

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources Director Dan Eichinger talking with  
WGVU Radio Morning Show host Shelley Irwin – March 9, 2021**

Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([00:00](#)):

It's a big celebration. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is celebrating its centennial this year, marking 100 years of taking care of Michigan's natural resources and stories. Over the past century, of course, the DNR has evolved from its roots as the Department of Conservation, to protect not only fish and wildlife, but broader natural resources and history, too. One, well, maybe to cut the cake, Dan Eichinger, director of the DNR. Good morning to you, Dan.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([00:29](#)):

Good morning, Shelly. Thanks for having me on.

Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([00:30](#)):

You're quite welcome. Congratulations, a big year for the DNR. So we ask you to bring us back. You weren't there, I wasn't there, but what happened 100 years ago?

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([00:41](#)):

Well, that was a time when the conservation movement and the fish and wildlife movement across the country, it was just getting born. And so the Department of Natural Resources was really kind of a place where our state parks program, our game and fish law enforcement activities and sort of this nascent movement towards protecting and conserving fish and wildlife and the places that they depend upon.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([01:08](#)):

The Department of Natural Resources, what was then the Department of Conservation, was created to sort of be the hub where all of those activities could be managed and provided for. And we've seen that mission expand and grow over the intervening 100 years from just being state parks, just doing some wildlife reintroduction, just doing fish stocking, to now having a really expansive menu of areas that we work in.

Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([01:36](#)):

Definitely. I know you were appointed as director of the Michigan DNR, of course, December 2018. Executive director of Michigan United Conservation Clubs prior to that, and we'll continue spotlighting you as well.

Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([01:50](#)):

But it sounds like the department has really evolved, of course, since its founding. So let's talk about the types of work the DNR does now on behalf of we, the people of Michigan. And anything that might surprise us?

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([02:04](#)):

Well, one of the fun facts that I like to share with folks about our work is that we manage the largest state forest system anywhere in the lower 48 states. And with that, the evolution of the Michigan state forest system is not only ... It's a playground for our citizens where you can do all kinds of outdoor recreation or trail networks, snowmobile trails, the hunting opportunities, the fishing opportunities are fantastic. And the economic development that is derived from that state forest system is tremendous.

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Our forest products industry is like a \$20 billion business here in the state of Michigan. Thousands of jobs are supported by it.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([02:43](#)):

And while all of us who live here know that we're a heavily forested state, the idea that we've got the largest state-managed forest system anywhere in the lower 48, I think is pretty remarkable, and it's something a lot of folks don't think of. When you think about our work, you think about who we are, it's not something that seems self-evident.

Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([03:05](#)):

Under the DNR's watch, a few iconic Michigan species I know that once we're under the threat of extinction, are now thriving. So how important are these milestones, and how do such recovery efforts succeed, Dan?

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([03:18](#)):

Well, these are really important milestones because it's sort of proof positive that when you have the alignment of resources, the alignment of talent and the alignment of partnership, that you can be successful in recovering species that were critically endangered. And that is not only providing a regulatory framework to provide for their long-term conservation, but actually doing the really hard work on the ground, making sure that those habitats are conserved and that they're restored.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([03:46](#)):

And none of that happens in a vacuum. Obviously, you know, our folks and the men and women of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources put a lot of work and effort in towards species recovery. Likewise at the federal level with our partners in the Fish and Wildlife Service. And then across the state, citizen conservationists are ... that's one of the remarkable things about what we have here in this state, that the story of the Department of Natural Resources is as much a story about the citizen conservationists across our state and throughout our history who have supported our work, stood side by side with us as we have worked to recover species, helped to identify places that the department needs to be pointing effort and pointing work towards.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([04:30](#)):

None of this work happens in a vacuum and we're really the fortunate beneficiaries. And the species that we have stewardship responsibility for are the fortunate beneficiaries of that tremendous partnership with state government, our citizens, federal actors, the nonprofit community. It's really, it's a fantastic and important part of the story of conservation.

Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([04:51](#)):

Yes. The DNR's mission to oversee the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the state's natural and cultural resources for current and future generations. You can say that backwards, most likely, as the director. What's the mission mean to you?

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Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([05:08](#)):

Well, it's necessarily long-term, and it really requires us to think kind of over the horizon. And that's one of the things I think is really gratifying about this work. And I think why the folks who work in this space are so passionate about it, that the resources that we enjoy today and the good condition that they're in is because of work that was done 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago. Folks who had long-term visions to say, "I might not necessarily see all of the fruits of my efforts today, but I know future generations will be able to derive benefit from them."

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([05:45](#)):

It's a wonderful way to think about your work, that the decisions that we make today, are necessarily going to have a positive impact, or consequently decisions that we don't make today could have a negative impact later on in future generations. And that long arching, long temporal scale that we see our work in really demands something a little bit different. And again, I think it's really exciting to be working in a space that necessarily requires that sort of long-term thinking.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([06:25](#)):

And so that's what our mission is really all about. I mean, we talk about preserving these things for current generations, making sure that we have opportunity, that we are identifying the right things for us to prioritize our work. And that all of that then feeds into the benefits that future generations, things I'll never be able to see come to fruition, will be enjoyed by the inheritors of that legacy. And that's just a really wonderful ... It's a wonderful way to spend your time.

Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([06:53](#)):

Director of Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Dan Eichinger with us. Dan, let's talk about COVID-19 health and safety restrictions likely to affect how we can celebrate the centennial anniversary, but we move right along. What recommendations do you have for helping us get more involved with our natural and cultural heritage, and how will you celebrate?

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([07:17](#)):

Well, obviously we're not going to be able to do probably the number of in-person events and that kind of thing that we had really hoped that we'd be able to do this year. But at the end of the day, throughout what was a very difficult 2020 for a lot of us, the outdoors have always been open, and really the best way that anyone can celebrate this centennial. It's a shared birthday, all of us share in that.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([07:47](#)):

Get outdoors. Find a way that you and your loved ones can connect with nature. Find a pathway that you've never walked down. Find your way or make your way to one of our beautiful state parks. One of the tremendous hidden places in our state forest system, wherever it is that you go, find a way and find a reason to get outdoors and share that with the special people in your life. There's no better way to celebrate the work that we've all been able to accomplish by simply getting outdoors and enjoying what we have in this beautiful state.

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Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([08:23](#)):

Could you look into your crystal ball, what do you think about DNR's next 100 years? Any insights about what's ahead or where you want the agency to be?

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([08:34](#)):

Yeah, I mean, if we think about the first 100 years of the Department of Natural Resources, we can probably distill that work down into two words, restoration and recovery. We took very damaged landscapes, we had species that were on the brink, and we really restored and recovered in that first 100 years.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([08:52](#)):

I think our next 100 years, there's two new R words that I've started to introduce into the lexicon, and that's resiliency and relevancy. So resiliency, we obviously are dealing with the negative effects of climate change and how that's expressing itself on the landscapes that we manage. And so we're going to need to start to pivot our management approaches a bit to be thinking a little bit more about how we create resiliency on the landscape, in the face of change through climate change. Invasive species, fish and wildlife health, those kinds of things.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([09:24](#)):

And then the relevancy piece, I think is really important as well, because we have lots of stakeholders in the Department of Natural Resources and that's wonderful. They're fantastic partners, we get a lot done together. But it's really important for us to make sure that the work that we do is seen and is valued, is understood, and is available and accessible to all the people in the state of Michigan.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([09:47](#)):

And that's, what's going to make our work relevant. So we have to do a little bit more, I think, as a department to meet the folks that we haven't heard from in a while, or folks that are not visiting us in our parks are coming out to one of the special places that we manage. We have to really put some intent and effort into going and meeting those folks on their front doorstep and say, "Hey, come on outdoors. Come join us. What is it that you need from us in order for our work to be relevant and valued and continue to be as well supported as it has been in our first 100 years?"

Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([10:16](#)):

Wonderful. Can you share a couple of resources to learn more about DNR, the centennial anniversary and more?

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([10:23](#)):

Absolutely. Folks can find us on our social media pages. We're on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, all that happy stuff. But the best place for anyone to go and find out more information about us is [Michigan.gov/DNR](http://Michigan.gov/DNR). All good information about the opportunities that we have available for folks, and some of the special celebrations that we are going to be able to do this year in our centennial year.

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Shelley Irwin (WGVU host) ([10:45](#)):

Wonderful. I won't ask you about your favorite park, because I know you love them all. Avid hunter, angler, you enjoy camping, hiking and birding, as you should with your great role. Thank you very much, Dan Eichinger, director of the DNR. Great job and happy 100 to you and yours.

Dan Eichinger (DNR director) ([11:03](#)):

Thanks very much!