Michigan Trout Unlimited

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Testimony on SB 248 "The State Land Cap Bill" from Trout Unlimited

House of Representatives Natural Resources, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Committee

Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you and provide you our organization's thoughts and concerns with Senate Bill 248, a bill which proposes to limit the amount of land that the State of Michigan can acquire. **We oppose SB248** and offer rationale as follows.

Michigan and its use of public lands

Michigan is well-known for its incredible natural resources and outdoor-based recreation; it drives our tourism economy, is the foundation of our Pure Michigan campaign, and is at the core of the quality of life that makes Michigan a place worth living. Inherent in this, is the ability of Michigan's citizens and visitors to access and use its outdoors. This fact is so critical and well-accepted that we have a constitutionally framed **Natural Resources Trust Fund, created by the vote of its citizens to ensure funds to acquire lands for their use and enjoyment**. Michigan has 36,000 miles of streams and over 11,000 inland lakes that creates its public trust aquatic resources. Having access to these waters is imperative. Current amounts of public lands vary greatly with latitude in Michigan, with very little in southern Michigan where the majority of its citizens reside; and increasing amounts further north. In southern Michigan, there is an inadequate supply of public land for its residents to use and enjoy; a fact which affects; quality of life, attraction for business and the workers they need to attract, the health of citizens, and the level of outdoor recreation that is possible. This fact excludes many residents from enjoying our natural resources, while others spend significant time and money traveling to northern Michigan for recreation and relaxation either for weekend visits or to visit secondary properties they have purchased in areas with greater public lands. The use of public lands in northern Michigan, either by southern residents or from out-of-state tourists help form the foundation of the economy for much of northern Michigan. A sad fact is the abundance of conflict over competing uses of state lands in northern Michigan highlights the high use and demand for state lands even in the north. **We use these lands, we enjoy these lands, we profit from these lands, we depend upon these lands, and we voted to ensure future acquisition of them was possible.** This bill is contradictory to these many facts.

SB248 will not fix the issues raised as its impetus

Supporters and originators of this bill cite examples of state land acquisitions which were disruptive to goals of certain local municipalities; and also cite examples of certain management actions or designations of existing state lands which were undesirable to their uses of particular lands. **SB248 contains no language that would prevent these problems from occurring in the future.** What is needed to address these issues, is development of a better process and plan for state land acquisitions; one that relies on strategic acquisitions and divestitures, requires collaboration with stakeholders (e.g., coordination with land use plans from local municipalities), and recognizes the unique regional and local contexts for state lands needs across all of Michigan. If this improved process was created, than state land acquisition would not need to be arbitrarily capped, as it would be tool for its citizens to use to their benefit – whether that meant acquisition or divestiture of lands.

An important example of how state land acquisition can be a critical tool for our residents comes from this bill itself. **The largest exemption in SB248 is for acquiring lands under the Commercial Forest Act**. These largely exist in the Upper Peninsula, the very place where this bill originated. **Even while frustrated with elements of current state land acquisitions, Upper Peninsula representatives recognize that an ability to acquire more of them in the future is a critical tool to help their region**. In southern Michigan where public lands are scarce and will be an important tool to economic development – no similar exemption is provided. **The solution needed is strategic and collaborative state land holding plans – not an arbitrary statewide limit to state lands.**

The proceeding comments are but a few of the major concerns we have with SB248. Hopefully they are sufficient to highlight why we believe this bill is not worthy of our or your support. We are engaged on this issue and remain committed to seeing the concerns that gave rise to it addressed in a satisfactory and lasting way. We have many thoughts on how to get to work doing just that. Thank you for considering our concerns.

Respectfully,

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