

Position: SB 78 "Anti-Biodiversity Bill"

Posted by Michigan Audubon on 02/12/2013

To Senator Casperson, Members of the Senate Natural Resources Committee, and DNR Director Creagh:

More than 440 species of birds either use Michigan as a "rest stop" during migration or reside in the state full-time. The annual diversity of bird species in Michigan is the result of diverse native habitats available throughout the Great Lakes State. Michigan's birds are an economic asset as a form of watchable wildlife--contributing to \$1.6 billion in positive economic activity for Michigan in 2006--that must be actively protected with every tool available.

The stewardship of threatened and endangered species, the protection of functioning natural communities, and the restoration of native plants and wildlife are management concepts that date back 100 years in Michigan - through decades of thoughtful restoration and diligent conservation efforts that have returned our great forests to health following clear-cutting, fires and near ecological ruin in the early 19th century.

Michigan Audubon supports the responsibility and effort on the part of the state's Department of Natural Resources in deploying the best scientific and professional expertise and strategies to ensure "the continued existence and normal functioning of native species and communities" in Michigan. In short, our organization--Michigan's first centennial conservation organization--supports the protection, expansion, and further study of Michigan's diverse avian community and its supporting ecology.

Michigan Audubon estimates that the proposed legislation, Senate Bill 78, would result in further degradation of habitats already stressed by factors such as residential and commercial development, resource extraction, and chemical pollution (to name just a few). The availability and stewardship of biologically-diverse habitats is critical for Michigan's rare and declining bird species. Michigan Audubon supports the following analysis by the Michigan Environmental Council (MEC), which notes that this Bill, if enacted, would do the following:

Revise the definition of "conservation" with regard to biological diversity, removing key provisions regarding restoration, distribution and the "continued existence" of native species and communities. Prohibit the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Natural Resources Commission from promulgating or enforcing a rule or an order that designates or classifies an area of land specifically for the purpose of achieving or maintaining biological diversity, and provide that no other state agency would be required to do so either.

Delete the conservation of biological diversity from the DNR's duties regarding forest management, and require the Department to balance its management activities with economic values.

Eliminate a requirement that the DNR manage forests in a manner that promotes restoration.

Delete a legislative finding that most losses of biological diversity are the result of human activity.

Michigan Audubon agrees that biodiversity, as a management tool for enhancing and restoring Michigan's native natural ecosystems, is entirely in keeping with the idea of the Michigan's agencies are stewards of the public trust, and the caretakers of Michigan's abundant natural beauty and healthy ecosystems. Habitat management, biological diversity and ecosystem considerations are fundamental

tools of modern forest management, and it makes no sense to remove these from the DNR's mission or goals as it relates to forest management.

Michigan Audubon is opposed to SB 78 and its assumption that the perpetual survival of Michigan's native species--including more than 440 species of birds--and natural communities (as represented by the diversity of plant, animal and genetic material managed on state lands) is not of critical importance to Michigan and its residents. In fact, to the tens-of-thousands of Michigan's residents and visitors (there are 50 million wildlife-watching enthusiasts nationwide) the long-term survival and stewardship of wild birds and the conditions that support them is not only important, but an absolute necessity. Tools such as sustainable forestry and land designation to protect vital natural features and communities are key tools in achieving the DNR's mission and preserving our great natural resource legacy; we see no reason to eliminate them.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan E. Lutz, Executive Director
Michigan Audubon