

# Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership Strategic Plan



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## **I. Introduction**

Michigan has a wealth of water resources, including 11,000 inland lakes. Most of these lakes are high quality resources highly valued by society for recreation, subsistence, their ecological value and as places to live; however, very few have a strategic plan to guide protection, management, development or use. As demands grow, Michigan's inland lakes will be increasingly susceptible to overuse and environmental degradation. Rehabilitation will be significantly more difficult and costly than protective and proactive management would be.

The responsibility for management of lakes does not reside with any one agency or organization. Not only do federal, state, tribal and local agencies have management responsibilities, but the actions of citizens and environmental organizations (nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs) also can have significant positive or negative influences upon the quality of lakes. To proactively protect and manage its inland lakes Michigan must focus the many interests and responsibilities to achieve a sustainable resource for present and future generations. One of the solutions to this dilemma is a collaborative partnership among state and local agencies, Native American Nations, outreach institutions (universities and other educational institutions), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, industries and citizens.

## **Background**

In 2006, a few NGOs began meeting with Michigan's Departments of Natural Resources (MDNR) and Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) about the possibility of a partnership for the management of Michigan's lakes. Members of the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership were invited to Michigan to present their lake management program. The possibility of a lakes partnership for Michigan appeared feasible.

During 2007, MSUE facilitated several meetings with many NGOs, local governmental agencies (Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners and Michigan Townships Association) and Native American Nations. Meeting participants agreed that a partnership for Michigan's lakes was a worthwhile effort and that a three-year partnership should be initiated. At the end of this time period the participating partners could chose to terminate or renew the partnership.

In January 2008, the first meeting of the Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership (Partnership) was held. A Governance Document for the Partnership was drafted to delineate: purpose, structure, duration, membership, responsibilities and benefits, ground rules, meeting procedures and evaluation. This document is considered a "living document" and will continue to be adjusted.

The Partnership's first Strategic Plan was created to guide the Partnership's work from 2008 to 2011. Satisfied with its progress at the end of that three-year trial period, as documented in the Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership 2008-2011 Report, the Partnership voted to continue its collaborative efforts. This necessitated the creation of a second Strategic Plan, which covered activities from 2012 to 2015. Moving forward, this document, like the governing document, is considered to be a "living document" and will be modified to improve the efforts of the Partnership.

## **Purpose and Implementation**

This Strategic Plan (Plan) will guide the direction of the Partnership and set priorities for undertaking lake protection and management activities. The Partnership will review and amend it as appropriate and will use the Plan to measure and evaluate the performance of the Partnership and report to the citizens and policy makers of Michigan.

The Plan identifies the priority actions for the Partnership and those partners responsible for leading these “team” efforts – the Leadership Team. The Partnership invites others to become involved by participating in and supporting these efforts.

Beneath each Goal listed below, the Leadership Team members are listed by organizational acronym. Additional Partners are encouraged to join Leadership Teams at any time by contacting the Team Lead. A table of Partner organization acronyms is included at the end of this document.

A process for evaluating the Partnership’s progress in implementing this Plan is outlined in the Partnership’s Governance Document.

## **II. Strategic Goals of the Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership**

### **Goal 1. A Michigan Inland Lakes Convention** *(updated June 2016)*

*Leadership Team: Jo Latimore - lead (MSUE), Howard Wandell (McNALMS), Amy Lounds (MDEQ), Scott Brown (MLSA), Lois Wolfson (MSUE/IWR/McNALMS), Joe Nohner (MDNR), and Julia Kirkwood (MDEQ)*

**The Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership will continue hosting a statewide inland lakes convention.**

The intended audience is broad, and includes lakefront property owners, lake professionals (natural resource agencies, private contractors, researchers, etc.), lake users, educators, and decision makers.

#### **The Partnership's goals for the Michigan Inland Lakes Convention are:**

1. To raise, and maintain, awareness of the Partnership's mission, goals, accomplishments, and member organizations
2. To provide opportunities for lake-related education and outreach
3. To provide opportunities for networking within and among the stakeholder groups listed above
4. To generate revenue for the Partnership and certain member organizations that rely on conference revenue – MLSA, McNALMS, and MNSP.

#### **When and Where?**

Beginning in 2014, the Partnership has hosted a Convention every two years. This model allows member organizations to host their own conferences in alternate years. The choice of specific dates should take into account other organizations' events, schedules, and significant conflicts.

The Convention location can move around Michigan. The venue must be large enough to accommodate approximately 400 people.

#### **Important Considerations**

1. *Partner involvement is key.* The Convention is an opportunity for Partners to work together on a significant project. To be successful, all Partners must contribute substantially.
2. *This takes time and money.* Continue to pursue capacity-building grants or other support to cover some of the costs of planning and implementation. Develop realistic goals for revenue generation and expenses, as well as a detailed estimate of the time and effort necessary, by learning from our experiences with prior Conventions and others' experience in planning similar events.
3. *Individual partner organizations' identities must be preserved and respected, while the Partnership and uniqueness of the Michigan Inland Lakes Convention is emphasized throughout the event.* Annual lake conferences are a central part of the identity and function of some of our Partners. It is critical that all Partners respect that the Michigan Inland Lakes Convention is hosted by the Partnership as a whole, while allowing for individual Partner organizations to hold their own business meetings and events as much as possible within the Convention agenda and venue.
4. *Agenda must have broad appeal to attract the broad audience described above.*

## **Goal 2. Increase Membership and Participation** *(updated November 2016)*

*Proposal team: Dick Pinagel – lead (MAMA/MAPMS), Scott Brown (MLSA), Christina Baugher (MDNR)*

**Background:** Increasing membership would bring more diversity to MILP, while also adding creativity, credibility and access to potential resources.

The MILP spent much of its first 3 years meeting quarterly to develop mission statements and operating procedures. Some of the original partners withdrew from participating in MILP during that time, perhaps discouraged by the perceived lack of promotion of our collective capacity to advance the stewardship of Michigan's inland lakes. Since that time, the remaining partners have accomplished many stated goals and made progress toward the accomplishment of others (see current and past Strategic Plans and Progress Reports). Several groups, such as Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Bassmasters, Trout Unlimited, Michigan Boating Industries Association, Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners, Native American Nations, and the Nature Conservancy, were previously involved with MILP but have not attended meetings recently. An effort should be made to get these and other complementary organizations to the table and participating on a regular basis. These groups, by the very nature of their structures and missions, have much to offer and gain by their involvement with MILP.

### **Actions:**

A focused effort will be made to contact all the original stakeholders and ask that they consider attending MILP meetings, either in person or via video conference (e.g., Zoom meeting, available through MSU). Current and active MILP members will identify potential partners and personally send a letter stating that the Partnership has developed all necessary internal governance documents and is now advancing the stewardship of Michigan's inland lakes, including some tangible examples. Communications will also state that the group's involvement is crucial to the overall success of MILP regardless of participation level (i.e., full, voting Coordinating Council membership, or Associate Partner). Additionally, the benefits of having their organization represented on MILP will be given. A copy of the MILP brochure will be included with the letter.

Follow-up phone calls will be made to past participants and any identified potential new participants (for example, sporting groups not previously involved in MILP) to further encourage their participation.

**Goal 3. Promoting Collaborative Protective Management for Michigan Inland Lakes: The Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership will develop an Action Plan that all partners can agree upon to minimize negative impacts to lake ecosystems. (updated October 2021)**

*Leadership Team: Julia Kirkwood (EGLE – Lead), Joe Nohner (MDNR), Sarah Holden (EGLE), Jo Latimore (MSUE), Jason Broekstra (MAPMS), Ralph Bednarz (citizen; DEQ-retired), Erick Elgin (MSUE) Lois Wolfson (MSU-IWR)*

**Background:** Michigan inland lakes are ranked among the best in the nation regarding water quality, and biological diversity and integrity of healthy native plant and animal communities. Lakes are unique ecosystems fundamentally and ecologically different than river ecosystems. Each lake has distinctive morphology, hydrology, geography, water quality, trophic state, and biological integrity. Consequently, customized lake management plans are needed to address specific complexities. The consideration of the biological and physical differences in addition to the political, economic, and geographic complexities are critical when managing Michigan’s lake ecosystems. In addition, there are some other conditions that contribute to these complexities that should be considered when managing lake ecosystems. Some of the more significant conditions include:

- *Lakes are depositional systems and are sensitive to degradation:* Michigan’s geological and glacial history shaped the landscape and created the numerous and varied inland lake basins and lake watersheds of the State. Unlike rivers which are flow-through ecosystems, lakes are deposition ecosystems and respond rapidly and dramatically to material additions. Depending upon a lake’s water retention time, minor to large amounts of material can be permanently deposited in the lake. These materials can include chemicals like nutrients and heavy metals, sediments, organic material, and living biological agents.
- *Lakes are sensitive to climate change:* Lake ecosystems worldwide have been affected by climate change and the magnitude of these changes will increase in the future.
- *Most lakes respond marginally to restorative actions:* Once lakes are degraded major cost and effort must be made to achieve even minor rehabilitation results. While the technology exists to address specific stressors, the commitment needed for even one or two lake restoration efforts often exceeds all available resources in any given year.
- *Invasive species have negative impacts on lakes:* Once an invasive species has been detected within a waterbody, early efforts to remove and/or control it are critical. With early detection and the implementation of proactive management and best management practices, native plant diversity and overall ecological stability can be achieved.
- *Collaboration is necessary:* Michigan’s 11,000 lakes over 5 acres in size provide diverse ecological services and important recreational benefit, but for the State’s resource management agencies the number of lakes is a difficult management task that must rely on collaboration with others to comprehensively manage the resource.
- *Many lake protection/management strategies are typically land/watershed management activities:* These strategies are important throughout the entire lake watershed but especially critical within the immediate drainage area and lakeshore zones. Typically, these strategies are usually the responsibility of the lakefront property owners, but it is

also imperative to include local government and other property owners throughout the lake watershed.

Protective lake management is the practice of proactively managing lake ecosystems and watersheds, including conservation practices, to protect and preserve ecosystem quality and attainable uses. If Michigan is to keep its unique lake ecosystems, protective lake management is critical to sustain the distinctive qualities of each lake. It is far more ecologically and economically realistic to protect lake ecosystems than attempt to restore them once degraded. A holistic approach to address these complexities of inland lakes includes protecting intact resources, improving the capacity of lakes to return to their prior condition and accommodating changes while minimizing impacts.

**Actions:** The Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership will develop an Action Plan for managing Michigan's inland lakes that all partners can agree to collaboratively implement. The Plan will, as a minimum, include the identification of:

- Critical needs for protecting lakes.
- Data available for decision making.
- Data deficiencies.
- Appropriate management strategies.
- Possible funding opportunities.
- Available and needed demonstration projects.
- Educational needs and opportunities.
- Existing program and resource deficiencies and possible resolutions.

**Goal 4. Develop, Endorse and Promote a Comprehensive Lake Management Educational Program for Citizens, Local Governments and Others Involved in Lake Management** *(updated June 2016)*

*Leadership Team: Jo Latimore - lead (MSUE), Lois Wolfson (MSUE/IWR/McNALMS), Howard Wandell (McNALMS), Julia Kirkwood (DEQ), Dick Pinagel (MAMA/MAPMS) and Scott Brown (MLSA)*

**Background:** The Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership recognizes the importance of education in promoting inland lake stewardship. The Partnership has endorsed and promoted several educational events and conferences since its inception, and will continue to emphasize education of Michigan residents and decision makers.

At this time there is: no comprehensive educational plan for lake management, no coordination of educational opportunities, no promotional clearinghouse for educational events, and educational events are sporadic. These limitations diminish the attendance at educational events and the overall effectiveness of lake management educational opportunities. Improvement of lake management education should substantially increase the quality and quantity of lake management efforts in Michigan.

**Actions:** In recognition of the importance of educating Michigan residents and decision makers about limnology and inland lake management, and developing their capacity to become effective stewards of inland lakes, the Partnership will :

1. Identify existing educational programs as well as subjects/issues needing the establishment of educational programs. Use these data to develop a comprehensive lake management educational plan.
2. Post the educational plan and links to existing educational programs on the Partnership web site on a page devoted to lake education. Review this listing regularly.
3. Encourage Partner organizations to promote participation in these programs by their own members and constituencies.
4. Encourage Partners to participate in the programs as instructors or local hosts, as appropriate.
5. Allow the use of the Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership name and endorsement for promotional purposes of approved educational programs.
6. Specifically promote these educational programs: Introduction to Lakes, the Lake and Stream Leaders Institute, and the Michigan Shoreland Stewards program

**Goal 5. Build local support for shoreline restoration and riparian buffer zones.** *(updated June 2018)*

*Leadership Team: Amy Lounds – lead on Action 1 (MDEQ), Julia Kirkwood - lead on Action 2 (MDEQ), Howard Wandell (McNALMS), and Tom Frazier (MTA)*

**Actions:**

1. Work with the Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership to promote improved inland lake shoreline management at the local level including:
  - Educate local officials and representatives on natural shoreline management (using the existing local government guidebooks and toolkit).
  - Encourage integration of concepts into other existing programs (e.g., the Citizen Planner program, the Michigan Lake and Stream Leaders Institute, Water School)
  - Hold workshops on local government protection of inland lakes and present concepts at township official conferences and other meetings.
  - Provide available monitoring information and data to locals to help with planning and evaluating projects.
  
2. Develop a Shoreland Stewards program that provides recognition for local governments and lake associations that educate residents on natural shorelines, promote lake friendly practices, and reward lakefront property owners who are protecting inland lakes through best management practices on their property.

**III. Participating members of the Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership as of October 2021**

<b>Coordinating Council of the Partnership</b>	
<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Organization</i>
IWR	Institute of Water Research, Michigan State University
MAMA	Michigan Aquatic Managers Association
McNALMS	Michigan Chapter of the North American Lake Management Society
EGLE	Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy - Water Resources Division
MDNR	Michigan Department of Natural Resources - Fisheries Division
MLSA	Michigan Lakes and Streams Association
MSUE	Michigan State University Extension
MTA	Michigan Townships Association
MAPMS	Midwest Aquatic Plant Management Society
MWA	Michigan Waterfront Alliance
<b>Associate Partners</b>	
GTBOC	Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians
GLWSI	Great Lakes Water Studies Institute
HP	Huron Potawatomi, Inc.
HRWC	Huron River Watershed Council
LVDB	Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
LRBOI	Little River Band of Ottawa Indians
LTBB	Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
MACDC	Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners
MBIA	Michigan Boating Industries Association
TU	Michigan Council of Trout Unlimited
MUCC	Michigan United Conservation Clubs
MRWA	Muskegon River Watershed Assembly
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
NMEAC	Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council
TOMWC	Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
WCGTB	The Watershed Center – Grand Traverse Bay