

The Future of Michigan's Parks and Outdoor Recreation:

A Report to Governor Rick Snyder

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Prepared by:



The Michigan State Parks and
Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel

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Letter from the Co-chairs

Dear Governor Snyder:

On behalf of the 16-member Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel, we are pleased to present our recommendations on Michigan's system of parks and public recreational facilities. We strongly believe that implementing these recommendations will position our state to meet the needs of residents, visitors, and communities throughout the 21st century.

The report contains seven core recommendations and nineteen complementary recommendations that drive toward a cohesive vision and measurable outcomes. The recommendations focus on creating a 21st century infrastructure built around protecting and interpreting natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources, completing a connected, multi modal trail network, and the development of urban signature parks. They also specify how the state targets investments toward desired outcomes, integrates tourism and economic development promotion, prioritizes safety and maintenance, and helps communities use their park and recreation assets to strengthen regional identity.

The citizens of Michigan are truly fortunate to have had leaders over the sweep of time with the foresight to create a system of state, regional, and local parks and recreation facilities to meet the needs of our state as they understood them. Michiganders should be proud of the work of our public servants in building and maintaining this system to date, and this report builds upon that proud heritage. Our parks have been, and with thoughtful informed decision making will continue to be the foundation of a world-class recreation system that brings substantial tourism and leisure spending into Michigan, supports thousands of related businesses, creates vibrant, livable communities that attract and retain families, and offers substantial opportunities for improving the health and well-being of our residents.

Michigan's parks and outdoor recreation areas are iconic, and represent a portfolio of assets that should be viewed by the state as critical to advancing Michigan's prosperity. They return dividends—social, ecological, and economic—that far exceed the investments made by the state and its local public and private partners. These assets provide a place to recreate and, at their best, they help make our communities cohesive, connect people to their places and to each other, engender civic engagement, and remind us of our connection to the natural world and to our history.

We are grateful to you for the opportunity to discuss and make recommendations on such an important issue, and believe that the importance of parks and outdoor recreation investments to Michigan's current and future prosperity cannot be overstated. If Michigan is to thrive in the coming decades it must embrace and leverage the unique and bountiful resources that make up our state's park and recreation system and showcase it to the world.



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In Appreciation

The Panel wishes to express its deep appreciation to the governor for his confidence in the individuals appointed to this task of developing a vision for Michigan's parks and outdoor recreation areas. We hope that the report presented here exceeds his expectations and serves to help move the state toward the prosperity we all so desire.

During the Panel's deliberations, many people and organizations offered advice, support, recommendations, vision, and other valuable input, and we are immensely grateful for their time. The Panel deeply appreciates all of the support, tours, meals, and facilities it received from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the communities that it visited. The Co-Chairs would also like to recognize the individual Panel members and their organizations for the time they gave to this effort and the out-of-pocket expenses they willingly and graciously covered on their own. Intern support for this project was offered through the generosity of Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC).

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Finally, the Co-Chairs and Panel members wish to offer their sincere thanks to the staff of Public Sector Consultants. Their participation as trusted advisor, participant, and organizer went far above and beyond the Panel's expectations. We are deeply indebted.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Michigan's natural resources are the foundation of a world-class parks and outdoor recreation system. The state's abundant, high-quality, and—in many instances—globally unique natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources include Great Lakes and beaches, inland lakes and streams, grass lands, forests, and historic and cultural sites (such as battlefields, lighthouses, ancient burial grounds, and birthplaces of notable Michigan residents). These must be protected and enhanced to grow Michigan's economy and improve the well-being of our residents and visitors.

The state's outdoor recreation system includes 100 State Parks, millions of acres of State Forests, several national parks, regional parks, and thousands of local parks and trails. The State Park system alone covers over 300,000 acres and hosts more than 22 million visitors per year.

The DNR uses creative and entrepreneurial management approaches to meet evolving recreation needs and maintain the high quality of Michigan's State Parks and other recreation spaces. In 2011, the state was awarded the National Recreation and Park Association's Gold Medal for the top State Park system in the nation. This award honors states and communities throughout the United States that demonstrate excellence in long-range planning and resource management and stewardship (DNR 2011). The Panel recognizes the valuable and insightful management of the DNR's permanent and summer staff and the untold volunteer efforts that are contributed to the State Parks system.

Given these substantial, high-quality assets, it is not surprising that Michiganders have historically been, and continue to be, outdoor enthusiasts. Recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, camping, and boating bring billions of dollars in revenue to our state's economy, attract visitors to Michigan from other states, and provide lasting outdoor experiences and memories for residents. While these activities (including car and recreational vehicle camping) continue to be an important element in Michigan's outdoor experiences, there is a growing recognition that recreational opportunities must continue to diversify as public interests change and expand. Trails, outdoor adventure sports, nature observation, eco-tourism, motorized and non-motorized water sports, cultural events, and festivals reflect a rapidly changing and growing parks and outdoor recreation environment (Outdoor Foundation 2012; Cordell 2012).

In recognition of the fact that Michigan's park system has changed over time, and must continue to adapt to changes in resources, user interests, and facility needs, Governor Snyder issued Executive Order 2011-10, creating a Blue Ribbon Panel on State Parks and Outdoor Recreation. The Executive Order charges the Panel with:

- Identifying the role of State Parks and the importance of outdoor recreation areas
- Providing a vision for the future of the state's parks
- Recommending a strategy for the expansion and proper allocation of expected resources in order to meet the new vision of State Parks
- Proposing a vision and a strategy for future consideration aimed at creating stronger linkages between the State Park system and county and local parks to maximize use and cost efficiencies

The 16-member Panel has worked for nearly a year to understand Michigan's park and outdoor recreation resources, evaluate how demographic and recreational trends in Michigan and around the country align with the state's current recreation resources, and develop a long-term vision and strategy for the state's parks and outdoor recreation assets. In its work, the Panel considered the mechanisms the state uses to deliver recreation services and how funding strategies could be better aligned with outcomes the state desires from its park and recreation resources. The Panel reviewed an extensive array of research on recreational trends and perspectives, benefits, and best-in-class recreation programs and policies from around the country. It also engaged in many discussions about the meaning of the data, drawing from the Panelists' expertise,

impressions, and experience. Throughout its deliberations, the Panel held meetings across the state to more fully understand and experience firsthand important regional issues, and hear from State Park staff, local communities, recreation users, and other recreation providers. Panel members also met individually with more than 60 different stakeholder organizations, state agency staff, and other individuals to obtain their input on a vision for the future of parks and outdoor recreation in Michigan. The Panel has seen incredible passion and determination on the part of people and organizations that have the best interests of Michigan and its residents at heart.

Finally, Panel members have worked with numerous stakeholders who are involved in inter-related planning efforts related to strategic natural resources and/or outdoor recreation, including the Michigan Statewide Trails Advisory Council's Trails Plan and the DNR's Strategic Planning and Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning efforts.¹ The Panel sought to better understand the goals and objectives of these efforts, and find ways to closely align the Panel's strategies and recommendations with the work of these other efforts, where applicable. It is the Panel's firm belief that while good and forward-looking parks and outdoor recreation work is under way at every level, that work needs to be better recognized and more fully incorporated into a cogent, collaborative, and unified effort to leverage Michigan's outdoor recreation assets in pursuit of Michigan's prosperity.

In developing its recommendations, the Panel considered the entirety of Michigan's system of parks and outdoor recreation opportunities—not just focusing on state-owned facilities, but rather the range of parks including local, regional, and state. It has tried to illuminate this difference within the report by using the terms “State Parks” when referring to the 100 formally designated State Parks and Recreation Areas and “the state's parks” when referring to the full range of public parks and recreation spaces across the state. The Panel has heard nearly universally that people are more interested in the quality of a facility or the value of an experience in a park than in which government entity owns or operates it. The Panel's recommendations are reflective of both issues, but we have strived to create better linkages between all parks and recreational opportunities, regardless of ownership. We have also attempted throughout our recommendations to focus on actions that strengthen the connections between communities and their park and outdoor recreation spaces. We see this as a critical way to build stronger, healthier, and more economically robust communities. By implementing the recommendations in this report through collaborations of public, private, and nonprofit partners, we will contribute to comprehensively addressing Michigan's parks and recreation needs and positioning the state as a world-class outdoor recreation destination.

In order to have the broadest, most significant impact, the Panel has identified a number of recommendations for system-wide changes to programs, management, infrastructure type, and investment strategies that set up the visionary framework for the next 30 to 50 years of park and outdoor recreation management in Michigan. It has also addressed the need to create a durable mechanism for ensuring implementation and funding of the recommendations, and for making course corrections well into the future. Although recognizing the need for specific assets, infrastructure, and programs in certain areas, the Panel has purposely not focused on making recommendations regarding any specific park, recreation area, or community in this report.

¹ See Appendix A for an overview of current, related planning and management efforts

²The Blue Ribbon Panel's work is one of several important ongoing efforts to define priorities and create a vision for the state's public lands, water, and trails. See Appendix A for a list and diagram of ongoing, interrelated planning efforts.

What is a Park?

Given the immense variety of park and recreation areas, of origin and purpose, there is clearly no one definition of a park that can capture this wide range of places. Frederick Law Olmsted, who is considered to be the father of landscape architecture and was the designer of many of the most famous parks in the United States (including New York's Central Park), identified four important criteria for a state park: (1) sufficiently distinctive and notable to interest people, (2) scenic and recreational resources which are unlikely to be reasonably well conserved and made available for enjoyment under private ownership, (3) just sufficient in number and extent and character to meet the prospective demand, and (4) geographically distributed with a view to securing a wide and representative variety of type (Olmsted 1930).

The Panel believes that a "park" is both a social construct and a physical place that is so designated and managed as the result of a specific decision or set of decisions by society to set aside, preserve, invest in, create, and support that place for human use and enjoyment.

Chapter 2: The Role and Importance of Parks and Outdoor Recreation: A Vision for Michigan's Future

*Everybody needs beauty, as well as bread,
Places to play in and pray in,
Where nature may heal and give strength
To body and soul alike*
—John Muir

Before the 1830s in the United States there was little or no notion of the grand park, let alone a system of state or federal parks as we now know them. Michigan has played an important role in the development of parks almost since their beginning—in 1875 Mackinac Island became the second National Park ever dedicated, following closely behind Yellowstone; 20 years later it was transferred to the state as Michigan's first State Park (Mackinac Island State Park Commission 2012). The full vision of a National Park system took decades to form but was finalized in 1916 through the creation of the National Park Service, which was charged with the protection of the system that had grown to 40 National Parks and monuments (Dilsaver 1994).

In response to increasing pressures to include more and more areas as National Parks, a state-based system emerged by the mid-1920s. This system of State Parks across the nation was generally characterized by parks and wildlands that were distant from cities, and it expanded with the proliferation of the middle class and increasing use of the automobile throughout much of the 20th century. The concept of parks had existed, especially in urbanized areas, for much longer than the National and State Parks models, and largely grew out of the need for urban populations to find respite from the press of the city, to recreate, and to rest. The power of the current system of parks remains deeply embedded in this concept, which is to help interpret the human context, to provide access to unique places set aside for solace and recreation, and to engender people's love and stewardship of their valued "places." In Michigan, parks such as Detroit's Belle Isle, which was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, are wonderful, early examples of these special urban retreats.

The same values that initially formed the urban parks and that set the path for preservation of the country's most spectacular places in the National Park system remain equally important today. Michigan's parks and outdoor recreation spaces, regardless of who owns them, provide substantial social, environmental, and economic benefits to

What is the value of a park?

While the dollar value of the real estate representing Michigan's parks and recreation spaces may be substantial, what is truly impressive is that the value of these resources continues to pay extraordinary dividends back to our communities, regions, and the state. Calculating a return on investment is not the only measure, however, because the value of our parks goes well beyond just the economic return that the parks can generate.

The Panel reaffirms their economic value, but recognizes their value also lies in experience, feeling, affinity, care, and stewardship. It lies in the social and cultural ties and understanding that are derived from experiencing these places. It comes from the deep and abiding desire for place and for belonging. And it ultimately lies in our memory and in our heart. These are the feelings that bind people and families together and to their place, that strengthen community, and that forge and nurture citizenship. Our important places, some of which we call parks, serve all of these purposes and because of that, serve all of us, whether we set foot in them or not. They are of our place and our people, and thus are of all of us. This is the ethic that formed the parks and that still forms the basis of their enduring value.

the state. In the Panel's vision, this system provides more than a set of discrete assets to help people get outside and enjoy Michigan's great outdoors; it offers an incredible opportunity to reinvent Michigan—to bind people together and to attract visitors, residents, and businesses. The success of the emotionally evocative *Pure Michigan* advertising campaign, which is largely founded on Michigan's beautiful natural and recreational resources, is proof of this power. Parks and outdoor recreation opportunities are key to Michigan's prosperity, and the state is at an extraordinary juncture of examining our past, identifying needs and opportunities, and laying plans for the future of our natural, cultural, historic, prehistoric, and recreation resources.² To capitalize on this moment, we offer Michigan leaders the following vision and set of bold and hopeful recommendations to both protect and actively leverage our parks and outdoor recreation resources for Michigan's future prosperity.

Vision for the Future of Michigan's Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Michigan's parks and outdoor recreation areas are part of a broad network of public and private outdoor opportunities that provide tremendous economic, social, and environmental returns for the state and its communities.

Parks and outdoor recreation are one of the state's primary tools for conveying Michigan's image nationwide as a highly desirable place to visit, live, work, recreate, and create or grow a business. Collectively, our state's interconnected system of parks and recreation amenities must:

- Create and sustain cohesive, vibrant communities that attract and inspire residents and businesses, drive tourism, and grow private-sector investment in the state
- Protect, provide access to, and interpret the representative, rare, or unique ecological, cultural, historic, and prehistoric assets of our state
- Play a vital role in strengthening our social fabric and improving the health and well-being of our residents
- Protect, enhance, and be governed in a manner that achieves and demonstrates the community, economic, ecological, cultural, and social values articulated in this report

²The Blue Ribbon Panel's work is one of several important ongoing efforts to define priorities and create a vision for the state's public lands, water, and trails. See Appendix A for a list and diagram of ongoing, interrelated planning efforts.

Chapter 3: Desired Outcomes

To achieve the vision outlined in Chapter 2, the Panel strongly believes that the state, in partnership with other public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector, must collaboratively plan, manage, and invest in our natural assets, park and recreation facilities, and programs to drive the following outcomes:

Demonstrate the Value of the State's Investment in Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Parks and outdoor recreation places provide the state and local communities with substantial social, ecological, and economic benefits. In order to realize these benefits, financial resources must be dedicated and protected for the long-term maintenance, enhancement, and appropriate growth of park and outdoor recreation opportunities that drive these benefits and creatively capture their value (and associated revenue).

The state's current investment strategy does not fully advance the vision the Panel has articulated for parks and outdoor recreation in Michigan. It does not connect decision making to specific outcomes, and therefore inadequately demonstrates the long-term value of the state's investment in parks and outdoor recreation. The result is a system that regularly struggles to fund ongoing and evolving recreation infrastructure and programming needs, and must compete for resources and priority funding attention.

When the Panel's vision is achieved, the legacy of natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation funding will be reinforced and protected by clearly demonstrating that the social, ecological, and economic value to society of these resources remains worthy of that investment and protection.

Drive Michigan's Economic Prosperity

Numerous studies have documented the economic impacts and value that recreation activities and infrastructure provide—largely focused on sales of gear, spending on related services, property value increases adjacent to park land, and tax revenue.³ These are in fact key elements of the recreation economy, and all are important drivers of economic prosperity in Michigan as well.

More broadly however, and perhaps more significantly, high-quality parks and outdoor recreation amenities contribute to creating cohesive, vibrant communities that attract visitors, residents, and businesses. They are an essential part of Michigan's "place-making" efforts, and epitomize the state's successful *Pure Michigan* campaign to re-brand Michigan's image worldwide. This is a particularly important issue for a state such as Michigan which has suffered significant economic decline and population loss over the last decade, especially among young educated adults.

When the Panel's vision is achieved, Michigan's parks and outdoor recreation amenities will be recognized as one of the primary drivers of economic development in the state, and will be fully integrated into state, regional, and community economic development efforts.

A 2011 study by the Michigan Colleges Foundation found that the "variety of outdoor amenities—parks, bike, and hiking trails"—was the third highest (52% of respondents) desired asset in the place they want to live for recent Michigan college graduates (Next Generation Consulting and Michigan Colleges Foundation 2011).

³ See, for example Adelaja et al., 2012 and Outdoor Industry Association, 2012.

Inspire Greater Regional Identity, Differentiation, and Collaboration

When people visit a park or recreation area, they don't experience that place alone; they travel through a region and experience the park within the region's overall cultural and scenic context. From highways to downtowns to back roads, it is important that these experiences feel authentic and convey the region's unique "sense of place." Each of Michigan's regions offers a variety of outdoor recreation types and challenges, and recreation spaces often serve a unique function based on their regional context. There may be similar activities available in both urban and rural environments, such as hiking or fishing, but they offer different experiences for the user (for example, kayak-camping on a remote northern trout stream offers a different experience than paddling up to a riverside brewpub in downtown Grand Rapids on a busy Friday night).

Several regions in Michigan have already begun the process of understanding, differentiating, and marketing their unique assets and sense of place, which benefits local communities, businesses, and residents. They successfully combine parks and recreation with related business opportunities, festivals, events, and entertainment to create a strong sense of place. The Wilds of Michigan in the western Upper Peninsula, the Great Waters Initiative in the eastern Upper Peninsula, Dark Sky Coast in northwest Michigan, Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail in northern lower Michigan, Michigan Beachtowns along the western shoreline, the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary in Alpena, and the Detroit riverfront revitalization are just some of the examples. Other regional efforts are getting under way or expanding such as the regional trails vision along the US 31 Corridor from Traverse City to Elk Rapids.⁴

When the Panel's vision is achieved, the focus of Michigan's parks management and planning will be community-informed, based on unique regional assets, and packaged under the Pure Michigan brand to promote the region's sense of place.

Michigan's Dark Sky Coast

At the "Tip of the Mitt," extending westward from Mackinaw City to Cross Village, lies Michigan's "Dark Sky Coast." The absence of light pollution warranted International Dark Sky Park recognition for Emmet County's 600-acre Headlands Park. Following this recognition, and in response to a citizens' initiative that was supported by state, county, city, and township governments, 21,000 acres of State Forest and State Park lands were designated under Michigan law as Dark Sky Preserve. These actions have resulted in a measurable increase in tourism from around the United States and the world, and an extension of the tourist season in the region.

Make Michigan a Healthier Place

Outdoor recreation is an important part of improving people's health and wellness. The literature on this connection is vast and clear, and is increasingly being used by policymakers and health practitioners to identify strategies and investments for outdoor recreation as part of the provision of health services (Godbey 2009). Exercise helps manage weight and reduces obesity, controls blood pressure, decreases the risk of heart attack, stroke, and diabetes and is associated with other positive health outcomes. Despite the profusion of outdoor recreation opportunities in the state, and despite considerable parks visitation, Michigan suffers the fifth highest obesity rate in the nation. The cost of treating obesity and related health conditions is significant. A recent study found that if Michigan residents reduced their body mass index by an average of 5 percent, the state could save over \$8 billion in obesity-related health care costs by 2020 (Trust for America's Health, 2012). There is clearly a disconnect between our recreational resources and programming and our approach to health and wellness in Michigan.

⁴ See: <http://thewildsofmichigan.com>, www.thegreatwaters.com; www.emmetcounty.org/dark-sky-coast-600, <http://sleepingbeartrail.org>; www.beachtowns.org, <http://thunderbay.noaa.gov>; www.detroitriverfront.org; and www.theticker.tc/story/how-do-you-play-along-u-s-31-north.

Beyond the direct benefits associated with exercise, research has identified other health benefits of just interacting with nature. Historically, urban parks were designed with health benefits in mind, and exposure to nature and quiet areas were primary elements of park design. Research today documents what urban park planners of the past knew when they created small and large natural oases in the middle of cities—people benefit just from spending time in natural or green environments (Godbey 2009; De Vries et al. 2003; Louv 2005). This area of health benefit is often overlooked or not adequately considered when planning for recreation or encouraging outdoor recreation activity.

These benefits will be more fully realized if people increase the frequency and duration of time spent recreating outdoors. This can only happen when people feel they can safely and easily access recreation opportunities, when there is ample programming to get people active, and when Michigan’s health care system better recognizes the value of outdoor recreation in addressing health conditions.

When the Panel’s vision is achieved, all Michigan residents will have safe and proximate access to outdoor recreation spaces in order to increase people’s use of these places to help improve their health and well-being.

Art and Science Agree: Getting Outdoors Is Good for You

Poet Walt Whitman wrote “the secret of making the best persons is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.” Since then, modern science has shown this to be true. Time spent recreating outdoors has been shown to have a positive effect on mental health including stress, depression and anxiety, attention deficit, and hyperactivity (De Vries et al. 2003), and to reduce aggressiveness and violence (Kaplan 1995). Children in particular benefit socially, academically, and psychologically by spending time outdoors (Louv 2005).

Protect and Create Opportunities to Experience Michigan’s Natural, Cultural, Historic, and Prehistoric Resources

High-quality natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources form the backbone of our state’s recreation opportunities. Stunning natural features can be found in every region of our entire state, including forests, wetlands and fens, lakes, streams and rivers, miles of sand dunes, beaches, and many unique rock and geological formations. Michigan is at the center of the wondrous Great Lakes, and its woods and world-class fishing streams⁵ are legendary, shaping the life and classic short stories of Ernest Hemingway and dozens of other great writers and artists. Abundant wildlife provides opportunities for hunting, photography, and viewing.

Cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources vital to tourism and recreation range from copper mining pits in the Upper Peninsula, to the fossil beds of Rockport, to sacred and ceremonial Native American locations throughout the state (such as Sanilac), to stops on the Underground Railroad, to the many lighthouses, forts, ghost towns, battlefields, and other historic features that dot our landscape and illuminate our history. Over decades and centuries, Michigan has been at the crossroads of exploration; land and water transportation of all kinds; music, arts, and culture; immigration, invention, innovation and prosperity; resource use, harvest and processing; and manufacturing and agriculture. This is our history and our legacy. Parks and recreation spaces offer special opportunities to reflect upon and interpret this history for our residents and visitors. It allows us to interact with our past, love our present, and inspire our future.

⁵ Michigan was ranked #1 for fly fishing in the country by *Field and Stream* magazine. See: www.fieldandstream.com/blogs/flytalk/2011/04/deeter-picks-12-best-states-flyfishing.

In order to maintain the quality of Michigan’s natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources for future generations, the state, along with local, federal, nonprofit, and private entities, must collaborate to not only protect these rare, unique, and representative assets, but also provide appropriate access to them, maintain them, and help to interpret their importance. This allows people in both rural and urban areas to experience and understand the value of these assets and ultimately increases their desire to steward them over the long term. Opportunities to experience nature and wildlife, and derive the health benefits these spaces provide, are particularly critical for people in our urban and suburban areas who may have fewer regular opportunities to enjoy the natural environment. Instead of solely relying on “going to” nature and the outdoors, there must be greater opportunities for the outdoors and nature to become a more integral part of our population centers and cities.

When the Panel’s vision is achieved, the state will be protecting important recreational, natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources, and have substantially more nature-based recreation, conservation, and stewardship opportunities embedded within Michigan’s schools, cities, and population centers.

Connect People to Their Places and to Each Other

Parks and outdoor recreation resources, from local to National Parks, play a critical role in creating and reinforcing a strong sense of place and in connecting people, physically and emotionally, to each other and to their shared recreational, natural, and cultural heritage. They provide community gathering spaces, activities for youth and families, and places to learn about community history and heritage. Parks are an essential component of vibrant, healthy, and productive communities.

Parks help root people to their communities and create opportunities for stewardship, engagement, and citizenship, and as a result they strengthen the social fabric of communities, increase civic engagement, bring people from different backgrounds together in a comfortable environment, and promote long-term stewardship of the state’s resources. In doing so, they also contribute to the economic vitality of communities and create places where people want to live, work, and visit.

Parks also play a role in helping people understand history and their role in it. They reflect chapters of Michigan’s stories, whether they are major historical events or small community efforts to protect and improve a neighborhood playground.

When the Panel’s vision is achieved, the state and its communities will be collaboratively managing parks and outdoor recreation opportunities to provide programming, stewardship, and volunteer opportunities for communities that connect people to their “places,” help engender a strong natural, cultural, and historic resource protection ethic, and strengthen their social fabric.

Implement an Outcomes-Driven Governance System for Outdoor Recreation Services

The state’s decision making regarding the people it hires, the parcels of land it decides to buy, hold, or dispose of, the local projects it supports through grants, the programs it chooses to implement, and the infrastructure it develops or enhances must be driven by this clearly articulated set of outcomes and support the state’s collective vision for parks and recreation as outlined in this report. The state’s broad portfolio of parks and outdoor recreation must return social, ecological, and economic value back to its owners—Michigan’s residents. To accomplish this, the state’s management and governance of these resources must reflect these desired outcomes and ensure that the state’s investments are getting these return values.

For example, how and where the state invests in parks and outdoor recreation should be more informed by the vision and outcomes articulated in this document and less about who owns or manages the asset. Similarly, the skill sets of park and recreation agency staff shape how resources are managed and how

effectively the state partners and collaborates with local communities. Hiring and training decisions should be seen as long-term choices that shape the future as much or more than the present.

Lastly, the Panel believes that a more modernized, outcomes-oriented governance system requires the use of a strong comprehensive enterprise budget approach⁶ to managing State Parks and Recreation Areas rather than continuing the current focus on funds management.

To best leverage Michigan's system of parks and outdoor recreation areas to achieve these outcomes, the state must modernize its approach to delivering outdoor recreation services in a manner that expands the expertise and flexibility of state agency staff to meet changing recreational and economic needs of Michigan's communities; promotes greater facilitation and partnership opportunity, protects and maximizes the beneficial use of funds that have been designated in perpetuity for the protection of Michigan's natural and recreation resources; and ties state agency planning and evaluation of progress to desired outcomes.

When the Panel's vision is achieved, the state will be using greater fiscal and process discipline, based on outcome-oriented criteria, to manage its assets in achieving the vision.

⁶ Enterprise budgeting estimates projected costs, revenue, and net returns to determine profitability of specific ventures or products (Peabody 2007).

Chapter 4: Recommendations

The Panel identified a wide range of recommendations that will help the state and its partners achieve the vision and desired outcomes articulated in Chapters 2 and 3. The recommendations are based on the Panel’s significant expertise and specifically build on previous efforts to define outcomes for Michigan’s natural resource amenities, including, but not limited to, “A Roadmap to a New Environmental Management Model for Michigan” (Michigan Environmental Advisory Council 2009), “Connecting Michigan: A Statewide Trailways Vision and Action Plan” (MTGA 2007), “A Resolution on a New Vision for Conservation in Michigan” (Michigan Habitat Protection and Restoration Work Group 2010), and “Critical Conversations about Environmental and Natural Resource Governance” (Norris and Urban-Lurain 2011). These important reports were developed after considerable discussion and agreement among diverse stakeholders, and represent a growing recognition of the need to improve the environmental and natural resource governance model in the state and its regions. A common theme throughout this body of work, and in the Panel’s current recommendations, is that the state cannot address or solve the issues of the 21st century if it only looks to policies and tools that were invented in the previous century. There must also be a culture of entrepreneurialism and innovation in our parks and recreation policies and management. Michigan has shown the capacity and desire for this type of leadership and the Panel hopes to continue this tradition.

This chapter outlines seven top priority recommendations that emerged in the Panel’s discussions as the highest priorities for moving the state forward on its vision for parks and outdoor recreation, and Chapter 6 includes 19 additional recommendations that complement and enhance the seven core recommendations. Taken as a whole, the recommendations are important to meeting the governor’s charge to the Panel, and when implemented through a process of adaptive resource management (as illustrated in Exhibit 1) will help the state achieve the vision the Panel has identified. In some cases a recommendation may focus on one outcome in particular, while in other cases a recommendation may be related to several or all of the expected outcomes. The Panel’s recommendations address both “state-owned” resources (that is, State Parks), as well as parks and outdoor recreation opportunities at the regional, county, or local level (that is, the state’s parks). We urge the state and all of its public, nonprofit, and private-sector partners to immediately move forward with owning and implementing the Panel’s recommendations.

EXHIBIT 1: Adaptive Management of Desired Outcomes and Recommendations



SOURCE: Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel.

Recommendation 1:

Identify and protect important natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources for the enjoyment and education of Michigan's residents and visitors, and expand efforts to engender stewardship of those resources.

Priority Actions for Implementing this Recommendation

- The state must lead a gap analysis of recreational offerings; high-quality, rare, or representative natural areas; and other culturally or historically significant assets in order to ensure that Michigan's portfolio of public lands is meeting the outdoor recreation vision and outcomes articulated by this Panel. The state, local, nonprofit, and private partners should then aggressively seek to fill those gaps through strategic land exchanges, dedications, and acquisitions.
- The DNR, in partnership with other state, local, and federal agencies, universities, and nonprofits, should establish a research and monitoring program that tracks and forecasts natural and human-caused change within parks and enables managers to better develop compatible uses and respond to those changes.
- The state should allocate resources to the development and operation of existing, successful education programs that provide measurable results in the interpretation of the state's natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric assets and expand its efforts to partner with park and recreation facilities, schools, and nonprofit place-based education programs to routinely use local parks, outdoor recreation areas, natural areas, and historic sites as tools to educate youth about Michigan's natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources.

Background

In order to maintain, enhance, and provide valuable interactions with and interpretation of Michigan's high-quality outdoor recreation areas, the state must protect rare, unique, and representative natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric assets. It must provide easy access to these resources and help interpret their value to the state. This allows people to experience and understand the value of these resources and increases their desire to steward them.

The gap analysis should inform and be incorporated within the DNR's State Land Acquisition and Deposition strategy required under Public Act 240 of 2012, and other related agency plans. It must evaluate the existing portfolio of state public lands in terms of their recreational, natural resource, and social value, and identify gaps in the types of recreational activities and the diversity of natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources that are available and accessible. While much of this report focuses on Michigan's State Park system, by far the greatest amount of state-owned recreational land is in our State Forest system. These areas are host to the bulk of Michigan's more decentralized recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, ORV riding, hiking, paddling, horseback riding, mountain biking, birding, mushrooming, and many other outdoor recreational activities. Visitors to our State Forest facilities have diverse infrastructure and space needs. Some traditional forest recreation activities coexist with little or no problem, and in other cases there is need for separating activities or infrastructure in order to ensure a high-quality recreation experience for all users. The state must address these issues in the gap analysis and State Land Acquisition and Deposition strategy it develops.

The state and its local, federal, and nonprofit partners also need good data to monitor the status and condition of the natural, cultural, historic, and pre-historic resources they protect so they can be preserved for future generations. An effective research and monitoring program would characterize the existing condition of the park/recreation area's resources, provide managers with data to assess, manage, and interpret changes, and help create collaboration between the state, universities, nonprofit organizations, and other groups to meet

the parks' on-going management needs. Monitoring programs should be tailored to the information needs of the managers who are responsible for protecting resources in the individual parks, but should also address statewide approaches for consistently reporting the status and trends of protected resources and the activities that affect them.

A final, critical element of protecting our natural, cultural, historic, and pre-historic resources is to provide opportunities for people to experience these resources, which creates a sense of ownership and builds individual responsibility and community capacity for managing them. This continuum of stewardship often begins with families sharing outdoor traditions and grows over time through a series of recreational, natural, cultural, and historical experiences. It can also be solidified through programs in our primary education system. Numerous successful programs throughout the state are partnering with schools to help provide place-based science, math, language, and arts curriculum as a means of improving learning and connecting people to their places (including conservancies, outdoor education groups, and other environmental organizations). Michigan's parks and recreation spaces provide excellent opportunities to be learning laboratories and outdoor classrooms.

The Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative

The Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (GLSI) was established "to develop knowledgeable and active stewards of the Great Lakes through hands-on learning in the community." The GLSI is made up of eight regional "hubs," each of which supports a variety of collaborative, community-based stewardship projects and builds community capacity for place-based resource management.

www.glstewardship.org

Recommendation 2:

Diversify funding and use new criteria to target investments toward achieving the outcomes articulated in this report.

Priority Actions for Implementing this Recommendation

- The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and State Parks Endowment Fund programs are essential to providing the critical investment dollars our state needs to deliver on the *Pure Michigan* promise, and must be protected in perpetuity. In order to more strategically use these dollars, we must evaluate and prioritize state-funded parks and recreation investments by incorporating new or expanded investment and reporting criteria into the state's funding decisions (including grants to local communities or nonprofits for parks and recreation efforts). At a minimum, projects and programs must all or in part:
 - Be relevant to or specifically mentioned in community or regional economic development initiatives, strategies, and plans (such as Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies, regional marketing and branding efforts, local ordinances)
 - Include a plan for sustainable management and maintenance of the investment asset
 - Advance volunteerism and/or community partnerships that help increase investment in and stewardship of park and recreation resources
 - Address a gap in the diversity or geographic distribution of recreation activities, or the protection and interpretation of unique or representative natural, cultural, historic, or pre-historic resources (as identified in the gap analysis/planning efforts called for in Recommendations 1 and 4)
 - Partner with local school or nonprofit educational programs that help strengthen community fabric and create place-based learning opportunities for youth
 - Make physical connections to existing or planned state and local recreation facilities and/or key community assets (such as downtown commercial districts, regional transportation hubs, or redevelopment projects)
 - Demonstrate that they will contribute to increasing the number and frequency of Michigan residents exercising or spending time outdoors
 - Incorporate nationally recognized and new design elements for construction and renovation that create more unique and contemporary experiences for users and that help achieve the desired outcomes articulated by the Panel, such as:
 - ❖ Green building, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, Americans with Disabilities Act standards
 - ❖ Technology improvements, including wireless Internet access where appropriate in developed parks and at key recreational trailheads
 - ❖ Design ideas developed through the current MSU-DNR park redesign project⁷ or future Michigan State Park design contests (see Recommendation III in Chapter 6)

The Panel also encourages the state to incorporate the above criteria into the development of its Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) updates, and require local communities to utilize these

⁷ Michigan State University's (MSU) Department of Community Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies and School of Planning, Design & Construction is partnering with the DNR on a model project for the redesign, enhancement, and marketing of five State Park and Recreation Areas, and a State Parks Conference Center. This effort provides students a real-world learning experience and helps the DNR gain a fresh perspective on design and maintenance of State Parks.

criteria in the development of their DNR-approved five-year recreation plans to achieve better uniformity of approach between the state and local partners.

- The state should make the Recreation Passport Program “Opt-out” and also pursue revenue bonding authority, similar to that exercised by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, to address the backlog and ongoing **priority** maintenance and improvement needs for outdoor recreation facilities. These mechanisms appropriately capture the values these resources provide to all users and the state as a whole. Priority for maintenance and improvement efforts should be determined based on how well they align with the investment criteria outlined above.
- The state should work closely with the Michigan Recreation and Park Association and other partners to develop a robust data collection and analysis methodology for *consistently* documenting economic *and* social impacts of parks and recreation investments, events, and programs to better understand how they meet desired outcomes and inform future investment decisions.
- The state should re-establish the State Parks Foundation, enabling it to accept donations and philanthropic grants in pursuit of the desired outcomes for the state’s parks and outdoor recreation areas and actively seek donations to this foundation. Residents should have the opportunity to make a donation to the foundation using options such as a “check off” box on their tax returns.

Background

Michigan’s current funding system doesn’t explicitly connect decision making to the expected outcomes the state would like to get from its parks and outdoor recreation investments—including social, economic, and ecological benefits. Instead the system is structured and reported on around the source funding (Appendix B provides a visual depiction of the flows of funding that support State Parks and recreation services and local grant making). The result is a system that does not adequately demonstrate the value of State Park and outdoor recreation investments, and consistently competes for state funding resources.

Also, the state’s current parks and outdoor recreation funding system doesn’t adequately capture revenue from all beneficiaries—either recreationists who don’t currently pay “directly” into the system via licenses, permits, or user fees, or the general public who receives social, health, economic, and ecological benefits from the mere existence of these spaces. The Passport Program has been a good start to creating a more stable source of funding, easing people’s access to outdoor recreation, and reducing administrative costs at individual facilities. But current funding is still not durable enough and does not adequately address the backlog of priority facility improvements.

An investment strategy that is more visionary, and that ties decision making to the Panel’s desired outcomes, will not only help the state prioritize its recreation investments, it will help build and sustain the case for funding prioritized, deliberate improvements in Michigan’s park and recreation infrastructure so that the state continues to deliver on the promise of *Pure Michigan*.

Genesee County Parks

Driving and Demonstrating Economic Value

Genesee County annually evaluates the economic impact of its parks and recreation offerings, looking at both regular business initiatives as well as tourism impacts from special events such as the weekends it hosts “Day Out with Thomas.™” In 2011, the Genesee County Parks business operations added more than \$18 million to the local economy and funded roughly 446 jobs *in addition* to the parks’ own payroll. The Genesee County Parks have a successful business model and represent a significant part of the economic backbone of the county. The analysis helps demonstrate that parks are one of the best investments local residents make, and it helps direct the county’s work and investments for the coming year (PROS Consulting 2012).

The Panel categorically affirms the use of and perpetuation of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and the State Parks Endowment Fund as constitutionally protected mechanisms for investing in the state's natural resources. While we see the need for closely harmonizing the use of these and other resources toward the common purposes outlined in this report, we absolutely reject any dilution of these critical funding mechanisms or a redirection of their use from their current purpose.

Recommendation 3:

Make the development of statewide and regional systems of connected trail networks one of the state’s highest priorities for outdoor recreation investment over the next ten years.

Priority Actions for Implementing this Recommendation

- Use state, federal, and local recreation, economic development, and transportation funds to strategically expand the trail network; invest in priority trail connections between existing regional trails, “trunk” trails, and state or local park and recreation facilities; and create intermodal connections at major transportation hubs (such as harbors, railroad stations, airports, bus terminals).
- Provide an online trails database that includes comprehensive geospatial data, descriptions, and pictures of all the state-owned trails, and offers an easily accessible platform for other recreation providers (public and private) to include their trail data so users can have a single interface for searching and finding Michigan trails information. This should be integrated with the broader outdoor recreation database included in Recommendation 6.
- The state and local communities should invest in infrastructure (for example, wayfinding signage, points of interest information) that helps interpret interesting trail resources, directs people into adjacent and nearby communities, and highlights special community features or amenities along trails.
- The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and the DNR should recruit local communities along existing and planned “trunk-line” trails to participate in the “Pure Michigan Places” program as outlined in Recommendation 4 in order to help them maximize the economic, cultural, and “place-making” benefits of being a successful “trail town.”

Background

Trails of all sorts (including, but not limited to hiking, bicycling, equestrian, ORV, snowmobiling, skiing, and water trails) provide many opportunities for delivering the outcomes articulated by the Panel. They connect businesses and communities, support local economies, offer opportunities for people to experience regional assets, improve people’s health by offering convenient opportunities for exercise, and connect people to their “places.” They connect across local, state, federal, and private ownership, and are equally important in both rural and urban environments. Trails have also become an increasingly important transportation mechanism for allowing people to bike, run, walk, or skate to their destinations instead of driving, which provides environmental and health benefits.

Trails can be powerful economic engines that connect people to communities and their associated businesses. The Land Policy Institute at Michigan State University conducted a study that looked at the effects of green infrastructure on Michigan’s economy and found that outdoor recreation amenities, including the presence of identified trails, had positive effects on population and employment levels (Adelaja et al. 2012). Programs such as Pennsylvania’s Trail Town[®] have helped communities leverage the economic potential of trails by providing information and marketing assistance to businesses and communities.⁸ In Michigan, the Partnerships for Change and the Land Information Access Association (LIAA) assisted the “Up North Trails

⁸ See www.trailtowns.org.

Initiative” by providing a manual for towns along the North Central State Trail on how to leverage this valuable regional asset.⁹

The Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC), a Committee of the Natural Resource Commission, is in the process of developing a statewide trail plan, and the Panel encourages the Council to utilize the outcome criteria identified in Recommendation 2 to help identify and prioritize key trail connectors and investments. There are many important trail connection opportunities that could be pursued for improved connectivity. Exhibit 2 shows one example of this opportunity. In this region of Michigan’s west coast there are seven State Parks— Duck Lake State Park, P.J. Hoffmaster State Park, Ludington State Park, Mitchell State Park, Muskegon State Park, Newaygo State Park, and Silver Lake State Park, (as well as numerous local and regional parks and recreation areas). Four different major trail systems run through the area,¹⁰ including part of the 4,600 mile multi-state North Country Trail, but do not connect to each other or to the State Parks. This is just one example of how prioritizing key trail connections could create regionally significant loops that connect existing recreation spaces and surrounding communities, significantly increasing the use of those State Parks and attracting residents and visitors for a high-quality recreation experience. This lack of connectivity is not unique to central west Michigan. A host of other areas in the state also need this attention to connectivity.

⁹ The project was a 22-county effort that included cooperation with the Northeast and the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments and other stakeholders. See: www.liaa.org/downloads/north_central_state_trail_town_manual.pdf.

¹⁰ In addition to the North Country Trail (NCT), major trails in this region include the Hart-Montague Bicycle Trail, Musketawa Trail, and Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park. There are also many other motorized and non-motorized trails on public lands in this region. These above examples are just for illustration of the gaps.

EXHIBIT 2: Central West Michigan Trails and State Parks



SOURCE: Jon Allan, Panel Co-Chair.

The MSTAC, as well as the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, North Country Trail Association, and the regional and use-specific trails organizations (ORV, equestrian, snowmobiling, etc.) should all be substantially involved in (or lead) efforts to create a comprehensive, searchable trails database and set of mapping tools for the state. There are existing trail database efforts under way conducted by various organizations in Michigan that could be built upon, and some best-in-class trails databases of other states such as Pennsylvania, California, Florida, and Colorado¹¹ could be models. Though the state purports to have over 10,000 miles of trails of all kinds and lead the nation in trails, uniform and easily accessible data and information about these resources is scarce, locked in PDF images or brochures, and generally unavailable to users and entrepreneurs who might build technology applications around the data. If Michigan hopes to deliver on its goal to be known as a “trail state,” investing in improved linear and looped trail connectivity, and making all its trail *data* (not just pictures of trails) available in readily usable, geospatial formats, must be a high priority.

Finally, federal funding for non-motorized transportation will be a key resource for funding some of the priority trail improvements or extensions, and the Michigan Department of Transportation, the MEDC, the Convention and Visitors Bureaus, the private sector, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources should continue to actively seek and augment federal funds and invest them into non-motorized infrastructure.

¹¹ For example, see: www.explorepatrails.com and www.floridatrailnetwork.com.

Recommendation 4:

Encourage greater connections between communities and their recreational assets to strengthen regional identities.

Priority Actions for Implementing this Recommendation

- The state should develop a “Pure Michigan Places” program based on the Trail Town[®] program pioneered in Pennsylvania and designed to operate like the Michigan Main Street program, which provides technical assistance and financial resources to communities that make physical and programmatic connections to nearby state and regional recreation facilities.
- The ten regional members of the MEDC’s state Collaborative Development Council¹² should create regional parks and recreation asset and investment opportunity maps that identify regional assets, help to differentiate their areas using regional strengths or unique places (for example, cultural heritage sites), and are based on the results of the gap analysis described in Recommendation 1, user surveys, and recreation trends. The full Council should then help each member region develop a long-range investment strategy and marketing package through *Pure Michigan* that highlights the region’s tourism and recreation resources, develops and connects its regional brand, and engages private businesses serving tourism or recreation to help market regional assets.
- Collaboration and coordination between the state and local recreation providers should be improved by creating incentives for State Park and Recreation Area managers to collaborate with local governments in the provision of recreation services. Incentives could be employee rewards, increased local flexibility in park expenditure decisions, or options to keep a percentage of the revenue saved through collaboration with other parks and recreation entities for reinvestment in the park system they manage without restriction.

Background

Michigan’s parks and outdoor recreation spaces play an important role in defining community and regional identity and creating a strong sense of place for residents and visitors alike. The Panel spent considerable time discussing the importance of strong relationships between parks and their related community or communities. The stronger the relationship between the park and community, the healthier and more prosperous both are. Parks can benefit from community volunteers, relationships with schools, and being the site of community events. Communities benefit from having parks that attract residents and visitors and are hubs of activity and places of community pride.

Local and regional leaders must recognize and embrace their unique differences in order to strengthen regional identity and branding efforts and to encourage stronger collaboration between communities and their recreational assets. The state can support these efforts by establishing a Pure Michigan Places program that helps grow and strengthen local communities’ economies and sense of place. Pennsylvania has had significant success in helping to grow new and expand existing businesses in towns along the Great Allegheny Passage through its Trail Town[®] program. The program’s purpose is to “ensure that trail communities and businesses maximize the economic potential of the trail” by providing marketing assistance, data and economic studies, small grants for infrastructure and amenities, and business assistance and lending, and by facilitating regional branding and cooperation (Pennsylvania Trail Town Program 2012). The Michigan Main Street program provides technical assistance and training on community and economic development strategies for communities trying to revitalize their downtowns. Both of these program models offer elements that have substantial applicability to a Pure Michigan Places program. The state could develop

¹² See www.michiganadvantage.org/Collaborative-Development-Council.

best practices and support Pure Michigan Places communities by surveying and sharing information about users with local businesses and community leaders, building partnerships with local economic and community development organizations, and targeting community economic development and “place-making” funds for projects that link recreation, cultural, and historic assets to nearby communities.

The MEDC spearheaded an effort to establish a Collaborative Development Council in 2011, made up of ten regional Economic Development Collaboratives. The purpose of the Council is to “streamline services from statewide agencies, reduce duplication of outreach to communities and businesses, and better coordinate information and resource sharing among economic development professionals.” As these state and regional groups come together on collaborative efforts to advance regional economic and community development opportunities, it is critical that parks and outdoor recreation are a key part of the discussion and should play a larger role in regional branding and economic development programs. Given the significant opportunity that parks and outdoor recreation can play in regional economic development, the ten regional Economic Development Collaboratives should be the lead for developing park and outdoor recreation asset and opportunity maps that are used to prioritize infrastructure or programming investments (for example, through ongoing updates to Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies) and integrate regional marketing of those assets with the *Pure Michigan* campaign.

Asset strategies should be developed using a cultural-landscape approach, which combines three key elements: outdoor recreation, natural resources, and cultural heritage. As previously noted, there are several regions in Michigan that are already undertaking this type of regional planning. Many additional opportunities for defining and branding unique or special regional assets abound, such as:

- Ernest Hemingway heritage places in northern Michigan
- Michigan maritime history
- Michigan’s Native American experience
- Underground Railroad trail
- World-class trout streams
- The role of the outdoors in America’s automobile and manufacturing heritage (for example, sites of historic auto industry families/houses where Henry Ford spent summers or the McCormick Wilderness, associated with the McCormick manufacturing family)
- Unique or significant wildlife-related trails, such as regional and statewide birding trails or trails around Pigeon River’s free-roaming elk herd (the largest east of the Mississippi River)

These special cultural and historic places do not need to be state-owned property, but the state can play a key role in helping to identify significant areas, helping local communities or other public organizations acquire and develop management plans, and celebrate and market these resources as part of Michigan’s overall recreation and tourism system.

Finally, there are significant opportunities to create stronger connections between State Parks, local communities, and the private sector that will help increase overall use of parks and recreation spaces and provide a more comprehensive suite of recreation activities. Improved coordination between State Park managers and local communities could help save costs by sharing services, create local economic development opportunities, create capacity for self-governance, and help both the state and local communities invest in infrastructure or programming based on regional strengths or gaps.

Recommendation 5:

Use parks and recreation areas as a key tool for revitalizing Michigan's core urban areas by creating four to five Signature Parks and integrating green infrastructure into Michigan's urban redesign and redevelopment efforts.

Priority Actions for Implementing this Recommendation

- The DNR, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), the MEDC, and other state and local agencies should invest in and support locally driven public-private efforts to develop “Signature Parks” in four or five cities which are hallmark places of beauty, activity, community gathering and pride, and safety in core urban areas.¹³
- As Michigan's cities redesign and upgrade their neighborhoods and infrastructure, they must incorporate green infrastructure, and find ways to restore vacant or underutilized industrial land to create safe and attractive natural areas within or near our urban cores.

Background

Many of Michigan's urban areas have experienced significant economic decline over the last two decades, suffering disproportionate job losses, property value decline, blight, crime, and other social challenges. Despite that decline, Michigan's cities and suburbs remain the centers of our state's population, the hub of major industries, centers of cultural and entertainment opportunities, and places steeped in Michigan history. The state is currently focusing on revitalization of four urban areas that have been particularly hard hit by Michigan's economic decline—Pontiac, Detroit, Flint, and Saginaw—and these may be strong candidates for Signature Parks and green infrastructure investments.

Nationwide there is an increasing interest in urban living, particularly among the young, educated workforce (PSC and Brookings Institution 2012), and parks and outdoor recreation amenities offer a significant opportunity to contribute to the revitalization effort that is occurring in our central cities. To help facilitate this revitalization, urban parks and outdoor recreation opportunities should be a funding and programming priority for state and local natural resource, recreation, economic, and community development efforts.

Signature Parks offer a substantial opportunity for creating special spaces that attract residents and visitors and provide a sense of place and community pride. When properly invested in, a Signature Park is a focal point in a city, a “must-see destination” that provides quality programming and embodies the character and brand of a city. Signature Parks can increase tourism, generate new or expanded businesses surrounding the park, and help increase nearby property values (City Parks Alliance and HR&A Advisors, Inc. 2011). If successful, a Signature Park can be a key asset in transforming the reputation (as well as the reality) of a struggling urban community. Millennium Park in Chicago, WaterFire in Providence, Rhode Island, and High Line Park in New York are notable Signature Park examples. Detroit's own riverfront and Belle Isle are examples of potential Signature Parks in Michigan that should receive continued investment.

¹³ The City Parks Alliance defines a Signature Park as “the parks that are most heavily used and help establish distinctive identities for their cities.” See: www.cityparksalliance.org/storage/documents/HRA_-_Signature_Park_Survey_Findings_11-4-11_2.pdf.

Cities large and small have partnered with the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and their states to invest in and leverage these types of spaces as a way to get people back living in, working in, and visiting their urban areas. Key to their success is “activating” the park so that there is activity around the clock and throughout the week—this is what makes a Signature Park safe, vibrant, and popular.

Creating successful Signature Parks requires that municipalities and/or public-private partners utilize broader sources of funding to support strong urban park maintenance, operations, and programming. The average dedicated Signature Park manager relies on six or more sources of funding. Philanthropy is the most prevalent source of funds (89 percent of Signature Parks use this source), followed by corporate sponsorships and earned income from concessions and events. Other sources include public funds, foundations, infrastructure revenue (such as parking, communications), and real estate value capture from land transactions and special assessments (City Parks Alliance and HR&A Advisors, Inc. 2011).

Green infrastructure that provides ecosystem services such as storm-water management and runoff filtration enables the provision of natural and wildlife areas that are equally important for the revitalization and health of our densest urban areas. Such projects offer low-development recreation opportunities and respite from busy urbanized environments while also revitalizing older industrial landscapes. Chicago’s “Millennium Reserve” initiative and the “Green TIME Zone of Chicago’s Southland” are successful examples of how these spaces can transform and revitalize our densest urban areas.¹⁴ These types of places that allow residents to experience nature and naturalized landscapes are particularly important for urban areas, where opportunities for getting out in nature are limited and sometimes non-existent.



Detroit Riverfront

In the last decade, the Detroit riverfront has undergone a major physical and economic transformation, with over \$400 million of public and private investment in revitalizing the area. The Detroit RiverFront Conservancy’s Rivi re 28 initiative embraces the Signature Park concept and is introducing young professionals to the riverfront while engaging them in all sorts of activities, from channeling their inner Zen during a yoga class, to toasting S’mores over an open campfire, to even creating urban artwork along the Dequindre Cut. Other events such as the “Light Up the Riverfront” pig and turkey roast (which had over 500 attendees), “Soiree on the Greenway,” and “Sunday Funday” have attracted hundreds of young professionals to the riverfront and helped create “buzz” for the area that is contributing to its popularity and investment (Detroit RiverFront Conservancy 2012).

¹⁴ See more about the Millennium Reserve and the Green TIME Zone at www2.illinois.gov/gov/millennium-reserve/Pages/default.aspx and www.ent.org/repository/GTZ.pdf.

Recommendation 6:

Integrate tourism and economic development marketing in order to fully leverage the economic and social benefits that parks and outdoor recreation resources can provide.

Priority Actions for Implementing this Recommendation

- The MEDC and the DNR should specifically highlight local, regional, and state outdoor recreation assets in the state's ongoing place-making and business and talent attraction programs (such as "Why Michigan?" and Pure Michigan Talent Connect) including websites, marketing materials, and presentations.
- The MEDC and the DNR must make it an immediate priority to identify and make publicly available all data on State Parks, trails, and outdoor recreation facilities on a common platform capable of inclusion in geospatial data systems.
- Nonprofit, private, and public-sector recreation or recreation-related service providers must collaborate on the development of a unified, open source geospatial database of public parks, trails, and outdoor recreation facilities.
- The DNR's web-based state camping and recreation booking site should be of the highest quality in both appearance and functionality, consistent in visual appeal with the MEDC's www.michiganadvantage.org, and fully integrated with the *Pure Michigan* travel and tourism website in order to provide a more substantive and enticing outdoor recreation trip planning tool.

Background

Marketing of Michigan's abundant and high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities is critical to realizing the associated economic and social benefits these areas provide. The state has expended significant resources on our *Pure Michigan* tourism marketing campaign. This powerful advertising campaign has been successful in rebranding the state's image, showing off some of Michigan's most beautiful and treasured natural and cultural resources, and creating the expectation for unique experiences and adventure. It has also become the calling card of the MEDC and its talent and business attraction programs, including the business and talent landing pages.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the Panel believes the state is not yet fully delivering on the brand it promises through the *Pure Michigan* campaign. There continue to be opportunities to better integrate recreation opportunities and the outdoor quality of life our state provides into the state's tourism marketing, and the state has not effectively integrated these assets in its talent and business attraction marketing efforts. In particular, the state's online resources (which the state drives people to in its *Pure Michigan* campaign as well as its Talent Connect efforts) fall short of providing easy-to-use, compelling information about the state's abundant, high-quality parks and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Michigan's recreational and cultural assets are the foundation of the *Pure Michigan* brand, but the importance of these assets is not adequately recognized or integrated given their growing importance to the state's economic success and emerging "brand" in the world. For example, the DNR is required to pay MEDC/Travel Michigan to promote and connect residents and visitors to State Parks and recreation amenities through the *Pure Michigan* campaign, even though these resources are the backbone of the *Pure*

¹⁵ See MEDC Business Connect (www.MichiganAdvantage.org), The Pure Michigan Talent Connect (www.mitalent.org), the Pure Michigan Mentor Network (www.mimentornetwork.org); and the Pure Michigan Venture Development Fund (<http://www.michiganadvantage.org/pure-michigan-venture-development-fund/>).

Michigan experience. Similarly, the MEDC's Michigan Advantage website has an entire "Why Michigan?" section listing the reasons a business might choose to locate here, but it does not reference or crosslink to sites showing the outdoor and recreational assets of the state that are increasingly critical to attracting business and talented workers (MEDC 2012). We lose opportunities every time this agency "silo" approach disconnects *Pure Michigan* programs from *Pure Michigan* assets.

There is also a considerable lack of publicly available, comprehensive, searchable geospatial data on Michigan's parks, trails, and recreation areas, and neither the *Pure Michigan* nor the DNR websites adequately allow for "concierge" type service for people to build recreation-oriented itineraries in Michigan. The DNR's website does not allow users to search by type of outdoor recreation amenity or activity, lacks detailed descriptions or photos of the state's facilities that help users understand the recreational opportunities available at that site, does not provide or connect to related amenities in surrounding communities, lacks geospatial data on its parks and recreation areas, and utilizes a clunky reservation system for its campgrounds.¹⁶ The MEDC's recently upgraded *Pure Michigan* website offers some of these functions, but is not populated with data on all of the state, federal, regional, and local park, trail and recreation resources that would make it a comprehensive and robust tool.¹⁷

A first critical step is making the digital entry point for people seeking information about experiencing Michigan's outdoors appealing and worthy of the beauty of Michigan's natural wonders—the *Pure Michigan* program has proven it is up to this task and should be tapped to fully integrate the DNR's recreation resources and trip planning tools as well. Next, it is critical to make the website's underlying data more robust and comprehensive, and this can best be accomplished by developing the appropriate, open source platform for the database of trails, parks, and recreation areas, and populating it with state-owned facilities. By providing an open source platform, it also unleashes the entrepreneurial creativity of the private sector to develop related electronic applications that help people evaluate outdoor recreational amenities and experiences.

¹⁶ See <http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10365---,00.html>.

¹⁷ See <http://www.michigan.org/>.

Recommendation 7:

Prioritize investment in the safety and maintenance of, and access to, parks and recreation spaces.

Priority Actions for Implementing this Recommendation

- Nonprofits, local law enforcement, state police, the private sector, and park and recreation units must collaborate to develop partnerships that activate and improve the safety of local public open spaces, with a special emphasis on neighborhood and community parks.
- The Recreation Passport Program should create a special initiative to fund park safety and access improvements in all of Michigan's parks.
- Michigan's urban areas must evaluate the current condition of **all** existing parks and recreation spaces and prioritize maintenance and safety initiatives based on neighborhood/community needs in order to concentrate limited resources on highest need areas.
- The Michigan Department of Transportation, County Road Commissions, and local communities must support, invest in, and implement Complete Streets¹⁸ initiatives to ensure that Michigan residents can safely and reasonably have access to appropriately maintained recreation spaces (such as parks or schools) within their communities.

Background

In order for our state's parks and outdoor recreation areas to achieve the social, health, and economic benefits identified in this report, they must be places that people perceive to be well-maintained and safe. Access to those facilities must also be safe (Godbey 2009). If there is a community park within two blocks of a child's home, but he or she cannot walk there without fear of being harmed by crime or other unsafe conditions, that child will not be taking full advantage of opportunities to get exercise, enjoy nature, or relax. And it is not far-fetched to assume that the child will think all parks and recreation places are unappealing or lack value—we only have one moment to make a first impression. In other words, safe access to and well-maintained conditions in our state's parks and outdoor recreation spaces are key determinants for their use and achieving the lasting benefits these resources provide.

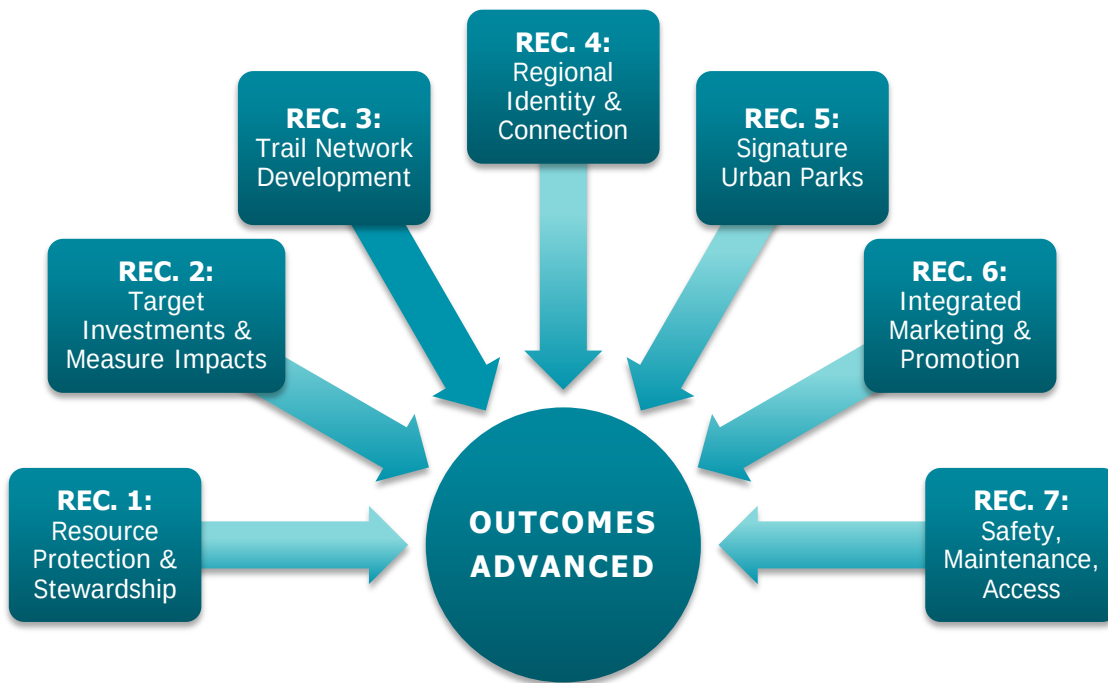
Public-private partnerships must be utilized to help ensure that public parks and recreation areas are properly developed, maintained, and improved. In particular, the poor conditions of public property in core urban cities increases obstacles to using outdoor recreation facilities, and limits the ability of communities to recognize the health and economic development benefits that are derived from parks and outdoor recreation areas. Safe, accessible parks and outdoor recreation opportunities support each of these objectives in an efficient, cost-effective manner, and the state should provide assistance in helping these cities and other communities implement a safety management plan and program for public parks and recreation areas.

¹⁸ Complete Streets is a nationwide effort to change transportation policies so that roads and other transportation links are designed and operated in a manner that enables safe access for all users (e.g., cars, bikes, pedestrians). See www.completestreets.org for more information.

Chapter 5: Implementing the Panel’s Recommendations

The Panel has identified seven top priority recommendations that drive toward achieving and demonstrating the desired outcomes articulated in Chapter 3. Exhibit 3 shows how the top seven priority recommendations, when implemented, will help the state achieve the desired outcomes identified by the Panel.

EXHIBIT 3: Recommendations that Drive Outcomes



SOURCE: Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel.

The Panel feels very strongly that its recommendations should be actively encouraged, nurtured, and implemented by the governor, state agencies, county and local governmental units, and public, private, and nonprofit partners at the regional and local levels. All of these partners have important roles in improving the quality and experience of Michigan’s parks and outdoor recreation opportunities—both state-owned facilities and local, regional, and federal spaces that make up the state’s broad parks and recreation system.

Critical to the successful implementation of these recommendations and achievement of the vision and desired outcomes will be a strong and diverse external advisory group and an adaptive management approach that helps demonstrate the value of Michigan’s system of parks and recreation amenities.

External Advisory Committee

The Panel recognizes the importance of a strong external advisory committee to help the governor and state agencies implement the state-focused recommendations of this report, and provide guidance to local and nonprofit partners on driving toward the vision and outcomes articulated by the Panel. The existing Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee is currently made up of dedicated individuals and has played a very important role in helping the DNR identify priorities. The Committee was instrumental in helping develop the critical Recreation Passport funding program. But the Panel feels its role could be strengthened and

recommends the Committee be restructured and more broadly empowered to provide stronger oversight and advice to state agencies and the governor.

While the DNR and other state agencies will continue to look to the Committee for ongoing guidance and support, the Committee should specifically be charged with three key roles:

- **Identify Metrics of Success for Each of the Desired Outcomes:** In order to provide guidance to the state and evaluate progress, the Committee must start by developing a handful of key metrics for measuring how well the state is achieving the desired outcomes.
- **Evaluate Success and Progress:** While there are many actions that Michigan's state agencies and other partners undertake on a daily basis that will help achieve the desired outcomes articulated by the Panel, as a starting point the Committee should annually evaluate the state, local, nonprofit, and private-sector partners' progress in implementing the Panel's specific recommendations and the effectiveness of those recommendations in driving toward the desired outcomes (based on the metrics the Committee identifies).

The evaluation should take an "investment analysis" approach, utilizing the metrics of success identified by the Committee to evaluate how well resources spent by the state (including DNR, MEDC, MDOT, MSHDA and any other state agencies funding parks or outdoor recreation-related activities) are driving toward the desired outcomes and returning ecological, economic, and social value to the state.

- **Recommend Improvements or Adaptations:** Based on its ongoing evaluation of the extent to which the actions of the state and its partners are achieving the outcomes, the Committee should be charged with making recommendations every two years on:
 - What additional actions the state and other recreation partners should pursue to help achieve the desired outcomes
 - How the Panel's proposed recommendations need to be adjusted in order to better achieve the desired outcomes
 - How the recommendations or desired outcomes need to be changed to respond to emerging issues

The Panel recommends that the Committee continue operating under the auspices of the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and be made up of nine members, appointed by the director of the DNR, in consultation with the governor's Interagency Collaboration Committee and the Governor's Appointments Division, and serve two-year terms with a rotating appointment schedule. The Committee should include two additional members from the NRC (for a total of 11 Committee members) who are appointed by the NRC chairperson. The Committee chair shall be appointed by the NRC chairperson with consultation from the governor and his office. Committee members must represent a diverse set of expertise (such as natural resource managers; urban, cultural, or historic preservation experts; economic developers; financial advisors; recreation-oriented businesses; recreation user groups; educators; or health and fitness experts) that aligns with the vision and desired outcomes for the state's parks and outdoor recreation areas.

Reporting Progress and Demonstrating Value

The Panel recommends the DNR, in cooperation with the MEDC, MDOT, and MSHDA, demonstrate progress in implementing the recommendations and achieving desired outcomes by incorporating the criteria identified in Recommendation 2 and the metrics of success identified by the Advisory Committee into an annual parks and outdoor recreation "investment return" dashboard and report. The dashboard and report should be provided to the governor, the Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee, and the public. In order to consolidate reporting as much as possible, the state should use this dashboard and report to meet as many other recreation and tourism-related program reporting requirements as possible, amending existing state legislation to achieve this, if necessary.

Chapter 6: Additional Recommendations

In addition to the top seven priority recommendations, the Panel identified 19 additional, complementary recommendations that, when implemented, will also significantly contribute to achieving the desired outcomes articulated by the Panel. Some of these recommendations are targeted toward the state—the governor, the legislature, or state agencies. Others are more broadly geared toward local, nonprofit, and private-sector partners.

- I. While affirming the durability and critical importance of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and State Parks Endowment Fund, the governor should create a follow-on Panel that looks at the state’s overall natural resources funding system. The Blue Ribbon Panel spent significant time evaluating the state’s current system of funding and accounting for parks and recreation infrastructure and programming, and has made recommendations in this report for a number of funding-related changes. However, there are still significant changes related to funding and accounting that the state should consider in order to more effectively achieve the outcomes articulated by the Panel. Some of these funding issues go well beyond, but directly affect, parks and recreation. Others require a deeper analysis of the DNR’s current funding and accounting mechanisms, an activity for which this Panel simply did not have enough time. Specifically, a follow-on natural resources funding panel must look at:
 - a. Changes to the Commercial Forest Act to better match today’s land ownership patterns and the legal and financial needs of land owners. The update should consider new methods of value assessment or purchase of permanent conservation easements in order to provide greater capital returns to owners while assuring perpetual public access.
 - b. Replacing or making substantive changes to the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and “Swamp Tax” system, such as eliminating it and replacing it with better methods of allocating revenue sharing based on public land ownership in counties. Currently, the state legislature authorizes approximately \$15 million in PILT payments to local governments. These payments are for a broad suite of public lands, including state-owned forests, recreation areas, and parks. These are not substantial amounts of money in the broader state budget picture, but the PILT issue is significant because of the financial pressure felt by many local governments and the perception by some that the state owns too much land that would be better utilized if it were in private use.
 - c. How future mineral lease revenues will be allocated after the State Parks Endowment Fund has reached its statutory cap for the protection and stewardship of our state’s natural resources.
 - d. State Parks Endowment Fund balance requirements and potential use of a Stabilization Fund that will be used to offset annual income fluctuations due to market volatility that impact the annual purchasing capacity of the Endowment Fund.
- II. In order to facilitate the analysis called for in Recommendation I, the DNR should designate an individual (or small team) with the task of developing a revised internal income and expense tracking system that provides financial reports to more directly illustrate trends in revenues and expenses and facilitates accurate estimates of program sustainability. The Panel has worked closely with the DNR to understand the historical statement of income and expenditures for the overall State Parks and Recreation Area budget, and for the first time has been able to capture the and illustrate the DNR flow-through budget for parks and recreation (see Appendix B). But the state lacks an accounting system that provides a clear understanding of the State Parks and Recreation Division financial picture at any given point in time. The Panel believes the DNR has the data and capability, but the existing system is not designed to support this type of reporting and analysis.
- III. The governor should call for a pilot design competition for one of Michigan’s State Parks. The design competition should include a specific request to conceive a new design and experience in a State Park that specifically demonstrates and achieves the vision set forth in this report. The design competition should include a professional design and a student design element as a unified package.

- IV. Michigan's health care providers and insurance companies, especially its leading hospitals and recuperative centers, should work with the DNR and the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) on a pilot program to actively engage the medical community and local park and recreation providers in opportunities for better utilizing parks and outdoor recreation spaces as part of prescribed recuperation, health, and well-being treatments.¹⁹
- V. Communities should identify wellness champions to collaborate with local parks on simple, year-round fitness and wellness programs in parks (such as walking and fit clubs, boot camps, and other fitness classes). By becoming a hub of wellness and offering readily available programs that provide support and structure, parks will become easier to use, less intimidating, and a "go to" place for regular fitness and exercise.
- VI. The DNR should augment the use of commercial leases for park services when appropriate and in consultation with their local communities (for example, lodges, canoe/kayak liveries), and have strong lease agreements that adequately capture the value of those services (such as share of profits). Wherever possible, the state should prioritize opportunities to support local businesses in providing those services rather than statewide centralized contracts or agreements.²⁰
- VII. In order to better address needs identified in the gap analysis (Recommendation 1), local governments and the state should continue to pursue public-private partnerships (with land conservancies and other organizations, for example) for the acquisition and disposal of public recreation land.
- VIII. The DNR should establish strong partnerships with special-event organizers that have proven, responsible track records to be primary organizers of events (trails runs, field trials, adventure races, festivals) on state lands, and should ensure that processes and permit fees adequately cover the costs directly associated with those events.
- IX. Michigan's State Forests are an important source of timber, as well as being home to many dispersed recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, foraging and wildlife viewing. As part of the state's update to its State and Regional Forest Management Plans, the need has emerged to better integrate recreational uses with timber production, recognizing that, while recreational activities should not manage the forest, they should be part of the consideration in the planning process. The compartment review process should continue to be the front door for the public to engage in case-by-case decisions within the State Forests, but there is also a need to:
 - a. Create a set of Best Management Practices (BMPs) to guide timber management and the integration of other recreational uses around defined Pathways in the State Forests. Pathways are places in which the state has chosen to invest and should be treated as such. These BMPs should start with the Forest Management Plans, but should extend to the timber harvest contracts.
 - b. Enhance coordination between all the resource divisions in the DNR to ensure that fisheries, wildlife, recreation, and timber work together to create multi-use State and Regional Forest Management.
- X. The state, through its parks funding mechanisms, should provide modest capacity support for "Friends" and other local and regional volunteer groups as a means of leveraging their help in maintaining park resources, creating stronger physical, social, and emotional connections between

¹⁹ As examples, see California (www.parks.ca.gov/pages/1324/files/healthy%20trail%20prescriptions%20combined.pdf), New Zealand (www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/physical-activity/green-prescriptions/how-green-prescription-works), Canada (www.pace-canada.org/products/pdfs/en/goforgreen-en.pdf).

²⁰ By moving to central procurement contracts, the local parks superintendents and management have lost the opportunity to make local purchases, straining the relationships in some cases between the parks and their communities. Superintendents need to have the flexibility to buy locally.

community members and their park and recreation resources, in facilitating use and conflict management, and in engendering a stewardship ethic. Volunteer support groups that receive state financial support should be required to add broad representation from a variety of ecological, historical, and social backgrounds as well as advocates for particular recreational activities.

- XI. The DNR should explore, through community facilitated discussion and engagement, the development of a public-private lodge system that offers more upscale, full-service accommodations (such as hotel-type rooms, restaurants, family activities, and other amenities) at two or three of its most popular State Parks over the next five years.
- XII. To strengthen resource protection on state lands, the DNR should have adequate enforcement capabilities to promote stewardship of the state's natural and cultural resources. Successful enforcement relies on frequent patrols to deter users from willful or inadvertent violations of resource protection regulations. To achieve this, the state should undertake a gap analysis to determine need levels of enforcement activities to ensure the safety of patrons and conservation of natural and cultural assets. This analysis would develop metrics to monitor progress toward desired safety and conservation outcomes and recommend improvements in enforcement funding.
- XIII. The state should evaluate options and make necessary changes for pricing campsites to better reflect relative costs and impact of different user types (for example, greater electrical use by people who use campers rather than tents).
- XIV. Building on recent efforts to foster management and integration of parks staff with their local communities, the DNR should recruit, train, and evaluate department staff based on skill sets that drive toward the outcomes articulated by the Panel such as community or economic development, marketing or market research, facilitation and collaboration, and community or youth engagement. DNR staff, particularly those based in our State Park and Recreation Areas, should be given training and direction to drive deeper deliberate engagement with local businesses, economic and community planners, and other stakeholders in the communities in which they are located. By serving on boards or commissions, for example, they will help to improve collaboration and drive economic growth.
- XV. The Michigan Recreation and Park Association (or other relevant organization) should pursue funding to conduct a comprehensive analysis of total parks and recreation spending in the state from all private and public sources. Better understanding the nature and magnitude of investments throughout the state's system of parks and recreation could help the state and partners prioritize areas of collaboration and better leverage existing funding.
- XVI. Drawing on the work of the Michigan Sense of Place Council, The MiPlace Initiative, and work done by the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council, the state should work with local communities to help them manage land and real estate development in ways that reinforce and support their unique sense of place and cultural heritage, enhance their various rural or urban character, and support small downtowns, strong neighborhood identity, and walkable destinations.

The Blue Ribbon Panel visited Tahquamenon Falls State Park for its April 2012 meeting and was impressed by the collaboration between the State Park and the surrounding communities of Paradise and Newberry. The Park Superintendent regularly works with local officials (Downtown Development Authorities and others) and businesses on opportunities to support each other's work and help the surrounding communities benefit from the hundreds of thousands of visitors to Tahquamenon Falls each year. This type of community engagement is the skill set that the Panel would like to encourage more of throughout the state.

- XVII. Develop a program to identify, analyze, interpret, protect, and provide public access to the significant historic and archaeological properties in Michigan's State Parks. Establish and implement sustainable maintenance, interpretive, and restoration plans, informed by the U.S. Department of Interior standards (US DOI, 1983). Resources within Michigan's eight already designated "historic" state parks should be the first priority.
- XVIII. Invest in sustainable access to Michigan's shipwrecks and other underwater heritage sites so current and future residents and visitors can enjoy and explore the state's rich maritime cultural landscape. Investment should support increased recreational access to these sites, establishment of mooring buoys or other protective devices at key shipwreck sites, "way-finding" signage, and increased on-water enforcement and monitoring to ensure the preservation of these resources.
- XIX. The DNR, in collaboration with the State Energy Office (housed within the MEDC) and nonprofit and private stakeholders, should develop a sustainability strategy to integrate renewable energy, energy efficiency, clean transportation, recycling, and/or other "green" measures into all State Park and Recreation Area investments. This strategy would be targeted to reduce operation and maintenance costs (for example, installation of LED lighting reduces both energy consumption and staff time), represent sound environmental stewardship, and promote the utilization and/or demonstration of Michigan-made technologies within our parks and recreation system.

Chapter 7: Concluding Thoughts

In this report, the Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel has laid out its vision for what role our state's parks and outdoor recreation areas can and should play in Michigan's prosperity and how they should be managed and invested in to achieve the outcomes we desire from these resources.

Michigan's parks and outdoor recreation areas are true gems, and should be viewed by the state and all of our residents as critical assets for advancing Michigan's prosperity. They return dividends—social, ecological, and economic—that far exceed the investments made by the state and other public and private partners. These resources are part of our state's identity, and an increasingly important part of how we reflect ourselves to the world.

This is a moment of opportunity for Michigan to boldly reaffirm our commitment to high-quality parks and outdoor recreation spaces and the protection of the natural, cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources that are the backbone of these opportunities. It is a moment to be proud of our visionary legacy for dedicating funding for the protection and enhancement of those resources, and commit to protecting and augmenting those resources to meet the park and outdoor recreation needs of generations to come. Finally, it is a moment to recognize and embrace that the future of parks and outdoor recreation encompasses more than simply preserving places to recreate. They are places that help create vibrant communities, attract visitors and talent, encourage people to gather and connect with one another, offer opportunities for people to improve their health and well-being, and remind us of our connection to the natural world and to our history. If Michigan can capitalize on this moment and embrace this broader vision, we will truly have a world-class parks and outdoor recreation system.

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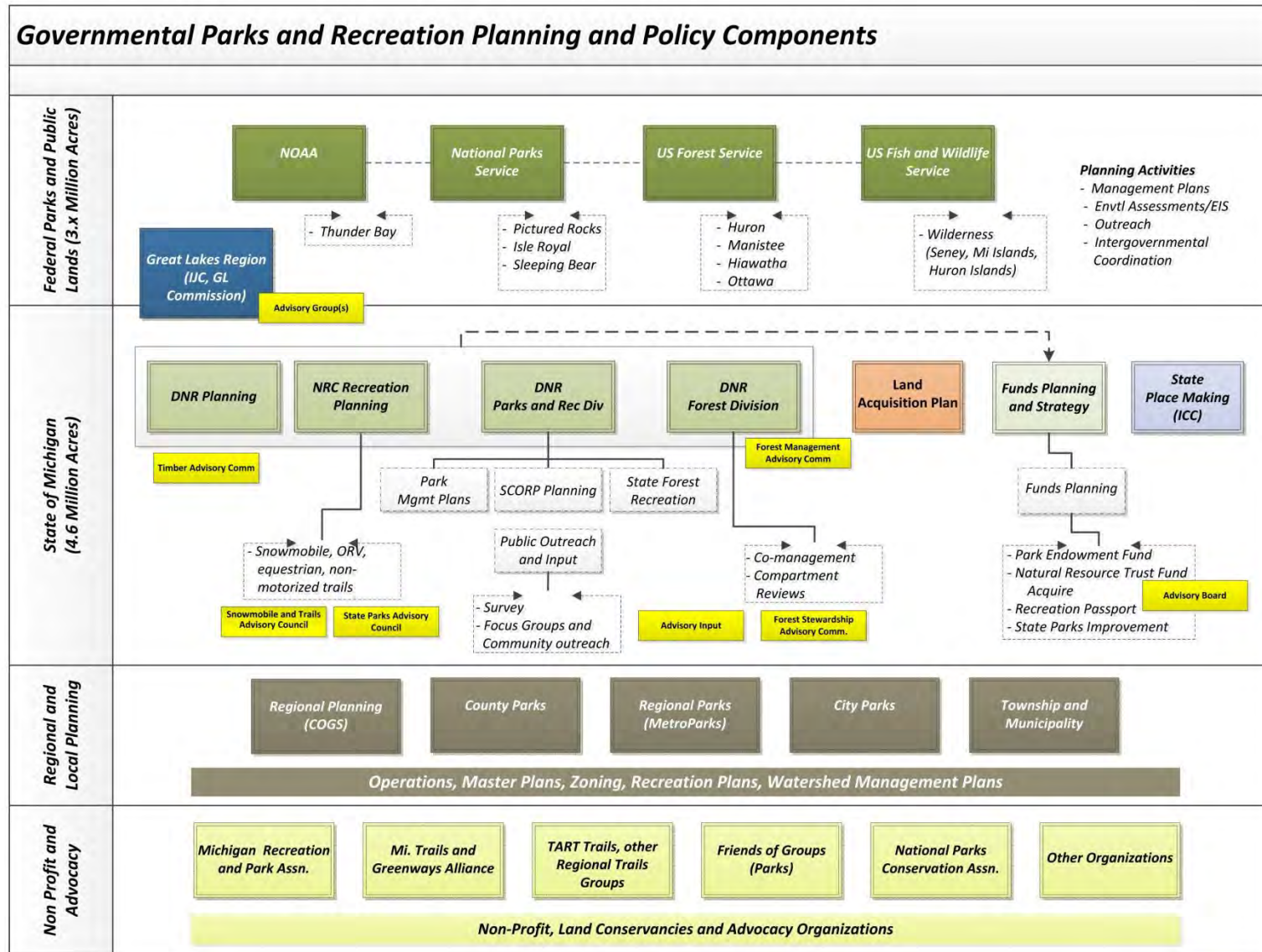
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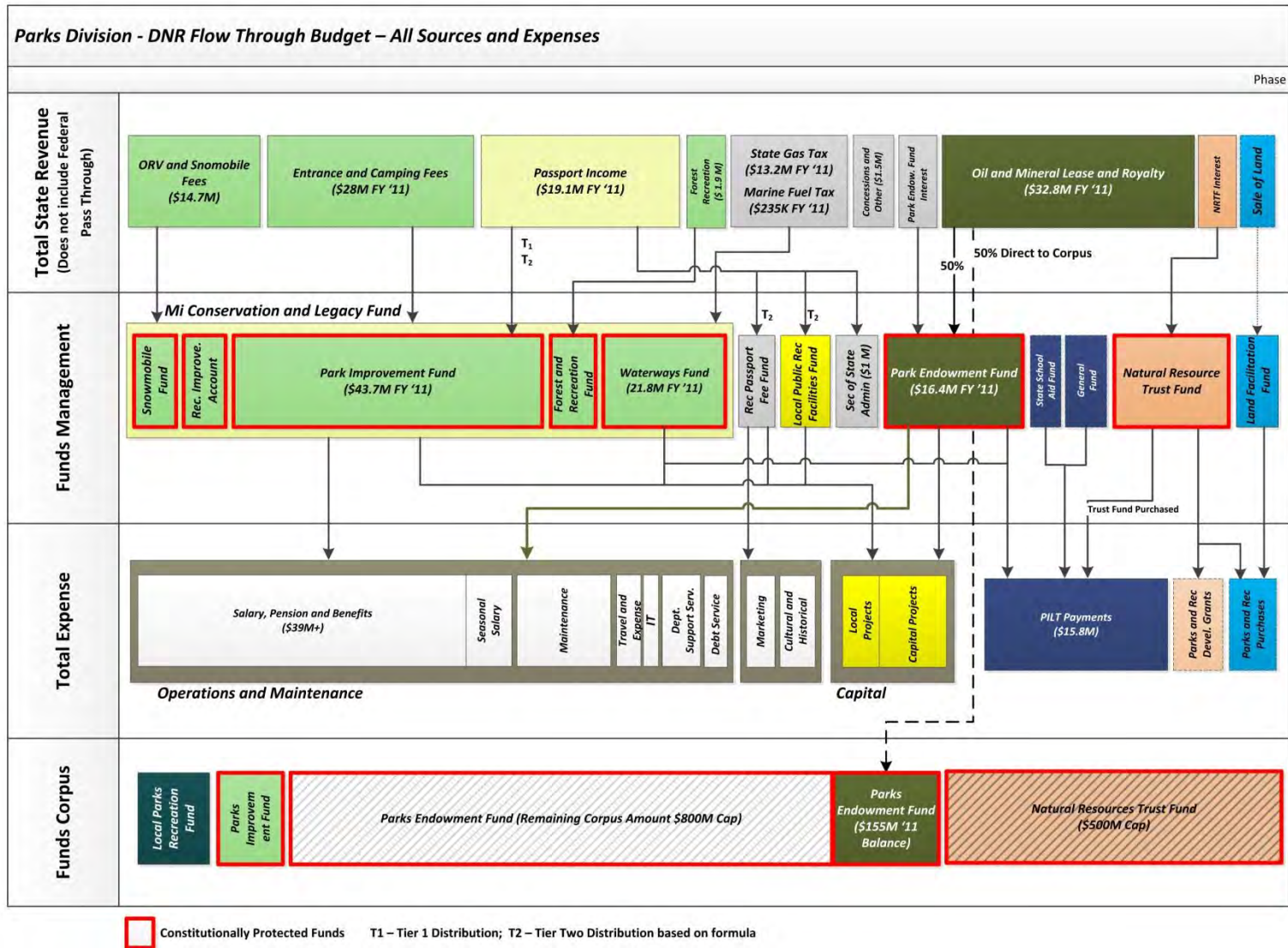
Appendix A:

Overview of Related State Natural Resource and Recreation Planning Efforts



Appendix B:

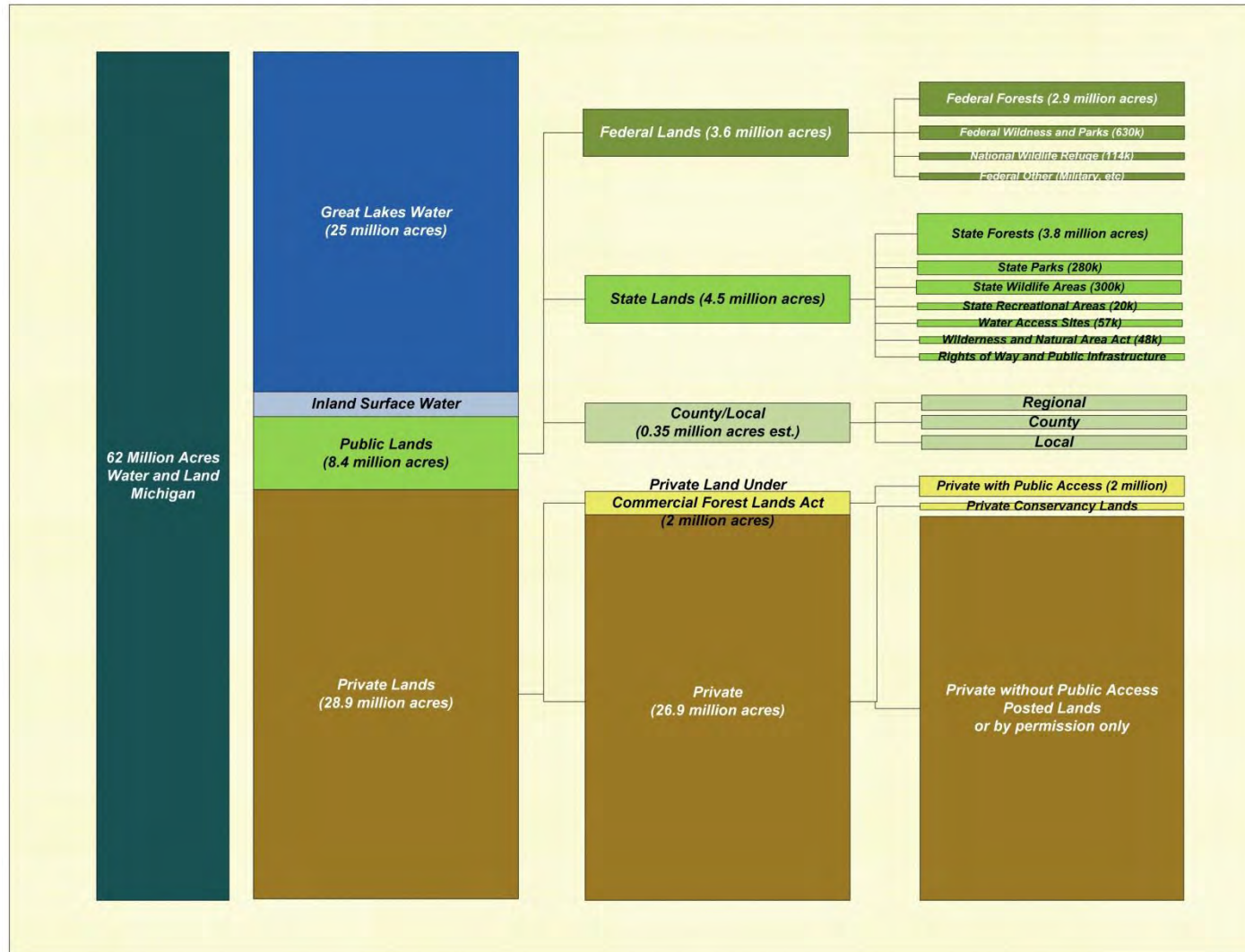
State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Funding Flows



Appendix C:

State Public Lands Classification

Acres of Private, Public Land and Bottomlands for Michigan 2012



Appendix D:

Blue Ribbon Panel Meeting Dates and Locations

November 7, 2011—Henry Center for Executive Development, Lansing

December 19, 2011—Kuntzsch Business Services Office, Grand Ledge

January 9, 2012—Michigan Municipal League Office, Lansing

February 6, 2012—Crossroads Village, Flint

March 5, 2012—Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center, Roscommon

April 16, 2012—Tahquamenon Falls State Park, Paradise

May 7, 2012—Detroit Port Authority, Detroit

June 4, 2012—Consumers Energy South Haven Conference Center, South Haven

July 9, 2012—Petoskey City Hall, Petoskey

August 13, 2012—Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center/Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, Alpena

September 10, 2012—Michigan Municipal League Office, Lansing

September 17, 2012—Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center, Roscommon