

A Shared Journey
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You and I are on a shared journey. It is a journey that started long before any of us joined, and is one that will continue after all of us step off the path. What I would like to share with you tonight is a few thoughts on where we've been, where we are, and what lies ahead. And finally, I will describe our characteristics as travelers, and why it is crucial that we continue on our way.

I think that we too often focus recollection on the peaks and valleys. The highs of thrilling accomplishments, or the lows of crushing lost opportunities. In the forty years of WMEAC's involvement in Michigan environmental affairs, there have certainly been many of the former with which you are familiar: Initiating and winning the federal lawsuit to ban DDT, spearheading the passage of the Michigan Environmental Protection Act, protecting the Pigeon River Country State Forest, invigorating community action to protect aquatic systems from Lake Michigan and the Grand River to local neighborhood drainages, and focusing attention and energy on sustainable business, building, and personal practices.

But it is perhaps more instructive to also think about the quotidian, the small steps we have taken each day, the increments by which we have modified our world view and personal perspective.

In that regard, I think about the past as a tapestry, a rich weaving of people, places and events. The tapestry certainly depicts the momentous events, for that is one of its purposes. But in focusing only on the depictions, we lose sight of the individual threads that makeup the very essence of the weaving and are, in fact, the fundamental material of which the tapestry is formed.

And so I invite you to recall that which only you individually know: Where you were and what you thought when you first heard of the West Michigan Environmental Action Council. Who first greeted you when you walked in the door, and what they said. What newsletter article or publication struck you as meaningful or inspirational. What caused you to think of WMEAC as an intellectual or philosophical home, or when you first realized that is how you felt. What project gave you a sense of accomplishment. What change in personal behavior you adopted because of a clearer understanding or deeper commitment engendered by your affiliation. When you consciously first set out to translate concern into action.

If I have done my job, everyone in this room has just pulled up at least one mental picture of their past. And now I invite each of you to connect that past with the person you are today. Now think of the threads that would connect us all if we could physically show where all of those memories are interconnected one to another and each to at least several others sitting in this room.

I offer this mental picture because I think of the past as prelude. It helps to recognize that where we are today is the product of the practices and policies we adopted in the past. And just as this is

* The opinions expressed herein are those of the author's alone and are not to be considered to represent those of the Department of Environmental Quality or the State of Michigan.

true of us as individuals, it is true of us collectively as an organization, and, on a broader scale, as a society with respect to environmental, social, and economic policy.

So let me now turn to two matters of current environmental, social, and economic importance.

The first is the continuing need to address our mistakes of the past. It is no secret that Michigan's industrial legacy has left us a tens of thousands of known and yet to be identified contaminated sites in both urban and rural settings. In 1988 and again in 1998, Michigan voters overwhelmingly approved bond funding to address this legacy. That funding has had substantial benefits:

First, it has supported the DEQ's efforts to work with parties responsible for contamination to complete cleanup activities. The DEQ has assisted or provided regulatory oversight of more than 10,000 such responsible party remediation projects.

In addition, over \$927 million in state funds have addressed nearly 1,800 sites where the party responsible for the contamination is unknown, no longer exists, or cannot financially address the problem. With this money, the DEQ has completed cleanup activity at over 1,000 sites, prepared 521 sites for redevelopment, provided safe drinking water to over 10,000 homes and businesses, and mitigated fire, vapor, and explosion hazards at hundred of sites.

But Michigan voters also wisely realized that an important aspect of addressing our industrial legacy is rededicating contaminated and abandoned sites to new productive uses. And so, the DEQ has awarded \$95 million in Brownfield Grants and Loans to 228 projects statewide. This money has reinvigorated our communities by generating \$3.1 billion in private investment and created 18,000 jobs.

This area of the state has benefited greatly from these programs. In Kent and Ottawa Counties, \$13.7 million of state funds has leveraged \$435 million in private redevelopment investment, creating over 5,000 jobs. In Grand Rapids, the Heartside and Wealthy Neighborhoods have been transformed by these investments. And WMEAC's own office is a product of this program.

But now this funding is running out, and much more work needs to be done. There are more than 400 currently active cleanup projects that need additional funding to complete. At least 1,600 abandoned landfills require actions to assess or control the potential for explosion from methane generation or groundwater contamination from seeping chemicals. There is a continuing need, in the order of \$5 million per year, to provide safe drinking water supplies for homes and communities affected by groundwater contamination. And thousands of derelict buildings pose public safety hazards and blighting influences in urban communities.

Importantly, these are just the problem sites that we know about. Because of the way Michigan's cleanup program is structured, there is no actual obligation for parties who caused contamination to inform the state that a problem exists. Therefore, given what we know and can project based on experience, the DEQ believes we have a problem that will take in the neighborhood of \$95 million per year for the foreseeable future to address.

This is obviously a significant need, and so Lansing is giving serious thought to asking the voters in November to approve a bond to help meet this, and other crucial environmental needs. While the structure of this proposal is still being developed, I can share with you some of the details currently under discussion, but please recognize these details as preliminary and subject to change.

The proposal will likely consist of three components. The first is to provide funding to meet the continuing cleanup need as I just described. This would be an \$820 million component. Of this \$550 million would be devoted to cleanup of the contaminated sites, \$250 million would support redevelopment and brownfield programs, and \$20 million would address the acute human health implications of lead paint in older housing.

The second component of the bond proposal would fund many activities to protect and restore Great Lakes waters. This \$390 million program would address aquatic invasive species, restore fish and wildlife habitat, address sources of pollution such as non-point source nutrient loads, failing septic tanks and illegal sewer connections, remove contaminated sediments, support pollution prevention programs, improve environmental monitoring, and support sustainable waterfront development. Importantly, much of this funding would match expected federal dollars for Great Lakes restoration, thereby multiplying the impact of our investment.

The third component of the bond proposal would provide \$90 million to support land stewardship through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, fostering agricultural practices to protect groundwater and surface water, and preserving farmland. These initiatives can have huge benefits for supporting open space, protecting habitat and controlling non-point pollution from rural activities.

The bond program is clearly an investment in the future that is needed because of problems we've created in the past. I would like to now turn to another current issue that will have crucial environmental, social, and economic implications for the future: management of our water resources.

Michigan is a place that is of water. Be it a Great Lake that stretches to the horizon from the top of a sand dune. Or an inland lake, still on a summer evening but for the call of a loon. Or a river, running cold and free over moss covered rocks, or deep and quiet through riparian woods and wetlands.

And this place is of water because it is green. A field of wheat that looks like a quilt rippling in the sun. Corn knee high by the 4th of July that soon turns narrow country roads into tunnels. Majestic oak woodlots, quaking aspen covets and cattails marshes.

But international, national, and regional debates rage about just whose water this is. And so Michigan has joined with the other Great Lakes states to write the Great Lakes Compact. The Compact, if enacted by all eight Great Lakes States and adopted by Congress, will have the force and effect of federal law. No longer would there be federal constitutional issues as to whether the region can prevent diversion of Great Lakes water to other parts of the country.

In order to support this federal protection, the Great Lakes states must demonstrate a purposeful and conservative approach to managing our water resources. The details of that approach are currently being debated in the Michigan Legislature. The House of Representatives and Senate have each developed a package of bills that differ in some important ways but also share some crucial characteristics. I am going first going to highlight the similarities, and then focus on the differences.

First, the bills are based on a scientific approach to making basic decisions about water usage. Based on the unique integration of several scientific disciplines, we can predict the effect of a given water withdrawal on the flow of a stream and predict how the resulting reduction in flow will affect the assemblage of fish populations in that stream. Since the health of fish populations

is considered an accurate surrogate for the overall ecological integrity of a stream, we can draw a bright line that separates acceptable from unacceptable impacts. This is ground-breaking for two reasons. For the first time we have an objective or numerical basis, rather than a subjective one such as what is “reasonable”, upon which to predict and judge the acceptable impact of a given action on a natural resource. Further, we can make this judgment not only for individual actions, but also for the cumulative effect of a series of actions over time. Thus, we ha

The second crucial common aspect of these bills is that recognize that water, even in Michigan, is not a limitless resource. The bills include a series of steps that will encourage the development of industry specific measures to conserve water usage and the adoption of conservation practices by water users. Thus, we will encourage a tangible conservation ethic for water use that simply must be part of our future.

But there are significant differences between the bills that need to be adequately resolved. First, in action today, the Senate adopted a bill that defers the protections of the legislation to an uncertain point in the future. Thus, what they give with one hand, by adopting a scientific approach to resource management, they take away with the other, by preventing use of the science for at least a year. Importantly, the DEQ will be largely unable during this year to prevent a whole scale rush to lock in new and potentially damaging uses of water before the protections go in to effect.

Second, the House bills recognize that at some point, the appropriateness of water usage is not simply a technical deterministic judgment. Rather, for particularly large or significant withdrawals, the community should have a role in evaluating how its available water should be used. In short, the public should have a meaningful say in how the use of scarce water resources will impact their future. The Senate bills fail to recognize this and locks the public out of discussions over what the future should look like.

It is to that future, to the path ahead, that I would now like to turn. And let me start here: I describe the role of the Department of Environmental Quality as encouraging wise environmental choices. This may come as a surprise to some, who view the DEQ as a regulatory agency. But a regulator constrains. It is a power-based, authoritarian relationship, a parental relationship. Encouraging wise environmental choices, on the other hand, is collaborative. And I believe that we will be more successful in the long run by recognizing that people have choices and helping to inform those choices. Thus, even the laws we administer present choices about meeting legal requirements or being subject to the consequences of failing to meet them.

And I think of WMEAC in much the same way: You embody the community principle of encouraging people to make wise environmental choices. And you do that in a very tangible and effective way: You demonstrate the wisdom of choices. From illuminating the economic benefits of sustainable business practices, to building rain gardens, to showcasing your Double Gold LEED certified office building, WMEAC helps people wrap their arms and heads around both the theory and practice of wise environmental choices. And that is crucial to the future for a reason embodied in your motto: Trust in our Nature.

The part and parcel of making wise environmental choices is mediating the relationship between the human race and the rest of the natural world. The precise nature of that relationship is no where written on stone tablets. Deciding what is “wise” is, in large measure, deciding what the nature of the relationship should be. I would like to share with you three of my core beliefs in this regard.

First, I believe that no one owns the truth, but we all own a part of it. If that is accurate, then society's relationship to the natural order cannot be described a priori. Rather it is organic, a product of choices we as a society make everyday. And thus, everyone's opinion on society's relationship to the natural order has inherent validity.

Second, I believe that our choices as a society are an expression of our human nature at a point in time. In essence, it is the very interplay of a pluralistic society that validates our choices as natural beings, as part of the natural order.

Finally, since each of us has something to do or say about that natural order, we have a duty, an obligation to advance our beliefs in support of creating a more healthy and sustainable relationship with it. If our vision of the future is to be, it is crucially important that those of us—and I consider everyone in the room in this category—who believe in working as part of nature rather than against it, in treading lightly on the earth, in justice, and in joyous celebration of our connection with the wonder all around, to ACT on those beliefs.

I ask you now to think about these statements in the context of where we started: the past. I hope that discussion allowed you, even if only for a brief moment, to see the present as a natural outgrowth of the small but important steps you had taken in the past in working with WMEAC and in your personal lives. If so, now jump ahead to the future and know that whatever hopes you hold for it will be, to some important degree, measured by each otherwise seemingly insignificant footfall on the path you choose to take in the journey we all share.

Thank you.