

**Preliminary Assessment of the Michigan  
Department of Natural Resources'  
Field Operations:  
Improving Service Delivery**

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# Executive Summary

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Public Sector Consultants was hired by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR, or “the Department”) in August 2006 to conduct a preliminary assessment of the agency’s field structure and make recommendations on how to enhance delivery of services to the public and staff by optimizing the use of technology and realigning its field operations. An internal steering committee comprised of DNR staff was convened to provide oversight and assist with project objectives. The project included a compilation and analysis of past studies that focused on DNR services and organizational structures. The project also included a series of focus group meetings throughout Michigan to solicit input from user groups and members of the public. This report is designed to give DNR decision-makers a starting point and provide a blueprint for strategic changes to the Department’s field operations. It is *not* designed to provide a detailed analysis of specific DNR facilities, programs, or field staffing operations.

The Michigan DNR is at a difficult time in its history. Factors contributing to the need to carry out this study include:

- Declining Department revenue and general funds
- High staff attrition due to impending “baby boomer” retirements
- Challenges of fully implementing the Department’s Ecosystem Management Initiative
- The Department’s identity in response to rapidly changing user group demands

A review of the DNR’s current field structure suggests that many opportunities exist to update and realign its operations. This study concludes that opportunities to implement these changes must be focused in the following areas:

- Facilities Currently Operated or Owned
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Communications

Some of these opportunities may be realized by a realignment of current activities without the need for additional funds or resources. Others will require additional resources and will need to be further evaluated, with recommendations fully developed. In the near term, existing resources could be leveraged to create efficiencies in the field operations intended to enhance service delivery.

Throughout its history, the DNR has consistently adapted its resource management priorities in response to shifting user demands and preferences, evolving program mandates, and available funding. A review of the literature and analysis of numerous reorganizations in the Department’s history show the DNR to be flexible, adaptive, and relatively successful at responding to continually changing conditions.

# Introduction

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The current field structure of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR, or “the Department”) is a result of over 150 years of evolution in response to various DNR mandates and Michigan’s wealth of public lands and natural resources. The Department’s field structure was originally developed to place managers in close proximity to natural resources, specifically timber, minerals, and petroleum. In addition, the Department’s field structure was initially designed for intensive management to benefit a single species or class of species in a single program (e.g., whitetail deer or large game) or for a particular purpose (e.g., timber production). This structure provided the groundwork for today’s extensive network of field and district offices, research facilities, service centers, storage buildings, and maintenance garages.

During the mid-1990s the DNR began a transition to an integrated management style, called ecosystem management, which focuses on ecosystem health at the landscape level in order to benefit all species in an area and combines the cooperative efforts of all the divisions within the DNR. The DNR has committed to ecosystem management as a strategic long-term principle to direct the Department’s actions. Any service delivery changes should be consistent with current ecosystem management activities.

Currently, the DNR manages the largest public land program east of the Mississippi River—12% of the state’s total land area or approximately 4.5 million acres of public land. Under the umbrella of the current DNR, program areas include recreation, forest management, state land and minerals management, wildlife and fisheries management, state parks and forest campgrounds, conservation, and law enforcement. The DNR has 1,477 permanent employees and 286 seasonal employees, and is currently operating with a budget of nearly \$254 million in actual revenues. A multitude of services are provided by the DNR under the various programs. These services are both internal (i.e., related to staff functions and performance) and external (i.e., related to the public, other government agencies, and non-profit organizations).

A major challenge for the Department is that its field structure, related infrastructure, programs, and services have evolved over many decades to accommodate a broad mandate from the time when funds were available to support a multitude of programs. Recent declines in revenues as a result of fewer sales of hunting and fishing licenses and reduced appropriations from the state’s general fund have resulted in shortfalls and portend a future of declining funding. As a result, the DNR must continually examine ways to refine its organizational structure and field operations to provide more efficient program integration and coordination in order to maintain and improve levels of service delivery.

The Department faces additional challenges, including Michigan’s changing user groups and their preferences, uncertain funding, an aging workforce and infrastructure, the ongoing challenges related to ecosystem management, and the demands of readily adapting to rapidly evolving technology.

# Discussion and Recommendations

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## SERVICES CURRENTLY DELIVERED

In order to improve its capacity to deliver services, the DNR should assess services it currently provides and use that assessment to make strategic decisions and investigate the potential to realign its field operations.

The DNR is a large and multifaceted agency. In order to fully understand how it may improve service delivery and streamline functions, it must first develop a comprehensive list of services currently provided, organized by division. The DNR has completed a similar exercise in its “Price of Government” report, which may be a useful source of information to begin this assessment.

Each division’s programs and services should be compared against the rest of the department. This would enable the management team to identify services that may be shared across divisions. This service list would also help convey the full range of Department functions and the need to prioritize those functions in light of shrinking funding.

While some overlap among divisions is expected, this assessment would allow divisions to accurately determine opportunities to share services across division lines in order to function more efficiently. Agency programs that are duplicative, either within the DNR or with other agencies, or those that are inconsistent with agency priorities should be eliminated. Also, services that could be administered by another entity should be relinquished.

Each division must refine its operational strategy to ensure its activities contribute directly to Department-wide priorities. These priorities must be chosen based on the extent to which services accomplish DNR’s core mandates and are supported with adequate funding levels. This set of service priorities must then be consistently communicated throughout the DNR and must be the basis for any operational changes, as internal communication of the reason for any change is crucial to its implementation. The communication strategy to internal staff lays the groundwork for the types of changes proposed; leaders must convey why the change is needed based on the stated priorities and the way in which the change would better serve the Department’s mission, internal services, and services to the public.

### *Recommendations*

- The Department should conduct a comprehensive review of the full range of services it provides to its user groups, the public, other agencies, and its own staff. A starting point may be the “Price of Government” report. This effort should also include an identification of the potential gaps in service resulting from changing preferences of various user groups.
- Each division’s programs and services should be compared against the rest of the department to determine where services can be shared across division lines in order to function more efficiently. Redundant and duplicative services should be eliminated.

- Continue to set and reassess Department priorities based on core DNR mandates; communicate those priorities consistently across divisions and ensure all divisions' services reflect the stated priorities.

## **FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT CURRENTLY OPERATED OR OWNED BY THE DNR**

In order to service its numerous and diverse divisions and programs, the DNR owns or operates a large number of facilities in Michigan, including an extensive network of field and district offices, research facilities, service centers, storage buildings, and maintenance garages. The DNR also owns and operates dams, fish ladders, docks, and boat launches. As the DNR prepares for the future, it must develop a clear vision for the future use of these facilities based on its ability to deliver its core programs while remaining consistent with ecosystem management principles and objectives. In order to accomplish this in a focused and comprehensive manner, detailed assessments of current facilities, equipment, and service delivery logistics are necessary.

### ***Facilities Assessment***

A comprehensive facilities assessment should be conducted to ensure that facility locations across divisions and programs and the use of staff currently supporting those operations are being optimized. The DNR Office of Land and Facilities reports that it has four different sources for information on facilities; these sources should be used as a starting point for a detailed analysis. Any consolidation of facilities and/or operations should be undertaken in accordance with a long-range strategy that utilizes resources across divisions and programs and provides planned targets and timelines.

A facilities assessment should include, at a minimum, the following information:

- Building ownership
- Building condition
- Square footage
- Space utilization data, including staff numbers and equipment storage, and current division or department representation
- Location characteristics, including proximity to existing DNR facilities and other state offices and highly visible transportation routes
- Feasibility of upgrading facility
- Proximity of facility to resource being managed
- Availability to the public for service
- Long-range strategic value of facility for Ecosystem Management Units

### ***Other Considerations***

Based on feedback through focus group meetings, stakeholders urge the DNR to consider the management needs of each geographical area and the potential gains in communication between divisions when it considers combining locations. Stakeholders contend that some small satellite offices serve important purposes in remote locations, while the public may feel that others do not provide essential services. This requires case-by-case, critical analysis of value added by locations and staff in remote offices.

DNR should examine all opportunities to make full use of facilities that it already owns. Leased facilities should be closely examined to determine if the lease is a strategic and wise long-term use of Department funds. Likewise, any facilities that the DNR does not use to their fullest potential should be considered for sale and disposition as part of the Lands Consolidation strategy.

Information about DNR organization and facilities should be transparent and readily available to the public. Feedback from focus group participants suggests the general public lacks understanding about DNR facilities and their different purposes.

### ***Equipment Assessment***

An assessment of equipment owned or used by the DNR is equally important to determine facilities necessary for equipment storage and to optimally distribute and share equipment across divisions and programs. An equipment assessment should include, at a minimum:

- Department-wide equipment inventory, broken down by divisions or programs
- Assessment of equipment condition
- Equipment maintenance and replacement schedule
- Designated use of the equipment (e.g., fire management, construction)
- Location of equipment storage, current and potential
- Opportunities to share equipment across divisions, programs, or geographical boundaries.

### ***Logistics Assessment***

Efficient delivery of field services requires an assessment of the logistics necessary to do so. Logistics is generally described as the overall management of the way resources are moved to the areas where they are required. A logistics analysis will likely include the facilities and equipment assessments above, but it will also determine the most efficient way to achieve the synergy among the available facilities, equipment, human resources, and natural resources that will enable successful and efficient delivery of DNR services. At a minimum, the logistics analysis should focus on:

- The distance between facilities, equipment, human resources, and the resource to be managed
- The ease of transportation between those components
- The desired level of service delivery

### *Recommendations*

- The Department should conduct a detailed facilities assessment in which it identifies and examines all current facilities and develops a coordinated plan for integrating facilities where possible, based on expanding technological capabilities and the sharing of resources across divisions and programs while maintaining acceptable levels of service delivery to the public and internally.
- Any consideration of consolidating facilities should be undertaken in accordance with a long-range strategy that incorporates a vision of changing user groups and management practices while also considering co-locating with other state and federal agencies.
- The DNR should examine all opportunities to fully utilize facilities that it already owns: leased space should be avoided unless the lease is deemed a strategic long-term use of Department funds. All facilities not used to their full potential should be considered for sale and disposition.
- The DNR field operations , including office locations and functions, should be clearly articulated within the DNR and readily available to the public, both in printed materials currently distributed (e.g., fishing and hunting guides) and via the Internet.
- The DNR should assess its equipment and develop opportunities to share equipment resources across divisions, programs, and geographical boundaries.
- The DNR should conduct a logistics analysis to determine the most efficient placement of its facilities, equipment, and human resources in order to achieve desired service levels.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES NEEDS AND CAPACITY**

The DNR is confronting the impending retirement of the aging baby-boomer population, which comprises a significant number of current DNR staff. While DNR staff retirements may reduce the numbers of staff and capacity, it will also provide an opportunity to reallocate the distribution of human resources to fit within the Department's long-range vision of its field operations. Opportunities also exist for creating synergies with realigned staff as consolidation occurs.

### ***Attrition***

The DNR's aging workforce will result in the loss of key managers over the next ten years. This trend is one that, while not unique to the DNR, will result in a loss of experienced resource management professionals and institutional knowledge. At the same time, the retirement of key DNR employees will create an opportunity to restructure Department field operations and services to more accurately reflect budget realities and trends in user groups' needs. This gradual restructuring of the Department staff, if managed proactively, will reposition the Department's human resources while minimizing the impact and disruption to employees who currently serve in the field.

### ***Co-location***

Opportunities to share services may be available through co-location of staff from various divisions or other conservation agencies or organizations. Co-locating staff should result

in the benefit of increasing collegiality and communication across divisions, agencies, or programs and enhance ecosystem management activities and collaboration.

Co-location of DNR staff should be considered a means of improving service delivery and adhering to the Governor's policy on combining state offices where feasible. In addition, focus group participants indicated that the public sees value in co-locating employees of different DNR divisions and other conservation agencies with the notion of "one-stop shopping" in mind.

### **Shared Administration**

#### *Recommendations*

- Evaluate the anticipated rate of employee retirements and its potential impact on the field operations. Employees should be realigned and located in accordance with a long-range vision for delivery of DNR services, based on the purpose of the staff and the availability of a suitable facility.
- Consider combining staff locations across divisions and programs wherever possible.
- Consider sharing locations with other agencies or organizations that share a similar or complementary purpose with the DNR.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Information technology offers the opportunity to maintain and improve services without moving facilities, equipment, and staff. Since the future of the Department will likely include fewer of those three components, information technology must be embraced and readily adapted to enable remaining facilities, equipment, and human resources to continue to provide desired levels of service. The Department should apply technology wherever possible to enhance its delivery of services. The Department must view technology as an investment for its future and recognize, as with all investments, that implementing new technology will have near-term start-up costs, including those for initial expenditures and staff training.

The DNR must consider two strategic actions: (1) adopting methods internally to review and update technological advancements on a regular basis, and (2) using the Department of Information and Technology (DIT) to help augment and implement an internal strategy to apply technology.

There is a recognized need for a dedicated DIT–DNR liaison position housed within the DNR. Since the department has been forced to generate the revenue it requires in order to fund its resource management programs in accordance with its mission, the DNR needs to establish a position responsible for reviewing department operations. The primary focus should be to use technology to continually improve Department-wide efficiencies and customer service. This position would be responsible for analyzing Department operations across divisional boundaries in order to leverage program strengths, create new partnerships, and generate savings or additional revenue. Changing and improving processes may result in quality improvements.

Information technology should be assessed for potential enhancements to service delivery under the following categories: Internet, geographic information systems, and communication technology.

### ***Internet***

The DNR must continually evaluate its presence and the services it provides on its website. Studies have shown that DNR customers are increasingly comfortable using the Internet to access information and to make purchases. Accordingly, the DNR must keep looking for ways to make the website more intuitive and user friendly, both for its own staff and for the public. The DNR should consider evaluating the performance of other states' DNR websites as well when considering how to improve its own site. The website must be evaluated to ensure that its content and format reflect its activities and that updates are ongoing.

Online activities that generate revenue should be moved to a prominent location on the website. The DNR homepage needs a statement that informs visitors immediately about the availability of permits and licenses (e.g., "Buy your DNR licenses online at the Michigan e-store"). As Internet purchase of goods and services grows in Michigan, the opportunity exists for the DNR to capture a larger percentage of fees collected by directing license sales to the Internet. While licenses purchased on the Internet have grown to almost 200,000 in 2006, this represents only four percent of total licenses sold in the state. The majority (approximately 95 percent) were sold through point-of-sale agents, who collect a small percentage of the fee to cover the expense of maintaining the point-of-sale device. Fewer than one percent of licenses sold in 2006 were sold through DNR field offices, operation service centers, and game areas combined.

Proactive database marketing using databases created by names, addresses, and transaction histories of those people who have purchased DNR licenses or permits in the past presents another opportunity to use the Internet. These databases contain a wealth of information about DNR customers and transactions, both face to face and online. That information must be continually analyzed and used to the maximum extent possible. Marketing activities from this database could include generating personalized communication to promote the DNR's activities and programs.

A large percentage of DNR website users has access to dial-up Internet connections only, which can hinder buying licenses online and downloading any sizable files. Dial-up connections regularly get disconnected, which may make users less likely to make online purchases if they fear the connection is not stable and their information may be lost or require re-entry. For this consumer group, it is easier and more reliable to go to a retail location that sells licenses. As long as this remains a concern, the DNR must also continue to pursue and expand its partnerships with private vendors for license and permit sales, as well as dissemination of information.

It is important that DNR customers seeking information not be frustrated by outdated information. Both DNR staff and focus group participants stressed the need for continually updated information on the Contact page. Lists that are correct and convenient for the users enhance the image of the DNR as an organized and efficient Department.

Consideration should be given to creating an “issues forum.” Issues of concern to the public are currently discussed in a myriad of Internet-based chat rooms. Using staff to monitor these sites is both very inefficient and not supported by managers. Addressing the public’s concerns and questions through a moderated forum would be a more efficient use of time for staff and a more reliable source of information for the public.

### ***Geographic Information Systems (GIS)***

The DNR should continue efforts to employ available GIS technology to the fullest extent possible.

In the future, investment in an enterprise system to ensure that GIS data from all DNR divisions are available and compatible for Department-wide information sharing will be essential. A GIS enterprise system refers to a network of hardware and software that is designed to store information centrally on one dedicated, powerful GIS server. Information is translated between desktop applications to enterprise (organization)-wide accessibility through a networked GIS file server. This creates an environment for sharing common spatial data resources among divisions. In order for all DNR divisions to improve cooperative functions, it is essential to share GIS information about each division’s management areas and activities across divisions.

DNR staff must be trained in any existing and new GIS technology. If civil service training courses are available to DNR staff, they must be promoted within the DNR. Also, DIT staff could be asked to conduct GIS training within the DNR. Since the Michigan DNR has the most extensive state land base to manage in the nation, it should set a goal to be the foremost authority on GIS resource management in the nation. DNR staff should set a goal of becoming the most GIS-literate resource management team in the country.

### ***Communication Technologies***

The DNR must assess its communication technology and continue to make improvements wherever possible. Communication technology includes e-mail, conference call capabilities, shared calendars, list servers, direct mail, direct e-mail, and others. Examples of specific considerations include:

- The DNR should take a leadership position in participating in DIT’s rollout of dedicated T1 (high-speed) video conferencing services. Currently, the DNR faces bandwidth limitations when using its video conferencing technology, resulting in poor quality interfaces and frustration with the system. A dedicated T1 line for video conferencing would be an improvement for the Department. Video conferencing is a perfect example of technology that could benefit the Department, its customers, and the bottom line, by allowing staff to forego travel time and expense through conducting meetings via video conference. Priority should be placed on developing video conferencing resources at locations that would save significant time in travel costs and other associated costs and increase service availability to the public.
- Use of shared calendars has the potential to create efficiencies among DNR staff. It allows individuals who organize meetings to quickly see when invitees are available and communicate efficiently about meeting plans. A number of free Web-based

meeting scheduling software applications could be used by staff to increase efficiency.

- Where not currently being used, the DNR should create internal e-mail listservs to educate staff on changes and obtain staff feedback on Department initiatives. This would ensure that a coherent, consistent message is communicated throughout the Department, including its field offices.

### *Recommendations*

- The DNR must continually evaluate its presence and the services it provides on its website.
- Links to revenue-generating activities online should be prominently featured on the DNR homepage.
- The DNR must increase the number of licenses sold through the Internet, while maintaining partnerships with current point-of-sale partners.
- The DNR should track its website traffic and manage comments and information from website users, including DNR employees, to its benefit, including proactive database marketing.
- The contacts lists for each division available on the “Contact DNR” Web page must be updated continually.
- The DNR should continue efforts to employ available GIS technology to the fullest extent possible.
- DNR staff must be trained in any existing and new GIS technology.
- The DNR should take a leadership position in participating in DIT’s rollout of dedicated T1 (high-speed) video conferencing services, focusing on locations that could best provide time savings and travel savings to staff.
- The DNR should seek other ways to improve its use of communication technology such as shared calendars and email list servers.

## **COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

In order to build and maintain continuity and staff confidence, especially during times of change, effective communication of the results of organizational changes is essential to both the Department’s reputation and its support base. The Department must continue to assess its communication strategy and evaluate the impacts of that strategy.

The public has both a real and a perceived need to remain informed about the DNR’s activities and operations. The DNR must initiate a proactive approach to communicating its day-to-day activities and positive accomplishments. This approach must clearly convey the critical nature of DNR activities to the interests of all Michigan’s citizens, not just hunters and other user groups. In developing this communication strategy, the DNR must seek to build a broad base of public support for its activities.

The DNR should continue to rely on its facility placement and employees to communicate with and educate the public. Facilities that are clearly marked as DNR offices are important to maintaining public understanding of the Department’s presence and role in communities. As it is likely that there will be fewer DNR facilities open to the

public in the future, the public's expectations about where they can access DNR information and services will need to be proactively managed. Where an office has been closed or moved, information about where services can now be accessed should be readily available. This effort should include promotion of the Operations Service Centers. Also, DNR staff in the field should be encouraged to use this opportunity to wear identifying clothing and to initiate word-of-mouth education about the DNR's current activities. Another method of increasing word-of-mouth exposure for the Department is through continued and expanded partnerships. The DNR should expand partnerships with user groups, retail outlets, and any other organizations that may have shared interests. Since press releases are the primary tool used by the DNR to communicate with the public, press releases should be issued to partnership organizations as well as to the press in order to build publicity. Using partnerships to communicate the DNR message allows for maximum publicity of DNR activities.

### *Recommendations*

- Assess current communication strategy, and continue to evaluate the impacts of that strategy.
- Ensure that signs clearly reflect DNR offices, even where office space is shared with other state agencies, in order to communicate the DNR's identity to the public.
- Proactively manage the public's expectations of being able to contact DNR staff in local buildings.
- Ensure that when DNR facilities that have been open in the past are closed to the public information detailing where the public now may contact the DNR is posted or otherwise readily available.
- Leverage word-of-mouth exposure and partnerships to communicate with the public.

## **LONG-RANGE VISION AND STRATEGY**

If completed in a sequential and coordinated manner, the assessments and related actions recommended in this report will provide important opportunities to the DNR. Leadership, vision, execution, and communication are essential to any successful effort that the Department may undertake to enhance field operations.

### *Recommendations*

- The steering committee should play an integral role in completing the various assessments and developing a strategic plan.
- The DNR steering committee should meet with the DNR management team at least four times in the next 24 months to communicate the goals of the report and discuss implementation.

# Conclusion

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Results from this study indicate significant opportunities for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to maintain and improve delivery of services through creation of a more efficient field structure by assessing services and proactively using technology and communication. The approach recommended in the report identifies the need for additional studies and a commitment from the DNR management team to drive organizational change not only in its field structure, but also in the development of a comprehensive vision for carrying out its mission to manage and protect Michigan's natural resources.

The DNR must continue to assess how it conducts business with its user groups and constituents. As Michigan demographics shift and the DNR's stakeholder bases change, the Department must be prepared to modify its approach to natural resource management and delivery of services. Clearly, the DNR field operations are the backbone of the agency and central to carrying out its mission.

This project was not designed to provide a detailed analysis of specific DNR facilities, programs, or field staffing operations. It is intended to serve as a blueprint to help assess long-term opportunities for creating operational efficiencies in its organizational structure in order to meet emerging trends such as Michigan's changing user groups and their demands, uncertain funding, an aging workforce, aging infrastructure, the ongoing challenges inherent in ecosystem management, and the demands of managing ever-advancing technology. By embarking on this approach, the DNR will also realize additional benefits that result from streamlining and optimizing many of its functions within its current organizational structure. These additional benefits may include streamlined processes in the decision-making framework, increased access to agency expertise, faster response times, and increased capacity for better practice and innovation.

For many organizations, consolidation and realignment has become an ongoing effort rather than a discrete project. They continually look for ways to realign their operations as they reorganize or deploy new technology. Adopting this paradigm would create continuing benefits for both the DNR and the constituents it serves.

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# Appendix A:

## *History of the Department*

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### **STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

Public Act 451 of 1994, as amended, referred to as the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, is the primary act governing the DNR.

The Department of Natural Resources is responsible for the stewardship of Michigan's natural resources and for the provision of outdoor recreational opportunities; a role it has been entrusted with since creation of the original Conservation Department in 1921.

### **ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT**

**1837:** The Geological Survey was established. This was the inception of the organization that later became known as the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

**1843:** The State Land office, now the Land and Facilities Division of the Department, was organized to dispose of the lands granted to the state by the federal government.

**1887:** The first salaried game and fish warden in the United States was appointed in Michigan in 1887.

**1909:** The Public Domain Commission was formed for the purpose of consolidating various conservation functions. By 1915, all functions except the geological Survey Board were brought under one agency. This was a forerunner to the subsequent Conservation Department.

**1919:** The State Parks Commission was established.

**1921:** Creation of the original Conservation Department in Michigan by Public Act 17 marked the establishment of the broadest natural resources management agency in the United States. The Natural Resource Commission was also established by this Act. The original organization of the Department was made up of the following divisions based in Lansing: Parks, Forestry, Pollution, Game, Administration, Fire, Fish, Geology, and Lands.

**1929:** The Education Division was created.

**1931:** The Field Administration Division was created to adjust for the placement of increasing staff in the field. This division incorporated the functions of Fire, Law Enforcement, and Game Refuges, as well as field employees of the Lands division. This new division created a district field office organization.

**1945:** The Department had grown to nearly 950 employees by 1945. Then-Director P. J. Hoffmaster was concerned that the Department was experiencing an image crisis amid mounting problems in field coordination. As a result, the first of many organizational studies was conducted by Floyd Reeves. The recommendations from the 1945 Reeves Study initiated a continuing debate on centralized versus decentralized organization.

**1945:** *Report on the Organization and Administration of the Michigan Department of Conservation*, by Floyd Reeves. The recommendations are as follows:

- The organization should remain centralized, but establish Regional Offices under the supervision of a Regional Coordinator to improve coordination of the field activities.
- Improve public relations program.
- Improve facilities for coordination and administrative support in the office of the Director.

**1947:** Regional offices were established and Regional Coordinators were appointed. This was the beginning of the decentralization shift that materialized more fully in 1965.

**1953:** *Second Organization Study* by Reeves reaffirmed his 1945 conclusions.

**1963:** *Governor's Special Conservation Study (Blue Ribbon) Committee* conducted a very extensive organizational study, whose recommendations led to decentralization of the agency. By that time the Department had grown to 2,100 employees and 13 divisions.

**1965:** Executive Reorganization Act (Act 380 P.A. 1965) established the Department of Natural Resources.

**1970:** *Reappraisal of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources*, by the Wildlife Management Institute. This study evaluated the progress made in implementing the 1963 recommendations. It recommended that the agencies transferred into the Department in the 1965 reorganization be fully integrated under the authority of the Department of Natural Resources rather than maintaining their independence. This was later accomplished by Executive Order. The study also recommended a clearer delineation of responsibilities between the Commission and Director and an expansion of the Department to include environmental science staff.

**1972:** Director A. Gene Gazlay's first action in office was to pledge to improve the Department's public image. He appointed a special task force to review the problem and recommend improvements.

**1973:** Executive Orders 1973-2 and 1973-2a broadened the Department's mission to include virtually all environmental protection and natural resource management functions of state government.

**1975:** *Report of the Special Committee to Study Department Reorganization* recommended retention of the staff-line concept of decentralized organization for natural resources and recreation; elimination of district offices to reduce lines of communication; elimination of the two-branch concept; and strengthening the role of bureau chiefs to replace divisions as the core of operating responsibility at the staff level.

**1986:** *Opportunities for the Future: A Report on the Organization and Operation of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources*, July 7, 1986, presented to Director Gordon E. Guyer.

In May 1986, Director Guyer appointed a four-person action team to evaluate the Department. Director Guyer asked the team to focus on five areas. Three of those areas are pertinent to this discussion:

- Evaluate the organization of the Department and recommend any changes needed to improve efficiency and accountability.
- Identify policy issues that will help the Department attack priority conservation and environmental problems.
- Develop methods of promoting the Department's mission, with particular emphasis on tourism and economic development.

Selected recommendations of the action team include:

- A review of the need to consolidate divisions should be conducted by the deputy directors for Environmental Protection and Resource Management (the DNR had not yet been split into DNR and MDEQ).
- Each deputy director for regions should develop a means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Department programs in his or her region.
- The Department should continue to integrate staff from environmental and resource programs into common field office facilities.
- The Department should review its perspective on economic development, ensuring a positive attitude toward economic development without abdicating its resource management and environmental protection responsibilities.
- The Department should study the feasibility and desirability of cooperating with the private sector in developing and operating outdoor recreational facilities.
- The Department should change the current system for strategic planning and implement a more dynamic process directed by top management and integrated with the budget.
- Top management staff and division chiefs must increase the frequency of personal visits to field offices.
- There are too many decision-making bodies managing the Department's programs. This situation is in desperate need of correction.

**1992:** *Managing Change: An Agenda for Action*, August 12, 1992, presented to Director Roland Harmes.

This was an extensive internal review of the agency. All deputy directors and division/office chiefs were interviewed to solicit their input. Meetings were held in 28 different DNR offices throughout the state, resulting in inclusion of approximately 400 DNR employees.

- While analyzing previous organizational studies, the report found the following:
  - Several key recommendations of the 1986 report (above) had not yet been implemented.
  - Virtually all large natural resource agencies with field operations have problems that are similar to those of the DNR.

- Major reorganizations create tremendous turmoil and cause disruption to the DNR's mission, the lives of agency employees, and the public.
  - Although DNR structure plays a role in determining the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations, the DNR's structure cannot replace effective management. Consequently, most recommendations focus on improved decision-making.
- While evaluating the DNR's public image, the report recommended that the Department
- initiate a proactive approach to communicate the positive accomplishments of the DNR,
  - utilize DNR employees more effectively in communicating with and educating the public,
  - dedicate a percentage of each program's time to interact with the public in community meetings and school presentations,
  - create standing and ad hoc committees involving stakeholders to promote open communication and exchange of information,
  - establish an environmental education position to coordinate the DNR's education efforts,
  - establish a public information office to coordinate dissemination of public information,
  - establish regional communication specialists in the Region I and II offices and in the Livonia and Grand Rapids offices to serve Region III,
  - use *Michigan Natural Resources Magazine* more effectively for environmental education and for communicating DNR programs,
  - inventory and consolidate field offices to provide adequate staff support and integrated resource management,
  - reopen field offices during normal business hours to restore public services by either providing additional secretarial support or by using existing staff on a rotating basis,
  - analyze the existing phone systems in DNR offices to identify deficiencies and prepare a plan of action to provide adequate services, and
  - improve telephone interaction with the public by upgrading receptionist positions, limiting voice mail to backup use at employees' desks, and providing additional employee training in telephone etiquette.
- While assessing employee needs for effective performance, the report recommended, among other things, that the DNR
- revise, update, and coordinate division operational memos, program directives, and other forms of employee guidance;
  - initiate a strategic planning process at the Department and division level with strong leadership provided by DNR managers and full involvement of DNR employees; and

- establish cross-training as a DNR priority, ensuring that each employee receives a Department-wide perspective.
- The report recommended a development of a clear mission, vision, and constancy of purpose for DNR employees to understand, share, and communicate amongst themselves and to the public.
- The report advocated a client focus encompassing all direct, indirect, and internal customers of DNR programs.
- The report recommended delegating authority and responsibility for decision making to the lowest possible level in order to support staff in their efforts.
- The report highlights the need to establish DNR-wide priorities and then match funding sources or secure new revenues to implement the priorities.
- The report indicated the need to improve internal communications through greater use of electronic media, using shared databases, and connecting all field offices and state parks.
- The report suggested designating “public information centers” which are now the DNR Operation Service Centers. The report comments that all other DNR facilities not designated to be open to the public should be signed as “work stations.”
- The report advocated the annual compilation and publishing of an employee directory which provides contact information for specific programs and issues.

**1992:** *The Organizational Culture of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources*, by Ralph C. Chandler, March 25, 1992.

- Describes qualities of DNR managers and organization: technically competent, independent.
- Indicates that decentralized field officers must use their own judgment and that the organization works best when it is in close contact with the individuals it serves while protecting the public good.
- Finds several agencies operating under one umbrella sometimes at cross purposes to each other. (This was before the DNR/DEQ split, but the finding may hold true today.)
- Enumerates qualities of a successful manager and managing atmosphere, based on agency perceptions of risk taking.

**1995:** Governor John Engler issued Executive Order 1995–18, which separated environmental and natural resources functions into two departments, elevating environmental protection to Cabinet status for the first time in history and allowing the DNR to return to its original conservation mission. The Department of Environmental Quality now focuses on environmental regulatory, permitting, and related enforcement functions, while the DNR focuses on promoting diverse outdoor recreational opportunities, wildlife and fisheries management, forest management, state lands and minerals, state parks and recreation areas, and conservation and law enforcement.

**1999:** *DNR Customer Service Project Final Report*, March 1999. Prepared for the DNR by Public Policy Associates, Inc.

- Information customers were identified. Groups included various user groups, internal DNR staff, and researchers.
- Examination of website footprint found that only about 25 percent of the respondents would use an Internet search for DNR information although a much larger percentage of the respondents reported having access to the Internet and performing Internet searches on some topic at least once per week.
- The study recommended managing hours of operation to match customer needs, using a trial of later hours on a rotating basis.
- The study also found that hunters, campers, anglers, and boaters are core customer base of DNR. Some members of these groups represent “cross-sporters” or those outdoors people who participate in more than one activity. Research indicated that communicating to these “cross-sporters” would be a more effective use of communication resources. Hunters were found to be the least likely to “cross-sport.”

**1999:** *Implementing Organizational Change in a Public Agency*, by David E. Freed, dissertation, Western Michigan University, December 1999.

- Based on the information reported above in *Managing Change: An Agenda for Action*, August 12, 1992, presented to Director Roland Harmes.
- Makes recommendations for successful organizational change based on lessons learned from the study.
- Found preplanning is critical to strategic planning and reorganization.
- Indicated that when change is mandated from above, lower-level managers must be enabled and empowered to determine how to meet those mandates.
- Reported a lack of attempt to build consensus on organizational change led to resistance by the staff in previous reorganization efforts.
- Communicating the meaning of change is crucial. Communication strategy to public and internal staff lays groundwork for types of changes proposed, closes door to rumor and backdoor politics. Leaders must convey why the change was needed and how it would better serve the agency and the public.
- Agency Director, Assistant Directors, and Office Chiefs must be consistent.
- Budget constraints and need for flatter organization should not overrule and ignore organizational perspectives and attitudes. For instance, staff members often view themselves as officers of natural resource protection for current and future generations; they feel a duty to their jobs, and are undermined when they are not supported.

**Circa 2000:** The DNR Management Team completed a facilities management review guided by the following objectives:

- Focus overall DNR facilities management
- Identify facilities management efficiencies
- Evaluate staff work conditions and consider new alternatives
- Improve DNR network delivery and services (technology)

This report recognized the need for the DNR to respond to shrinking budgets and adapt to changing technology. The report proposed the following:

*MDNR will reduce the number of facilities through staff consolidation and the creation of a few new “office” locations. Administrative, management, customer service and IT functions will be centralized in 11 locations throughout the State. Storage complexes will be constructed or improved at 21 locations. In some areas of the state, Field Offices will be consolidated, either together, or with a State Park facility. Other Field Offices and program support facilities will continue to operate, but will have only minimal IT support and will not provide customer services.*

The eleven central locations referred to above are the Operation Service Centers, nine of which are now located in Baraga, Marquette, Newberry, Cadillac, Gaylord, Roscommon, Bay City, Southfield and Plainwell. The proposed Operation Service Centers at Comstock Park, Brighton, and Escanaba were not realized. An Operations Service Center was opened in Southfield, which was not one of the original eleven locations.

The report also included a concise field office assessment that outlined specific facilities consolidation plans. The assessment designated specific offices, storage facilities, and support facilities for consolidation or closure.

A review of the technology available at each remaining site was also provided. The proposed changes to the technology structure:

- Remove inconsistencies through maintenance and help desk functions
- Increase staff productivity
- Reduce mistakes and increase service
- Provide a structured and disciplined approach to management that yields significant benefits in terms of cost and service quality.

**2001:** Brogan and Partners with Performax Consulting Services conducted an *Image Survey* of the DNR. This study was composed of a telephone survey and a series of focus groups, interviews with members of the DNR management team, and focus groups with DNR middle management. The telephone survey interviewed 1,500 Michigan residents about their perceptions of the DNR. Focus groups targeting specific consumer groups, such as anglers and recreational users, were conducted in Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Traverse City.

Selected findings from the report:

- Eighty-nine percent of all persons interviewed were aware of the DNR, with 68 percent approving of the job the DNR is doing.
- The DNR spends a great deal of resources on marketing but has no plan or ability to measure results. According to the study, the DNR annually spends more than \$1.6 million on its marketing effort.
- The lack of a recognizable “brand” for the DNR confuses the public (brand in this sense referring to the mission or reason for being). Uniform identity, trademark, or color scheme were suggested as ways to manage the DNR’s public identity and to reinforce the Department’s mission.

- The DNR has opportunities to improve its database management to enable the Department to more effectively use e-mail and direct mail as communication tools.
- The DNR does not consistently use customer research as a guide when making customer service decisions. For example, customer research shows that DNR field employees are the Department's best and most effective communicators with the public, and word of mouth between customers is the most effective communication tool.

The report recommended the following:

- Centralize and coordinate marketing across divisions.
- Use the Internet as a means to effectively communicate with audiences that demonstrate a history and preference of Internet use.
- Use proactive database marketing.
- Improve communications with DNR middle managers and field staff.
- Upgrade technology reliability and training in the field: Internet provides a significant opportunity for the DNR to provide information economically and quickly to its frontline staff.
- Distinguish funding investments on the basis of "policy investment" and "marketing investment," meaning that the DNR should separate its marketing investment from the time that is invested on reaction to policy initiatives. Marketing dollars should focus on the highest-value DNR customer (i.e., those who contribute the most economic activity to the state), not on the minority or the vocal dissenters only.

This information was used to develop a set of goals for the DNR.

- Increase Web presence.
- Develop a brand and brand promise.
- Encourage Michigan residents to identify with the DNR.

**2005:** "Privatizing State Parks," by Russ Harding. Fall 2005. *Michigan Privatization Report* No. 2005-01.

- Harding argues that the Michigan state park system has grown beyond what it was originally intended to be, and claims that Michigan has acquired many state parks over the years that are not unique in either their natural resources or their historic value.
- The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act states that the purpose of Michigan state parks is to "preserve and protect Michigan's significant natural and historic resources."
- Harding advises that the state would benefit from selling some of the state parks and he isolated 15 locations as possible candidates for sale.
- He argues that creating revenue and competing with private campgrounds are not the reasons the state Legislature created the state park system; the system will ultimately be stronger if it is comprised only of parks that represent the most important natural and historic treasures of our state.

**2006:** *Michigan's State Forests: A Century of Stewardship*, by William B. Botti and Michael D. Moore, 2006, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, Michigan.

- Michigan has the largest dedicated state forest area of any state in the United States.
- Forest certification in Michigan is a sign that Michigan's forests are being managed in a healthy, sustainable way to the benefit of the state's economy.
- Revenue from the controlled sale of timber from the state forests is sufficient today to cover the costs of management. General funds were eliminated from the forest management budget in 1994.
- Forest recovery has also allowed wildlife to recover and provided recreational opportunities in Michigan.
- It is difficult to predict what future generations will want from their forests.



# Appendix B:

## *Current Organizational Structure*

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### **DNR MISSION STATEMENT**

“The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the State's natural resources for current and future generations.”

The Constitution of the State of Michigan of 1963 (as amended), Article 4, § 52, states: “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.” To address this concern, the Michigan Legislature enacted Public Act 451, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (as amended) and established the DNR and assigned its duties (“The department shall protect and conserve the natural resources of this State...”). Under the public trust doctrine, the DNR holds *all wildlife*, including mussels, snails, crayfish, insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals, in trust for the benefit of the people of Michigan. The Wildlife Action Plan is a tool that will aid the DNR in complying with this mandate, and can be integrated, as appropriate and applicable, into the DNR’s many public trust responsibilities and management efforts.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Under the umbrella of the current DNR, program responsibilities include recreation, forest management, state land and minerals management, wildlife and fisheries management, state parks and forest campgrounds, conservation, and law enforcement.

The DNR operates under the policy guidance of the Natural Resources Commission, whose duties are outlined in the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (1994 PA 451, as amended). Seven Commissioners are appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate, and serve four-year terms. The Commission then appoints the DNR Director, who carries out Department policy and program development under the overall direction of the Commission. Currently, approximately 1,477 permanent employees and about 286 seasonal employees implement more than 70 programs under the supervision of DNR Director Rebecca A. Humphries and her management team. The DNR has primary responsibilities for managing more public lands than any other state agency east of the Mississippi River. Conservation officers, geologists, foresters, park rangers, and wildlife and fisheries biologists are just a few of the kinds of professionals the DNR employs to carry out its public trust responsibilities.

Internally, the Department is divided into two major areas, Administrative Services and Resource Management, each headed by a deputy. Each of the two major areas is then divided into the following divisions:

### ***Administration Division***

The importance of using customer-friendly service technologies, sound accounting principles and best business practices, proper contract administration, and educational outreach efforts in the management of Michigan's natural resources cannot be overstated. DNR's Financial Services; Budget and Support Services; Grants, Contracts and Customer Systems; Program Assistance and Review; and Human Resources all play vital roles in supporting the Department's conservation mission.

### ***Fisheries Division***

The mission of the Fisheries Division is to protect and enhance aquatic habitats and all forms of aquatic life, including valued fish stocks, and to promote wise use of these resources for the optimal benefit of the current and future people of Michigan.

The Fisheries Division works to preserve and enhance Michigan's fish populations, as well as other forms of aquatic life. Fish are monitored and studied by biologists who strive to keep Michigan's fishing among the nation's best. More than 20 fish species are reared and hatched at six state hatcheries, and then planted into designated waters to maintain or improve fish populations.

#### *Vision*

- Each watershed in Michigan would provide and maintain ecological functions and processes similar to those exhibited in their natural or unaltered state.
- Each body of water would provide and sustain aquatic habitat characteristics similar to those exhibited in their natural or unaltered state. These habitats would support healthy and self-sustaining biotic assemblages that would in turn sustain appropriate ecosystem functions.
- Each aquatic assemblage and population would provide desired societal benefits and services to current and future human generations.

#### *Goals*

- To protect and maintain healthy aquatic environments and communities, and rehabilitate those that are degraded.
- To provide diverse public fishing opportunities that maximize the value of recreational fishing to anglers.
- To encourage and permit economically efficient commercial fisheries that accommodate tribal fishing rights and do not conflict with recreational fisheries.
- To cultivate public stewardship of aquatic resources through scientific understanding of aquatic ecosystems, responsible human use of aquatic resources, and collaborative resource management.

### ***Forest, Mineral, and Fire Management Division (FMFMD)***

Spanning 3.9 million acres, Michigan has the largest dedicated state forest system in the nation—three forests in the Upper Peninsula and three forests in the Lower Peninsula. Forests are popular spots for wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, hiking, cross-country skiing, backpacking, and horseback riding. A DNR-established network of 6,100 miles of

groomed snowmobile trails is the reason that Michigan registers more snowmobiles than any other state, while 150 rustic campgrounds provide other valuable recreational opportunities.

Forest, Mineral, and Fire Management administers 6.3 million acres of mineral estate ownership and leasing rights to explore for oil, gas, and other minerals on state-owned lands (contributing \$20–\$30 million each year in royalties to the Natural Resources Trust Fund for recreational land acquisition and development, and for deposit into the Park Endowment Fund); maintains statewide aerial photographs in color, infra-red, and black-and-white formats; and provides detailed computerized map information for land use, management, and resource protection.

The mission of the division is as follows:

- Sustain fundamental ecological processes and functions that, in turn, support representative, diverse, and productive biological assemblages that provide a wide array of resource outputs.
- Provide for a variety of ecosystem services that help sustain human civilization. Examples include purification of air and water, carbon storage, and moderation of drought and flood conditions.
- Provide for a variety of sustainable human values that are derived from ecosystems, including economic, recreational, and intrinsic values.
- Provide for a variety of forest-based products.

The FMFMD manages the use of forests for timber production, new tree growth (growing trees at 2-1/2 times the rate of harvest), wildlife habitat, and recreation. Foresters regularly examine trees, plants, and soil characteristics to determine the best management practices to keep the forests healthy. Fire officers protect both public and private lands from wildfires. Forest timber products industries and recreational users contribute \$12 billion and 200,000 associated jobs annually to our economy.

### ***Office of Land and Facilities***

Land and Facilities assists with the overall administration of approximately 4.5 million acres of publicly owned lands, 25 million acres of Great Lakes bottomlands, and 130,000 platted lots under the jurisdiction of the DNR.

Staff maintain land ownership records on all Department land transactions and coordinate activities related to the acquisition and disposition of land or rights in land, and resolve title and boundary issues. These activities are accomplished through purchase, gift, exchange, sale, and easement transactions that serve to meet the objectives of the Department. The Land and Facilities Division also accepts title to and disposes of approximately 20,000 tax-reverted parcels each year through re-conveyances, public use deeds, or a public auction process.

This division also provides design and construction services for the Department and provides administrative and facility operational support to program staff located at DNR Operations Service Centers and other field offices.

## ***Law Enforcement***

The mission of the Law Enforcement Division is to protect Michigan's natural resources, the environment, and the health and safety of the public through effective law enforcement and education. The vision is to provide a group of well-trained and well-equipped professionals to accomplish the mission in a fair, efficient, effective, and safe manner while believing in the dignity of all people and upholding respect for individual and constitutional rights. The division's goal is to have adequate, stable funding and staffing maintained and supported that allow for the qualitative and innovative evaluation of enforcement efforts.

## ***Parks and Recreation Division***

The Parks and Recreation Division manages 97 state parks and recreation areas, 829 developed boating access sites, 10 lighthouses, 16 harbors, and six scenic sites. Together these facilities provide recreation opportunities for more than 22 million state park visitors each year and Michigan's nearly one million registered boaters.

Whether recreational users are hiking, camping, boating, fishing, hunting, or bicycling, the division provides outdoor recreation opportunities on 280,000 acres of land, 142 miles of Great Lakes shoreline, and 460 miles of inland lake shoreline. Campers will find 13,496 sites for modern and rustic camping. Trail users can experience 881 miles of non-motorized trails with 264 miles designated for mountain bike and bicycle use. Horseback riders can enjoy facilities at seven equestrian campgrounds, five stables, and 175 miles of trails.

Michigan's recreation facilities play an important role in the state's tourism industry. A 1997 study revealed that visitors to state parks and recreation areas spent an estimated \$464 million, about half of that within 20 miles of their destination. Owners of registered boats spent about \$700 million on trips in 1998.

State parklands play an important role in protecting and preserving the biological diversity of Michigan. More than 200 different rare species of plants and animals are located on parklands. These lands include 147 exemplary locations of 43 different Michigan ecosystems. A total of five federal and 21 state endangered species have been documented in state parks and recreation areas. Five federal and 75 state threatened species have been documented, and the state lists 102 species of special concern.

As a self-supporting system, these lands are supported by user fees, including motor vehicle permits, camping fees, boat registrations, harbor slip rentals, and marine fuel sales. The generous support of volunteers helps to maintain these recreation facilities for all to enjoy.

## ***Wildlife Division***

The Wildlife Division enhances, restores, and conserves the state's wildlife resources, natural communities, and ecosystems for the benefit of Michigan's citizens, visitors, and future generations. Its vision is to have sustainable wildlife habitat and sustainable wildlife populations in Michigan. Recently, the division has led development of a Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) to provide a common strategic framework that will enable

Michigan's conservation partners to jointly implement a long-term strategy for the conservation of all wildlife species. Following are selected elements of the action plan:

- Provides an ecological, habitat-based framework to aid in the conservation and management of wildlife
- Identifies and recommends actions to improve habitat conditions and population status of species with the greatest conservation need (SGCN), which are those species with small or declining populations or other characteristics that make them vulnerable
- Recommends actions that will help keep common species common
- Identifies and prioritizes conservation actions, research and survey needs, and long-term monitoring to assess the success of conservation efforts
- Complements other conservation strategies, funding sources, planning initiatives, and legally mandated activities
- Incorporates public participation throughout development and implementation to provide an opportunity for all conservation partners and Michigan residents to influence the future of resource management
- Provides guidance for use of State Wildlife Grant funds and fulfills federal requirements associated with these funds
- Provides a clear process for reviewing and revising this plan as necessary to address changing conditions and to integrate new information as it becomes available.



## Appendix C: *Focus Group Results*

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The project included four focus group meetings that were held around the state to solicit input on Department field operations from a cross-section of user groups and members of the public. Two meetings were held in Lansing, one in Gaylord, and one in Marquette. While the meetings were intended to focus on DNR field operations, participants were also given the opportunity to discuss other ideas, concerns, and observations about the Department, its mission, and how it interacts with its constituents. A summary of these themes and comments is provided below.

### **ORGANIZATION**

Participants agree that the DNR must understand that it will continue to be pressed to deliver existing services with less funding. The agency must prioritize its mandatory functions as part of a Department-wide agenda-setting process. The Department needs to take a hard look at its organization and better position itself to adapt to changing public preferences, shifts in demographics, and shrinking revenues. Its organizational structure was built largely over the previous 60 years and must be modified to reflect current priorities and resources.

#### ***Field Offices***

##### *Locations*

In remote Michigan locations, there are good reasons for maintaining field offices near the resource that is being managed. For instance, most locations for Forest, Mineral, and Fire Management offices were initially situated within the resource being managed. Stakeholders contend that remote field offices, especially those in the Upper Peninsula, serve a valuable purpose and may not be practically consolidated in most cases.

However, most field office locations must be reviewed for their value to the state's overall resource management effort. Effort should be placed on consolidating field offices, and combining multiple divisions wherever possible while being mindful of the opportunity to utilize technology to provide and maintain existing service levels. Specifically, the groups suggest that the DNR should assess the value of small field and satellite offices with a limited number of employees as a prime opportunity for consolidation.

Stakeholders suggest that the DNR should consider any location where it leases space as a potential target for streamlining and consolidating services. Considering the DNR's significant land holdings and building assets, stakeholders feel strongly that the Department, where feasible, should consider moving all operations onto land and buildings that it already owns. Also, the DNR should consider combining small offices with other state and federal agencies or local conservation organizations.

Cadillac was suggested as one location with numerous state buildings which presents an opportunity to share resources. Gaylord was referred to as DNR's "campus" facility

because of multiple state buildings in close proximity to each other. This is another location where resources might be combined.

Stakeholders urge the DNR to consider the management needs of each geographical area and the potential gains in communication between divisions (and departments) when it considers building consolidation.

### *Services*

Stakeholders commented that Michigan has the largest public lands program of any state east of the Mississippi. As a result, the DNR's numerous divisions provide many different services to the public. Stakeholders view the Department as being in the middle of a changing state with changing demographics. Concern was raised that the DNR must continue to evaluate the type and quality of services it provides while seeking to optimize and share existing resources wherever possible. Comments suggest that the different regions, funding sources, and missions must be realigned to reflect these changing conditions. Many participants also believe that the Department is missing a significant opportunity to carry out the agency mission through work with user groups and public/private partnerships.

Participants expressed the view that the DNR should conduct a logistics and facilities location analysis to determine what services can be consolidated and leveraged to create the best coverage to carry out its mission.

Some stakeholders perceive that *politics* plays a role in determining field office locations. For example, stakeholders report that whenever field offices are designated for possible closure, agency employees stationed at that location call their legislators to lobby for keeping the local office open.

Some stakeholders also believe that organized labor unions drive up costs in the agency and may impede some conservation efforts involving volunteer labor. Currently, many Department programs utilize in-house staff in lieu of contracting with the private sector (e.g., engineering services). In some cases, however, Department costs are considered to be exorbitant and non-competitive when compared to similar service levels offered by the private sector.

### *Operations Service Centers*

The Operations Service Center (OSC) approach is viewed by many focus group participants as a step in the right direction to help streamline and enhance the delivery of some Department functions. However, some feel that the OSCs are not placed in highly visible locations, and the public does not always know where to find them. Participants commented specifically on the Grayling office, saying it is a great location for public traffic, but it is not open to the public. A similar comment was offered about the DNR field office on U.S. Highway 2, just west of the Mackinac Bridge. Participants were familiar with the OSCs in the Upper Peninsula that are located in Marquette and Newberry. They understand that these OSCs are the designated points of public contact to interact with the Department.

Participants commented that the field offices are good resources when someone knows exactly what information they are seeking. However, some feel the DNR still has a significant opportunity to enhance its customer service orientation. Some participants suggest the DNR should focus on reorienting itself as a unified team that serves the public and actively encourages more public interaction. Other stakeholders feel that the DNR should continue to limit the amount of public interaction at field offices and direct the public to the Internet and the OSCs. There was support for designating all other field offices as “DNR work stations”; these offices could, in some cases, be closed to the public. If this were to occur, the Department must do a better job of educating the public about its field structure and the purpose of designated offices.

Stakeholders agree that the DNR should seek to create efficiency in its service delivery whenever possible. The public believes that Department resources could be leveraged further to facilitate partnerships and ensure the best resource management return for the funds invested. Some stated that the DNR should refocus on its core functions and, when possible, seek to consolidate layers of management.

Some participants commented that the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has a role to play in determining the customer service priorities of the Department. Comments indicate that the NRC should be more public-friendly and should be more inclusive of the field organization in its decision-making processes.

### *Co-locations and Sharing Resources*

Multiple stakeholder comments indicate that many user groups and the public see value in co-housing employees of different DNR divisions and other conservation agencies to a greater extent. The many suggestions include the following:

- DNR field staff could be housed with county conservation district offices and other public agencies at the local level (e.g., county extension offices), which would allow DNR staff to serve a wider area while keeping specific, designated hours during the week and at the same time sharing space with staff from other divisions.
- Housing several resource organizations at the same building location could create efficiencies in program delivery and wider benefits for the public and employees. For example, staff from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service could be housed at a DNR office. Co-housing the conservation staff from many agencies could benefit both the resource and the public. Based on the feedback, it is apparent that the public is often confused about resource agencies and it’s sometimes unclear which agency is responsible for what resource topic.
- Reinstate regular interaction between the MDEQ and the DNR by combining their district and field locations. There is an operational disconnect between the two agencies that impedes coordination across programs. Combining district and field office locations and housing staff from both agencies, and from others, would help. Recombining the two agencies is not necessary. Combining office space would allow the buildings from vacated locations to be considered for disposition and sale.
- The Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) is another agency that could consider co-location of its staff with the DNR and the MDEQ, the way it currently exists in the Lansing headquarters. This would encourage informal collaboration and

discussion between agencies, and would also reduce the number of office facilities the state would have to maintain. The USDA (i.e., Farm Services Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service) is one example of co-housing staff from different but related programs.

- Hunters and anglers would support this co-housing combination if the agencies' budgets were kept administratively separate.
- Bay City was given as an example in which the MDEQ and the DNR will be housed in the same office complex to the benefit of the state and the resource.

## ***DNR Staff***

### *Qualities/Attributes*

Focus group participants offered the following comments about the DNR field staff:

- Field staff are helpful and knowledgeable.
- DNR staff have high technical competence.
- Interaction with field foresters has been positive.
- Wildlife biologists are very good, caring staff, and exemplify the great effort of field staff.

Participants acknowledge huge growth in the ability of DNR staff to partner and communicate, but pointed out there is still room for improvement. It was suggested that some DNR staff should improve public presentations skills. While it is recognized that DNR staff are knowledgeable and often specialize in a given topic, the way the information is presented may prevent the audience from understanding and absorbing information if it is too complex. Resource managers must be cognizant of the DNR's image and communicate effectively to enhance the public's understanding of the agency and natural resources issues. Participants commented that the Fisheries Division has made the most notable improvements in communication. Participants believe this is a result of the mobile nature of the resource they manage which drives staff to communicate across many user groups.

### *Decentralization of Decision-Making Authority*

Focus group participants expressed concern that the current centralized decision-making process within the DNR hampers coordination with user groups at the local level. Some members of the public perceive that the current DNR management structure is inefficient.

It was recommended that the DNR management decentralize its decision-making structure and give more authority to the field operations. Participants find the field staff of the DNR to be dedicated, knowledgeable, and highly competent. Unease was expressed that the talent and ability of the field staff may be stifled by the current management structure which requires decision making to come from Lansing. Suggestions for solving this perceived problem include the elimination of layers of management within the current management hierarchy and the transfer of more authority and management staff to the field.

Currently, Lansing managers are perceived by some to be detached from the field and the interests of the field. Some believe the managers should have field experience in order to be promoted within the agency, or at least be required to complete coursework in field biology. It was suggested that managers, even those from Lansing, can now be stationed in field offices and complete their managerial duties remotely with the assistance of modern communication technology (i.e., Internet, conference call, and e-mail). Participants believe it is more valuable to have management staff with decision-making authority in the field who report remotely to Lansing. This would help to resolve the popular notion that DNR management is focused first on its internal organization and division of power and second on the natural resources it manages.

Further discussion suggested that if the field staff are not given any authority for decision making, their position should not require an undergraduate degree.

## **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

### ***Management Boundaries***

Focus group participants offered many comments about the current management boundaries of the DNR divisions. Some participants suggest that natural boundaries, such as watersheds currently utilized in the Fisheries Division, should determine the management unit, as opposed to political boundaries (e.g., county lines). Participants suggest that, to the extent practicable, there should be common management boundaries across the divisions to foster coordination and communication across Department programs. Further, participants propose that there may be value in defining management boundaries on the eco-regions delineated in DNR's eco-regional planning initiative.

### ***Fisheries***

Some stakeholders perceive the Fisheries Division's transition from political boundaries to watershed boundaries as positive, strategic progress because it aligns management with the resource itself. It is also seen as a progressive move under the ecosystem-based management initiative of the DNR. Other stakeholders feel that watershed boundaries of the Fisheries Division cause problems for the rest of the DNR divisions because they operate on different boundaries that are focused on aquatic resources as opposed to terrestrial resources.

Stakeholders commented that the DNR Fisheries Division is a model for the United States. Comments indicated that the catalysts for this division's shift to watershed boundaries were (1) an early retirement program that reduced staff numbers, creating an imperative for changing management, and (2) a visionary leader. Stakeholders acknowledge that the boundary shift was not without transition costs and discomfort. However, stakeholders view the transition as a positive step. Several comments indicated that management by watershed works well for fisheries, but it might pose challenges for wildlife or forestry.

### ***Wildlife***

Stakeholders support the Wildlife Division's decision to set bear management lines based on roads instead of county lines. Comments indicated that a road is a visible boundary

that is easy to locate and understand. While a county line is a political boundary, it isn't clearly marked for hunters and managers.

Stakeholders also praise the DNR's adaptation of management boundaries to deal with bovine tuberculosis. Since the disease did not fit within county lines, the DNR created a management unit based on the range of the resource (deer population). This effort was viewed as a success by focus group participants. Some participants suggest a similar approach should be used as a model elsewhere when resources do not match county (or other arbitrary) lines on maps.

### *Forestry*

Forestry management as conducted through the compartment review process received some comment in the focus groups. Stakeholders understand that compartments were originally developed by timber stand characteristics, and the stands are reviewed in 10 percent increments each year and assessed for treatment opportunities. Stakeholders suggest that while management based on stand characteristics is a good idea, the static approach is not the most efficient way to evaluate a dynamic resource. For instance, adjacent compartments may benefit from a nearby treatment but may not be scheduled for treatment at the same time. These practices result in the inefficient allocation of staff time and resources. Economies of scale could be achieved if adjoining timber stands are considered as part of larger treatment activities. For example, an isolated small acreage timber sale doesn't sell because it is too small to be profitable alone, but would be profitable if it had been included in a larger timber sale in the same geographic area. Stakeholders recommend abandonment of the 1/10 forest review while shifting toward full system review of forest treatments using better GIS technology.

Forest management review should continue to include other DNR divisions, such as Wildlife, but improvements to the process are necessary. DNR divisions operating within the forest management boundary must participate in and cooperate with the forest management review. Stakeholders report witnessing field foresters outlining treatment options for the forest and then being questioned in a public forum by Wildlife division staff about the treatment effects on wildlife. Reportedly, this scenario presents Forestry and Wildlife divisions at cross-purposes to each other in front of the public, which hurts the Department's public image. This may also give the public the perception that the forests are not being managed to maximize the resource income from forestry, but to provide wildlife habitat.

### ***Private Lands***

Many focus group participants believe the DNR should be cognizant of private resources that augment public resources. They suggest the DNR should understand that many private landowners have a vested interest in the DNR's conservation goals, and are positioned to contribute to the achievement of those goals if proper communication and cooperation exists. Landowners value cooperation with the DNR to manage private lands as well as those owned by the state in order to accomplish DNR goals. Accordingly, the DNR should understand the impact of its management priorities outside the boundaries of state-owned land.

For instance, Farm Conservation Plans were mentioned as one avenue that a private land owner can use to manage land and advance many goals of the DNR. Farmland management has potential impacts on wildlife, fisheries, and forestry in the state. In addition, there are high-quality forests in the southern third of the Lower Peninsula on private land. There is only one DNR forester for the whole southern Lower Peninsula region and this person spends an inordinate amount of time on administrative business, not field forestry. Currently, county conservation district foresters, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are the most accessible to private landowners, but that program is expected to be cut in the near term. If those cuts occur, private landowners would have access only to private forestry consultants who may or may not have the state's best interest in mind when developing forest plans. This represents an opportunity for the DNR to partner with private landowners. Since private farmland and forests contribute to the natural resource base in Michigan, DNR staff should be available to private landowners for consultation.

### ***Prioritization***

Stakeholders indicated their preference that public lands and resources should be scientifically managed for fish, wildlife, and forestry. Comments indicate that management decisions should be based on sound science and accurate statistics. Stakeholders explained that they perceive politics, special interests, and funding as driving the wildlife management goals of the Department. They indicated that if this is not so, the DNR should better publicize its scientific basis for management decisions in a way that the average citizen of the state can understand.

Stakeholders contend that the best available technologies should be used to advance knowledge of species. Current studies of the wildlife populations are valuable and should be accomplished through funding partnerships wherever possible. Trail cameras were suggested as an inexpensive tool. A deer harvest-tracking system similar to that used in Wisconsin was also suggested.

### ***Standards***

Participants report that the Department applies different management standards with respect to public versus private lands. For instance, it appears acceptable to leave mine and well tailings onsite for private land disposal, but this same practice is not allowed on state land, where the tailings must be hauled offsite for disposal.

### ***User Fees***

State forests and lands have historically been open to hunters and anglers. Hunters and anglers pay license fees that they consider an entrance pass to use the state land and facilities. Since little or no general funds are going to pay for state land maintenance, taxpayers are not supporting the state land resource, though many enjoy it. There is increasing interest in having recreational users pay some form of fee for their enjoyment of state land. However, stakeholders are concerned that if the state implements a user fee for access to state land, it will create a double burden on those who already buy licenses that support the DNR, such as hunters, trappers, anglers, and snowmobile or off-road vehicle (ORV) users. Stakeholders urge the state to consider how to replace the general fund dollars that formerly contributed to natural resource management in Michigan with

an equitable user fee that captures those users of state land who do not already support the DNR.

## **COMMUNICATION**

Based on focus group discussion, the Department has the potential to improve its communication skills, both with the public and internally.

### ***Internal Communication***

Cross-program coordination builds efficiencies; departments can learn from each other. Cross-division relationships add value to all programs.

The state employee directory available online is considered useful.

DNR's use of Groupwise calendars is seen as an organizational benefit. It would be more beneficial still if it could be opened to partners such as federal agencies or local conservation organizations to enable meeting planning. Partnerships could benefit from sharing calendars.

### ***Public Communication***

#### ***Presenting a Unified Message***

Stakeholders suggest that divisions of the DNR must actively communicate before meetings, especially if the public is in attendance, to ensure a consistent message is presented. There is value in having a public forum where all Department views are presented, but the outcome or consensus of the DNR, as a whole, should be the main view presented.

Stakeholders recognize that information sharing is a challenge for most large organizations. Comments suggest that information presented in multiple ways gives more visibility (e.g., citizens' advisory boards, press releases, Web page, and word of mouth).

Stakeholders expressed the need for DNR to develop specific communication strategies for user groups and the general public. These strategies must include an evaluation component and measurable benchmarks to determine if goals are being met.

Many stakeholders have a perception that current DNR communications consist primarily of press releases. They suggest that the Department could do a better job of communicating its activities and priorities to the public. Some even believe there may be value in reducing some division functions to direct funds toward Department-wide communication efforts.

#### ***Public Meetings and Public Involvement***

Stakeholders report that the DNR is good at timing meetings for public accessibility (i.e., evenings). Stakeholders recognize there are legal mandates that require the Department to hold public meetings on some issues. However, the value of these meetings was questioned when the same few interested and vocal people participate, with limited involvement by other stakeholders. Participants generally recognize that the DNR doesn't have advertising funds, but commented that these meetings should be better publicized.

At the same time, many participants recognize that they have a duty and obligation to educate their own membership and encourage active involvement on resources issues.

Stakeholders indicate that the Fisheries Division is very good at communicating its activities and disseminating information to the public. A broad stakeholder meeting regarding fisheries resources was held recently in Ludington and was described as an excellent example of public participation. In contrast, stakeholders commented that often there is no public comment or participation in forest compartment review.

At the same time, some suggested that the Wildlife Division could do a better job at communicating information to the public. For instance, there is a public misconception that the DNR planted wolves in Michigan. Comments suggest that Department staff, on some occasions, do not understand their audience and ways of framing information so that it can be understood by the public. Deer numbers are constantly challenged, and the public doesn't feel the DNR has a good rationale for estimating the deer population and harvest rates. One exception under the wildlife programs is the turkey program. Stakeholders reported that the turkey program has good visibility and is understood by sportsmen. Stakeholders suggested that Wisconsin's progressive deer reporting method should be used as a model.

Some stakeholders also believe that that the Department could do a better job of listening and incorporating information from citizen advisory groups.

Stakeholders recommend that this study, and others like it, should be publicized to change the perception of the public and demonstrate that the DNR does involve stakeholders and is looking to make adjustments to its operations to better serve the public.

### *Marketing*

Stakeholders report that the state park database of camping reservations and information on various license holders provides a wealth of information for direct marketing of DNR-sponsored activities and recreational opportunities. A participant noted that, after a recent trip to South Dakota, he received a letter from that state's governor thanking him for his visit, since he had bought an out-of-state hunting license. A similar letter to out-of-state campers and hunters/anglers here in Michigan might encourage a higher rate of repeat visits.

### *Information about DNR Programs and Requirements*

Field offices and operations service centers present an opportunity to provide information to the public. Yet stakeholders argue that often the public has no idea where a DNR office is located and what type of information is available at those locations.

The DNR process for determining resource management priorities is unclear. However, stakeholders believe that current funding allocations and mechanisms drive management priorities first and foremost. Michigan should look to restructure its funding mechanism to capture funds from groups other than fish and game user groups. Management priorities could then be more responsive to ecosystem health and less responsive to groups with a special interest in wildlife management. Missouri was mentioned as a

model state that receives dedicated funding from state sales tax—with broad public support.

Stakeholders commented that trails information is not clearly provided by the DNR. In order to get trail info in Michigan, you must already understand that three divisions manage trails. A more comprehensive guide to Michigan trail resources would be useful.

While the methodology to determine the deer herd numbers may be sufficient, comments offered underscore the importance of communicating how the DNR does business in a credible way that gains the support and loyalty of the public. Some hunters feel the deer herd in Michigan is being managed by the interest of insurance companies or the health of the deer herds; they do not feel their interests are being considered.

### ***Communication with other Governmental Organizations***

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) works well with Upper Peninsula field staff. The two agencies are often working on the same side of an issue, even if their organizations don't always agree on the specifics.

Stakeholders believe that the DNR doesn't participate or cooperate with the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, even though a large amount of Michigan's forest land is held under federal management.

## **WEBSITE/INTERNET**

Stakeholders believe that the Department's customers must be steered and encouraged to access the DNR website more regularly. But additional contact with DNR should be easily accessible when Web resources are exhausted.

While some users are reluctant to use the Internet for license purchases because of perceived "security issues," most comments suggest that people are increasingly comfortable with making purchases over the Internet. Stakeholders feel it is convenient to buy many types of licenses online, especially on short notice—the only exception being licenses that require stickers from the Secretary of State (e.g., boat registration). These stickers must be mailed after they are purchased online, so it is not convenient to use this option for last-minute purchases.

In order to ensure ease of use, the DNR must remember that a large percentage of its website users have access to dial-up Internet connections only. This can slow online transactions, including the ability to download large files. In addition, dial-up connections are not always reliable, and dropped calls are not uncommon. Users report they may be less likely to adopt online purchases if they feel the connection is not stable and their information may be lost or require re-entry. For this group, it is easier and more reliable to go to a retail location that sells licenses. Stakeholders also suggest that the website should include a search function that is specific to DNR Web pages and does not return information for the entire State of Michigan website. Further, some believe that the website should be reviewed to make it more intuitive and able to accommodate a wider range of users, especially those with limited technical knowledge about the Internet.

Suggestions indicate that as it is currently organized, the website is cluttered and difficult to navigate. Some believe that using the site map is easier than navigating through the site itself. A few stakeholders commented that the DNR staff contact information listed by division was difficult to locate.

Stakeholders feel the campground reservation system works well and the public boat access facilities page is one of the best tools on the DNR website.

### **Permits**

The online license store is not clearly presented on the DNR website. The “Michigan E-Store” icon is not sufficiently explained in its current form. If you are a visitor to Michigan, or a first-time website user and it is your first time buying a Michigan license, it’s not immediately clear how to purchase a license. One participant said he tried to get his turkey tag online this year and he couldn’t figure out what he was supposed to do. He’s an Internet user, but it was confusing to him. Other comments were similar. Also, many documents are available only in a “PDF” format, which limits the ability of dial-up users to download information in an efficient manner.

Vehicle and other ORV permits that are issued in conjunction with the Secretary of State pose unique challenges to online sales. Stakeholders commented that Web-based purchase of these sticker-style permits doesn’t happen instantly because the sticker must be sent in the mail. This frustrates users who wait until the last minute to obtain necessary licenses. Some questioned why they couldn’t get park stickers or other forms of registration (e.g., snowmobile, ORV, boat) at retail outlets where they currently purchase other DNR licenses. New partnerships with retail outlets were suggested as an improvement to the current situation. For instance, camping stickers could be sold at outfitting stores or recreational vehicle sales locations, and snowmobile stickers could be sold at snowmobile shops where the machines are sold.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Stakeholders recommend that the DNR should continue to create and expand existing partnerships with the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and other governmental agencies.

Stakeholders in the recreational vehicle (RV) industry praised the DNR for its partnership efforts in the past. The DNR has sent staff to RV shows to provide information and sell park passes to the attendees. The RV industry cited its publication that lists all public and private campgrounds in Michigan as a positive example of partnerships that provide information to the public about DNR facilities.

Other suggestions include the following:

- Use more MDOT Welcome Centers as deer check stations. Stakeholders suggest the DNR should examine other ways to create partnerships, with MDOT and Travel Michigan, to transmit information to visitors.
- Partnerships with major outdoor outfitters in Michigan should also be examined. Jay’s in Clare and Gaylord and Cabela’s were mentioned as possible sources for

partnerships. Cabela's has allowed the DNR to have deer check stations onsite in the past.

Partnerships with nonprofits and volunteers are important, but stakeholders report those efforts are being discouraged by organized labor unions. Another reported benefit of these partnerships occurs when nonprofits interested in natural resource management act as the liaison across DNR divisions in order to ensure communication. Nonprofit entities can also assist DNR's communication efforts. The Department could improve outreach to nonprofits and raise awareness of DNR successes (e.g., parks and recreation areas that provide excellent access to disabled individuals).

Snowmobile associations work well with county sheriffs and township police for providing trail enforcement. DNR could do a better job of emulating these types of partnerships.

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) works well partnering with organizations, which demonstrates that it cares about the input of the community. In addition, the USFWS is the only federal agency with the primary function of conservation of fish and wildlife resources. The Ecological Services Division of the USFWS doesn't have a land base so it relies on public-private partnerships.

## **GIS TECHNOLOGY**

Some focus group participants perceive that DNR divisions have good GIS resources, but mentioned that crucial improvements are necessary across divisions to enhance resource allocation and management decisions. Participants noted that a previous attempt to establish a DNR GIS Center in Roscommon failed, but didn't know why.

Stakeholders believe that GIS resources are vital for the future of resource management. Suggestions indicate that the state should seek to develop a GIS enterprise system for the entire DNR. An enterprise system is one that has integrated data from all divisions in the same format that can be accessed remotely throughout the state. According to participants, this effort should begin with forestry information. A move to GIS-based forest management would allow the DNR to coordinate activities at the landscape level and streamline operations. Field foresters strongly advocate for the upgrade, but cite lack of funding as a roadblock. Stakeholders understand that full-scale inventory of all 3.9 million acres of state forests would require significant capital outlay.

Stakeholders report that the estimated cost of such an enterprise system is \$10 million. The Forest Finance Authority committed \$1 million, but the future of that commitment is uncertain because of current state budget constraints. The DNR is looking for other sources of funding to meet the projected \$10 million estimate. Stakeholders recognize that there is a problem convincing any state government to fund a project that goes beyond the current fiscal year budget.

Stakeholders believe that the Michigan Department of Information Technology (MDIT) capacity is essential to the success of any DNR technology program. Other DNR divisions have developed GIS resources, but until a common, enterprise-wide interface is established, these may not be compatible across departments. Reportedly, the Fisheries

Division has used grant funds to develop its GIS resources. Wildlife, parks, and trail overlays that are compatible with forestry would be helpful to ecosystem management. Admittedly, software development and staff training would be associated costs of GIS technology. Some believe the payoff in streamlining forest review would make this a good investment.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

### ***Eco-Regional Planning***

Stakeholders are aware of the Department-wide eco-regional planning effort that has been in development for approximately eight years. Some feel it is not getting the attention at the highest levels nor the traction it needs to be successful. Business is still being conducted by division, not across disciplines and division programs. Stakeholders argue that a new way of thinking, nested in the current field organizational structure, presents challenges. One such challenge presented was avoiding creation of five eco-regional mini-DNRs. Stakeholders contend that it is essential for divisions to plan together. Comments suggested the Eastern UP division is the most advanced in reviewing across each division's plans and activities in the region.

The Department spent a great deal of effort on the statewide Wildlife Action Plan. It was completed to get federal match funding for implementation. Now it is on hold because the Department can't meet its match obligations. The Department must embrace these planning efforts because they are important for Michigan's resources, not just because they are a source of funds. Stakeholders feel it shows little commitment to the resource, but commitment only to the funding.

### ***Adapting to Trends***

If the DNR doesn't adapt to trends while protecting the basic core of the resource, stakeholders believe it runs the risk of becoming irrelevant. Outdoor recreation is changing. For instance, geo-caching (i.e., GPS orienteering) and rock climbing are becoming more popular. DNR should consider the trends and understand better that the agency needs to evolve to serve expanding users. An example of embracing new trends would be for the Department to coordinate an educational geo-cache from the DNR website or in partnership with any of the interested organizations in the state.

A key message emerged that the Department must do a better job of responding to changing trends while continuing to evolve. Moving toward resource management across division programs is essential. All divisions must embrace and contribute to this effort. It was a big accomplishment for Fisheries to move from species management to management units comprised of watershed boundaries. The Wildlife Division would benefit from moving away from perceived single-species management toward broader ecosystem management. This will be difficult because constituent groups are often highly specialized and want a Department focus on a single species. The Parks and Recreation Division must focus on today's user and plan for improvements that keep Michigan competitive with other states in the eyes of travelers and in terms of emerging trends. For instance, there has been a revolution in camping toward RVs. The people who are buying

large RVs have money to spend, but also want upgraded facilities with electrical hookup and pull-through concrete pads on which to park their vehicles.

Stakeholders believe that integrated Regional Conservation Plans should be the basis for justifying choices regarding each division's activities. All management of DNR lands should be holistic and consider recreational opportunities and economic benefits impacts.

### ***Return on Funds Invested***

Some stakeholders believe that the Parks and Recreation Division must review camping operations to make them profitable. The mission of Parks and Recreation is to protect natural and historic features of Michigan. It must do this first and create campgrounds second, *unless* its campgrounds become revenue centers that enable it to provide more protection of natural and historic features. Strategically, it may be necessary for DNR to disinvest in park facilities or consider allowing a private contractor to operate the facilities. Stakeholders perceive that revenue generated from day use is becoming a more valuable use of the parks. Island Lake was offered as an example.

### ***Meeting the Challenges of the Future***

Stakeholders believe that part of the DNR's long-term strategy should include educating people to think longer term about their impact of their actions (e.g., impacts on the seventh generation, grandkids, silent future generations).

Stakeholders listed future challenges for the DNR and the state, which will become significant challenges in the future if they are not properly addressed today:

- Forestry stagnation, or reduced productivity
- Invasive species
- Deer herd management
- Protecting critical wetlands
- Eliminating duplicative services
- Self-sustaining fish populations
- Global warming

### ***DNR Accessibility to the Disabled***

Given that there are one million people with disabilities in Michigan, stakeholders contend that DNR staff training is extremely important. For example, all DNR staff must understand that a power wheelchair is acceptable on non-motorized trails.

Design for accessibility is crucial. Technology for visual and hearing impaired should be considered. Audio transcripts or MP3 players for rent with audio information about the park would open accessibility to many. The DNR should consider pursuing additional grant funding opportunities. Stakeholders report that the DNR website is the state's best when it comes to providing information to disabled individuals.

## **USER GROUPS**

### ***Snowmobiles***

Michigan has 6,200 miles of snowmobile trails, half under private ownership, and half under state ownership. No other state has more snowmobile trails. Snowmobilers pay a \$25 trail user fee, and pay for a three-year registration. The snowmobile program is supported by user fees and registration. Stakeholders report that the snowmobile industry has grown since 1996, when it was last studied by the DNR, and should be re-evaluated.

The FMFMD administers the snowmobile program. The DNR has a snowmobile advisory committee (SAC). Those with snowmobile interests believe field staff are sometimes anti-motor sports. The DNR snowmobile program is entirely self-funded, and the SAC gives \$2.5 million to the DNR annually. Snowmobile users don't understand how, for example, a budget constraint causes a DNR SAC meeting to be cancelled.

There are 64 grant sponsors that groom the trails. DNR does not groom as of this year, but the DNR staff are currently responsible for overseeing the grant sponsor's activities. The DNR staff members who used to be groomers and operators are now snowmobile field contacts who manage the grant sponsor's activities. Grant managers report to field contacts. Those with snowmobile interests believe this is an unnecessary level of management.

When the DNR managed the grooming program, stakeholders reported that standards were lower. Now that DNR administers the program and oversees the groomers, standards have escalated. This creates challenges for the volunteer grooming staff.

Those with snowmobile interests report working well with the Federal Forest Service on snowmobile issues.

Snowmobile permits don't line up with permit season for the rest of Michigan permits. Permits are renewed March 31, but the snowmobile season goes into April which creates confusion. In order to increase funding mechanisms, those with snowmobile interests believe permits should be more widely accessible.

### ***Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs)***

Stakeholders report that ORV ridership is growing in Michigan. In 2005, more than 347,000 units were registered, 60,000 of which are registered in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties. Riders are not using their ORVs in those counties, but depend on traveling to trail systems in northern counties. Reportedly, no other state has more ATV trails.

Stakeholders say there are no data available for ATV fatalities that involve alcohol and excessive speed. The DNR claims the accident rates are climbing but eliminated the hands-on ATV training program. This was cited as an example of Department inconsistency. Stakeholders believe the ORV industry in Michigan needs a study, as the last one was conducted in 1998 by Chuck Nelson and provides outdated information that is no longer useful.

Those with ORV interests can't understand why motorcycles and snowmobiles are allowed on some trails, but ATVs are prohibited. On state land, ATVs can legally access forest roads and two tracks. One U.P. county opened its roads to ATVs, and has experienced an economic boom.

<b>Participating Organizations</b>
Ingham County Parks
Members of the Public
Michigan Association of Recreation Vehicles and Campgrounds
Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Americans with Disabilities Act Title II Coordination
Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Michigan Farm Bureau
Michigan Forest Association
Michigan Forest Products Council
Michigan Hydro Relicensing Coalition
Michigan ORV Advisory Board
Michigan Snowmobile Association
Michigan United Conservation Clubs
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International Lansing Chapter
The Nature Conservancy
United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services