

Press Release

P.O. Box 30036 • Lansing • Michigan • 48909-7536 • 517-373-7370
Fax: 517-373-1373 • E-mail: sendemstaff@senate.michigan.gov



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Contact: Alex Rossman
Phone: 517-373-6091

Senate Democrats Fight for Protection of Michigan's Precious Great Lakes, Freshwater

Push for True Safeguards, Responsible Use of Resources

LANSING- Senate Democrats fought today to strengthen the Great Lakes Compact legislation and ensure the protection of not only the Great Lakes, but the inland lakes, rivers, and streams that flow into them. During the debate on Senate Bill 860, which would implement the Great Lakes Compact, Senate Democrats offered and argued for five amendments that would further protect Michigan's freshwater by limiting withdrawals from cold water streams, increasing oversight of large water users, preserving citizen restoration efforts and placing groundwater in public trust.

"We could have made a lot of progress on this issue, but instead we took one step forward yesterday and two steps back today," said Sen. Ray Basham (D-Taylor). "By not adding these additional protections to this bill, we are falling significantly short of our responsibility as stewards of this state and its precious land, water and people."

As the Great Lakes Compact legislation moved on the Senate floor, Senate Democrats offered a series of amendments that underscore a desire for more protective standards and processes. The following amendments were proposed:

- Senator Mike Prusi (D-Ishpeming) offered an amendment that would limit water withdrawals from cold water streams. These are world class trout streams and deserve more stringent protection, and this attempts to provide water resources for wildlife, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts all to enjoy.
- Senator Ray Basham (D-Taylor) proposed that the Department of Environmental Quality to account for a company's capacity to withdraw water and not just their current, actual use. This would protect current water users' ability to expand their use and business while letting new companies in to also grow the economy, all while protecting the water resource.
- Senator Basham also offered an amendment that would expand permitting and oversight for any large water withdrawals. This would protect our water while still allowing reasonable use by businesses and farmers.
- Senator Mark Schauer (D-Battle Creek) offered an amendment that would preserve restoration efforts by conservation groups that positively affect water quality. Dedicated volunteers in these groups put in countless hours to make our rivers and streams cleaner and healthier. This amendment would ensure that the waters they restore would remain available for people and wildlife to use.

- Senator Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) proposed that the same public trust that Michigan's surface waters are held in should also apply to the state's groundwater, acknowledging the seamless connection between the two. This would confirm that *all* Michigan water truly belongs to the people.

"This is one of the most important pieces of legislation that we'll address for current and future generations," said Sen. Liz Brater. "We had an historic opportunity to protect our water for our children and grandchildren to enjoy, but we fell short. I will continue to do everything in my power to ensure the long-term conservation of the Great Lakes and other waters."

"We need to protect our water for all Michigan citizens, including the businesses and farms that are economically dependent on the responsible consumption of our natural resources," said Sen. Mark Schauer. "We offered compromised measures to do just that, and it's unfortunate that this stronger proposal to protect the Great Lakes was not approved."

The Great Lakes Compact was negotiated over a span of almost five years with input from a variety of stakeholders from industry, business, shipping, agriculture, environmental and conservation groups, and all the Great Lakes governors and premiers. Yesterday, the Senate unanimously passed SB 212, the primary vehicle for the Great Lakes Compact, which bans large water diversions, stipulates the regulation and conservation of water resources, and develops rules for Great Lakes water usage. SB 860 would implement the Compact, and today's amendments sought to ensure the protection of all of Michigan's freshwater in realizing the connection between our state's ecological health and that of the Great Lakes. Differences between the Senate and House's Great Lakes legislation must still be resolved.

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