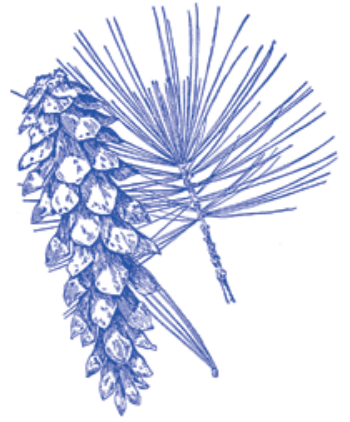




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*Michigan's Conservation Sentinel Since 1953*

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## North Woods Notes

**WORLD-RECORD MUSKIE:** The state-record Great Lakes muskellunge caught by Joseph Seeberger of Portage, Michigan, last October in Antrim County's Lake Bellaire has now been listed as a world record by the International Committee of Modern Day Muskellunge World Record Program. The 58-pound giant—featured in the Late October edition of *The North Woods Call* (Vol. 59, No. 3)—took nearly two hours to land and required the help of two friends.

**PRESERVING HEMINGWAY COUNTRY:** The Little Traverse Conservancy has purchased nearly 38 acres and a half-mile of frontage on Horton Creek in Charlevoix County, where Nobel Prize-winning author Ernest Hemingway honed his angling skills as a young man. Five acres will be added to the Nick Adams Preserve and the other 33 acres will be the most northern preserve on the creek. A 20-year-old Hemingway is said to have caught 65 trout here in one day.

**EMERGENCY DREDGING:** The Michigan State Waterways Commission has adopted an emergency dredging plan that will provide zero-match grant opportunities for harbors of refuge, marinas, boat launches and recreational boating harbors. The announcement in February by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) comes as water levels in Lake Michigan and Lake Huron are at record lows. Overall, nearly \$21 million is expected to be spent from state coffers to remove accumulated sediment at the bottom of Michigan waterways and help keep them open for navigation.

**SUSTAINABILITY CONFERENCE:** The Pierce Cedar Creek Institute—in partnership with the Hastings Public Library and *Natural Awakenings* magazine—will host its annual Sustainability Conference from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, March 16. The gathering will explore ways that individuals, organizations and communities are working to build a more sustainable future, and help participants prepare for ecological challenges while identifying opportunities to become a proactive force for positive global change. Keynote speakers include Peter Sinclair, creator of the internationally known video series “Climate Denial Crock of the Week” and contributor to the Yale Forum on Climate Change and the Media; and journalist Robin Mather, author of “The Feast Nearby” and “A Garden of Unearthly Delights. For more information, call (269) 721-4190.

**ENERGY FORUMS:** A series of renewable energy forums are being held throughout Michigan to collect data and testimony on the state's energy issues. The meetings will inform a one-year study requested by Gov. Rick Snyder after voters rejected a ballot proposal that would have amended the Michigan Constitution to require that utilities get at least 25 percent of their annual electric retail sales from clean renewable energy sources by 2025. Current law requires 10 percent renewable energy by 2015.

**RENEWABLE ENERGY PROGRESS:** Michigan is on track to meet its renewable energy goals in 2015, according to the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC). The state reached 4.4 percent renewable energy in 2011 and was expected to reach 4.7 percent for 2012, according to the third annual report on the state's renewable energy standard, released in mid-February by the MPSC. The standard calls for utilities to derive 10 percent of their annual electric retail sales from renewable sources by 2015.

**KEYSTONE PROTEST:** It was reportedly rather chilly in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 17 when several Michigan environmental activists—including some from the Michigan Land Use Institute—joined a rally aimed to bring awareness to global warming, call for the rejection of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline and urge the use of more renewable energy. At least six buses were chartered to carry the activists from Battle Creek, Detroit, East Lansing, Traverse City and Ann Arbor to the rally. The Republican-led Michigan Senate, meanwhile, approved a resolution urging the federal government to approve the pipeline from Canada to Nebraska.

**MUSKEGON PLANNER HONORED:** Kathy Evans, a Muskegon-based environmental planner, has been honored by the West Michigan Environmental Action Council for her contributions to the protection of West Michigan's natural resources. Evans is program manager at the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission and provides staff support for the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership.

**CROSSBOWS:** The DNR says crossbows have become increasingly popular among deer hunters in Michigan since the state began allowing them in most areas during the archery deer season, beginning in 2009. In the past, only hunters with disabilities had the option to hunt with a crossbow. A survey showed that, during 2012, twenty-five percent of the crossbow users had not hunted during the archery season in previous years, according to Brent Rudolph, DNR Deer and Elk Program leader. “These hunters were newly recruited, or drawn back to the sport of archery hunting,” he said. More than 88,500 hunters obtained the free crossbow stamp in 2012, compared to 45,692 in 2009.

**WINTER CELEBRATION:** The Michigan Land Use Institute and Crystal Mountain are hosting the second annual Taste the Local Difference Winter Celebration from 4 to 7 p.m. March 16. The event, at Crystal Mountain's Crystal Center, Thompsonville, features local foods from more than two dozen farmers and producers, along with some of northern Michigan's favorite chefs preparing dishes using local ingredients. This is just one part of a big weekend that also features the Teddy Knappe Film Festival, and Crystal Mountain's Spring Fling, Slush Cup, Cardboard Classic sled racing and luau.

## Debate intensifies over wolf hunting

The huffing and puffing continues over Michigan's new “Wolf Management Law” and opponents of a hunting season are intensifying their efforts to blow the house down with a referendum in 2014.

Keep Michigan Wolves Protected (KMWP)—a coalition of animal welfare organizations, conservation groups, wildlife professionals, ranchers and other Michigan citizens working to protect the state's wolf population—hopes to gather 225,000 signatures by the end of March to put the issue on the ballot and let voters decide.

“Wolves have been on the protected list for nearly 50 years,” the organization said. “There are fewer than 700 wolves in Michigan and their numbers are only now starting to recover. It's not right to spend decades bringing the wolf back from the brink of extinction, only to turn around and allow them to be killed for sport.”

Public Act 520 of 2012 added wolves to the list of game species, which allows the Natural Resources

Commission (NRC) to create a limited public hunting season. The NRC is mandated to use sound science in making wildlife management decisions, and both it and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have committed to following the Wolf Management Plan—approved in 2008 as the basis for the federal government's decision to turn wolf management authority over to the state.

The plan authorizes the use of public hunting as a management tool when wolf densities are linked to human-wolf conflicts such as livestock, or pet depredation.

“(The Wolf Management Law) allows the NRC to do its job, which is to manage wildlife populations based on the best available science,” said Erin McDonough, executive director of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC). “The NRC has not set any sort of wolf hunting season. It is coordinating efforts within the DNR to provide the very data and

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### The Great Lakes & harbor dredging

## Long-term view is urged for water levels

While supporting Gov. Rick Snyder's decision to use money from the state Waterways Commission Harbor Fund to dredge Michigan harbors before the summer tourist season, a Traverse City-based environmental policy group is urging the governor to consider longer-term strategies to minimize and adapt to low water levels in the Great Lakes.

The Flow for Water Public Trust Policy Center (FLOW), which seeks solutions to protect and save the Great Lakes in the 21st Century, said immediate dredging is necessary this spring, but more focused efforts are needed to address the critical condition of the state's waterways and harbors.

The state needs to adapt to “the uncertainties of climate change, and erratic and less-predictable water levels,” according to Jim Olson, chair and president of FLOW.

Although there remains some heated debate over the causes of climate change, Olson—a leading water and environmental lawyer from Traverse City—said that “science overwhelmingly demonstrates that global warming effects on climate have been dramatic and will become worse in this century.”

Global warming, which many are convinced is caused—in part, at least—by human activity, means increased evaporation, which means lower water levels.

“Look at it this way,” Olson said. “Climate change caused by global warming is the single greatest human-caused diversion of the Great Lakes. If we can better control the rate of flow out of Lake Huron into the St. Clair River, re-balance the allocation of water between the Great Lakes, and over the long term stop burning coal and so much petroleum, then we can plug the holes and get a handle on water levels.”

“We aren't going to be able to throw billions of dollars every year to dredge without getting serious about these other actions.”

Olson recently sent a letter to Gov. Snyder on behalf of FLOW, encouraging him to consider

*(Continued on Page 2)*



### Growing Windmills

Windmill farms are becoming increasingly prevalent across the United States, thrilling renewable energy advocates, but raising concerns among those who would rather the landscape remain unblemished by billboards, cell phone towers and, yes, windmills. This one is located near U.S. 127 in mid-Michigan, between St. Johns and St. Louis. Another has been proposed for the sprawling 11,000-acre Muskegon County Wastewater Treatment facility. Gamesa Energy USA, a subsidiary of a Spanish-based wind energy company, already has a lease agreement and has been testing the Muskegon County site to map wind speeds and directions, and weighing the environmental impact. If the project goes ahead, construction is probably still about a year away, according to county officials.

**Our 60th Year: Looking Back to March 3, 1954**— Excerpts from *The North Woods Call* —**“Hannibal the Bear”**

By Lee Smits

It was nearly 80 years ago that Lee Smits worked in the north woods. He never lost his love of the woods—even though he went to Detroit to become one of the state’s best-known newspaperman, before turning to radio where he is now news commentator for WXYZ.

“I sure get a kick out of *The North Woods Call*,” Smits said in a letter to the publication. “I’m enclosing a story I did on a north woods character I never heard about until I started reading about him in the *Jackson Prison paper*, *The Spectator*.”

\* \* \*

While the Old West still flourishes, the Old North has almost vanished.

The Old West has become a highly organized industry, paying far bigger profits than it ever did in the days of the open range and placer mining. Whether we look, or whether we listen, the Old West is with us—in movies, television, radio, cowboy pants, shirts, boots and imitation six guns.

All that lingers of the Old North are a few Paul Bunyan legends, here and there a pair of big wheels in resort towns and tales of the ancient wickedness of Michigan’s sawdust cities.

The Old North has left us no homicidal heroes like Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickok, Jesse James and the Dalton Gang. When the last pine logger has joined the Jordan River drive, the names of men once famous in camp and barroom will pass from living memory.

Among the few whose reputations found their way into print are Silver Jack Driscoll and Hannibal the Bear.

Driscoll was at one time banished from the state of Michigan. That was after he had served five years in Jackson Prison for a strong-arm robbery in Saginaw, which netted him two dollars-and-a-half. Silver Jack tamed down in his later years and when he was past 60 got premium pay as a riverman. He died in L’Anse in the Upper Peninsula in 1895.

What finally became of Hannibal the Bear is not recorded, as far as I know.

Edward Hannibal was 30-years-old when he arrived at Jackson Prison in 1882, convicted of doing his best to kill a town marshal in Newaygo County.

\* \* \*

Hannibal the Bear is described ... as a giant with superhuman strength—able and willing to do two men’s work, but subject to maniacal outbursts of temper. It took more than a month of solitary confinement and frequent trips to the paddling room to convince The Bear that he had better accept prison discipline. When he had given his solemn promise to refrain from violence, he was assigned to the prison flour mill.

One day, a free-for-all broke out among the mill workers. The Bear stood by until the mill superintendent called on him to help restore the peace. With a joyous yell, The Bear went into action. Peace was restored soon enough, with two men being carried away to the infirmary.

Then The Bear was put to work unloading coal cars. He was trying hard to behave himself. When he saw members of the unloading crew preparing to go into battle with socks filled with coal, The Bear protested. Four men jumped on him. Four men were laid out, in quick order, and The Bear went back to solitary. He kept promising to put the boots to the troublemakers when he got out, which caused him to be locked up for quite a while.

Silver Jack arrived at Jackson Prison while Hannibal the Bear was an inmate. Had the two met at large—in town—a fight to the finish would have been inevitable. As it was, the prison population was in acute suspense, waiting for a collision between these men who were undoubtedly among the greatest rough-and-tumble fighters who ever lived.

... The Bear plotted their encounter and came armed with a stool he had carved. The Bear claimed that he saw Silver Jack making ready to knife a fellow convict in the back—an accusation indignantly denied by the followers of the great Driscoll.

At any rate, there was an explosive brawl, and Silver Jack and another man were laid out with fractured skulls.

Another fighting man named Emery O’Toole challenged The Bear on St. Patrick’s Day, 1887. When O’Toole recovered consciousness, his nose was missing, bitten off by The Bear.

The Bear was a sentimentalist at heart. One night, a young screech owl found its way into the prison. The nightkeeper trusted the bird to Hannibal. Presently, a guard reported The Bear for talking in his cell after lights-out. (Officials investigated and) discovered The Bear had a pet mouse. Mice are the favorite food of screech owls.

The Bear, having saved stew meat from his supper to feed the owl, was sitting on the edge of his bunk, protecting his friend the mouse, and profanely chiding the screech owl.

**Long-term Great Lakes water level strategies urged**

(Continued from Page 1)

these longer-term strategies.

Earlier, FLOW told the International Joint Commission that principles of public trust can help find solutions to problems with Great Lakes water levels.

“We’re trying to demonstrate to decision makers how we might begin to think about the issues we face in the 21st Century and how we might find more effective solutions,” Olson told *The North Woods Call* last October. “We’re taking each threat issue and looking at it through the Public Trust Doctrine to see whether those principles can actually help solve those problems ...”

The doctrine—based on principles traced from Rome to the present through civil law and common law systems—deem water a public resource, unlike land that can be transferred with exclusive rights of possession. As a result, water is generally considered to be in the public domain in Canada, and for the benefit and use of citizens in the United States.

The prolonged period of low water levels affecting the lower and upper Great Lakes poses serious threats to wetlands, fish and aquatic habitat, shipping and navigation, boating, recreation, power generation and agriculture.

These factors have increased competition and conflict between various uses of the Great Lakes, most of which are dependent on both water quality and quantity, Olson said.

“When we have a conflict, those types of uses would be subordinate to public trust uses, such as navigation, fishing, boating, swimming and other forms of recreation,” Olson said.

**Wanted****Correspondents**

We would like to hear from quality writers & reporters interested in contributing conservation-related news from across Michigan—particularly in the northern lower and upper peninsulas, and the capitol city of Lansing.

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**Potential low-water solution****Can “sills” fix water flow from Great Lakes to St. Clair River?**

Some conservationists are suggesting that a series of “compensating structures” in the upper St. Clair River could significantly reduce the loss of water from the Great Lakes.

The structures—known as “sills”—were first designed in the early 1960s by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a potential antidote to dredging and associated erosion, but were reportedly not used because water levels rose before they could be installed.

Some Canadian groups—and an increasing number of Americans—have been asking the International Joint Commission and the Army Corps of Engineers to reauthorize construction of the sills in hopes of helping restore water in Lakes Michigan and Huron, which are at historically low levels.

The structures, which would be built low enough to allow ship navigation in the river, are designed to sit on legs three feet off the bottom and leave fish habitat undisturbed, proponents say. In the event of a future high-water crisis, they can be rotated 90 degrees to be positioned with the flow, or could be completely removed.

Douglas Heuck of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—a summer resident of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula—recently wrote an opinion article that appeared in *Scuttlebutt* magazine, imploring officials to take immediate and decisive action on this problem. The article was shared with *The North Woods Call* by reader Russell Reister of Chelsea, Michigan (See letter on Page 5 of this edition).

“It used to be that the scientifically inclined among us would explain that the water levels followed general cycles,” Heuck wrote. “But whatever patterns existed for the 10,000 years since glaciers created the Great Lakes began to change in 1910 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began dredging a deeper commercial shipping channel at Port Huron.”

Subsequent dredging in 1933 and 1962 cut through the natural sand and gravel bar at the south end of Lake Huron that previously acted as a natural barrier restricting outflow from the lake, Heuck said. The activity deepened the channel flowing out of Lake Huron into the St. Clair River to 27 feet and “set off a disastrous process that has essentially pulled the plug on Lake Huron and Lake Michigan,” causing erosion beyond anyone’s expectations, he said.

“These unintended effects have resulted in a broad array of crises and irreversible damage across the ‘middle’ Great Lakes, which are more than 30 inches below historic averages and deteriorating rapidly,” Heuck said.

The compensating sills were reportedly part of a bi-national agreement and a condition of the 1962 dredging, he said. That agreement apparently has not been withdrawn—only the funding for the sills.

Studies by the Georgian Bay Association in Ontario have confirmed that the dredging and subsequent erosion has caused the levels of Lakes Huron and Michigan to drop significantly, according to Heuck. The studies further conclude that building compensating structures, such as the sills, would gradually increase water levels by at least 10 inches with minimal and temporary downstream impact, he said, and the St. Clair Riverbed would be stabilized.

“If current conditions and trends continue,” Heuck said, “... property values will plummet, tax bases will evaporate, jobs will disappear and high percentages of local and summer residents alike will leave the area.”

Heuck is encouraging others to get involved in the effort to preserve the Great Lakes.

For more information, visit [www.restoreourwater.com](http://www.restoreourwater.com).

**Wolf hunting debate grows**

(Continued from Page 1)

science that the anti-hunting groups claim doesn’t exist.”

KMWP has launched a website—[keepwolvesprotected.com](http://keepwolvesprotected.com)—which includes information about their activities and how others might support the cause.

“It’s already legal in Michigan to kill wolves in order to protect livestock or dogs,” the website says. “The wolf population is simply not large enough to support the hunting of wolves for sport.”

That is not necessarily so, say DNR officials and the MUCC.

“We make wildlife management decisions based on sound science—not emotion,” said the MUCC’s Tony Hansen.

“People don’t eat wolves,” KMWP counters, “and it’s just pointless trophy hunting for no

good purpose.”

The Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve—a Big Bay-based environmental group—is supporting KMWP, as is the Humane Society of the United States, which the MUCC has called “just another out-of-state interest group trying to hijack Michigan’s ballot to push its radical animal rights agenda.”

According to KMWP, endorsements have also been made by a number of other organizations, businesses and individual citizens—including several local veterinarians, Humane Societies and local Audubon Society groups. A complete list of endorsements can be found on the KMWP website.

A number of Michigan Indian Tribes have also said they oppose wolf hunting, because they believe the animal is sacred.

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[www.mynorthwoodscall.com](http://www.mynorthwoodscall.com)



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## Spring Migrations

(Michigan DNR photos)

You never know what you might see when the annual spring migration begins in the next few weeks. This black-necked stilt (above) made a rare appearance in 2003 at Point Mouillee State Game Area, displaying the second-longest legs in proportion to their bodies of any bird except flamingos. Tundra swans (below)—often called whistling swans—will be passing through Michigan soon, winging their way northward along the state's eastern shoreline, and can be identified by a small yellow patch at the base of their black beaks. From woodcocks to warblers and owls to hawks, a wide variety of species make the spring pilgrimage across the Great Lakes State. Michigan, of course, is the summer home of Kirtland's warblers, which attract thousands of viewers from all over the world to the jack pine forests of the northern Lower Peninsula. Not to be outdone, as many as 3,000 raptors pass by Whitefish Point at the southern edge of Lake Superior—along with a range of other species—from mid-March to mid-May.



## Barry lawsuit against DNR inches ahead

Lawyers representing a Barry County citizens group in its lawsuit against the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) are continuing legal discovery and preparation for the trial—which is expected to occur in late 2013 or early 2014 before Circuit Court Judge Amy McDowell.

“(They’re) preparing a list of interrogatory questions, examining Freedom of Information Act documents and putting together a list of expert witnesses,” Steve Loshier, president of the Michigan Land Air Water Defense (MLAWD) said in mid-February.

The lawsuit, filed October 24 in Barry County Circuit Court, is aimed at reforming DNR practices in auctioning and leasing oil- and gas-drilling rights in state-owned parks, and recreation, game and wildlife management and hiking trail areas.

The nonprofit group sued following the DNR’s Oct. 22 denial of its request to remove the right to “unconventionally” develop oil and gas on the contested parcels. They had made three such previous requests, all of which were denied.

DNR officials said they believe the lease sales were proper and lawful, and they intend to defend that position in court.

MLAWD, whose members live and/or recreate in Barry and Allegan counties, claims that the DNR’s failure to sufficiently consider the unavoidable impacts on the natural features, streams, human use and enjoyment of these areas—coupled with loss to businesses due to oil and gas development—has breached the state’s duty to protect the environment from harm before selling and transferring development rights to water and surface resources.

At the core of this dispute is the controversial oil and gas extraction method commonly known as “fracking,” which MLAWD says involves “the inherent industrialization of rural and natural landscapes, as well as the unavoidable withdrawal, contamination and disposal of significant quantities of groundwater.”

The organization maintains that—by leasing mineral rights in specially designated and protected areas—the DNR has failed to uphold its public trust duties, which are outlined in the Michigan Constitu-

tion and the Michigan Environmental Protection Act, to responsibly manage state-held lands.

“Under Michigan law and court precedents, the DNR had a duty to look at, understand and determine what would happen as a result of the massive industrial type activities associated with oil and gas development, especially the proposed fracking of deep rock formations that use millions of gallons of water mixed with sand and chemicals,” said Jeff Jocks, an attorney with Olson, Bzdok & Howard, the Traverse City based law firm representing MLAWD.

“We seek to protect these special lands from unavoidable damage from fracking; the noise, fumes and dust from hundreds of trucks per day; the smell of methane gas venting; and the millions of gallons of water taken and left with chemicals—things that are simply incompatible with the special areas that are the jewels of our state land system,” Loshier said.

“The DNR has responded that it doesn’t have to treat these special lands differently from anything else, and that the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality reviews for impacts at the time (permit applications) are made to drill each oil and gas well,” he said. “But this ignores the fact that when the DNR leases these special lands, it transfers certain rights, including the right to use huge quantities of water near lakes or streams, (and to construct) roads, pipelines, production facilities, and storage and waste disposal areas on the surface—even when (the land) is designated as “non development.”

It is not unusual for the state to reclassify nondevelopment leases after they have been issued, according to MLAWD, and those holding leases on adjacent lands can “bore under and develop the minerals with explosive pressures,” and use so-called “nondevelopment” lands for industrial-type activities.

This “renders DNR promises meaningless,” Loshier said. “It’s inexcusable for the state to open up its special parks and recreation areas—and hunting and fishing grounds—for this industrial-type oil and gas development when (such areas) represent only a small fraction of the millions of state lands in Michigan.”

## Boosting fees in a bad economy

In case you’re wondering—as *The North Woods Call* has been—why Michigan officials are talking about raising license fees and gasoline taxes at a time when so many citizens are struggling with a bad economy, here’s a little perspective.

Ed Golder, public information officer at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), agrees that it’s a legitimate question and one that the DNR takes seriously.

“This is something we’ve talked about,” he said in response to a recent *Call* inquiry (See editorial on Page 4). “It has been 17 years since we had a license increase. Inflation alone has eroded the buying power of fishing and hunting license revenue by 45 percent. That has compromised our ability to manage resources.”

In addition, Golder said, the ranks are thin among conservation officers in the field, and the DNR’s ability to manage hunting and fishing habitat has declined.

Maintaining strong natural resources in the state is every bit as important as maintaining good roads, or good schools, he said.

“Young people, especially, move to new places based on quality of life,” Golder said. “Hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and other recreational opportunities help make Michigan a more attractive and inviting place.”

The proposed increases are modest, he said, and the DNR is committed to making sure any additional revenue goes back into natural resources—“boots on the ground, waders in the water and eyes in the field.”

“We recognize that times have been tough for everyone,” Golder said, and the governor’s budget recognizes that “conservation shouldn’t be funded solely by hunters and anglers, but by everybody.”

Also, Michigan license fees will remain competitive compared with other states, he said.

## League balks a bit at plan for streamlining the DNR

The Michigan League of Conservation Voters (MLCV) has expressed concern over at least one recommendation in a suggested plan for streamlining the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The state Office of Regulatory Reinvention (ORR) released its report in February with 16 separate recommendations that covered topics ranging from youth off-road vehicle use to rescinding outdated rules, according to MLCV officials. A number of the recommendations would not have a direct impact on natural resources protection or conservation, they said, but one has caused some hesitation.

It focuses on mineral rights and the ORR suggested that the state develop a management plan “that will optimize the value to the state of its mineral resources.”

“That sounds like pretty broad language to me,” said Jack Schmitt, the MLCV political director, “and I would certainly prefer that the focus of mineral resource extraction policy be on preserving our natural resources for generations to come. ... The authors of our constitution strongly believed that natural resources management should balance both conservation and development, as opposed to focusing solely on ‘optimizing value.’”

## Bid-fixing inquiry continues

The Michigan Attorney General’s office is still declining to release details about its investigation into allegations that two of North America’s largest natural gas companies colluded in an effort to fix bids in the state’s oil and gas market.

The investigation reportedly began last fall at the urging of two Michigan representatives—Dian Slavens (D-Canton) and Charles Smiley (D-Burton). Requests by *The North Woods Call* for comments from these representatives and for more information from the attorney general’s office have gone unheeded.

Slavens, Smiley and their staffs have ignored the inquiries and Joy Yearout, acting director of communications for Attorney General Bill Schuette said the attorney general’s office does not comment on the details of ongoing investigations.

“Feel free to check back,” she said cheerfully when follow-up questions have been raised on at least two occasions.

The two companies in question—Encana and Chesapeake Energy—came under scrutiny after Reuters News Service intercepted at least a dozen e-mail messages that suggested top company

officials discussed a plan to divide up Michigan counties that were auctioning prime oil and gas acreage in order to avoid a costly bidding competition.

Yearout initially acknowledged that an investigation had been opened regarding anti-trust allegations raised in the media reports. At the time, she said the attorney general had “requested information from the companies.”

“It’s not clear how long such investigations typically last,” said *North Woods Call* editor Mike VanBuren, “but it seems reasonable to assume that the attorney general has learned something from the inquiry. We trust that he will be forthcoming with some information soon. Michigan citizens need to know what occurred in this case.”

Last June, Reuters reported that the two business rivals plotted during 2010 to avoid bidding against each other in a state auction and in at least nine prospective deals with private land owners.

Both companies have denied the allegations, although they reportedly admitted to talking about some kind of joint venture in Michigan.

# Opinion Page

## Conservation Quote

*"Neither the country nor the society we built out of it can be healthy until we stop raiding and running, and learn to be quiet part of the time—and acquire the sense not of ownership, but of belonging."*  
— Wallace Stegner

## Higher taxes and license fees

OK, we get it. Government plays a vitally important role in our lives—and it takes a certain amount of money to operate the bureaucracy and preserve our conservation legacy.

Agencies such as the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have done much good work over the years managing and protecting resources, and dedicated staff members deserve to be paid a fair wage for their efforts.

There's no argument here about that. In fact, we salute these tireless civil servants and thank them for all they have done to improve recreational opportunities and the general quality of life for Michigan residents.

Similarly, we'd all like to see better roads, improved education, more comprehensive health care and myriad other wonderful and costly additions to the state's infrastructure and social fabric.

Yet, with Gov. Rick Snyder's recent proposal to "invest in Michigan's future" via higher taxes and increased hunting/fishing license fees, we can't help but ask, "How much is enough?"

In case the governor hasn't noticed, we're experiencing severe economic doldrums here and elsewhere across the nation. Many people have lost their jobs and families are struggling to make ends meet. Few tax-paying citizens who find themselves in this condition ever have the opportunity to simply vote themselves additional revenue whenever there's "too much month at the end of the money."

Instead, we have to prioritize expenses and do without things that we can't afford. Why can't the government do that—especially during times when burgeoning taxes and user fees only add to the hardships so many people are already experiencing?

Yes, hunting, fishing and trapping fees fund the lion's share of conservation in Michigan and license fees are a significant part of the DNR's operating budget. Inflation and a devalued dollar have eroded the agency's buying power—as they have for most citizens—and some proponents of the governor's plan say that Michigan residents have been paying some of the lowest license fees of any state for decades, so it's time to pony up some more.

But is now the right time?

Sometimes we aren't able to do the things we'd like to do because our budgets will not sustain the spending. Is it too much to ask government to cut back like everybody else, or for citizens addicted to public spending to realize that—in the words of the Rolling Stones—you can't always get what you want?

## Stealing from Michigan's future

For those who tell us that they don't mind "paying their fair share" in taxes and that politicians and bureaucrats can be trusted to use monetary resources wisely, we point to Michigan's Natural Resources Trust Fund as a case study.

The fund was intended to be used for special activities that preserve the beauty of Michigan for future generations, but managers of our public resources have routinely attempted to raid it for pet projects, or to shore up the state's general fund whenever a budget shortfall occurs and spending continues unabated.

Has anybody ever heard of the Social Security Trust Fund, which has been victimized by federal politicians in much the same manner?

Michigan residents were so concerned about such irresponsibility that they voted in 1984 to put the Natural Resources Trust Fund into the state Constitution and under control of an independent board to keep it away from the Legislature.

But that hasn't stopped the politicians from trying, as evidenced in several bills introduced recently (see commentary by Drew YoungeDyke in the last issue of *The North Woods Call*).

Curiously, many of the same individuals who generally say they trust politicians to do the right thing—and have even criticized *The Call* for suggesting that our leaders follow the constitutional rule of law more faithfully—apparently see things differently when it comes to the Natural Resources Trust Fund. They point to the unconstitutional violations that have occurred and demand that the thievery stop.

We couldn't agree more.

Since its inception some 36 years ago, the popular trust fund has awarded 1,957 grants totaling \$969 million. Of that, \$757 million went to buying land and \$212 million reportedly went to develop outdoor recreation facilities.

This is a good thing that needs to continue. All we have to do is keep the raiders away.

If Michigan residents are going to set aside money to be used for the specific purpose of protecting Michigan's natural resources for future generations, it is reasonable to expect that politicians will honor this intent.

# Water wars: Hands off the Great Lakes

When I was a boy, my grandmother sent me a postcard from Arizona. It was covered with pictures of desert plants and animals. There were cacti, jackrabbits and rattlesnakes—each well adapted to the harsh climate.

My grandmother was well adapted, too—having lived in Phoenix for many years. But her needs were different from the coyotes and roadrunners that populated the countryside. They'd learned to get by on less. She—like the rest of us—was dependent on generous supplies of clean, fresh water.

The Southwest, you see, is a thirsty place. The sun is bright and hot. And the land is dry. It's enough to send a Gila monster out for a tall glass of cold sarsaparilla. And it has made many misguided public servants cast greedy eyes on the Great Lakes.

The reasons are simple. Water is critical to life, and to many social and economic activities. In some areas—such as Arizona—water is in short supply.

The Great Lakes Basin contains about twenty percent of the freshwater on the surface of the earth. Why not just redistribute it so everyone has enough?

Some profiteers—and politicians with dry tongues—like this idea. But I don't.

## North Woods Journal

By Mike VanBuren



Water is already being pumped in and out of the Great Lakes on a relatively small scale. Fortunately, no major diversions are currently planned. But some public officials and environmental leaders say it's just a matter of time.

The population is expanding in many parts of the country where water is scarce. Recent census results show that some of the fastest-growing states—Arizona, California, Nevada and Texas—are also among those most in need of water.

The census also shows that those states will gain seats in Congress, while the Great Lakes region loses seats. That means that it could be harder to win a congressional vote to restrict the sale of Great Lakes water.

Siphoning lake water makes perfect sense to those who don't know—or care—about ecosystems. But scientists say such activity could harm plants and animals. It could upset the balance of nature, lower groundwater levels, reduce water quality, and even impact the climate.

And what happens if you have to shut the spigot off for some reason? Who's going to tell the folks in Sun City that the well is dry?

My home state of Michigan is almost entirely within the Great Lakes basin. We have everything to lose and very little to gain if water is taken. Our economy is tied to shipping, fishing, agriculture, recreation and tourism. These activities depend on the Great Lakes being healthy and vibrant.

That's why we all need to conserve water and develop strong policies to prevent raids on the resource.

Now, I love Arizona and I'm pleased my grandmother could live there. But if she had wanted to drink from the Great Lakes, she probably should have moved back to Michigan.

\* \* \*

*This column originally appeared as a commentary on National Public Radio's Living on Earth program and on Michigan Public Radio.*

## Reader Comment

# Logging, climate change and trees

Editor:

Good to see *The North Woods Call* back in business.

There is a connection between the bleak report on climate change and the less-depressing excerpt from your February 1954 issue

about logging before modern equipment.

In the old-time logging article, Clarence Bergey says, "The miles of big timber gave moisture to the air. Take away the trees and you don't get the snows and rains of

the old days."

Mr. Bergey has a good point, but the big trees did more than provide moisture. The process of evaporation cools the surrounding air. (It's why a body sweats when it's hot).

I used to jog in Mayberry Suburban State Park in Wayne County and the temperature would drop a good ten degrees in forested areas.

Much is said about the ability of trees to absorb or sequester greenhouse gases, but not enough credit is given to forests for the direct cooling impact of transpiration.

Jerry Jung  
Novi, Michigan

## Reader Comment

# Background checks & guns

Editor,

How can you oppose background checks for gun purchases?

I've hunted everything huntable in Michigan since getting my first gun 70 years ago. I was a reloader and—sorry to say now—used to be a National Rifle Association (NRA) member.

Yes, limiting magazine capacity would be a waste of ink, and there's no functional difference between "assault" rifles and Remington 740s. But the same "logic" opposing background checks at gun shows says eliminate checks altogether.

And, incidentally—if it were legal for us to own a 50-caliber machine gun and legislation was introduced to make it illegal—the NRA will spend its last dime to defeat it.

Bill Swart  
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan

Bill,

*With the growing lawlessness and general immorality that pervades our culture today, we can't say with any certainty that there shouldn't be some kind of background check.*

*Maybe such checks aren't currently happening at gun shows, but it seems like we have plenty of laws on the books already requiring such things. Have they helped curb the violence? Will those who are intent on creating mayhem submit themselves to such checks? When have they done so in the past?*

*We happen to believe that liberty and self-determination are important to the strength of our republic, so whatever is done needs to be reasonable and not trample on Second Amendment rights. We shouldn't be making criminals out of law-abiding citizens.*

*Perhaps our politicians should set an example and submit to thorough background checks before they run for office. They seem to be doing more damage to our society than the millions of responsible gun owners who have already been checked, fingerprinted and registered ad nauseum.* —Mike

## The North Woods Call

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## U.P. strip mine: To be, or not to be?

Some Michigan residents have sounded the alarm over a proposed limestone quarry in Mackinaw County south of Newberry.

Among them are David Gorenflo of Traverse City and his brother, Tom Gorenflo of Brimley, who have hunted that area of the Upper Peninsula's Lake Superior State Forest for many years.

Both men have written letters published in *The North Woods Call* challenging the project being explored by Graymont, one of North America's leading lime producers. They are concerned about the environmental impact of such a strip mine and the loss of public land to hunting, fishing, hiking and camping.

David Gorenflo also sent a letter to Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Director Keith Creagh outlining the reasons for his opposition to the project. The letter said, in part:

"I can't imagine that you, or the DNR in general, would be in favor of such a devastating project. After all, there is nothing to 'manage' with an enormous empty hole in the ground. ... Considering the fact that the DNR has ownership of the majority of the mineral rights in this area, I would hope that would give you some level of influence during this process.

"A strip mine is everything that the DNR is not. This region of the Lake Superior State Forest is way too valuable as it

stands to be transformed into something as completely useless as an abandoned strip mine.

"Also, this area is abundant with wildlife such as grouse, woodcock and deer. This has been the hunting ground for my family and me since the 1960s, so our connection to the land is indescribable."

In early February, Gorenflo heard back from DNR Deputy Director William Moritz—a response that he said "does not leave me very hopeful about the future of this area."

Here is what Moritz said:

Dear Mr. Gorenflo:

"Thank you for your correspondence ... to Director Keith Creagh. Director Creagh has asked me to respond to your concerns regarding a proposed limestone mine in the eastern Upper Peninsula.

"Graymont initially approached the DNR with interest in limestone found on state lands. The company is currently assessing the distribution and abundance of resources. As with all land transaction proposals that the DNR received, the proposal will be reviewed with great attention and detail to assess whether it conforms to state law, DNR policies and procedures, and if it is in the best interest of the state.

"The DNR's review will include many of the issues mentioned in your correspondence, such as number of jobs created, potential loss of use by the public, potential environmental impacts and restoration of the land.

"In our thorough review of any proposal, we need to assess the balance of a need for natural resource products, like limestone, to be used for roads, steelmaking and many other products, and all the other factors involved in each project. Our team takes this review process seriously.

"In the instance of mineral rights, if the rights were to be leased, the people of the state would be compensated for those minerals, with the revenues being deposited into such accounts as the State Parks Endowment Fund to maintain our state parks.

"The leasing process also entails a very detailed review process, which includes foresters, wildlife biologists, fisheries biologists and others.

"At this time, Graymont has suggested that the land involved in the project could be approximately 5,000 acres—a portion of which would be a buffer to the mining operations.

"This project is still in the field exploration stage, with the exact area(s) of interest undefined at this time. Please be assured that the DNR will thoroughly consider all aspects of this transaction before a decision is made, including providing opportunities for public comments to be heard.

"I appreciate your time and effort in bringing these topics to our attention."

Sincerely,  
William E. Moritz, Ph.D.  
Natural Resources Deputy  
Michigan DNR

### The Wild Nearby

By Tom Springer



## Thea's bird feeder: A gift that flutters, but never fades

An empty bird feeder can't look any emptier than when it's rimmed with hoar frost on a grey winter morning.

The one in our front yard hangs from a pin oak, and with no weight for ballast, swings like a pendulum until it bumps the trunk with a sad, lonely clunk.

A few loyal chickadees still flutter past out of habit, but their winter song (chick a dee-dee-dee, if you didn't know) sounds a might dispirited. Not unlike the chimes on my mother's living room clock when the batteries start to run down.

OK, then, compadres. For you I'll make the half-hour trip into town and buy some seed and suet cakes.

With a sawed off plastic milk jug for a scoop, I fill the three feeders with black oil sunflower seed. My sentimental favorite is the one my friend, Thea, bought us as a wedding gift. It's nothing fancy: a clear acrylic tower with a pitched roof and landing board made of Michigan cedar.

We put out feeders from early December to late March and probably run 150 pounds of seed through them. It's what biologists call a symbiotic relationship. You get a little feathered opera outside your window, and the birds get some extra protein to help endure the cold. It's always a comfort to imagine them asleep under a snowy spruce bough, the furnace of their tiny hearts fueled by the good seed that will keep them warm and alive till morning.

And such is the altruistic nature of a bird feeder. You can buy one for yourself, or buy one for a friend, but either way the feeder can only be used in the service of something else. Selfishness doesn't become it.

For the first nine years that we fed birds, I didn't think much about why. They looked pretty and had a ferocious appetite, which seemed reason and reward enough. (Whoever coined the phrase "eats like a bird" never watched hungry birds swarm a feeder.) But then came the year when the birds decided to take care of me for a while.

It was February and ruthlessly cold. For reasons that in hindsight seem blatantly obvious, I'd worked myself into a state of exhaustion—mental, physical, spiritual, you name it. Work had become a fixation that left me too tired to rest or recuperate. So my body, and my doctor, both demanded that I take two months of sick leave.

Part of my recovery required that I practice something called the Relaxation Response. Basically, you're supposed to sit in a quiet room with your eyes closed and think peaceful thoughts. That's fine, provided you have thoughts you'd like to spend time with. I did not, so I'd open my eyes and focus on something less disturbing—like the bird feeder.

Sometimes, after I zoned out for an hour or so, I'd glimpse an alternate reality. I'd begin to see the feeder as more than a humble food dispenser. It was a nexus of fluid energy and calculated motion. The birds would ascend and descend, angelic in form and manner, earthly seraphs around a lesser throne. They'd come and go with a pattern you could almost discern.

Too bad they sent me back to work before I could figure it all out.

I'd love to know now what Thea would make of such metaphysical musings. There was nothing bird-like about her: big heart, big voice, big physique, a tireless newspaper reporter and overall nonstop force of nature. Unstoppable, at least, until the end. She died of uterine cancer three-and-a-half years ago at age 53.

The last time I saw Thea she talked nonstop about her big plans to write a book titled "I Don't Have Time for This." Those were the first words out of her mouth when she learned of her diagnosis. Being a respectable journalist, she never had to retract them.

Last season, for the first time in 16 years, I gave the cedar trim on Thea's feeder a coat of Tung oil to prolong its life. It's a shame the feeder had to outlast her. It's also a pity she's not here to discuss—in nonstop fashion—what I should write about next or why.

I rarely took her advice before, but in her new celestial perch, maybe she's got an inside track. So, Thea? May the glad company of birds help give flight to all the words you'd have me say.

*Tom Springer writes from rural Three Rivers, Michigan. A collection of his essays, Looking for Hickories, (University of Michigan Press), was a Michigan Notable Book in 2009. Another collection of essays in under way.*

### A note to letter writers

All letters must be signed. Please include your name and mailing address (e-mail address, too, if you don't mind).

We won't publish addresses or phone numbers, but we must have them to verify that letters are authentic. No unsigned letters will be used. It's OK for your signature to be electronic.

### Reader Comment

## Low Great Lakes water levels and the St. Clair River

Editor:

I have recently written a letter to Gov. Snyder concerning the low water levels in Lakes Michigan and Huron. I have enclosed the letter and its enclosures.

I am sure the report by Mr. Heuck is too long to reprint in its entirety, but you might be able to print a shorter story about the problem (*See related story on Page 2 of this edition*). As a conservation topic, it has to be one of the most important issues we are currently facing.

I have a second request and one in which you have complete power to correct. I have recently rejoined the ranks of your readers (I had subscribed to Shep's editions for years) and have great difficulty reading the extremely small print. I suspect that I am not the only subscriber who would appreciate a larger font.

Russell Reister  
Chelsea, Michigan

*Thanks, Russell. We will consider your suggestion, although we hesitate to enlarge the font because bigger print consumes more space and leaves less real estate for news, etc. The only way around that is to add more pages, which significantly increases printing and distribution costs. For the record, the 10-point font in our body text is the same size as Shep was using. We'll explore this further.*

—Mike

Following is the letter that was sent to Governor Snyder:

Dear Governor Snyder:

I know you are aware of the low water levels in the Great Lakes. Your proposal to dredge the harbors along our shorelines will be helpful, but it represents only a short-term solution. A long-term solution must address the excessive outflow through the St. Clair River.

I have enclosed a letter from a summer resident of the Upper Peninsula, which states the opinion of many Michigan citizens. A second enclosure from the Corps of Engineers appears to support the conclusion that the amount of water flowing through the St. Clair River is in fact a major cause of the low lake levels. You will note that the level of Lake Erie is 16 inches above low-water datum, while Lakes Michigan and Huron are 18 inches below low-water datum.

The Corps of Engineers has not been responsive to our pleas to slow the outflow into Lake Erie. Instead, they claim that lack of precipitation and warmer weather are the culprits. They are certainly part of the cause, but not the only one.

The solution recommended in Mr. Heuck's letter (*See Page 2 of this edition*) could be implemented in a reasonably short time and doesn't appear to be excessively expensive. In addition, it could be reversed if conditions change and there was a need to increase the outflow through the river.

I and many other Michiganians would appreciate your using the influence of your office to help slow the depletions of our lakes and hopefully restore the lakes to a more healthy level.

Sincerely,  
Russell W. Reister

**Please encourage others to join the North Woods Call community today!**

### Help distribute *The North Woods Call*

If you own a store and want to stock *The North Woods Call*, please contact us. We may be able to accommodate you.

editor@mynorthwoodscall.com

# More Opinion

## Outdoor Rhythms

By Doug Freeman



### Perils at the Rural Mailbox

Sometimes, just strolling out to your own rural mailbox leads to trouble. Besides the usual assortment of painful bills and unwanted advertisements, nastier surprises may await.

On several occasions over the past ten years, we've found our standard metal box beaten into a crumpled mass by the multiple impacts of a heavy object—a baseball bat or iron pipe, I usually assume.

The event is often noted during the wee hours of the morning as a series of metallic-sounding "thunks" coming from somewhere nearby. As this square mile is home to about a dozen horses, everyone assumes the noise is due to a shod hoof banging repeatedly against a barn wall. Skittish or restive horses tend to do that when startled by small animals or possibly a bad dream. No big deal.

Then, the next morning, you notice your Federally-sanctioned pigeonhole is badly mangled and completely unusable. Many of the neighbors find themselves in the same boat.

Most of us keep an extra mailbox in the garage, basement, or shed. The replacement is installed within hours, amidst much grumbling and cussing, and a discussion with your spouse about renting a P.O. box in town "the next time this happens." Eventually, you'll stop by the hardware store and pick up a new box, just to be prepared.

One pleasant afternoon last summer, I was shuffling through a pile of mail out at the box when two young men (riding very small bicycles) accosted me. I nodded and smiled, not paying them too much attention. One of the boys suddenly hurled a rather derogatory comment in my direction. The other joined in. Both began to circle around on the road in front of me on their little bikes, uttering obscenities and unkind remarks.

In an era of heavily-armed Americans and growing numbers of concealed weapons permits, this behavior could only be considered unwise, if not bizarre. My mind strayed back to my own youth, trying to recall an occasion when I'd acted so stupidly. Couldn't think of one.

The boys, probably in their mid- to late-teens, finally tired of their sport. They were still shouting and laughing as they vigorously pedaled their clown bikes down the road. Gee, when I was about their age, I was serving in a nuclear weapons unit on the German-Czech border. Standards of maturity and responsibility may have shifted somewhat since those days.

Earlier this winter, before the snow got deep, I was again out at the mailbox pawing through envelopes. Our local turkey flock was crossing the road in single-file. They're stately birds. My neighbors and I have watched the big ones nurture the small ones, and all have grown large over the past couple of seasons. Many of us have developed a soft spot for them in our hearts, accompanied by more than a bit of protectiveness.

A car approached at high speed from the south. Surely the driver would slow or stop his vehicle until all the turkeys had crossed. Nope. Birds scattered and squawked as the car buzzed through their formation. Miraculously, of the 20 or so turkeys, none appeared to have been seriously injured.

The speedster passed within a few feet of where I stood, not even showing enough courtesy to veer slightly away. Two young men. No way to recognize them, let alone get a license plate number. They were moving way too fast. I did catch a glimpse of a couple of laughing faces, however.

I'm not sure why causing property damage and danger to others seems so hilarious. Certainly, there are many cases of poor parenting, and of spiritual voids. Maybe it's just a relative few "boys-to-men" that are acting badly and doing most of the mayhem. I hope so.

Going out to the mailbox should be fun.

*Doug Freeman is a writer and amateur naturalist living near the Lake Michigan shoreline north of Montague, Michigan.*

### Annual frog & toad survey

As many of us have learned from childhood fables and personal experience, we sometimes have to kiss a few amphibians before we discover our handsome prince, or fair maiden.

What better reason to participate in the 18th annual Michigan Frog and Toad Survey that is coming up soon?

The survey—which helps biologists keep tabs on frog and toad populations and distribution—is being coordinated by the state Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Wildlife Division.

The surveys are conducted by volunteer observers along a

statewide system of permanent survey routes, each consisting of 10 wetland sites. The observers visit the sites three times during spring—when frogs and toads are actively breeding. They listen for calling frogs and toads at each site, identify the species and estimate the numbers.

Declining populations of frogs and toads have been documented worldwide since the 1980s due to habitat loss, pollution, disease and collection.

If you're interested in helping out, call Survey Coordinator Lori Sargent at (517) 373-9418, or e-mail SargentL@michigan.gov.



Michigan Conservation Officer Shannon VanPatten with poached salmon from a commercial fishing operation she investigated on Little Bay de Noc in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. (Michigan DNR photo)

### Dream job: Cops in the north woods

With the possible exception of the work by longtime *North Woods Call* friend and subscriber Joseph Heywood—who regularly hangs out with Michigan conservation officers and writes about them in his "Woods Cop" mystery books—there may not be a better job for outdoor lovers than this.

With the Michigan Department of Natural Resource (DNR) stepping up efforts to add more conservation officers (COs) to its ranks, more people will get to pursue what many COs consider their "dream job."

Gov. Rick Snyder has proposed a fiscal year 2014 budget that includes \$2.9 million in ongoing general fund money for additional COs and \$600,000 in one-time general fund dollars for a CO school.

"Our officers are fully commissioned peace officers who are sworn to protect Michigan's natural resources and the citizens and visitors who cherish them," said DNR Law Enforcement Division Chief Gary Hagler. "It's really a unique class of law enforcement officer—one that's focused on ensuring that people understand and follow regulations while enjoying outdoor recreation activities..."

Because COs are responsible for enforcing all Michigan laws (not just the ones that pertain to natural resources and outdoor recreation), they cover a lot of ground, interact with a lot of people and make quite an impact, especially in rural areas where local law enforcement is limited, Hagler said.

In 2011 alone, Michigan COs came into contact with roughly 350,000 residents and visitors. Of those, just 7 percent—or 25,000—involved unlawful activity, according to Hagler. Only about 8,000 of those contacts resulted in any actual enforcement action, he said.

"While I think most people respect the work that COs do, there are some who see us as only about enforcement," Hagler said. "In reality, we're committed to community oriented, customer service-based efforts that are aimed at education and voluntary compliance."

"If we have the chance to teach people the safe and correct way to do something, or why certain de-

isions are better for Michigan's forests, streams and wildlife, those are the best possible outcomes for everyone."

The state's roster of conservation officers has steadily declined over the years, dropping nearly 30 percent from 243 in 2001 to 173 in 2013. That's one reason the governor wants to shore up the staffing.

Having a chance to be outdoors every day, protecting Michigan's natural resources and educating people about those resources, is a compelling draw for new recruits and veteran COs alike.

Todd Thorn hired in as a CO in 2010 after working in another career he didn't particularly enjoy. Now, he said, he looks forward to going to work every day and loves the freedom and flexibility that come with his position.

"Now that I'm a conservation officer, I find that I'm consistently challenged and always learning, and I think that is my favorite part of this job," Thorn said.

"Nothing is perfect in this

world," said 32-year veteran CO Dan Walzak, "but on the subject of career positions, this may be as close as you can get."

Every new CO participates in a 22-week DNR Law Enforcement Academy, followed by 18 weeks of field training and four weeks of specialized break-out sessions in the areas of marine, off-road vehicles, fish and game, and waterfowl identification and enforcement.

Hagler said the last academy was held in 2007, graduating 14 officers. Hopefully, a much-needed crop of new COs will be coming soon, he said.

"More COs on the ground means more opportunities to talk with Michigan's outdoor men and women," Hagler said. "It also means faster response times on complaint calls and the ability to patrol more area."

To learn more about the program: [www.michigan.gov/conservationofficers](http://www.michigan.gov/conservationofficers).

—Michigan DNR



Michigan Conservation Officer Mike Bomay talks to a trapper in Mecosta County. (Michigan DNR photo)

**Conservation Officer Logs (2/4/13 through 2/18/13)****Snowmobile madness: Injuries, deaths and sunken machines investigated****DISTRICT 1**

**CO Marvin Gerlach** reports that a snowmobiler has died in Menominee County. A 24-year-old male subject was killed when his snowmobile struck a tree while traveling down the frozen surface of a river. The investigation is ongoing.

**CO Brian Bacon** contacted a group of anglers fishing a remote Dickinson County lake. A check of one angler found he was fishing with more than the legal three lines. The angler was also in possession of a bass during the closed season. Enforcement action was taken.

**DISTRICT 2**

**CO Mike Evink** contacted two subjects fishing on a lake in Schoolcraft County. They both had many extra tip-ups set out. They explained that the fishing was very slow and they didn't expect to see a CO at that lake in the middle of the day on a Thursday, so they took the chance. They accepted their tickets gracefully.

**CO Mike Evink** contacted an angler on the ice with six tip-ups. When asked about a license, he advised he did not have one. He went on to say his son would be right back and that the son was a tribal member and was allowed to have all six tip-ups. When the son arrived a short time later, CO Evink found that the son was not a tribal member and did indeed have a Michigan fishing license. The father was ticketed for fishing without a license.

**COs Kyle Publiski and Jeff Panich** teamed up with tribal conservation officers and conducted an ice fishing patrol on Sugar Island. Although the day proved to be a little on the slow side, they found 15 unattended fishing lines. They tracked the wayward anglers to a cabin over a mile away. The subjects claimed that they could see and monitor the tip-ups from that distance, but when asked why they didn't see the officers on the scene they couldn't come up with a good excuse. Tickets issued for unattended lines.

**DISTRICT 3**

A complaint was received about a subject who has set up cones and signs on the ice of Burt Lake. Responding to the area, COs discovered a skeet shooting range set up on the ice of Burt Lake. The cones, signs and other equipment have been removed and the issue is being addressed.

**CO Andrea Albert** handled two snowmobile injury accidents this past week on the snowmobile trails. In one incident the operator was traveling too fast for conditions and hit a small snow embankment, lost control and rolled the snowmobile over several times. The driver was transported to the hospital for his injuries and the snowmobile was a total loss.

**A NOTE TO READERS:**

These are brief excerpts from the CO's bi-monthly field reports. To conserve space, we have excluded the more routine activities in favor of what we think are the most unusual and interesting.

If you want a more complete log than we are able to provide, you can find an archive of them under the Law Enforcement tab on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources website.

In a second accident, the operator hit a deer in the Jordan Valley. The operator had minor injuries and the snowmobile was not drivable. The deer was dispatched at the scene.

**CO Andrea Albert** was a first responder to a snowmobile accident in Antrim County which resulted in a fatality. The snowmobile collided head on with a logging truck on a one-lane seasonal road. The snowmobile was traveling at a high rate of speed and crested a blind hill, colliding head on with the slow moving truck. The operator was pronounced dead at the scene. It is believed alcohol was not a factor in the crash.

**DISTRICT 4**

**CO Jeff Ginn** assisted with the investigation of a snowmobile personal injury accident that took place near Croton. The operator lost control and was ejected from the snowmobile causing injuries. The operator was transported to a local hospital for treatment.

**CO Mike Wells** was checking ice fishing activity on Kimble Lake and observed two subjects tending eight lines. CO Wells contacted the two subjects and obtained identification. A record check revealed that one of the subjects had an outstanding arrest warrant. The subject fled the scene, leaving behind his fishing equipment and fishing partner. CO Wells advised the remaining subject that if his friend would turn himself in, the CO would not pursue additional charges. CO Wells met with the wanted subject the next day on the same lake in order to turn himself in. In the meantime, CO Wells confirmed an additional arrest warrant and lodged the subject in the Newaygo County Jail. A ticket was also issued for fishing with too many lines.

**DISTRICT 5**

**CO Brian Olsen** responded to a snowmobile accident where a subject lost control of her snowmobile and hit a tree while traveling on a county road. The victim died from her injuries. Alcohol and speed are believed to be factors. The investigation continues.

**CO Brian Olsen** and **Sgt. Glenn Gutierrez** were assisting sheriff's deputies in a search for the owners of two abandoned vehicles on state land when Sgt. Gutierrez observed a pickup truck heading toward the vehicles and come to a stop in the middle of the road. Several occupants got out

of the truck and ran into the woods carrying objects and then came back to their truck empty handed. As luck would have it, the owners of the abandoned vehicles were occupants in the truck. A check of the woods where the subjects had stopped revealed litter in the form of alcoholic beverages and empty cans and bottles. The subjects were minors and were attempting to hide the incriminating evidence. Tickets were issued for littering and minors in possession of alcohol, and the missing owners of the vehicles were located.

**DISTRICT 6**

**CO Ken Lowell** received a call regarding a possible illegal snare set on private land. The CO located an illegal snare that had a coyote caught in it. After pulling the snare, the CO made numerous phone calls attempting to find out who may have set the snare. After a week of talking with local hunters in the area, a suspect was found and contact was made. The trapper admitted to setting the illegal snare and tickets were issued.

Central Dispatch in Isabella County put out information that a suspect had advised they were going to level the Beal City High School. **CO Jeremy Payne** and local deputies responded to the school and provided security. After all the students were secure, the CO assisted the deputies with the arrest of the subject.

**CO Jeremy Payne** received a complaint of two subjects hunting right alongside Highway 127. The CO contacted the hunters and their bleeding beagle. The CO provided first aid to the beagle's torn ear and then discussed the trespassing issue of hunting along the freeway. Further investigation revealed that one of the hunters had his limit of five rabbits. The additional problem was that he did not have a hunting license. Further additional problems were that the hunters had loaded and uncased firearms in their vehicle. Enforcement action was taken.

**Sgt. Ron Kimmerly** has reported numerous ORVs, snowmobiles and full size vehicles that have recently broken through the ice on a number of different lakes and rivers. All operators should be reminded that operating vehicles and snowmobiles on frozen waters can be extremely dangerous. Operators are responsible for the removal of these vehicles, which can be very expensive. This does not include the fines that are associated with the failure to have such vehicles removed promptly.

**DISTRICT 7**

**CO Mike Mshar** reported that a subject fled from him when he tried to stop him for not having a

snowmobile trail permit. CO Mshar was able to track the subject and after a short distance contacted him. The subject became very aggressive toward CO Mshar and threatened the CO. CO Mshar contacted the Allegan County Sheriff's Department, and with their assistance calmed down the subject. The snowmobile was impounded and the subject was issued tickets for fleeing and eluding, and no trail permit. A warrant was also authorized for resisting and obstructing an officer, and the subject was lodged in jail.

**CO Greg Patten** was conducting an inspection of a taxidermist in Muskegon County when he observed an 11-point rack tagged with a license purchased opening day of the firearm season. CO Patten contacted and interviewed the hunter to learn he was in possession of two valid antlerless tags on that day and had just returned from an out-of-state trip where he had taken two other whitetail bucks. The hunter advised he simply forgot to purchase a Michigan deer or combination license until after taking the buck on opening day, as he was so busy with his annual out-of-state hunt, where he normally takes bucks every year. CO Patten requested a warrant charging the hunter with taking the buck without a valid deer license.

**DISTRICT 8**

**CO Dan Bigger** investigated a complaint resulting from deer season of a deer that may have been illegally taken and tagged with a family member's kill tag. Through phone calls with a CO in the U.P. confirming information regarding details surrounding the complaint, the case was moved forward and investigation conducted. After interviews with the subject and his wife, conflicting stories began to pile up, leaving them both unable to remember what untruths had been told. After over an hour of interviews, confessions were obtained, the firearm seized, and a warrant request is pending for several charges, including an illegal deer.

**CO Rich Nickols** assisted the local police department with an investigation of reports of loud explosions in the township. After obtaining a possible suspect vehicle description, CO Nickols located the vehicle and conducted a traffic stop. Through a conversation with the driver, he was able to determine that several people had been target shooting with various weapons and with commercially manufactured exploding targets. It appears all activities were legal.

**CO Shane Webster** followed up on the taking of a six-point antlered deer during the firearm deer season. The subject was contacted and after a lengthy interview it was revealed that he had taken the deer three days prior to purchasing his hunting licenses. The subject had decided to buy a license for the deer because he wanted to use the cape from the six-point to get a mount done on another buck that he had shot four years prior. A complaint is being submitted to the prosecutor's office.

While on patrol, **CO Jeff Goss** came across a 15-year-old operating an ORV in the curves of an icy dirt road. The teen was towing his four-year-old brother and seven-year-old sister on sleds and none of them were wearing helmets. Upon stopping the teen, he advised that his parents probably didn't know where he was. CO Goss had him call his parents to come to the scene. The father was ticketed for allowing a minor child to operate an ORV unsupervised and verbally warned for multiple other violations and safety concerns. Everyone was transported back home safely.

**DISTRICT 9**

**CO Ken Kovach** and **CO Ben Lasher** made good use of the recent snowfall and conducted a snowmobile patrol on Anchor Bay. The COs made several contacts and issued 10 tickets for various violations. Numerous warnings were given for fishing without a license, operating too fast within 100 feet of a shanty, expired registrations, drag racing and no helmets.

While on foot patrol in Captain's Cove Marina, **CO Todd Szyska** checked one angler who had his bluegill lying all over the ice. When the fish on the ice were counted along with the extras in a plastic bag in the angler's bucket, the total of bluegill ran up to 35. The subject's fish were seized and a ticket was issued for possession of an over-limit of bluegills.

**Sgt. Arthur Green** and **CO Brandon Kieft** responded to a report of an ORV that had gone through the ice on Cass Lake. While enroute, the report was updated to add that a snowmobile had gone through near the ORV. There were no injuries and all victims returned to their homes to dry off and warm up. The ORV owner was working to remove the vehicle from the water when another ORV drove past. They started yelling at the driver and when he turned around to see what they were yelling about, his ORV went through the ice, too.

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## Final Shot

**The Waning Days of Michigan's Winter**  
*The fields and forests surrounding The North Woods Call office were laden with heavy snow on more than one occasion during the past month, as lake-effect precipitation blanketed much of Michigan with the beauty of winter. Spring is now only a few weeks away, so scenes like this will soon be replaced by green grass, wildflowers and gentle rains. Regardless of the season, God's handiwork is all around us and his glory is evident to all those with eyes to see.*



### Young Hunters

*Keeping Michigan's rich hunting tradition alive—and helping it thrive—involves giving young people opportunities to create lasting memories. That's why the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and its conservation-minded partners continue to develop programs aimed at giving youngsters the chance to try hunting—and ensuring enough success so that they'll stick with it. Lately, the DNR has been teaming with sportsmen's groups to encourage kids to give small-game hunting—once a popular pastime among young hunters—a try. Here, Mitchell Neeb (left) and Justin Meyers, both of Clarksville, along with dog Sadie, admire a rabbit taken during the Belding Sportsman's Club Youth Rabbit Hunt. It was the first rabbit Neeb had ever bagged and he said the experience was "exciting" and "more fun than I thought it would be." To learn more about opportunities to involve young people in hunting, check out [www.michigan.gov/mentoredhunting](http://www.michigan.gov/mentoredhunting).*

—Michigan DNR Photo

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