



# A Vision for the Future of Conservation Policy

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# Bob Wilson

- ▶ **28** years of environmental policymaking in the Senate
- ▶ Worked on the Michigan Trailways Act, the Sand Dune Protection Act, two times on Wetland reforms, Great Lakes Compact, Recreation Passport, Part 201 and 213 reforms, Ballast water and invasive species, NRTF and other funding issues.
- ▶ **7** different Majority Leaders
- ▶ Political Appointee
- ▶ Professor at MSU, WMU and North Central Michigan College
- ▶ Current Executive Director of the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance—we build trails in Michigan



# The Center of Policy and **Politics!**





## Key Lessons Learned in 28 years of Policy Making

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Politics dominates policy. It is **the driving** force in Lansing.

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Term Limits have changed the landscape of policymaking—some say for the good, many say for the bad. Staff and lobbyists way more influential.

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Trend has been for loosening regulations with a very conservative legislature

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Short term focus on creating jobs, acting now to improve and often not as much foresight for the longer-term future.

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Natural resources are there to exploit for other purposes—not as concerned about looking too far out! Hardin's Tragedy of the Commons.

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Legislature often less interested in details, but still want to ride herd on the agencies.

# Environmental Protection—Series of Sea Changes!





# Natural Resources—Series of boom and bust years!

01

Over consumption of natural resources—based on need to consume and profits—over harvesting of timber, mineral resources and wildlife.

02

Led to creation of agencies to control human behavior—First Game Warden, and Department of Conservation

03

Led to regulatory moves in early years with Water Resources Commission in 1929

04

Continued abuses—politics impacts WRC and need for more specific regulations and citizen involvement.



# Boom and Bust Years (continued)

Earth Day in 1970 sparked nationwide movement to provide more accountability


More citizens get involved--  
Air Pollution Control Commission, Water Resources Commission, Hazardous Waste Siting Boards, and the Natural Resources Commission.

Natural Resources were on the minds of our framers of the Michigan Constitution as far back as 1962!

# What Does our Constitution Tell us about Natural Resources?

- Art. IV, Sec. **52**.
- **The conservation and development of the natural resources of the state are hereby declared to be of paramount public concern in the interest of the health, safety and general welfare of the people. The legislature shall provide for the protection of the air, water and other natural resources of the state from pollution, impairment and destruction**
- Art. IV, Sec **51**.
- **The legislature** shall provide for the protection of public health.
- What did the framers have in mind with this provision?
- Is it enforceable? Has the Legislature done its job? If not, why not?





# What has happened to cause this shift away from natural resources?

1

Minds of voters are focused on basic human needs—jobs, education and safe communities.

2

Don't like added fees or taxes, hard to see the long term importance of natural resources for many.

3

Political Managers see this and emphasize an agenda that appeals to the voters

4

Term limits have not helped of course

5

And voters feel apathetic about trying to change the dynamics. Citizen Boards are largely gone!

# MY VISION



- ▶ Politics will continue to dominate at state level
- ▶ Citizens will continue to lag behind in activism efforts
- ▶ Change in appreciation for natural resources is slow in coming.
- ▶ Economy will dominate, quality of life will be the focus and this may or may not include.
- ▶ Where can we look for a brighter future?

# Need Strong Leaders and Strong Issues

- Governor with a vision and strong governance skills
- Need for one branch or one house to switch majority
- Need a new voice in conservation policy that assimilates economics and natural resources. And knows political waters! Can you think of one in the recent past?
- **Need for strong local leaders and a more engaged citizenry**
- Ballot proposals can help, but they are expensive. Initiated Laws and Referendum
- Sad to say but I have heard more than one person say that “a real demonstrated crisis will help to spur change!” Threats to Great Lakes drove the Compact!
- Public Trust Doctrine a “new” old tool? What is the likelihood of using the PTD?
- Conservation-based interest groups can help to drive change



# New Quality of Life Bond Proposal

- ▶ \$2.2 Billion GO Bond
- ▶ November 2018 Ballot
- ▶ Money for cleanup, drinking water/septic inspection subsidies, state park infrastructure, recycling, trails maintenance and local park grants
- ▶ Starting to take shape in the Senate
- ▶ Need to get folks educated
- ▶ Business groups need to support!
- ▶ With money always being in short supply, programs suffer.
- ▶ Bond can really help change the game!

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