



Growing a Greener Michigan

Michigan is blessed with abundant, high quality natural resources that contribute about \$85 million a year to our state economy through forestry, fishing, mining, and recreation.¹ Responsibly stewarding these resources is critical for Michigan to thrive and be a place where people choose to live, work, and visit.

However, Michigan's industrial history, sprawling land use, and lack of investment in mass transit have put many of these resources at risk of degradation and loss. Climate change and shifting demands for natural resources pose added challenges that must be addressed. For example, in a recent survey, two-thirds of U.S. youth aged 16–25 said that climate change would influence where they choose to live.²

Both Lansing and local communities play a role in protecting Michigan's natural resources and environment by managing waste, reducing climate and air quality emissions, protecting our waterbodies, and managing public and private lands.



MICHIGAN
GREEN
COMMUNITIES

The Michigan Green Communities (MGC) program provides assistance to communities to take actions and benchmark their progress across nine environmental sustainability categories.

Participating communities annually track their progress and are certified as bronze, silver, gold, or platinum level MGC communities.

Waste Not, Want Not

“Reduce, reuse, and recycle” is the classic slogan for managing waste to protect our environment. For years, Michigan's performance in this area was poor. While we are one of only 10 states with a bottle deposit law and have had extremely high rates of recycling those containers, our overall recycling rate for all materials was less than 15 percent until 2019.³

Recently, the State has invested in helping communities develop recycling programs and infrastructure, supported research and business development on product reuse, and increased public education efforts. In 2025, Michigan's recycling rate grew to approximately 25 percent. While more progress is needed (the national average for recycling is about 30 percent, according to the EPA), the 11 percent increase over the past six years shows a healthy growth trajectory for Michigan.

How Michigan Powers Up

Energy use is a major contributor to air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) that affect human health and natural resources. In 2020, Michigan adopted the MI Healthy Climate Plan, which sets a goal for reaching carbon neutrality by 2050 and an interim target of 60 percent renewable energy by 2035. As of 2023, Michigan still has a ways to go in meeting those goals.

According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, Michigan ranks 17th among states on efforts to advance energy efficiency and reduce climate emissions. Our utility low-income and public benefits programs are bright spots in the study. We ranked second on these metrics—a testament to Michigan's commitment to a just and fair clean energy future. However, Michigan ranked only 24th in our transportation energy efforts (e.g., EV programs and transit) and 26th for our building energy policies (e.g., stringency of energy codes).⁵

Thriving Michigan evaluates how well Michigan is fostering thriving communities where people want to live, work, and build their futures. This series benchmarks the state's performance across key indicators that contribute to long-term prosperity. Each report presents a clear, data-driven snapshot of how state policies and investments are impacting one of the key indicators in Michigan communities, including health and safety, economic and financial security, natural resources, virtual and physical infrastructure, arts and cultural, lifelong learning opportunities, and housing.

Michigan waterbodies that are **not** supporting designated uses⁷



Recreation



Fish Consumption



Warm/Cold Water Fishery

11%

Michigan's in-state electricity net generation via renewable energy.

25th

Michigan's rank on renewable energy consumption as a share of state total

Water, Water Everywhere

Michigan is surrounded by four of the five Great Lakes and has over 870,000 acres of inland lakes, over 76,000 miles of rivers and streams, almost 6.5 million acres of wetlands, and a significant groundwater supply.⁶ Water is central to our identity, economic well-being, and quality of life. Michigan's abundant water resources are a huge asset—but only if they are responsibly managed.

The State monitors waterways to ensure they are clean and safe for recreation, fishing, drinking and industrial water supply, navigation, and aquatic ecosystems. Michigan has many waterways in excellent condition, particularly in the Upper and northern Lower Peninsulas. Nevertheless, there are significant threats from contaminants like nutrients, sediments, and chemicals (e.g., PCBs, PFAS, mercury, lead, etc.) that impair designated uses.

Michigan gained national attention for its drinking water quality during the Flint Water Crisis in 2015. In response, the State passed the most stringent Lead and Copper Rule in the U.S., which requires community water systems to replace all lead service lines by 2041. About 26 percent of Michigan's 1,395 community water systems report having possible lead service lines, affecting more than five million people. As of 2024, 15 of these systems had “action level exceedances” for the lead and copper rule.⁸

Huge Tracts of Land

Michigan boasts enormous public land and open space. The State manages 4.6 million acres of parks, forests, trails, boat access sites, and wildlife areas. Michigan municipalities and regional entities also provide thousands of acres of convenient local parks and open spaces. In addition, about 30 percent of Michigan's private farmland is protected from development as non-agricultural uses, maintaining these resources as valuable food production and habitat spaces.⁹

These resources offer opportunities for recreation, food generation, and business, and space for quiet contemplation. They are also critical habitats for the health of thousands of aquatic and terrestrial species that call Michigan home.

Budget challenges threaten our ability to support and improve these crucial spaces. Between 2000 and 2020, Michigan's General Fund support for the Department of Natural Resources decreased by 39.5 percent.¹⁰ Municipal budgets have also declined during this period (for more on this, see the Economic Security Thriving Communities brief), and parks and recreation projects are often the first items cut under budget reductions.

1 in 3

U.S. residents in do not have a park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home.



The Path to Thriving

For a thriving Michigan, the state must continue to responsibly steward our natural resources for the enjoyment and economic benefit of all.

- Ensure that state and local policies focus on developing areas that are already built out in order to avoid the high costs of new infrastructure and to prevent the loss of valuable natural resources.
- Dedicate funding and leverage partnerships to expand networks of both state and local parks, trails, and preserves, and restore wilderness areas throughout the state.
- Address legacy and emerging contaminants in our waterways that threaten public health and natural ecosystems.
- Invest in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and clean transportation technology to improve quality of life and reduce climate impacts.

1 Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Our Economic Impact. www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/economic-impact 2 Lancet Planet Health 2024; 8: e879–93 Published Online October 17, 2024. doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(24)00229-8. 3 www.michigan.gov/egle/newsroom/press-releases/2025/04/23/record-high-recycling-rate?utm_source=chatgpt.com 4 U.S. Energy Information System. Michigan State Profile and Energy Estimates. www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?aid=11. Accessed 10/13/2025. 5 Kresowik, Mark, et al. 2025 State Energy Efficiency Scorecard. Washington, DC: ACEEE. www.aceee.org/research-report/12502. 6 www.michigan.gov/egle/-/media/Project/Websites/egle/Documents/Programs/WRD/GLWARM/IR/Integrated-Report-2024.pdf?rev=0f3b59b062da435ea11a4cf895f0b9276&hash=BF0E4582AA6C3AB990EE81D3E8997953 7 Lancet Planet Health 2024; 8: e879–93 Published Online October 17, 2024. doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(24)00229-8. 7 Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy. 2024. Water Quality and Pollution Control in Michigan 2024 Sections 303(d), 305(b), and 314 Integrated Report. www.michigan.gov/egle/-/media/Project/Websites/egle/Documents/Programs/WRD/GLWARM/IR/Integrated-Report-2024.pdf?rev=0f3b59b062da435ea11a4cf895f0b9276&hash=BF0E4582AA6C3AB990EE81D3E8997953. Accessed October 2, 2025. 9 Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. 2024. Annual MDARD Report. www.michigan.gov/mdard/-/media/Project/Websites/mdard/documents/annual-reports/2024/MDARD2024AnnualReports.pdf?rev=d9e19ce298e14339894363d1fc8543926&hash=5C96BEA650FC76292A6E12C57E3D6D1. Accessed 10/4/2025. 10 Based on data from the Michigan House Fiscal Agency.