

Huron River Watershed Council  
1100 N Main Street, Suite 210  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104 (734) 769-5123

Testimony of the Huron River Watershed Council  
Presented by Elizabeth Riggs, Deputy Director  
IN SUPPORT OF SB 873-877, UPDATES TO MICHIGAN TRAILWAYS ACT  
Before the Senate Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Committee

Good afternoon, honorable members of the committee. My name is Elizabeth Riggs, and I serve as Deputy Director for the Huron River Watershed Council and as Director of the RiverUp! program to revitalize the river communities on the Huron River. The Council leads RiverUp!, a 3-year campaign to raise \$1 million in private and public support for projects that invest in river recreation, improve the health of the river, and leverage river assets for local economic growth. Through RiverUp!, the communities on the river are becoming part of Michigan's Blue Economy.

RiverUp! is investing in creating Trail Towns on the Huron River. Through a new Trail Towns Coordinator, we support the community leaders in Milford, Dexter, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Belleville, Flat Rock, and Rockwood to become destinations on the trail. Our goal by 2015 is to have the five largest Trail Towns be fully developed as Water Trail destinations where trail users can venture off the trail to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of each community.

Expanding support for all trails is a smart move for the economic vitality and livability of our communities. Studies of tourism and outdoor recreation from Pure Michigan, the Outdoor Industry Association, and Washtenaw County all show that river recreation boosts the economy and creates jobs:

- Outdoor Industry Association report, "The Outdoor Recreation Economy: Take it Outside for American Jobs and a Strong Economy," detailing the economic impact of outdoor recreation in the U.S.
- An economic impact analysis for recreation on the Huron River in Washtenaw County finds that the local economy receives \$33 million annually from non-motorized water sports (2013, Washtenaw County, OECD)
- Pure Michigan just recently released a study that found for every dollar invested in Pure Michigan, the State Treasury received around \$5.76 in tax revenues

I appreciate this opportunity to express support of Senate Bills 873 through 877 and urge the committee to support them today. By voting in support of these bills, the committee extends a valuable existing program to a broader statewide network of multi-use trails, specifically water trails on our state's coastal and inland waters. The bills update the Michigan Trailways Act by:

- incorporating all types of trails into the Act;
- creating a "Pure Michigan Trail" designation;
- creating a "Pure Michigan Trail Town" designation;
- requiring the Department of Natural Resources to create an electronic portal for trails information;
- requires adopt-a-trail programs to be coordinated with other volunteer clean-up programs;
- changes formal name of the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council to Michigan Trails Advisory Council; and
- officially incorporates water trails under the umbrella of the Council.

Thank you for your time and consideration.