



## PRESS RELEASE

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## Bipartisan Leaders Call For Stronger Great Lakes Protections

*Reps Brandenburg, Sak, joined by 54 organizations, vow to strengthen water use bills*

Lansing — More than two dozen Michigan nonprofit organizations met today with lawmakers from both political parties in a rare bipartisan push for support on three key amendments the groups want adopted by the Legislature to protect Michigan's water resources from unwise diversions and overuse. The amendments serve to strengthen the package of water-use bills that the Senate passed in December.

The briefing was co-hosted by State Rep. Jack Brandenburg, R-Harrison Township, and State Rep. Michael Sak, D-Grand Rapids.

"Protecting Michigan's water is not a partisan issue," explained Rep. Jack Brandenburg (R-Harrison Township). "Great Lakes water belongs to all taxpayers. We must step up to the plate now and pass strong water use laws or risk losing the water resources we depend on to sustain our economy. Remember, our water is the base of our whole tourism industry."

Rep. Michael Sak (D-Grand Rapids), who co-hosted the event, agreed, stating, "Water is what makes Michigan a great place to live. We can't afford to let politics as usual put our most important public resource at risk."

More than 36,000 Michigan residents have written lawmakers and dozens of organizations have worked for months to strengthen the water-use bills, but the resulting Senate package left three critical areas unaddressed. Amendments that would have plugged these three holes were defeated by narrow margins in the Senate, despite garnering bipartisan support. Focus now has shifted to the House, where hearings were held last week on the bills.

The Great Lakes, Great Michigan coalition is urging legislators to support these amendments in the House. The amendments would:

- 1) **Protect against diversions** by requiring legislative approval for diversions outside of the Great Lakes basin,
- 2) **Protect all of our natural resources** from water use impacts by expanding protections to include private property and habitats without fish populations, and
- 3) **Ensure water conservation** by requiring water users to self-certify that they are following generally accepted water management practices.

"We all have a responsibility to be good stewards of the gift of water," said Sister Lucille Janowiak of Religion, Ecology and Spirituality, a West Michigan Environmental Action Council group. "This means using it wisely, sharing it with the other living beings that depend on it for their survival, and making sure that citizens always have a say in the way water, our public trust, is used."

With the Governor's legal authority to veto proposed diversions of Great Lakes water under court challenge and with demand for water increasing, maintaining public control over proposed water diversions is particularly critical, explained Cyndi Roper of Clean Water Action. "If the court challenge succeeds and the legislative approval amendment is not adopted, we will have no way to prevent our water from being shipped off to water the lawns of other states, or sold to the highest bidder," said Roper.

Moreover, the Senate bills would only prevent those groundwater withdrawals that alter waterways so radically that they impair the ability of the native fish to survive. "This is an unacceptably high threshold, not just because it ignores the possibility of damage to non-fish wildlife, but because it does nothing to protect landowners from property damage from large water users, such as dried-up ponds and dead trees," said Kelly Dardzinski of PIRGIM. Excessive water withdrawals can cause irreversible damage to property as well as drinking water. As William Tobler of Inter-county Citizens Action Group (ICAG) states, "dry residential wells and wells with very poor water quality continue to be a problem in northwestern Monroe County, while the State allows large water withdrawals to continue unchecked."

Finally, adopting the proposed conservation amendment "would bring so many benefits," stated Cheryl Mendoza of Alliance for the Great Lakes, "from reducing impacts to wildlife habitat to saving businesses money to improving Michigan's ability to say no to unwise diversion proposals."

"Requiring each water-using sector to develop sound water management practices would jumpstart more efficient water use, which is good for our waterways and good for business," agreed Thomas Newhouse, President of the West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum. "The conservation amendment should be an easy one for legislators to support." A vote on the bills is expected by mid-February.

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