



A Coalition of Organizations Protecting Michigan's People and the Environment

***New DEQ chief Dan Wyant:* Looking to economic gardening to grow, protect Michigan**

This is an edited version of a story that appeared in the Michigan Environmental Report online newsletter. To subscribe to our e-newsletter, or to receive the newsletter electronically, please e-mail hugh@environmentalcouncil.org.

As a boy, Dan Wyant used to stop traffic on US-131 near Schoolcraft to let his grandfather's 20 head of dairy cows march across the highway to be milked.

Times and technology changed. Today, Wyant directs the state agency that oversees enforcement of pollution laws—including laws regulating huge factory farms that house thousands of cattle and produce waste equivalent to a medium-sized city.

It ain't his grandfather's dairy farm. And it ain't his grandfather's Michigan anymore.

Wyant, 51, knows he is on the hot seat as Governor Rick Snyder's director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). He must simultaneously protect the state's natural resources and aid Snyder in fostering a renaissance of economic development in Michigan. He doesn't think the two are mutually exclusive—in fact, he believes they are dependant on each other.

"We need to recognize the broader quality of life focus. We have 20 percent of the world's fresh (surface) water, 19 million acres of forested land, 10 million



Dan Wyant, appointed director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality by Governor Rick Snyder

See **Protecting Michigan**, page 4

Myth buster: State data shows Michigan renewable energy beats coal on cost alone

Renewable energy in Michigan is significantly less expensive than new coal-fired power and will cost ratepayers far less than originally projected, according to a new report from the state's Public Service Commission (PSC) and a revised renewable energy plan filed in February by Consumers Energy.

The reports also show that the state's energy efficiency programs are meeting energy needs at a fraction of the cost of new power generation.

Using figures from actual contracts for energy in Michigan, the data shatters the oft-repeated contention that renewable power is prohibitively expensive, according to David Gard, energy program director with the Michigan Environmental Council.

"Clean energy in Michigan, particularly from wind turbines, is already less expensive than new coal power, and it's becoming even cheaper as the technology improves," said Gard. He said renewable energy

See **Renewable energy**, page 10



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PURPOSE

Founded in 1980, MEC is a coalition of over 60 environmental and public health organizations with more than 200,000 individual members. For 31 years, MEC has provided a voice for the environment at the State Capital. In addition to serving as a clearinghouse of environmental information, MEC develops public policy, educates elected officials and the public, and provides training and support to member organizations.

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QUOTABLE

“If we all do a little bit, we’ll get a little bit done. So it’s even perhaps more important to get involved in the political process where the big decisions are made ... you’d be surprised how much a handwritten letter to your state representative or your senator will be worth.”

—MEC Communications Director Hugh McDiarmid, Jr., on WJR’s *Greening of the Great Lakes* radio show in early March: <http://bit.ly/eFmKky>

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Plunging into a legislative session with open lines of communication

If the first months of 2011 are any indication, we are in for a barn burner of a year. From Gov. Snyder's administration coming into office and releasing its first budget, to a new legislature getting started and environmental legislation already moving, there won't be much time to catch a breath. As we predicted last year, it's going to be all hands on deck during this legislative session.

Here at the Michigan Environmental Council, lines of communication with the new administration are open, and dialogue is regularly occurring.

Dennis Muchmore, Snyder's chief of staff, spoke to MEC members at our annual meeting in December. Dan Wyant, director of the Department of Environmental Quality, reached out to MEC and its members groups at the beginning of the new year. You can

read an interview with him in this issue of the *Michigan Environmental Report*.

Director Wyatt and Bill Rustem, director of policy and strategy, spoke at the MEC Board of Directors meeting in February. Additionally, MEC, Smart Growth America, and the Michigan Suburbs Alliance held a sit-down meeting with MDOT Director Kirk Steudle and Rustem to discuss transportation policy. Patty Birkholz, director of the Office of the Great Lakes, was highly engaged during a meeting with the "Healing Our Waters" coalition.

Whether we agree or not with their positions—and sometimes we don't—the new administration has



Chris Kolb

done a good job so far of reaching out to MEC and the environmental community. Facing a tumultuous financial picture and a new group of legislators, they recognize the need for as many allies as they can find.

Breaking bread. On February 9, some 40 legislators and staff along with more than 60 member group representatives and other participants, including Gov. Snyder's staff, attended MEC's biennial legislative breakfast (see page 7 story) at the House Office Building across from the Capitol.

It's all part of a continuing effort to educate and build relationships with new and returning legislators. Relationships are critical to moving legislation to protect our environment and block legislation that threatens it. Since the middle of last year, MEC and its partners met with 163 legislative

See **Open communication** page 5



Bell ringers! Environmental successes won in recent weeks

In each issue of the *Michigan Environmental Report*, we celebrate accomplishments by MEC and member groups.

Parks funding

It's a glimmer of good fiscal news for Michigan's state parks and recreation areas: The state's new funding system—the Recreation Passport that replaces window decals—has reached and passed the 'break even' point. 2011 should see modest increases in revenue for critical infrastructure upgrades to the parks, operations and maintenance, and even support for local governments. The parks pass is \$10, available when motorists renew vehicle registrations or at the parks themselves. Details are in our story on page 8.

Green Engler?

Former Michigan Gov. John Engler—long a nemesis of the environmental community—has taken a position with the Business Roundtable in Washington, DC. The organization states that it is "committed to aggressive energy efficiency programs and recognizes the important role of energy savings in improving the bottom line" and that it was "the first broad-based business group to agree on the need to address climate change through collective action." Gov. Engler declined our request for an interview, but we're encouraged by the glint of green.

Moving people

Amid the budget cuts aimed at nearly every corner of the state budget, Governor Rick Snyder has proposed a transportation budget that essentially maintains existing funding for public transit and statewide passenger rail services. Meanwhile, a series of public meetings in Detroit on the Woodward Avenue light rail transportation project generated some visibility for the project that could transform the roadway into a more vibrant, vital corridor of commerce and activity.

Protecting Michigan

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acres of farmland. These natural assets are fundamental to Michigan's success. We can have resource protection and have the DEQ be a full partner in economic growth."

Central to that strategy is fostering an economic development model that assists Michigan's small and medium-sized businesses to grow and expand. Dubbed "economic gardening," this model is a departure from past practices that often focus on tax breaks, financial incentives and special infrastructure improvements to lure huge out-of-state firms or manufacturers to Michigan.

Wyant said economic gardening rewards existing Michigan businesses, reduces taxpayer subsidies like tax breaks, and helps create a more diverse and flexible economic base. It also relies on preserving and enhancing the state's quality of life—including its spectacular natural resources, which are primary drivers for workers and employers deciding where to locate or expand.

"This second-stage growth represents 37 percent of new job growth," said Wyant. "It's growing your own entrepreneurs."

The learning curve at the DEQ will be steep for Wyant, but an easier climb thanks to the nine years he spent at the helm of the state's Department of Agriculture under governors Engler and Granholm.

He acknowledges the issues faced by DEQ staff are more complex and diverse than those at the Agriculture Department. He said he favors approaches that provide incentives to companies to reduce their pollution voluntarily. But he won't hesitate to support DEQ staff when they administer the law.

"It's important for me to defend staff, and for them to hear that from me," Wyant said.

During a wide ranging interview, Wyant addressed several specific topics:

◆ Regarding enforcement of pollution laws against concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs, or factory farms) Wyant said he supports voluntary incentive programs, but "we are not going to turn the clock back on CAFO regulation." He said the DEQ's enforcement actions against the Vreba-Hoff Dairy have been "appropriate."

◆ Regarding diminished funding for environmental enforcement: "I'm open to opportunities to look at dedicated resources," including "fee-based inspection programs."

SIERRA CLUB MICHIGAN/LIGHTHAWK



Large factory farms can produce as much animal waste as a medium-sized city.

◆ On climate change: "Clearly the science supports" the theory that manmade greenhouse gas emissions contribute to changing the climate, "and clearly the goal should be reducing emissions" as well as "mitigation and adaptation."

◆ On the possibility of new coal plants, Wyant said the state's energy policy "will come from the governor's office," and Wyant's DEQ will follow Snyder's lead.

◆ On a new wave of more intensive natural gas exploration, including expanded types of underground hydraulic fracturing (fracking): "We need to be proactive and bring the best minds to the table" to determine whether the state's laws protect the environment from dangerous fracking chemicals. "There is a potential for significant degradation there."

◆ On his background: He most recently was president and CEO of the Cassopolis-based Edward Lowe Foundation, which seeks to promote entrepreneurship and help second-stage companies accelerate growth. The foundation practices environmental conservation on its properties, and the economic gardening principles of growth with its clients.

◆ On what he does in his spare time: He runs the Lansing half-marathon every year, hunts and fly fishes.

◆ On family: He is married to wife Kathy, who works for Sparrow Physicians Health Network in Lansing. They have two adult children: Monica, 26, works as the deputy White House liaison for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the Obama Administration. Son Jordan, 22, just graduated from the University of Michigan and is a writer. ■

Budget highlights

Department of Environmental Quality

- Overall 15% reduction in general fund support for the department. That reduces the general fund portion of the budget by about \$3.8 million, leaving \$21.5 million in general fund support.
- The budget does not suggest that any program be returned to the federal government to administer.
- The budget continues to divert a portion of the money collected through 7/8ths of one cent per gallon gas tax for the cleanup of leaking underground storage tanks. Of the \$50 million collected, about \$20 million will go toward tank cleanups, the remaining \$30 million will go toward paying other administrative expenses of the department and debt service on environmental bonds.
- The budget includes proposed fee increases in two areas: Clean Air Act fees for air pollution permits as required by federal law, and a small increase on solid waste disposal fees to pay for current programs within the waste program.
- The budget plan will reduce the amount of brown-field redevelopment tax credits available by half or more.



Gov. Rick Snyder

Department of Natural Resources

- Overall 15% reduction in general fund support for the department. That reduces the general fund portion of the budget by about \$1.9 million, leaving \$13.7 million in general fund support.
- The department continues to focus on improving parks and park funding. Currently about 21% of Michigan residents are participating in the Recreation Passport program which charges \$10 on vehicle registrations for annual state park passes (see related story on page 8).

Department of Agriculture

- Overall 10% reduction in general fund support for the department. That reduces the general fund portion of the budget by about \$2.7 million, leaving \$27.1 million in general fund support.
- A number of savings occur by having various industries undertake safety and inspections functions currently performed by the department.

Open communication

— continued from page 3

candidates and officeholders to build these relationships and connect legislators with expert constituents they can turn to for information and guidance.

Dashboards, metrics, and budget cuts. On February 17, Gov. Snyder unveiled his first budget. General fund money for environmental protection took a 15 percent cut. That means a \$3.8 million reduction for the Department of Environmental Quality and a \$1.9 million cut for the Department of Natural Resources. The budget proposes two fee increases; the Clean Air Act fees and a small increase on solid waste disposal fees. Additionally, the budget has metrics to measure the performance of departments. We are weighing in on these criteria as well.

There is a long way to go in the budget process, and we will need to keep engaged to maintain current programs and protections.

As we move forward legislatively, we expect to see action on creating an invasive species compact, offshore wind siting criteria, critical dunes protection, Great Lakes Restoration activities and the extension of user fees to fund environmental protection. Additionally, transportation continues to be a priority, and the Governor's focus on improving the quality of life in our urban communities means more potential in building sustainable communities.

Federal issues that will keep us occupied with our Congressional delegation include Asian Carp, reauthorization of the transportation bill, funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and a continued assault on the U.S. EPA, especially in regard to regulating greenhouse gases.

Your Vision. A revised version of our 50 Year Vision for Michigan was released in February with changes incorporated from the many comments we received. This document will provide a long-term vision and strategic, proactive plan for this legislative cycle.

MEC staff members are planning more webinars and policy briefings for our member groups and allies. A new "member only" website called "LegisView" provides important information about our lawmakers. It helps members to gain insight into their legislators with the ability to add information based on their interactions with them.

We should have a lot to discuss when we hold our regional meetings this summer. I know I'm looking forward to the hard and rewarding work of protecting our environment and enhancing our quality of life here in the Great Lakes state. ■

State's Supreme Court restores citizens' right to protect resources; but AG Schuette wants reconsideration

The right of Michiganders to sue to protect the state's natural resources was restored by the Michigan Supreme Court in a decision made in late December with input from a Michigan Environmental Council legal brief, but the citizen

rights may be short-lived if Attorney General Bill Schuette has his way.

MEC filed the "friend of the court" amicus brief on behalf of member group Anglers of the AuSable. The brief argued for restoration of parts of the Michigan Environmental Protec-

tion Act (MEPA), which gives "any person" living in Michigan the right to use the courts to "protect the air, water and other natural resources ... from pollution, impairment or destruction."

The 1970 MEPA law and similar statutes were unchallenged for decades, until recent years when court rulings eroded that right. The rulings required that only persons directly impacted by pollution may sue.

The Anglers of the AuSable case involved the group's opposition to a plan approved by state regulators to pump water contaminated by an oil company into a tributary of the AuSable. The pumping plan was scrapped, but the legal issue of whether the Anglers has standing to sue under the MEPA law continued winding through the court system.

The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Anglers in a 5-4 opinion released just before the end of the year. Traverse City attorney Jim Olson argued the case successfully on behalf of the Anglers of the Au Sable.

But new Attorney General Bill Schuette has asked the court to reconsider the case—calling the 2010 decision improper and the product of a "lame-duck court." He said he believes that the appeals process is adequate to protect citizens' interests.

A newly sworn-in Supreme Court will decide whether to revisit the issue.

Stay tuned. ■



Playing defense

Michigan Environmental Council Policy Director James Clift testified before the Michigan House of Representatives Energy and Technology Committee Feb. 22, urging the committee not to approve legislation allowing compostable yard waste in landfills. The bill would result in the elimination of close to 1,000 composting industry jobs in order to give landfills more revenue and a slight increase in methane gas to burn for energy. Committee Chair Ken Horn, R-Frankenmuth, later referred the bill for study in a workgroup.

MEET & GREET

MEC breakfast introduces member groups to Michigan’s new legislators

At the beginning of each legislative term, the Michigan Environmental Council hosts a breakfast to introduce new and returning lawmakers to member groups. This year, the Feb. 9 event took place in the Anderson House Office Building near the State Capitol. Some 126 people attended, including 22 legislators, 18 legislative staff members, 64 member group representatives and three members of Gov. Rick Snyder’s cabinet.

The breakfast is part of MEC’s efforts to engage environmental advocates with the decision makers in Lansing.

Other outreach efforts in recent months by MEC and our allies included meetings with 163 legislative candidates and officeholders prior to the November election. Building bipartisan relationships and providing educational information is crucial in influencing the political process.

MEC also hosts an informational database on state legislators called LegisView, that provides biographical information, photos and positions on key issues. That service is available to all of MEC’s member organizations, who are encouraged to contribute to the database.



Clockwise, from top left: State Rep. Ellen Cogen Lipton talks with Butch Hollowell, general counsel with the Detroit NAACP; Jim Hinkins and Robert Tischbien from the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers man an informational booth; Rep. Steven Lindberg, D-Marquette, chats with MEC’s Tina Reynolds and Sarah Mulkoff (right) of Clean Water Action; Dan Wyant, director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), talks with Lisa Wozniak of the Michigan League of Conservation Voters; Jim Sygo, deputy director of the DEQ with former MEC Board member Mary Brown; Imam Achmat Salie and Julie Lyons-Bricker from Michigan Interfaith Power and Light.

Recreation Passport is paying off so far

Michigan's innovative new state park funding is providing a glimmer of good fiscal news amid a backdrop of budget woes.

Since the Recreation Passport program was introduced in October 2010, almost 20 percent of Michigan drivers have opted to pay the \$10 annual park pass fee during their motor vehicle registration renewal. The pass gives unlimited access to all of Michigan's 98 parks and 1,000 boat launches. It replaced the previous system, which required the purchase of \$6 daily park passes or \$24 annual passes affixed to windshields.

In order to match revenue from the old system, 17 percent of drivers need to purchase the new \$10 permits. At 20 percent, the parks are getting about \$1 million more to work on backlogged park infrastructure improvements. There are \$300 million in backlogged needs.

Ron Olson, chief of the Department of Natural Resources and Envi-



ronment Parks and Recreation Division, said the numbers are increasing as drivers become more familiar with the system. He hopes to achieve 25 percent by the fiscal year end, with a long-term goal of 50 percent. A 25 percent purchase rate would give the parks system close to \$5 million additional funds to meet park needs.

Passport revenue is allocated by a prescribed formula: Half of it goes for infrastructure, 30 percent to operations and maintenance, and 10 percent to local governments. The remainder

goes to forest recreation (7 percent); cultural and history education (2.75 percent) and marketing (0.25 percent). Some initial improvements funded with the new money will be apparent, but others may be harder to spot. For example, maintenance to a sewer line is essential but invisible. "Visitors might think 'Well, the toilet flushed last time I was here, and it flushed this time, too,'" says Olson.

The passports are purchased from the Secretary of State during car registration renewal or at state park offices. When purchased during car registration, "Recreation Passport" will be printed on the upper left corner of the vehicle registration sticker, letting park employees know the pass has been purchased.

Olsen said Secretary of State Ruth Johnson and her staff members have been instrumental in encouraging vehicle owners to consider the passport endorsements at SOS offices throughout the state. "We've had great cooperation from them," he said.

Purchasers of the passport will also reap benefits of the Passport Perks program, receiving discounts from over 200 Michigan businesses. Businesses range from beauty salons to sporting goods stores to tax preparers. Business owners recognize that parks bring business, so participating in the program is mutually beneficial for them, Olson said.

"[The program] will take a few years to build up and become impactful," said Olson. "It will take a little while to make this significant."

—Thea Hassan, MEC



Lake Michigan beaches draw thousands to enjoy the sun and water.

TRIVIA TIME

Michigan clean energy's affordability

A revealing picture of where clean energy stands relative to coal-fired electricity in Michigan was illuminated in February through two new documents: Analysis from the state's Public Service Commission (PSC) and a revised renewable energy plan from Consumers Energy Co. (see front page story). Let's see what's true and what's false:

1 Electricity generated from wind turbines in Michigan is more expensive than electricity from a new coal-fired power plant.

True: Because everyone knows that and we hear it repeated all the time.

False: The PSC says wind costs \$98.83 per megawatt hour (MWh) while new coal would cost \$133.

2 Laws passed in 2008 that require 10 percent of the utilities' electricity come from renewable sources have increased electricity prices.

True: Again, everyone knows this!

False: PSC says there is "no indication" that the laws have had any impact on prices.

3 Electricity conserved through the state's energy efficiency program costs ratepayers about one-tenth of the cost of buying that same electricity from a new coal plant.

True: The cost of energy optimization is about \$13.25/MWh compared to new coal's \$133.

False: Conserving electricity is for wimps, and people who don't own stock in power companies.

4 Consumers Energy originally estimated that it would cost \$1.5 billion to meet the renewable energy standard by 2015. In February, it revised its estimate to \$500 million.

True: A two-thirds reduction in estimated costs.

False: Everyone knows renewable energy is prohibitively expensive, and this doesn't support that antiquated myth.

5 The Michigan Environmental Council testified as early as 2009 that Consumers Energy's estimated cost for renewable energy was too high.

True: In fact, MEC's formal challenge resulted in a reduction in the utility's renewable energy surcharge from \$3 to \$2.50 on residential customers. Turns out we were more right than we knew!

False: I believe Glenn Beck says environmentalists want to take our money, not conserve it.

6 New estimates will almost surely mean a reduction in the \$2.50 residential surcharge for renewable energy on Consumers' residential customers' bills (and corresponding reductions in commercial and industrial rates).

True: We don't want to say 'we told you so,' but we did.

False: This does not fit at all with the "renewable energy will bankrupt us" mantra.



Energy efficiency measures like insulation, combined with renewable energy, can help keep electricity and heating bills manageable and protect Michigan's natural resources from coal power plant pollution.

7 The percentage of Michigan's electricity generated from renewable sources rose from 2.9 percent in 2007 to 3.6 percent in 2009.

True: An even more dramatic increase is expected for 2010.

False: Not true.

8 Of the 74 regulated utilities and others required to meet the state's renewable energy target of 10 percent electric generation from renewable sources by 2015, the Public Service Commission expects 71 of them to meet the goal.

True: That's correct.

False: Opponents of the renewable energy bill said it would never work, so it can't be true.

9 Part of the reduced cost of renewable energy is because wind turbine costs have been halved over the last 10 years, and their efficiency has doubled in five years.

True: Source is Grand Valley State University economics professor Paul Isley, quoted in the *Muskegon Chronicle*.

False: Source is Russ Harding of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, who in the same *Chronicle* story continued, incongruously, to criticize the high cost of renewable power.

10 Our job is done.

True: By 2015, our problems will be solved.

False: The opportunities to save ratepayers money through efficiency and provide a more sustainable mix of energy sources is still virtually untapped. The recent Consumers Energy estimates and PSC report are tremendous indications that we are moving in the right direction.

Answers: Some of our quizzes are challenging. If you really need the answers to this one, we can't help you!

Renewable energy — continued from page 1

is also a hedge against unpredictable fossil fuel prices. "Coal plants lock us into decades of buying out-of-state coal that could become much more expensive. But once you build a turbine or install a solar array, the fuel is free forever."

Both efficiency programs and increased renewable energy are required under 2008 laws passed with support from the Michigan Environmental Council. The laws require public utilities to generate 10 percent of their energy from renewable sources by the year 2015.

The PSC's Feb. 15 *Report on the Implementation of the P.A. 295 Renewable Energy Standard and the Cost Effectiveness of the Energy Standards* says the utilities are on track to meet that 10 percent goal by 2015.

In a separate rate filing in late February, Consumers Energy reported that meeting the renewable energy law's



Electricity from wind turbines is already less expensive than it would be from a new coal plant, according to the state's Public Service Commission.

requirements will cost only one-third of its original projections. As a result, the utility plans to reduce the program's annual cost to ratepayers from

\$78 million annually to \$23 million, almost certainly meaning a reduction of the renewable energy surcharge on ratepayers' bills.

The PSC's report also showed:

◆ The levelized cost of renewable energy is \$98.68 per megawatt hour (MWh). That is about 25 percent less than energy from a new conventional coal-fired power plant, at a projected \$133/MWh.

◆ The cost of energy optimization (energy efficiency measures) was \$13.25/MWh, making new coal power literally 10 times more expensive than meeting the same goals through efficiency savings.

◆ There is no indication that the renewable energy law has yet had any impact on electricity prices in Michigan.

◆ In 2007, 2.9 percent of Michigan's electricity came from renewable sources. By 2009, that number had risen to 3.7 percent. ■

MEC, allies applaud federal electric vehicle agenda

Michigan Environmental Council joined the Ecology Center and the Michigan League of Conservation Voters in applauding President Barack Obama's January call for Americans to make the nation the world's first to put one million electric vehicles on the road by 2015. The groups supported his call to shift money from oil company subsidies into incentives for electric vehicle purchases and infrastructure investments.

"The President in his State of the Union address nailed it when he said it is time to stop subsidizing yesterday's energy, and to start investing in tomorrow's," said Charles Griffith of the Ecology Center in a joint press release issued in late January. "In Michigan, tomorrow is here. With the Chevy Volt and the new electric Ford Focus, we can lead the nation to meeting the one-million vehicle challenge, and continue to be part of the exciting future of the domestic auto industry."

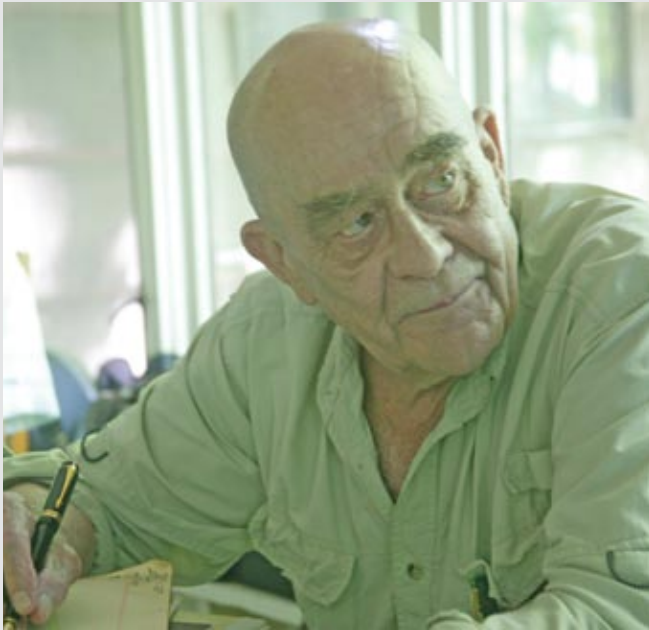
The electric Chevy Volt recently hit the streets to rave reviews and was the star of the North American Interna-

tional Auto Show. Both the car and the advanced battery it runs on are manufactured in Michigan. The electric Ford Focus, unveiled at the same auto show, will also be built in Michigan.

"Putting the electric vehicle in the national spotlight is a huge opportunity for Michigan," said Ryan Werder of the Michigan League of Conservation Voters. "Michigan needs to step up to the plate and make sure we take advantage of that opportunity, including ramping up infrastructure investments like charging stations for electric vehicles."

The President's budget should include funds directed to select communities with the intent of ratcheting up infrastructure like the charging stations, which will help to support electric vehicle use and purchase.

"We want Michigan to be the top of the list for these infrastructure investments," said David Gard of Michigan Environmental Council. "The electric car, and the industries it supports, is vital to Michigan's economic recovery." ■



End of an era

Glen Sheppard, the legendary editor of the *North Woods Call*, passed away in early January at the age of 74. The *Call*, his fiercely independent conservation newspaper, has ceased publication. Sheppard regularly beat the big city newspapers to big conservation stories during the 1970s and 1980s and helped shape the course of public and political debate on issues like drilling in the Pigeon River Valley and the damage caused by urban sprawl. Many of Michigan’s governors, as well as conservation and political leaders, including Michigan Environmental Council President Chris Kolb and past President Lana Pollack, made the trek to Shep’s woody home/office near Charlevoix to be grilled by ‘Shep.’ His feisty paper was “An admittedly biased newspaper: Dedicated to the proposition that there is only one side to any issue involving natural resources...NATURE’S!” Amen, and RIP, Shep.

MEC OVERHEARD IN THE NEWS



“When the President releases that budget, we want Michigan to be the top of the list for these infrastructure investments. The electric car, and the industries it supports, is vital to Michigan’s economic recovery.”

—MEC Energy Program Director David Gard in the Jan. 27 Oakland Press applauding President Barack Obama’s goal of one million electric cars by 2015

“This incident illustrates for us the need for a public dialogue over whether we need to look at or change any of the fracking regulations.”

—MEC Communications Director Hugh McDiarmid, Jr. in a Feb. 11 Associated Press story regarding a leak in a natural gas drilling operation using hydraulic fracturing

“These are big concerns that need to be a priority. If this isn’t taken care of now, it’s going to get worse.”

—MEC Policy Director James Clift in the Feb. 21 Detroit Free Press on upgrading the sewer systems in Detroit

“Pure Michigan is not going to remain very pure at these levels.”

—MEC Policy Director James Clift in the Feb. 18 Detroit Free Press on Gov. Rick Snyder’s proposal to cut funding by 15% for environmental protection

“We’re still gonna have those bad actors out there. We’re still gonna need the courts to keep them in line.”

—MEC Policy Director James Clift on WKAR Radio on Jan 25, on the need to continue strong enforcement of factory farm pollution law, along with voluntary compliance programs

“It’s a struggle to maintain the roads we have with the money available, so it makes sense to use that limited money to maintain what we have.”

—MEC President Chris Kolb in a Feb. 11 Associated Press story on a study showing that fixing existing roads creates more jobs than building new ones

(Overheard compiled by Thea Hassan)

Toxic chemicals in kids' toys would be disclosed under legislation being crafted at the State Capitol

Michigan parents would have new tools to help keep their kids safe from toxic chemicals in toys under legislation expected soon in the State Senate. The bill would require large toy manufacturers and importers to disclose their use of hazardous chemicals in children's products.

With one-third of toys containing toxic chemicals, it is difficult for parents to differentiate the toxic toys from the safe, according to Rebecca Meuninck, environmental health campaign director of the Ecology Center. If passed, the law could change the nature of the guessing game parents play when trying to choose safe toys.

"It's frustrating that I have no choices when purchasing because there is no information," said Melissa Combs, a concerned mother of Parker, age 3, and Rowan, age 1, who supports the bill. Combs hopes the bill could help empower consumers to choose safer products for children.

The proposal was announced recently by Senator Roger Kahn, R-Saginaw, who is working with the Michigan Network for Children's Environmental Health (MNCEH) to write the legislation. MNCEH is a coalition of health professionals, health-affected groups, and environmental organizations, including the Michigan Environmental Council. It is led by the Ecology Center, an MEC member organization.



Families would get information about toxic chemicals in children's toys under the legislation being drafted.

Since the law will only be applied to large-scale businesses and importers, local producers will have a competitive advantage.

"My bill will require large manufacturers and importers of children's products to give families the information they need to protect children from the most hazardous chemicals," Kahn said during a Jan. 19 press conference in the Capitol building.

Potential disincentives for the use of toxic chemicals by manufacturers could include labeling of hazardous chemicals contained within the toy, listing of manufacturers that use hazardous products in their toys, and fines for violators of the policy.

Such labeling would give parents new tools, but the decisions would

still be up to them. Little Susie really wants the doll, but the label says the mercury concentration is a little high. What is a parent to do?

One option is to explore alternatives—which also could help Michigan businesses.

"Reducing childhood exposure to toxic chemicals in kids' products is great for children's health and local businesses," said Jennifer Canvasser, environmental health organizer with the Ecology Center and MNCEH. Canvasser hopes parents will turn to small, local toy makers, like the ones at farmers markets. Since the law will only be applied to large-scale businesses and importers, local producers will have a competitive advantage.

Several other states, including California, Maine, and Washington, have passed similar legislation. The MNCEH plans to work with these states to ensure Michigan's bill is as efficient as possible without negatively affecting business, according to Canvasser.

The Ecology Center had past success with the passage of a green chemistry law last year, signed by Governor Jennifer Granholm in December. The green chemistry law promotes greener practices in chemical production and use, encouraging the consideration of environmental and health impact of chemicals.

—Thea Hassan, MEC

Study: Michigan creates more jobs, faster, with public transportation and work on existing roads

The state will create more jobs, faster, by investing in existing roads and improving public transportation rather than funding new road projects, according to a report released in Michigan by the Michigan Environmental Council, the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, and Smart Growth America (SGA).

The report graded Michigan's use of federal transportation stimulus dollars from average to poor, when ranked against the job-creation effectiveness of the 50 states.

Gov. Rick Snyder has recognized the role of infrastructure in economic well-being, even including bridge condition as an initial indicator on his MiDashboard—a scorecard of the state's economic and social conditions announced during his State of the State speech. The groups, in a February press blitz, urged the governor, Transportation Director Kirk Steudle and Michigan's legislature to use this report's findings to continue moving Michigan towards prosperity. That is best done by investing in public transportation and maintenance of existing roads as a strategy to increase jobs and economic activity.

"It's a struggle to maintain the roads we have with the money available, so it makes sense to use that limited money to maintain what we have," said Chris Kolb of the Michigan Environmental Council. "This report shows that this makes sense from a jobs standpoint as well as an infrastructure perspective."

The report includes rankings showing how effectively the state used its share of \$26.6 billion in flexible transportation dollars given out as part of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

Spending on public transportation, the report found, creates 31 percent more jobs per dollar than spending on new capacity. Road and bridge repair creates 16 percent more jobs than new capacity.

Michigan ranked 24th among states in spending money on maintaining existing roadways—using 81 percent of its ARRA dollars to do so. Nineteen percent was spent on new road capacity.

In spending on public transportation, Michigan ranked 38th—using only 2.6 percent of the federal funds on such projects. Each of the other seven Great Lakes states spent a higher percentage on public transportation—led by New York at 21.2 percent.



Michigan spent 81 percent of its Recovery Act transportation money to maintain existing roadways. The remaining 19 percent went toward new roads or other capacity.

"Nationally, we are beginning to chart an aggressive course of improving existing infrastructure and upgrading public transportation solutions like passenger rail lines," said Richard Murphy of the Michigan Suburbs Alliance. "In Michigan, it's not just about jobs laying pavement or railroad tracks—it's about jobs created in vibrant commercial districts near transit lines and rail stations and in walkable, accessible downtowns."

A copy of the report is available at this link: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/smart-transportation-mich.pdf>. ■

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