

VIII. NEED FOR FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

A. Summary

Michigan's forests are of incredible value to the people, animals, plants, and other organisms that live in and travel through the State. Forested ecosystems of numerous types provide homes for common and rare species and resting places for species that are moving through the State. They also are critical for maintaining the quality of surface and sub-surface waters, and ultimately the Great Lakes. Forest products from Michigan are significant in the global marketplace in terms of their volume and quality, and the forest products industry is a sizeable component of Michigan's economy. A substantial portion of the economy of many counties depends on forested areas and other wildlands, and many people in public agencies and private commercial enterprises depend, for their livelihood, on the timber products industry. Lastly, people simply enjoy seeing the variety of colorful forests in Michigan as they live in, travel through, and recreate in the State.

Without a doubt, Michigan's forest lands play a vital role in the economic, cultural and biological health of the State. They provide multiple benefits to Michigan citizens including habitat for flora and fauna, recreational and sightseeing opportunities, filtration for air and water quality, and timber for social consumption. Forest lands cover more than 50% of the State, with timberland acreage the 5th largest in the United States. Forest-based industries, tourism and recreation support 200,000 of the State's jobs, with over \$12 billion of value added to its economy. Over 2,600 businesses are engaged in the forestry industry in Michigan.

The forests of Michigan are also under significant threat. Though the total area of forest increased throughout the Twentieth Century through re-growth of areas that had been cleared for agriculture, current trends of urban sprawl and second-home development are resulting in increased destruction and fragmentation of forests. An increase in the splitting of large tracts, both commercial and non-commercial, is facilitating the process of development. In addition, there is recognition that some management practices are not sustainable.

While Michigan has long been a leader in conservation of its abundant natural resources, and existing programs make an important contribution toward protection of its forest lands, the threat to the future health and size of this vital resource is great--and growing with each passing year. These threats include conversion of forests to residential and commercial development, parcelization, invasive species, unsustainable timber management practices and forest fragmentation. By offering private forest owners the option of voluntary conservation easements, the Forest Legacy Program provides a powerful new tool to keep working forest lands contributing to Michigan's economy and quality-

of-life , as well as offering protection of a vital natural resource for future generations.

B. Goals and Objectives of the Forest Legacy Program in Michigan

The goal of the Forest Legacy Program in Michigan is to ensure the continuity of economic, ecologic, aesthetic, and cultural benefits derived from the forests of Michigan by enabling the persistence of sustainable, traditional uses of environmentally important, threatened forests on private lands.

To achieve this goal, the Forest Legacy Program has the following objectives:

- Identify and protect environmentally important, privately owned forests threatened by conversion to uses inconsistent with traditional forest uses.
- Reduce forest fragmentation caused by parcelization/subdivision and development.
- Provide environmental benefits through the protection of riparian areas, native forest plants and animals, and natural ecosystem functions.
- Maintain scenic resources.
- Enhance recreational opportunities.
- Promote forest stewardship.
- Provide undeveloped buffer areas to already protected areas.
- Complement other state or federal interests or assistance programs.
- Protect rare, threatened, endangered species.
- Enhance habitat connectivity.

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