

Senator Stabenow Announces Historic \$40 Million Investment in Conservation Projects Across Michigan, Great Lakes Region

Wednesday, Jan 14, 2015

U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, today announced a historic \$40 million investment in critical conservation projects across Michigan and the Great Lakes Region supported by over 130 local partners. This major investment is a direct result of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, created in Sen. Stabenow's 2014 Farm Bill, to protect our Great Lakes and invest in water, land, and wildlife conservation across the country. Three Michigan projects were awarded that will address water quality concerns in Western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay, and the St. Joseph River. One project will address wildlife habitat in Michigan's Upper Peninsula forests and another will improve forest health throughout the state.

"Today's announcement is historic and marks one of the largest single federal investments ever in water quality conservation in Michigan and the Great Lakes," said Stabenow. "Our Michigan projects bring together hundreds of partners already working hard to protect our water, land, and wildlife habitat for future generations. This first-of-its-kind commitment to conserving our natural resources is truly unprecedented and will have a lasting impact on the health of our Great Lakes."

Michigan's five proposals were designed by over 130 local partners- including businesses, non-profits, universities, and federal, state and local governments- specifically for their region. Partners are required to match federal funding, effectively doubling the federal investment.

Details of the Michigan projects:

\$17.5 million- Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin Phosphorus Reduction Initiative

This partnership will help farmers implement conservation practices to reduce phosphorus and sediment runoff into the western Lake Erie basin and reduce toxic algae blooms. The

Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will lead the initiative in collaboration with Ohio, Indiana and more than 40 local partners. The initiative will focus on the West Lake Erie Watershed from Sandusky at the southern limit to River Raisin in the north.

\$10 million- Saginaw Bay Watershed Conservation Partnership

This initiative will help farmers and conservation partners improve the water quality and wildlife habitat in the Saginaw Bay Watershed, which has been negatively impacted by phosphorus and nutrient sediment runoff. The Michigan Agri-Business Association and Nature Conservancy will lead 35 local partners to restore acres of wetlands, reduce excessive sediments and nutrients in the watershed, and monitor long-term trends in the fish population and habitat.

\$6.8 million- St. Joseph Watershed Conservation Partnership

Over 70 percent of the St. Joseph River is in agricultural use, stretching 210 miles. This project will offer farmers public and private financial and technical assistance to access conservation tools that reduce excessive sediment and nutrients in the St. Joseph River and improve wildlife and fish habitat. The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will partner with the State of Indiana and over 30 local organizations.

\$5 million- Improving Forest Health for Wildlife Resources in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin

This project will improve forest health on nearly 12,000 acres of nonindustrial forest land in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in order to conserve essential habitat for threatened and endangered species. In Michigan, work will focus on counties in the Upper Peninsula including but not limited to Marquette, Baraga, Iron, Dickinson, and Menominee. The project is led by the American Bird Conservancy and the State of Wisconsin in collaboration with Michigan, Minnesota, and 25 local partners.

\$1 million- Training Foresters to Enhance the Sustainable Management of Private Forest Land

This project will improve healthier forests within the 12 million acres of private forest land throughout Michigan. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources Forestry Division will train private and public sector professional foresters to work with landowners to implement best management practices that combat soil erosion and sediment runoff from timber harvests.

About the Regional Conservation Partnership Program

USDA will provide \$1.2 billion in funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program over the five-year life of the Farm Bill. This funding can leverage an additional \$1.2 billion from partners for a total of \$2.4 billion for conservation. \$400 million in USDA funding was available in the first year.

In addition, USDA has designated the Great Lakes as one of eight Critical Conservation Areas across the country, which provides an opportunity for additional funding to address water quality issues. The other areas designated are the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, Mississippi River Basin, Longleaf Pine Range, Columbia River Basin, California Bay Delta, Prairie Grasslands, and the Colorado River Basin.

About the Farm Bill

The 2014 Farm Bill is our country's biggest investment in private land conservation and has been called the most significant conservation legislation in generations. Voluntary partnerships between agricultural and conservation groups help farmers conserve soil health, protect water quality, and restore wildlife habitat in the Great Lakes region and across our state.