opportunities and fostering land-based natural resource industries are the core responsibilities of the DNR and are the three goals that drive this Strategy. These are responsibilities the DNR cannot or should not accomplish alone. Strong partnerships and collaborations are imperative to fulfill these responsibilities and sustain both the social and economic opportunities that DNR-managed public land provides. Other governmental agencies, land conservancies and the private sector own significant amounts of land and also assist in protecting natural resources, providing outdoor recreation and fostering land-based natural resource economies. Michigan’s integrated network of outdoor recreation opportunities is provided by the state and federal government, local and regional governments, non-profits and the private sector. Protection of Michigan’s natural and cultural resources and natural functions occurs on private as well as public lands. This Strategy calls for increased integrated planning among all land managers to clarify roles and responsibilities, grow opportunities, maintain standards for quality across all public facilities and improve marketing of opportunities.

Also in his Energy and Environment message, Governor Snyder encouraged the continued use of an ecosystem management approach to balance the demands for outdoor recreation, resource protection and economic opportunity. This Strategy employs that ecosystem approach, providing a method of decision making aimed at protecting and enhancing the sustainability, diversity and productivity of Michigan’s natural resources. The ecosystem approach allows the Strategy to adapt and respond to changing demands, information or outcomes following its implementation.

Nearly every acre of DNR-managed land is actively managed for multiple uses and values with consideration for timber production, oil, gas and mineral development, fish and wildlife and their habitats, resource protection, recreation, ecosystem functions, cultural significance, and public access. Appendix 2 has as an example, a tactical management plan of one state forest compartment that shows all of the activities managed in one area. These multiple uses are often at odds and the DNR utilizes an ecosystem approach to balance the social, ecological and economic demands in resolving conflicts. The multiple demands for the use of public land will continue to evolve and provide challenges as pressures from current users increase and new opportunities, such as biomass fuels, emerge.

This Strategy should be viewed as a six-year framework for managing DNR public lands and not a tactical management document. This framework will ensure that Michigan will remain “Pure Michigan” and will be a place future generations will continue to live, work and play. The desired outcomes, objectives and metrics in this Strategy define how the DNR will manage public lands for the benefit of all Michiganders and for a variety of uses with minimal conflict. It sets priorities for the DNR, its stakeholders and partners who share in protecting public lands and the natural resources they hold. A foundation is laid for a new way to manage, acquire and dispose of DNR-managed public lands that builds upon past success, yet remains adaptable to the changing needs and uses of DNR-managed public lands. It establishes a new role in the management of public land--- to help regional economies grow and thrive. The Strategy is divided into three equal parts: 1) public land management Strategy; 2) a framework on how the DNR will manage public lands differently in the future, including a new approach for the disposal and acquisition of state land and 3) a timetable for implementing the Strategy. The appendices provide detailed background information about DNR-managed public lands which is important for informing the Strategy.

The Strategy was developed and informed with the input of local units of government, economic developers, regional community leaders, stakeholders and interested citizens. An advisory committee helped develop the desired outcomes for each goal. Meetings between DNR leadership and county leadership were held in the ten counties with the most DNR-managed lands. Facilitated discussions with MEDC Community Leadership Councils were organized in six locations throughout the state to discuss how DNR-managed lands could help facilitate local economic prosperity initiatives. Nine public open houses were held throughout the state to receive public feedback on the draft plan. The public also had approximately one month to provide comments on the plan via the DNR’s website. Over 550 citizens took that opportunity. The DNR also organized a meeting for 500 critical stakeholders and stakeholder organizations including all of the members of the various DNR advisory committees to receive their comments and concerns on the Strategy. Throughout the development process, the DNR kept the Natural Resources Commission and the Quality of Life team informed about the Strategy and provided opportunities to comment.

## History

From the beginning of statehood, the state of Michigan has been in the real estate business and the owner of substantial acres of land. State policy shaped by public opinion determined how Michigan’s public lands were viewed and how much land was retained in state ownership. The current DNR-managed public land holdings -- state parks and recreation areas, boating access sites, historic sites, game and wildlife areas and state forests -- were acquired through a deliberative process that reflected state policy and public opinion at the time. Early state policy supported the sale of public land for settlement and development, changed to support the sale of land for extraction, and then evolved to a policy of owning and managing public lands for public benefits.

When Michigan was admitted to the Union in 1837, the public land management role of the state was to sell land for settlement and to support the development of government functions. Many of these lands that were sold went through several cycles of tax reversion as the land was cleared of timber resources and subsequent attempts at agriculture failed.

From the 1890s through the 1930s, the state underwent a series of economic downturns that caused lands to revert to the state for non-payment of taxes -- over 116 million acres (the land reverted multiple times) in a 22-year period. The Legislature created the State Forestry Commission in 1899 and began to set aside forest reserves as one of the efforts to stop this cycle of tax delinquencies. Further expansion of the state forests occurred with the creation of the Public Domain Commission in 1909. That same year, legislative action required the state to reserve the mineral rights on all lands sold or homesteaded and in 1911 the Legislature provided the state with the authority to exchange lands to consolidate ownership.

The exploitation of land and resources triggered the rise of the conservation movement and state policy changed to a focus on wise allocation of land, rather than sale for short-term gain. Various commissions, including the Public Lands and Fisheries (1873), Forestry (1899) and Parks (1919), were created to manage resources and to stop tax reversions. The commissions were eliminated and their functions merged into the new Department of Conservation in 1921. One of the first rulings of the new Conservation Commission was that no state lands bordering upon the Great Lakes or any inland lake were to be sold, but were to be held for the “enjoyment of the people.”

Throughout its tenure, the Department of Conservation set forth a strategy to co-manage public lands whereby the Game and Forestry Divisions could not conduct land management practices without concurrence from the other division. This approach was similar to the current concept of joint management. This approach continues to be the cornerstone of DNR public land management.

In 1922, under the guidance of the USDA, the Michigan Land Economic Survey was created to review the lands in northern Michigan and determine their value for agriculture or whether they were more suitable for recreation, other public uses or should be sold. The USDA Land Use Planning Program also had a land planning effort which lasted until the 1950s. These planning initiatives were intended to stop the tax delinquency cycle.

By 1938, land use planning committees were organized for each county in the state. They were comprised of some 1,700 local, county, township and school officials who reviewed all state land holdings, including tax-reverted lands, and made recommendations for their future. Recommendations included retaining the land in public ownership (state or local) or selling to private land owners.

As a result of this review, by 1950, over 1.3 million acres were sold and 130,000 acres were turned over to local governments. The remaining acres were added to the state forest, wildlife areas or state park systems.

Through sustained investment and management, lands stripped of their timber grew into a robust state forest system that supports the state’s timber industry, provides numerous outdoor recreation opportunities, nurtures natural resources and has restored natural processes.

There were two more recent extensive reviews of Michigan’s public land policy, in 1984 and again in 1996. The Report of the Task Force on Public Lands Policy was presented to Governor James Blanchard in 1984 and provided a series of 24 recommendations regarding the state’s public land. The primary points of this report were that the state

needed to consolidate its ownership of land and that it “did not find a need for major changes to land management practices and philosophies.” In 1996, the Senate Select Committee on Public Land Ownership, Purchase and Management also conducted an extensive study of the DNR’s land acquisition policy as well as other state land-holding agencies. The select committee proposed seven “principle changes” in the state’s land acquisition policy including 1) greater flexibility in state programs to allow for shifts in land policy, 2) adopt new attitudes and incentives to work with the private sector and 3) that the legislature should reaffirm its role as the chief conservator of the state’s natural assets.

In 2003, the department initiated a thorough review of DNR land ownership in response to Natural Resources Commission Policy 2627 of 2003. This project, known as the DNR Land Ownership Strategy, implemented a four-phase approach to review the DNR land ownership pattern, evaluate DNR-managed public lands from a natural resources perspective, and dispose of those parcels that did not contribute to the overall mission of the DNR. The purpose of the land ownership review was to continue the ongoing effort to consolidate state land ownership for a variety of economic, outdoor recreation and other natural resource benefits. In addition, it sought land management efficiencies by reducing trespass issues, addressing shooting zone encroachments and the need to monitor and survey public/private boundary lines.

Today, the DNR manages state-owned lands in a manner that protects and enhances the public trust while providing for the use and enjoyment of those lands as required in the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. As such, state parks, wildlife areas and state forests are managed for multiple use and multiple objectives utilizing an ecosystem management approach. The core of this approach is to use principles of ecosystem management, application of technologies such as geographic information systems (GIS) and implementation of adaptive management techniques to sustain the diversity and productivity of Michigan's natural resources. Management of state parks and recreation areas, state game and wildlife areas, state forests and state fisheries are guided by management plans.

**State Parks and Recreation Areas:** A General Management Plan which considers a park’s importance in terms of natural, cultural and historic resources, and recreational and educational opportunities. Management Zones are identified in each plan which reflects the resource protection goals and recreation development opportunities for different areas within each park. For each management zone identified, individual long-range (10-year) action goals are developed.

**State Game and Wildlife Areas:** The purpose of wildlife project areas is to provide habitat for wildlife populations and public lands for hunting and trapping. Master plans describe the desired future conditions of wildlife areas (for example, in the thumb area of Michigan the desired condition in state game areas is grasslands for pheasants) and set goals to improve wildlife habitat and the infrastructure for wildlife-related recreational activities.

**Fisheries:** Statewide angler opportunity and habitat protection goals are provided in Fisheries Division’s Strategic Plan “Charting the Course.” More specific goals are established for the Great Lakes and inland waters. Fish community and habitat objectives are established for lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, and Erie through collaborative efforts under the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Goals for inland lakes

are established through Fisheries Division's "Conservation Guidelines for Michigan Lakes and Associated Natural Resources". Status of the Fisheries Reports establishes management actions for both inland lakes and small streams, and River Assessment Reports provide management direction for major watersheds throughout the state.

**State Forests:** The DNR uses a hierarchical, geographic planning framework to coordinate planning activities and guide operational decisions for state forest management. That framework includes a strategic state-level plan (2008 Michigan State Forest Management Plan, or SFMP), three (soon to be approved) operational Regional State Forest Management Plans (RSFMP), and tactical forest management unit-level planning (the aggregate of all forest prescriptions from compartment reviews, which constitute the annual work plan and represent the tactical level of planning for state forest operations).

The DNR manages protected and unique areas in state parks, wildlife areas and state forests utilizing a variety of tools. State parks have "Environmentally Sensitive Zones" where use is highly restricted and management is wholly focused on attaining and maintaining a pristine natural resource environment. There are 48 designated Natural Areas, most of which occur on DNR-managed lands, such as the dunes at Ludington State Parks, Laughing Whitefish Falls or St. John's Wet Prairie. These lands were dedicated under the PA 451 of 1994, Part 351. Critical dunes as regulated under PA 451 of 1994, Part 353 are also found on state lands. Designated natural rivers flow through state lands and the DNR must manage those rivers according to law. Critical habitat areas are designated for some federal and state-endangered species such as the Kirtland's warbler and the piping plover. Ecological Reference Areas are also found on state land and serve as models for ecological reference within the state. These areas are high quality examples of functioning ecosystem that are primarily influenced by natural ecological processes. Today, 50 percent of the 4.6 million acres of DNR-managed public lands have been acquired through tax reversion, 26 percent have been purchased, 21 percent were obtained through exchanges with other landowners, are held in conservation easements or were acquired through gifts.

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## State Land Facts

Land Ownership

| | |
|---|---|
| Statewide surface total | 4,592,400 acres |
| Statewide total mineral ownership | 6,400,000 acres |

| Division | Tax Reverted Acres | Purchased Acres | Misc. Acres | Total Acres |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Forest Resources Division | 2,306,000 | 1,500,000 | 37,000 | 3,843,000 |
| Parks and Recreation Division | 56,000 | 246,000 | 50,000 | 352,000 |
| Wildlife Division | 29,000 | 317,000 | 14,000 | 360,000 |
| Fisheries Division | 2,000 | 3,300 | 400 | 5,700 |
| Boating and Water Access | 16,000 | 15,000 | 700 | 31,700 |
| **Total Acres** | **2,409,000** | **2,081,300** | **102,100** | **4,592,400** |

From 1921 to 2012 the DNR:

- Disposed of 2.5 million acres of land.
- Gave nearly 150,000 acres of land to local governments.
- Received almost 100,000 acres of land as gifts.

During the last ten years, the DNR:

- Expanded its land ownership base by 66,738 acres through purchase or exchange.
- Sold, transferred and exchanged 33,846 acres.

Timber

- By providing a steady flow of timber to the market, the state forest system is a key participant in the $14 billion forest industry, which directly employs 26,000 people in Michigan.
- In 2012, DNR timber sales resulted in 800,000 cords of wood being harvested for the market.
- The state forest system has received dual certification from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). Certification improves the global market competitiveness of Michigan's certified timber products, resulting in improved economic gain for Michigan's rural, timber dependent communities. This achievement is critical to the sustainability of state forests and integral to conserving the quality of life that makes Michigan a great place to live.
- Almost 11 percent of Michigan's forestlands are enrolled in the Commercial Forest Program, a program which provides property tax breaks to private landowners in return for them managing for timber production and providing public access for hunting, fishing and trapping.

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Minerals/Oil and Gas

- Michigan has 1.1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas storage capacity in depleted oil fields, the greatest volume of any state. Thirteen percent of the capacity is on DNR-managed public lands. Storage of natural gas reserves results in lower, more predictable and year-around natural gas supply for Michigan's citizens and industry.
- Currently, 50 percent of state-owned mineral rights in the Lower Peninsula are leased for oil and gas production.
- Oil and gas revenues to the Natural Resources Trust Fund and Game and Fish Protection Fund have totaled almost $2 billion.

Parks, Recreation, and Tourism

- In 2012, Michigan state parks hosted 1 million visitor camp nights and 22 million visitors.
- The DNR manages more than 1,300 boat launches and more than 80 harbors in support of the state's $4 billion boating industry.
- Michigan has more than 12,000 miles of trails and the nearly 2,623 miles of rail-trail are the most of any state.
- Michigan mountain biking, ORV and snowmobile trails are regularly cited as among the best in their class.

Wildlife

- The state has 9.9 million acres of land that are open to the public for hunting. DNR-managed public lands provide approximately 40 percent of this total.
- Hunters provide an estimated $1.3 billion annually to Michigan's economy.
- Michigan has seven managed waterfowl areas and 187 state game areas.
- Michigan ranks third in the nation in the number of hunters who spend 11.9 million days afield.

Fisheries

- Approximately 1.4 million Michigan residents and 347,000 nonresidents fished in Michigan in 2011, contributing an estimated $2 billion to Michigan's economy and supporting 38,000 jobs.
- An angler in Michigan is never more than seven miles from fishable waters.
- *Bassmaster Magazine* just named Lake St. Clair as the top bass fishing lake in the country and *Field and Stream Magazine* has named Michigan as the top destination for fly fishing.
- Michigan has the most diverse portfolio of freshwater fishing in the world.

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# PART ONE - STRATEGY

Part One of the Strategy defines the reason why the state owns public lands. The desired outcomes from managing those lands are for recreation, supporting land-based industries and protecting natural and cultural features, the three primary responsibilities of the DNR. It also identifies the metrics that will be used by the DNR and stakeholders to determine if desired outcomes are being met. Utilizing metrics to measure program progress is evolving in the DNR and the identified metrics should be expected to also evolve as additional data is collected. This part begins to answer the question of "how" the DNR manages land by identifying measurable objectives that are already guiding the work of the DNR. The objectives are products of planning efforts such as the State Forest Management Plan, Fisheries Division strategic plan "Charting the Course," the Wildlife Division's Guiding Principles and Strategies (GPS), Parks and Recreation Division's Strategic Plan, Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Committee's draft Comprehensive Trail Plan, ORV Strategy Plan and the Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel's work. The plan in which each measurable objective appears is identified. New measurable objectives are identified as such.

**Goal 1: Ensure Recreational Opportunities to Enjoy and Appreciate Michigan's Natural and Cultural Resources.**

Michigan citizens and visitors have the opportunity to enjoy a vast diversity of recreational activities and facilities ranging from the traditional--such as camping, hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling--to new and emerging, like white-water paddling, disc golf and trail running. Many of these opportunities are found at DNR-managed public facilities including 101 state parks and recreation areas, 3.9 million acres of state forests, 110 state game and wildlife areas, more than 1,300 public water access sites and over 12,000 miles of trails. Michigan's many outdoor recreational activities also offer opportunities to connect to cultural resources, for example along trails and at lake and river access points, creating a sense of discovery that enriches the recreational experience.

Collaborations play an important role in fulfilling recreationists' desires for multiple and varied opportunities. For example, the state's renowned trail system is provided by state, federal, regional and local units of government as well as the private and non-profit sectors. Collaborations between the private and public sectors are also important in providing other recreational opportunities. Private guides utilize state land for hunting or angling opportunities. The private sector provides the amenities that enrich a snowmobile trip or a deer camp experience.
For many small businesses throughout Michigan, proximity to DNR-managed public lands has a direct impact on their bottom line. Bob and Kurt Eppley, the owners of Alpine Cycles in Port Huron, next to the increasing popular 37-mile Bridge to Bay Trail, have noticed a steady increase in sales of road and mountain bikes, and cyclists coming in for repairs – both residents and tourists. Katherine Weaver, owner of Weavers Market on Harsens Island, definitely notices the impact of waterfowl hunters coming to the island's DNR St. Clair Flats Wildlife Area to hunt.

> "Without waterfowl hunters, business would die after September," Weaver said. "I wish there were more [hunters]! We need hunters to hold us over once the summer people leave the island. [Hunters ensure] October to December is great for business."

Because Michiganders and visitors to the state love to recreate, there is an increasing demand for more facilities, more trails, new experiences, bigger campsites and increased access for hunting and fishing. Often these needs conflict with existing uses, whether it is an existing trail, timber management, oil and gas activity or natural resource protection. The DNR and its partners must manage these conflicts.

**Desired outcomes for recreation opportunities**

- Citizens and tourists experience Michigan's incredible natural and cultural resources through diverse, adaptable and accessible outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Michigan's population has the opportunity to be physically active through outdoor recreation opportunities.
- The recreational system in the state is planned, developed and managed collaboratively among all recreational providers.

*"Our customers use state land to access local lakes and the Kalamazoo River, and we often send customers looking for good hiking experiences out to Allegan State Game Area." –* ***Skip Lee, owner of Lee's Adventure Sports in Portage***

**Metric for access to public lands**

*Increase citizen satisfaction with the amount of public recreation facilities by 5 percent.*

The Department of Natural Resources will regularly conduct a survey of Michigan citizens to measure their use and enjoyment of Michigan's outdoor recreation resources. The baseline survey was conducted in 2012 to inform the 2013-2017 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Seventy-nine percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of outdoor recreation in Michigan.

**Measurable objectives regarding access to DNR-managed public lands**

- Completion of a road plan that ensures motorized and non-motorized access to public land. (Act 240, 2012)
- Provide access for every citizen to 500 acre blocks of land within 15 miles of their residence. (SCORP, Wildlife GPS, State Forest Management Plan)
- Access to the amount of land available for dispersed public recreation in southern Michigan will be increased by 25 percent with emphasis in areas with low per capita access. (Request of Public Land Management Strategy Advisory Committee (PLMSAC)
- Ensure that opportunities on public lands meet the needs of young people and other critical workers as determined by surveys. (New objective)

**Metric for access to the water**

*Percent of inland lakes and the Great Lakes (and connecting waters) with access that meets measurable objectives.*

Access to Michigan's water has always been a state priority. This metric incorporates the land and water access measurable objectives that are reflected in the strategic plan

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of the Parks and Recreation Division and in the goals for land and river access established by the Fisheries Division.

**Measurable objectives for access to water**

- Provide public access (including boating access) on all lakes over 100 acres. (PRD Strategic Plan)
- Provide boating access on all lakes over 500 acres. (New objective)
- Provide a safe harbor of refuge system on the Great Lakes with one harbor every 30 miles. (PRD Strategic Plan)
- Provide public access every five miles on the Great Lakes. (Great Lakes Water Trail Plan)
- Provide access every mile on Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River from Lake Huron to Lake Erie. (PLMSAC request)
- Complete a gap analysis of existing access points on rivers identified as priorities by Fisheries Division and fill identified gaps in access. (New objective)
- Provide access to 25 percent of smaller lakes (less than 100 acres in size) that have significant recreational opportunity as identified by Fisheries Division. (New objective)

> *"We use state land as put-in and take-out points for our boats. We welcome (the state) and need them to run our fishing guide business." – **Jeff Gardner, owner, Old Au Sable Fly***

**Metric for trails**

*With partners, complete ten priority connections as identified by the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC).*

The Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council endorsed an action item in its Comprehensive Trail Plan to identify priority trail connections for completion in the next six years.

**Measurable objectives for trails**

- Designate public water trails that have appropriate signage, amenities and promotion on 30 percent of Michigan's navigable waters, five connected lake systems, and 75 percent of the Great Lakes and connecting channels shoreline. (Draft Comprehensive Trail Plan (DCTP)
- In conjunction with partners provide a well-maintained, interconnected system of multi-use trails that are within five miles of 90 percent of Michigan's citizens. (DCTP)
- Fill critical linkages to complete the five (Great Lakes) lake-to-lake linear trails. (DCTP)
- Fill critical linkages to complete a north-south hiking trail system from Belle Isle to Wisconsin. (Governor Snyder)
- Develop an interconnected snowmobile trail system on secure permanent easements.(DCTP)

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- Create an interconnected system of equestrian trails in southeast Michigan by connecting equestrian looped routes. (DCTP)
- Provide at least 4,000 miles of safe and connected off-road vehicle (ORV) opportunities. (ORV Strategic Plan)
- Develop bike connections to the state's extensive off-road multi-use recreation trail network to create better access for communities, neighborhoods and families. (DCTP)
- Complete the acquisition and development of the 400 undeveloped miles of the 1,150-mile North Country National Scenic Trail within the state. (DCTP)

> *"(State land) is very valuable to our business, during hunting season, most of the campers who stay at Apple Creek use state land."* – ***Mary Ann Brennan, owner of Apple Creek Campground and RV Park in Grass Lake***

**Metric for urban recreation**

*Establish five signature urban parks with partners.*

This metric is a priority action identified in The Future of Michigan's Parks and Outdoor Recreation: A Report to Governor Rick Snyder, Sept. 23, 2012 by the Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel.

**Measurable objectives for urban recreation**

- Use parks and recreation as a key tool for revitalizing Michigan's core urban areas by working with partners to establish five signature parks and integrate green infrastructure into Michigan's urban redesign and redevelopment efforts. (Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel).

**Metric for diversity of recreational offerings**

*Increase the percent of citizen's satisfied with diversity of recreation opportunities provided in the state.*

The Department of Natural Resources will regularly conduct a survey of Michigan citizens to measure their use and enjoyment of Michigan's outdoor recreation resources. The baseline survey of Michigan residents was conducted in 2012 to inform the 2013-2017 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Seventy-nine percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of outdoor recreation in Michigan.

**Goal 2: Foster the Growth and Stability of Michigan's Land-Based Natural and Cultural Resource Economies.**

DNR-managed public lands play a critical role in the state's land-based industries and the state's rural economies. State forest lands provide more than 20 percent of the timber that supports Michigan's $14 billion timber economy. It is an industry that wants to grow, said Chad Bisballe of Bisballe Forest Products in Lake City.

> "State land is important to the viability of our forest product company. More land would help in bringing more wood to market—as long as the land does not get

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> used for set aside areas or other restrictions when it does not warrant it,."-- Bisballe noted.

Governor Snyder recently noted the potential for expansion and the economic advantage that Michigan's natural gas underground storage industry provides to the state. Access to state land for natural gas exploration is a definite business advantage, according to Glen W. Merrill, Jr., senior land representative for ANR Pipeline Company in Big Rapids.

> "The value of state land leases encourages the development of critical energy infrastructure benefiting Michigan's energy users and the energy industry providing the service. Access to state land reduces the uncertainty and delay the energy projects would have if faced with having to negotiate with many individual land owners for easement rights," Merrill noted.

*"Our state forest land base is a critical aspect of the raw material supply chain here in Michigan and was part of the decision to start our O.S.B. business here over 30 years ago."* – ***Todd Johnson, Forestry Services Manager, Weyerhaeuser NR Company***

Michigan's rich and varied natural and cultural resources and recreational opportunities also support the state's $17.7 billion tourism industry. Half of the state's 6,200 miles of snowmobile trails are located on state land and provide a steady flow of winter visitors to northern Michigan communities. The two weeks of firearm deer season are financially critical in many rural areas, when hunters flood restaurants, hotels and grocery stores. Last year, Michigan state parks hosted over 22 million visitors who spent time and money in surrounding communities, and also exceeded one million camp nights. Michigan has world-class trout streams and visitors access these streams through sites developed and managed by the DNR. Communities like Vanderbilt were founded during the lumber era and now depend on the North Central State Trail and the Pigeon River Country State Forest for its economic prosperity. Emmet County is experiencing increased tourism because of their "dark sky" area designation, bringing in astronomy enthusiasts to have clear night views of stars, constellations, meteor showers, lunar eclipses and other celestial observations.

In Luce County, businesses know the value of being close to DNR-managed public lands and the recreation amenities they support, said Jomay Bomber, director of the Newberry Area Chamber of Commerce:

> "Tourism is huge for Luce County and our biggest attractions are the natural resources. The #1 draw to this area is Tahquamenon Falls State Park. These visitors drive the local restaurant and hotel businesses. Because so many people visit the park, it has a big impact on the tourism in the area. The public land also draws people to the area for hunting, fishing and trail use, which is huge. I would estimate that at least 60 percent of the businesses in the county are tied to tourism. This does not include other businesses impacted by public lands, such as the logging industry."

The economic benefits of public lands are well understood in western states. According to *West is Best: How Public Lands in the West Create a Competitive Economic Advantage* "Western non-metropolitan counties with more than 30 percent of the county's land base in federal protected status such as national parks, monuments,

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wilderness, and other similar designations increased jobs by 345 percent over the last 40 years. By comparison, similar counties with no protected federal public lands increased employment by 83 percent."  Similar to western states, Michigan has the natural resource assets to create a competitive economic advantage.

**Desired outcomes for natural resource based industries**

- Outdoor recreation opportunities that enhance local and regional economies and assist in retaining and attracting young trained/educated workers.
- Thriving and sustainable state forest products industries that support communities by providing jobs, products and diverse and resilient forests.
- Michigan is one of America's favorite four seasons travel experience (Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan),
- Strong and sustainable oil and gas industries that promote national security, maximize production opportunities and minimize adverse impacts.
- Extraction of non-renewable resources on DNR-managed public lands provides sustainable funding for investments in public land, another non-renewable resource.
- Michigan's unique geology for natural gas storage stabilizes energy costs and ensures natural gas supply.
- Strong metallic and nonmetallic mineral industries that leverage unique geological opportunities minimize adverse resource impacts and provide sustained prosperity to local economies.
- Renewable energy industry that becomes competitive by capitalizing on Michigan's unique geology.
- Vibrant fisheries and wildlife-based industries that promote Michigan's world class fisheries and wildlife opportunities and sustain local economies.

**Metric for forest products industry**

*Increase career-related* forest *products jobs by 10 percent.*

This is a goal established for the forest products industry and endorsed at the Governor's Forest Products Summit.

**Measurable objectives for forest products industry**

- The Department will meet the sustainable timber harvest goals as established in the regional forest management plans. (New objective)

**Metric for mineral management**

*Increase the number of acres leased for mineral production and underground natural gas storage by 10* percent.

While the oil and gas and mineral industries have not established measurable objectives for the growth of their industries, the DNR is interested in supporting this important natural resource industry as measured by increasing the number of acres of state land leased for mineral production, while still protecting the State's other natural resource values.

### Measurable objectives for mineral management

- Hold regular oil and gas lease auctions to make leasable DNR-managed public lands available for production. (New objective)

### Metric for tourism

*In partnership with Pure Michigan, increase the number of tourists to Michigan by 10 percent.*

A recent article in *Bridge Magazine* indicated that six of the top ten tourist attractions in Michigan are managed by the DNR (Holland, Grand Haven, Warren Dunes, and Muskegon State Parks, Island Lake Recreation Area and Mackinac Island) Public lands are also vital for trails of all kinds, from snowmobile to mountain bike. The DNR is an active partner with Pure Michigan. All of these factors reflect the important role that DNR-managed public lands play in Michigan's tourism industry and contribute to a growing tourism sector.

### Measurable objectives for tourism

- Three percent increase in tourism at historic parks. (Michigan Historical Center)
- Increase non-resident state park passes from 250,000 to 275,000. (DNR Scorecard)
- Increase overnight stays at marinas by 3 percent. (New objective)
- Increase the annual number of anglers that purchase a fishing license for the first time from 245,790 to 260,000. (DNR Scorecard)
- Increase the number of new hunters who purchase a hunting license from 99,361 to 110,000 each year. (DNR Scorecard)
- Increase participation in non-consumptive wildlife-based outdoor recreation by 10 percent. (WLD GPS)
- Implement a marketing strategy that highlights Michigan's unique natural and cultural assets in partnership with Pure Michigan. (New objective)

### Measurable objective for wildlife and fisheries-based industries

- Maintain the number of licensed charter boats above 500 statewide. (New objective)

## Goal 3: Protect Natural Functions and Natural and Cultural Resources.

DNR-managed public lands hold significant natural and cultural resources that, considered as a whole, make Michigan a special place. Nestled in the Great Lakes, carpeted with a variety of ecosystems, Michigan is home to an enormous variety of wildlife and fish species, diverse forest systems and numerous outdoor recreation opportunities that provides a means for people to connect with the natural world. Receding glaciers left Michigan with unique geological features, including a legacy of world class trout streams supported by ever-flowing cold groundwater and thousands of lakes. Some of these, like the state's big inland lakes, are found nowhere else in the world. The quality of our Great Lakes depends on natural systems, like coastal wetlands and healthy rivers that flow into the Great Lakes. Cultural resources -- archaeological sites, landscapes shaped by human activity and standing structures -- all reflect the unique ways that people have interacted with Michigan's natural resources and made

the places of Michigan their own. Michigan's spectacular natural resources draw visitors from around the world. Providing ample access to the state's natural resources in turn supports thousands of small businesses.

> "As a small business owner and a commercial fishing guide, it is extremely valuable to utilize state land access sites and rivers. In my business, standing in a state-owned river is a must and showing customers the closest access site is always helpful," said John Karakashian, a fishing guide with Baldwin Bait & Tackle, who works with customers on the Pere Marquette and Muskegon rivers. "More access and availability of state land opens up recreational opportunities to residents and visitors. Through those opportunities more licenses will be sold to outdoor users. A reduction in access sites will limit users and reduce revenue -- not to mention reduce tourist spending throughout the state."

Protecting both natural and cultural resources and natural systems is the state's responsibility as recognized in the Michigan Constitution. Degradation or loss of public land directly impacts many aspects of the state's economy – forest products, tourism, oil and gas production, hunting and fishing, mineral development and countless small businesses that rely on outdoor recreation pursuits. DNR-managed public lands support Michigan's economy in many ways. Protecting the natural and cultural resources on those lands ensures continued contribution to the state's economy and sustainable quality of life for the citizens of the state.

**Desired outcomes for protecting natural functions and natural and cultural resources**

- Future generations have an opportunity to also experience Michigan's high quality natural and cultural resources.
- Diversity of resilient cover types and natural communities sustain healthy ecosystems and species populations for future generations and economic prosperity.
- Michigan's identity as the Great Lakes State is sustained.

**Metric for cover types and population goals**

*Double the number of fish and wildlife habitat projects accomplished with partners.*

Fish and wildlife habitat projects completed with partners, are critical to the long-term health of DNR-managed state land. One of the outcomes from the passage of the proposed hunting and fishing license package will be additional grant dollars directed to habitat improvement projects by partners.

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**Measurable objectives for cover types and population goals**

- Achieve habitat management goals for grassland, mesic conifer, aspen cover types and wetlands to assist in achieving the goals as stated in the Upper Mississippi & Great Lakes Region Joint Venture (waterfowl), Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative, American Woodcock Conservation Plan and North American Waterfowl Management Plan.
- Achieve population goals for state and federally-listed non-game species as defined in recovery plans including those for the Karner Blue Butterfly, Kirkland's Warbler and Piping Plover.
- Double the number of acres involved in habitat partnership projects in order to meet the habitat goals identified in the Wildlife Division's GPS, Fisheries Division's 2013-2017 *Charting the Course* Strategic Plan, and specific species plans.

***Tony Snyder, Michigan State Chapter president of the National Wild Turkey Federation*** *(NWTF), appreciates the value of Michigan's public lands especially for mentoring and youth recruitment opportunities. The ability to "go over to the state lands" is critical for rural or urban residents and out-of-state tourists who lack access to private land for hunting, hiking, or just spending time outdoors, Snyder says. NWTF's national initiative Save the Habitat, Save the Hunt is a bold effort to save 4 million acres of upland habitat and create 1.5 million new hunters across the nation. The initiative strives to make it easier to find new places to hunt by creating 500,000 acres of new public land across the nation.*

**Metric for healthy forest**

*Maintain annual forest certification*

Certification substantiates that the DNR is appropriately managing public lands to ensure healthy forests.

**Measurable objective for healthy forest**

- Pursue and maintain third-party certification to ensure sustainable healthy forests

Forest certification promotes the sustainable management of forest ecosystems resulting in healthy forests. A matrix of forest age classes needs to be actively managed in order to promote vigorous and healthy forests, preclude the impacts of large scale outbreaks from some major forest pests, and minimize the growth and impacts of catastrophic disturbances.

**Metric for diversity**

*Achieve FSC and SFI standards for biodiversity management within state forests.*

Annual audits are conducted on state-managed forests to ensure that the state forests are managed to meet the requirements of forest certification. Certification requires integrated management of biological, social and economic factors.

**Measurable objectives for diversity**

- Maintain or enhance quality of natural communities.

### Metric for protection of cultural resources

*Complete cultural features spatial comprehensive database.*

A comprehensive database of known cultural features on state lands needs to be completed to advance the protection of Michigan's cultural resources. This metric reflects an important first step in meeting the outcome of future generations having an opportunity to experience Michigan's natural and cultural resources.

### Measurable objectives for cultural protection

- Work with partners to develop a protection strategy for 10 critical culturally significant rare and unique places in state parks. (Parks and Recreation Division Strategic Plan and Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on State Parks and Outdoor Recreation)
- Protect and conserve significant natural and cultural features within state parks. (Parks and Recreation Division Strategic Plan and Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on State Parks and Outdoor Recreation)
- Develop a comprehensive database of known cultural features on state land.

### Metric for protection of aquatic resources

*Increase from a baseline established in 2013, the miles of corridors under active management for each aquatic habitat classification.*

Healthy aquatic habitats depend on the use of the land and how water travels through the landscape. Priority watersheds will be managed through DNR and partnership initiatives to maintain and restore aquatic habitats and their connectivity.

### Measurable objectives for protection of aquatic resources

- Develop a strategy using current GIS-based classification systems to protect river, lake, and Great Lakes coastal habitats in each region by 2015. (New objective)
- Conserve and manage aquatic species and their habitats as identified in *Charting the Course*- Fisheries Division strategic plan.

> *"We depend on state land for our survival. We cater almost entirely to folks who enjoy the outdoors – fly-fishers, hunters, hikers, bird watchers, mountain bikers. All these pursuits, so popular among our customers, depend on public lands. Access to state lands offered by this area of Michigan is one of the main attractions of a trip 'Up North." –**Josh Greenberg, owner of Gates Au Sable Lodge in Grayling***

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# PART TWO - LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Part Two of the Strategy outlines how the DNR will manage public lands and activities associated with public lands differently in the future. It identifies a new approach for acquisition and disposal of DNR-managed public lands to focus land ownership that provides for quality recreation opportunity, significant resource protection and enhances support of land-based industries. The Strategy also discusses seven new ways that DNR's activities associated with public land management will change. To ensure that DNR-managed public lands are meeting local needs, the DNR will engage more with local and regional units of government to understand their priorities, participate in regional planning efforts, and collaborate on land ownership issues.

**How the DNR Will Refocus Public Lands Ownership**

In response to the question "what public lands should the DNR manage," the following section describes the process the DNR will utilize going forward to balance the state's portfolio of public lands.

The DNR continuously engages in acquisition, exchange or disposal of land to balance the DNR's public land ownership and meet its diverse mission. To guide the DNR's public land ownership, a new Strategy will be used for both strategic acquisitions and disposal of state lands. The intent of this new approach is to refocus ownership on priority areas, adapt to changing demands and move toward greater efficiency and effectiveness in land management. The intent of this new approach is not to dispose of lands just to shrink the amount of land managed by the DNR.

Increasing efficiencies in state land management is especially important. The pattern and distribution of ownership and land use greatly impacts the management of natural resources, land management options, and ecosystem function and processes. This new strategic direction is intended to significantly reduce staff time spent on land management issues, while extending natural resource protections and high quality access opportunities for public outdoor recreation. Consolidated state lands also provide benefits to the public including reducing the risk of trespass on public lands, avoiding shooting safety zone violations and enhancing resource management.

*"Chippewa Landing is a canoe livery/campground on the Manistee River that has been in business for 50+ years. For a majority of that time, the business has been located on privately-owned lands and operated under a lease with the landowners. Recently the landowners decided that they wanted to sell their property, putting the future of Chippewa Landing at risk. The State of Michigan acquired this property and in an effort to ensure continued public access to this stretch of the Manistee River, has continued the lease of the Chippewa Landing canoe livery and campground. In doing so, the future of this business is more secure. Chippewa Landing is dependent upon the State of Michigan ownership. This property is a very valuable asset to the State because without it, good public access for use of this stretch of the river would be nil. This is a unique property and I'm glad that the State owns it." –* ***Rick Walsh, business owner, Chippewa Landing in Manton***

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The new strategic direction will be implemented in a four-phase approach:

**Phase 1: Identify State Lands for Disposal**

The DNR will identify lands for potential disposal under five considerations:

1. Lands that are either 200 acres or less and do not adjoin other DNR-managed public lands or the irregular shape of their boundary makes them difficult to administer. These lands have been mapped and total approximately 240,000 acres.
2. Lands lacking public access.
3. Lands nominated by field land managers because of concerns with management effectiveness or efficiencies.
4. Lands that were identified as available for acquisition by conservation partners in the 2008 land consolidation effort but were not acquired.
5. Large blocks of land would be made available for exchange with other similar blocks of lands. This would offer the opportunity to consolidate state land ownership and result in private land owners consolidating their ownership.

   These acres will be reviewed by the DNR, local units of government and the public on a county-by-county basis utilizing criteria that recognize the outcomes, metrics and measurable objectives identified in this plan.

**Phase 2: Focused Boundaries**

Once the review has been completed, the DNR will establish updated project boundaries for state forests, state game areas, state wildlife areas, state recreation areas, and state parks. In most cases, boundaries will be tightened. In other cases, boundaries will be expanded to reflect priority acquisitions, especially in Southern Michigan.

**Phase 3: Disposal or Acquisition of Identified Lands**

Disposal

An important component of this new strategic direction is to make effective use of those lands that are determined to be surplus to public needs. Conveyance of these parcels may be conducted in a manner that 1) provides for their continued protection of important natural or cultural resource or recreation values where warranted; 2) provides a means to purchase or exchange for more desirable replacement lands; or 3) supports local economic activities. These acres will be reviewed by the DNR, local units of government and the public on a county-by-county basis utilizing criteria that recognize the metrics identified in this plan. Based upon the criteria, parcels will be placed into one of four categories: dispose, offer to a local units of government or alternative conservation owner, make available for exchange, or retain in state ownership.

Evaluation criteria may include the following (additional criteria are in the Appendix):

- Pertinence to the Department's mission and desired outcomes;
- Presence or absence of significant ecological features, recreation facilities or potential, water access, trails or regional economic opportunities;

- Other relevant natural resource, public recreation, and cultural resource values;
- An exchange or sale of these lands will result in an improvement in the location or pattern of state ownership and will provide for greater natural resource value.

Disposal Process

- Lands will first be offered to local units of government for 30 days, followed by Alternate Conservation Owner's (ACO) for 30 days. Public Use deeds may be used where appropriate.
- Parcels will then be offered for sale through a sealed bid auction.
- Any parcels remaining after the sealed bid auction will be available for direct purchase.
- As with current practice, DNR managed public lands also are available for exchange.
- Proceeds from the sale of land are deposited into the fund that was used to purchase the land, for example, the revenues from the sale of lands purchased with the assistance of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) are deposited back into the MNRTF. Revenues from the sale of lands acquired through tax reversion are deposited into the Land Facilitation Fund. Laws govern how the funds can be used.

Acquisition

Strategic acquisition of land in priority areas is a critical component of this new approach. The acquisition process needs to be flexible and efficient in order to ensure quality, strategy acquisitions. Acquisition will achieve the DNR's mission and desired outcomes by meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- Address the goals, outcomes and measurable objectives identified in the Strategy,
- Contribute to existing initiatives or plans such as trail corridor acquisition,
- Address user conflict.

Acquisition Process

Lands nominated for acquisition will be reviewed internally to ensure compliance with goals and measurable objectives.

If internally approved, the DNR will review the proposed purchase with the local units of government in which the land is located.

The Legislature has 30 days to review all proposed land acquisitions.

The potential land acquisition is also posted on the DNR website for at least 30 days to allow for public comment.

The public has an opportunity to provide comment on proposed acquisitions at the Natural Resources Commission meeting one month prior to the potential formal approval of the land acquisition by the Director.

### Phase 4: Maintain an Up-to-Date Public Land Base

In compliance with Act 240 of 2012, after six years the DNR and its partners will formally review the Strategy, considering changing land ownership and management priorities. On an on-going basis, the DNR and its partners will evaluate its land holdings, and as appropriate, will offer for sale, exchange or transfer those lands whose highest and best use would be to support local public priorities by no longer remaining in State ownership. This will be a dynamic process to continuously review as opportunities resulting in a public benefit become available. This continuous process will assist in informing the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund acquisitions and the utilization of other acquisition funding sources.

### Key Actions over the Next Six Years

Refocusing ownership, measuring progress toward meeting desired outcomes and implementing measurable objectives will precipitate significant change in the management of DNR-managed public lands and the engagement model of the DNR. The measurable objectives found in Part One will drive the DNR's management over the next six years. In addition, the DNR will move forward with the following actions as they related to the management of DNR managed lands.

### Become Data Driven

Investment by the DNR in understanding user needs and interests and local economics in terms of recreation can be improved. The DNR has significant data that is utilized for management of game and fisheries resources and the management of state lands for oil, gas, timber and mineral production. To ensure that public lands are meeting the needs of Michigan's citizens, visitors, wildlife and businesses, the DNR will do the following:

1. Conduct regular citizen surveys to keep current on outdoor recreation interests, needs, and satisfaction and emerging trends.
2. Complete the gap analysis called for by the Michigan State Park and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel on recreation assets, high quality rare or representative natural areas and other culturally significant assets to ensure that Michigan's portfolio of public lands is meeting the Strategy and to focus on priority acquisitions.
3. Conduct regular analysis of recreational, hunting and fishing trends to determine changing facility and access needs.
4. Complete an analysis of the economic value of state lands and products from those lands. This analysis could be used by local and regional economic development initiatives as well as the DNR to make investment decisions.
5. Understand the recreation and resource drivers for retaining and attracting young people and target investments to those factors.
6. Continue to improve the use of metrics and indicators to measure and report progress toward meeting desired outcomes.
7. Gain an understanding of the data needs of local units of government, regional planning organizations and the private sector regarding natural and cultural resources and recreation. Supply the data in a useful format to help drive local initiatives.

## Focus Regionally

Integrated planning strategies for public land with local units of government and more collaboration with stakeholders will be key to managing public lands in the immediate future. The DNR must become a more active player in regional planning initiatives due to the tremendous economic asset we bring to the table – the state's public lands. The DNR intends to focus regionally in these ways:

1. Use state outdoor recreation facilities and natural features to help regions establish their own unique sense of place by understanding, differentiating and marketing their unique assets often found on state lands.
2. Participate in regional economic prosperity initiatives and environmental planning to help integrate public land management and DNR expertise into regional priorities.
3. Pilot two regional collaborative outdoor recreation planning initiatives as called for in the SCORP.
4. Improve communications and relationships with local units of government through an intentional process of initiating contacts and meetings to discuss land ownership issues and to provide technical expertise that is unique to DNR staff.
5. DNR facility and area managers will increase their collaboration with adjoining local communities by hosting events and providing additional information about amenities surrounding DNR public recreation opportunities.
6. Develop a toolbox to help local units of governments and regional planning organizations better collaborate, cooperate and form partnerships with the DNR.
7. A DNR staff person will be assigned to participate with each of the ten MEDC regional Collaborative Development Councils.

> *"This area is known for the public land and natural resources and it is what draws people to the area. At least 80 percent (and likely more) of the area businesses are almost solely dependent upon the public land and natural resources/tourism in the area for their survival. The natural resources in this area are 100 percent of the tourism draw. Due to that, and the fact that this area is known for the State land, the Chamber of Commerce recently changed our tag line to 'Pure Water….Pure Trails…Pure North' since that better embodies what brings people to this area to spend their time and money." –* ***Dawn Bodnar, executive director, Indian River Chamber of Commerce***

## Link Facilities

The desire to have linked recreation facilities is an emerging trend in current research and collaborative projects, SCORP, the Michigan Snowmobile and Trail Advisory Committee Draft Comprehensive Trail Plan and the Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel report to the Governor all call for linking recreation facilities, identifying critical trail connections and focusing on completing those priority linkages. The Blue Ribbon Panel also calls for programming, stewardship and volunteer opportunities to connect people to their outdoor "places." To link facilities and people with the outdoors, the DNR will:

1. Expand and adapt Recreation 101 programming, which teaches new outdoor skills to novices, both in state parks and with partner organizations, to grow the public's use of outdoor recreation offerings and appreciation of resource stewardship.
2. Establish a trails-oriented economic development program to link communities with DNR managed trails. Lessons learned from this initiative will be applied to linking other department assets with surrounding communities.
3. Establish a pilot project to identify priorities associated with a river corridor, measures needed to protect the key values of that corridor, and the collaborators' opportunities to address those measures. Lessons learned from the pilot project will be applied to other key river corridors.
4. Improve signage on all DNR-managed facilities and trails that linking them to surrounding communities.
5. Implement the road plan identified as a measurable objective under Goal 1.
6. With partners develop ten "experience" trails to guide citizens and visitors around the state to see Michigan's unique cultural and natural opportunities. The U.P. Iron Ore Heritage Trail is an example of an experience trail that allows users to appreciate Michigan's iron ore heritage on a multi-use recreation trail. Examples of additional trails include a woodcock-hunting trail, a fly-fishing trail or a bird-watching trail.

## Participate in Integrated Planning

The SCORP calls for improved collaboration and cooperation among all outdoor recreation providers to ensure that Michigan's recreation system meets the needs and desires of its residents. The same collaboration and cooperation is needed to ensure that DNR managed lands meet the needs of local and regional economies. Over the next six years, the DNR will:

1. Complete a southern Michigan recreation plan with partners to identify roles, responsibilities, areas for expansion and strategies for meeting outdoor recreation needs. The plan will build upon the gap analysis discussed under the "Data Driven" section, interest and need surveys, and priorities of the partnering organizations.
2. Work with the mineral industry and other resource-based sectors to help identify desired outcomes and measurable objectives for DNR-managed public lands, recognizing the need to balance multiple values and activities.
3. Participate in local and regional planning initiatives.



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## Increase Collaboration

As stated earlier, collaboration with partners is essential in protecting natural resources, providing quality outdoor recreation and fostering the growth of land-based industries. Bob Frye of Cross Country Ski Headquarters in Roscommon already collaborates with the state as a part of his tourism business. Frye leases state land to maintain a network of cross country ski trails for his business.

> "I think this is a good example of how the private sector and the public sector can partner and add value for everyone without destroying the very 'Pure Michigan' part of northern Michigan that residents and tourists from many states and provinces have come here to love and enjoy," Frye said.

Over the next six years, the DNR will work collaboratively with its partners to improve the outdoor recreation system of the state, enhance the quality and diversity of its facilities, grow Michigan's resource-based economy, restore habitats and species and protect cultural resources. This is not a new approach, but the Department recognizes that it can only meet its mission in the future by increasing collaboration and partnerships. It will:

1. Improve the process by which citizens can become a "Friends" organization to a DNR-managed facility or program.
2. Launch annual meetings among public, private and non-profit recreation providers to foster collaboration and cooperation, proactively resolve conflicts and to coordinate among competing demands for the public land base.
3. Expand the fisheries and wildlife habitat restoration, improvement and enhancement programs with partner organizations.
4. Collaborate with other large property owners, the federal and local governments to work on large-scale land consolidation efforts that are mutually beneficial and provide a public benefit.
5. Collaborate with the forest products industry and other economic interests to expand employment opportunities, increase forest product markets, and coordinate competing demands on DNR-managed public lands.
6. Encourage the participation of Michigan artisans at state facilities.

## Focus on the Quality of Facilities

SCORP, the Draft Comprehensive Trail Strategy, and the Blue Ribbon Panel Report all recognize the importance of maintaining quality facilities to retain and attract visitors.

Over the course of the next six years, Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) expects to focus capital outlay funding on upgrading and replacing aging and obsolete infrastructure. Replacement/upgrades will not be in total, but use a "sustained contraction" approach. For example, two campground restroom buildings may be replaced with one centrally located building. Reviewing recreation trends in camping will influence the level of electrical service being replaced in a campground rather than like-kind replacement. All infrastructure replacement will consider longevity and sustainability. Many underground septic systems are failing due to their age. PRD will reassess these systems to determine priorities for improvement, repair and replacement in order to protect the overall water quality of the surrounding area. PRD recently instituted a fund-match incentive to



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encourage local friends groups to raise funds for recreational elements, such as new play equipment or a fishing pier. This approach helps PRD provide the recreational amenities that our customers value, while still allowing PRD to focus spending on major infrastructure improvements. Other measures include:

1. Guidelines for quality maintenance will be established for the DNR-managed trail system and other DNR-managed recreational facilities and regular inspections will be made to ensure compliance with guidelines.
2. Proactive enforcement strategies will ensure that visitors to DNR managed facilities have fun, feel a sense of safety, environmental integrity is maintained and illegal use is controlled.
3. Complete the DNR Facilities Inventory and analyze the results for opportunities for the most efficient use of existing and potential locations for customer service and staff support.

**Increase Marketing**

Over the next six years, the DNR will focus its marketing efforts to fully leverage all of the recreational, natural and cultural resource protection and economic benefits provided by DNR-managed public lands. To achieve this, the DNR will:

1. Continue to partner with Pure Michigan to promote Michigan's natural and cultural features, and also improve its geo-referenced database to allow outdoor enthusiasts to better plan their outdoor fun and utilize the amenities provided by local communities.
2. Increase public understanding of natural resources management, recreation offerings and resource-based industries through the use of technology, including more Web-based tools like MI-Hunt, which allows hunters to identify public hunting lands, or mobile applications such as the ones that provide a downloadable audio tour of Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park.
3. Collaborate with the public health community to highlight the linkages between outdoor recreation and opportunities for improved individual and family health.
4. Work with land-based industries to provide improved information and processes to help guide the industries' investment decisions.
5. Improve the permitting system for events and use of state land to cross-market facilities, attract event users to surrounding communities, and better understand the economic impact of the events.
6. Improve marketing efforts to encourage the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses and increase camp night reservations.
7. Pilot two collaborations between the DNR and local convention and visitors bureaus to increase marketing of unique local and regional state managed assets.
8. Provide DNR's photography and video to local marketing initiatives.

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# PART THREE - IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE

Part Three of the Strategy identifies the timetable for implementation of the new acquisition and disposal approach and the actions identified in Part Two.

One to six months

- Gain legislative approval of the Public Land Management Strategy to allow the land acquisition cap to be lifted.
- Meet with each of the ten MEDC Community Leadership Councils to present the assets and attributes of DNR-managed public lands and to facilitate continuing discussions and action on utilizing these lands for regional prosperity initiatives.
- Identify the gaps in the Belle Isle to Wisconsin trail and begin acquisition and development where needed.
- Review and tighten DNR management unit boundaries.
- Complete the DNR facilities inventory.
- Complete the DNR Comprehensive Trail Plan.
- Meet with the ten counties with the least percentage of DNR-managed lands to identify how to fulfill the measurable objectives identified in the Strategy as they related to these counties.
- Realign the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund criteria to reflect the goals and measurable objectives of the Strategy.
- Begin integration and implementation of the Blue Ribbon Committee on State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel report, SCORP and Comprehensive Trails Plan.

Six months to one year

- Begin disposal through sale, transfer or exchange, the lands from the original 240,000 acres identified as surplus. Ensure that disposal doesn't depress local land prices.
- Implement the new Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund criteria.

Year Two

- Dispose of additional surplus lands through sale, transfer or exchange
- Target investment of Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund based upon the Strategy and the result of collaborations with counties and MEDC Community Leadership Councils.
- Analyze the results of the DNR facilities inventory for most efficient use of existing and potential locations for customer service and staff support.

**Conclusion**

From its much-prized furs and forests in the 18th and 19th centuries to the modern, professionally managed woods, water and minerals, Michigan has long benefitted from its abundance of natural and cultural resources. Today, Michigan citizens and businesses demand investment in public lands as a way to grow the economy through



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tourism, forestry, oil and gas exploration, hunting and fishing and outdoor recreation. Tomorrow, our children will remain in Michigan, and we will attract young people from elsewhere, because we use our wealth of land-based resources to reinvent Michigan, grow our economy, and create an unmatched quality of life.

“If you seek a pleasant peninsula, look about you” is the official motto of the state of Michigan. Keeping that promise requires nurturing opportunities for recreation, collaborating with natural resource-based industries and protecting ecosystems to keep them functioning and healthy. This Public Land Management Strategy ensures that DNR-managed public lands will continue to support this mission by providing quality recreation facilities, economically viable natural resource-based industries and robust, functioning ecosystems. This Strategy also ensures that DNR-managed public lands will be focused in priority areas and managed efficiently. It charts a course for DNR-managed public lands to play a more integrated role in regional prosperity initiatives and create a sense of place -- for now, and for the future -- by taking a collaborative approach with partners.

For generations, Michiganders have valued protection of natural resources and access to public lands on which they can enjoy and use those resources. These values are a part of nearly every Michigander’s experience – whether casting a line into the Detroit River at Milliken State Park in downtown Detroit, tracking a deer in the Pigeon River Country State Forest, hiking among the hemlocks at Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park or making a living in the forest products industry. The future of these resources, and future access for our children, is dependent upon an adaptable land management Strategy that evolves with the trends, interests and needs of people, businesses and our communities.

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