



## FRIENDS OF THE JORDAN RIVER WATERSHED, INC.

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### BIODIVERSITY MATTERS

Friday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 marks one of the darkest days in Michigan's natural history. That was the day Michigan's Senate quietly passed S.B. 78 which specifically removed "Biodiversity" from the long held stated goals and policies by which our state has managed our public-owned natural resources. No longer will nature, diversity of species or environmental quality be considered or stand in the way of logging, mining or drilling for oil and gas in our State Forests.

Few people recognize the significance or implications of this act. The concept of "Biodiversity" is the pillar upon which conservation and environmental protection is built. Modern science has determined that one of the best ways to measure environmental health and quality of life is the diversity of plant and animal species within a given community. Biodiversity also confers biological integrity, which means that all the necessary components are present and viable to promote ecological health. Managing our State Forests to include biodiversity requires that we recognize and respect those elements that provide for the rich, balanced and diverse plant and animal communities upon which we all depend. It also requires that we avoid those things that fragment, pollute and destroy that delicate balance.

Following the travesties of the logging era, the citizens of Michigan and their representatives enacted a series of laws and policies to ensure that such a thing would never happen again. They had witnessed, first hand, the wholesale destruction of Michigan's virgin forests, extinction of species and the ensuing degradation of our rivers and streams. Clearly etched in their minds was the wasteful result of unfettered exploitation of our shared natural resources. They declared of "paramount importance" to; forever prevent such large scale deforestation and degradation, protect our natural heritage for the Common Trust and future generations and promote policies and goals which would foster biodiversity and ecological health. The concept of biodiversity was incorporated into our States natural resource management policies and goals. The era of Conservation was born.

Until recent years, the conservation and management of our public lands has been largely successful. For many years Michigan was considered a world leader for fostering the rejuvenation of abundant public lands. Michigan's forests have regrown to become viable forest ecosystems with valuable timber. They have also healed to provide the diversity of plant and animal species as was hoped for and intended. As a result, the waters of our streams and rivers run cleaner and faster. This rejuvenation has also provided a vast diversity of opportunities and uses for people who like to hunt, fish, canoe, hike, bird watch, snowmobile, ORV or just want to get outside. It also provides for the sustainable harvest of high quality timber and the extraction of minerals.

This was made possible because respect for nature was the priority and biodiversity was a vital management goal that kept the forest ecosystem healthy and vibrant.

Now, times have changed. Our re-born forests are seen as a commodity, open to the highest bidder. Our public lands have been leased for oil and gas extraction at unprecedented rates. The new, revised, State Forest Management Guidelines are focused squarely on logging with few spots spared. There are no provisions for Old Growth Designation or Natural Areas. Our pristine waters are being squandered, contaminated and permanently disposed of in alarming volumes. The oil and gas industry has found ways to extract the vast reserves of natural gas lying buried deep beneath our public lands through a process called fracking. These extractive and industrial scale operations fragment, pollute and destroy natural habitats and ecosystems. They are not compatible with the principals or goals of biodiversity. In order for these exploitations to proceed, biodiversity must be removed as a management goal. S.B. 78 is a dark traitor to the proud legacy wrought by those heroes who fought and struggled to reclaim Michigan's natural heritage and restore its environmental quality.

But wait! These are public-owned lands, our lands! These are my lands. These are your lands, our children's and grandchildren's lands (and waters too!). They were set aside and protected for good reasons. Who gave the OK to turn them over to the oil and gas and timber industries to exploit for private (even international) profit?

Governor Snyder heralded the advent of these ventures when he proclaimed that these industries will help lead Michigan out of its recession. The MDNR has enabled these industries by leasing millions of acres of State land for oil and gas extraction. The new State Forest Management Guidelines focus squarely on timber harvest and leave few places unscathed. MDEQ refuses to adequately regulate fracking and allows the toxic contamination of millions of gallons of fresh potable groundwater. Nowhere through the course of these events has the public been honestly engaged or properly informed by our State's officials. Instead, these decisions have been made quietly in closed rooms as witnessed by the passage of SB 78 or crammed through during a lame duck legislative blitzkrieg. The groundwork has been laid for the commercialization of our public assets.

I urge all who read this letter to look into these issues seriously and soon. Sadly I sense that the general public is too overwhelmed and worn out to put up much of a fight. The industries have mounted and sustained a massive and very effective advertising campaign filled with marvelous half truths. It's no wonder that people are confused and struggling just to make ends meet. Jobs and cheap energy sound pretty good right now. However, we have not been informed of the short and long term costs associated with these activities.

Removing biodiversity as a goal and management tool of our public lands will open the floodgates of industrialization and pollution of our most special places. The scars these activities leave behind may never heal and they have the potential to pollute our beautiful Great Lakes State forever. Are we willing to sacrifice our quality of life and that of future generations for a short term profit most of us will never see? Restore and sustain biodiversity.

Dr John W. Richter  
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