Forward Together

2021 Annual Report
"The 37 million acres that are Michigan is all the Michigan we will ever have."

–William Milliken
We turned many pages in 2021.

The easing of pandemic restrictions allowed us to gather in fellowship with friends and allies again. The inauguration of a new president heralded remarkable bipartisan investments in the Great Lakes and in wilderness protection. The environmental community rallied around crises and opportunities, from combatting lead poisoning in Benton Harbor to securing wilderness protections in the Upper Peninsula.

This past year was also one of growth for the Michigan Environmental Council.

Together we celebrated new chapters in the lives of many of our staff as Sean Hammond, Tom Zinnicki, Katharine Merritt and Samantha Pickering moved on to new opportunities, and Judy Bearup and Elizabeth Fedorchuk retired from the workforce. After these changes we restructured our team, and so the past year also saw the promotion of Charlotte Jameson and Joe Bover to new roles in executive leadership, and the introduction of new team members Tori Fancher Kletke and Megan Tinsley.

We welcomed new member organizations, like Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision and the Kalamazoo Climate Crisis Coalition. We said farewell to iconic board members Lisa Brush and Rick Bunch, and welcomed new insights from Raquel Garcia, Darryl Jordan, Mindy Koch and Selma Tucker.

This past year allowed us to witness what remarkable things we can achieve as our Environmental Council family continues to grow and thrive.

And together, we have seen tremendous victories.

As we share our 2021 reflections, we wanted to make sure they were presented through the eyes of the team that made these accomplishments possible with support from you—our generous donors, allies and dear friends. In this annual report, you’ll find a selection of year-end highlights of which we’re most proud from the perspectives of various Environmental Council staffers.

We hope that in reading their stories, you’ll get to know the dedicated, knowledgeable and compassionate individuals that help make this organization who we are today. We’re carrying on a legacy of getting things done at the Capitol that started over 40 years ago. And as long as we continue to stand together and fight for the environmental change that Michiganders deserve, the vision for the next 40 looks even brighter.

With gratitude,

Jennifer McKay
Board Chair
It’s the summer of 2050 in Michigan. You’ve just left your energy efficient, all-electric home and you’re biking to your job in an energy-efficient building powered by renewable energy. Your community is walkable, and any passing vehicles are either electric or part of a robust public transportation system. The haze from coal plants is a thing of the past, and gas plants are nearly extinct, too. Your energy bills use line items like “wind energy” and “solar energy.”

As a community, we’re feeling the positive impacts of more jobs and a stronger economy. Heat waves and major precipitation events are few and far between. It may seem like a distant future, but that’s the world we’re working for every single day at the Environmental Council. Our active role on Michigan’s Council on Climate Solutions is helping make this a reality.

The Council on Climate Solutions is responsible for the plan to hit targets established by Governor Whitmer to reduce carbon greenhouse gas emissions, culminating in statewide carbon neutrality by 2050. At the end of 2021, the Environmental Council delivered recommendations that helped shape the MI Healthy Climate Plan, our state’s most significant investment in combating the climate crisis.

The Council on Climate Solutions is supported by workgroups focused on the different sectors that need to decarbonize: energy systems, industry, buildings and housing, transportation and natural working lands. My years spent expanding renewable energy and energy efficiency put the Environmental Council in a position to lead the buildings and housing workgroup as co-chair. I helped lead the effort to develop recommendations for the Council and the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) to decarbonize our building sector.

We tapped into our strength as a convener and leveraged a diverse set of stakeholders for recommendations. There are many moving parts involved in reaching our overarching goal to decarbonize buildings and multiple perspectives are necessary to developing robust, achievable recommendations.

For example, a strategy to further develop and support a clean energy workforce will be critical—we simply do not have enough contractors and skilled trades people in Michigan to do the level of work that needs to be done. There’s training, investment, community prioritization and so much more to wrap our arms around if we’re going to get it right. As a state we also need to help all residents transition to efficient, electric appliances like heat pumps and access funding and finding creative solutions to improve improvements at their homes and businesses.

But the Environmental Council’s work doesn’t stop when the recommendations are set. Once the MI Health Climate Plan is finalized, we’ll shift to supporting the State with policy implementation, whether that’s through administrative action at State agencies or at the governor’s level, or if it requires further legislative action. We’ll be there pushing from all angles, providing leadership in policy development and advocating for aggressive solutions.

In parallel to the Council on Climate Solutions, the Environmental Council is doing its own coalition work around building decarbonization. Every six years, our state must revise its building codes, which determine how our buildings are constructed. These codes are responsible for ensuring we live in safe, comfortable homes. In 2021, we pulled together a group of organizations that shared our desire to fight for the safest and most sustainable building codes possible for Michiganders. What we build now will be around for generations, so we need to ensure homes are built using the most recent building science and with affordability and comfort in mind.

Whether we’re serving in an advisory capacity to the administration or collaborating with other organizations across the state, public health, affordability and climate are at the heart of the Environmental Council’s work. We know that inaction means locking in higher utility bills, poor indoor air quality from fossil fuel appliances, discomfort from poor heating and cooling systems and a worsening climate crisis for years to come.

These efforts can feel heavy—and yes, sometimes the barriers we face make change feel impossible. That’s when we step back to remind ourselves that change is ever-evolving. At the Michigan Environmental Council, celebrating improvements both incremental and monumental never leaving opportunities for a win on the table and keeping that vision of a better tomorrow keeps us going.

Why did you choose a career in environmentalism? I’ve had lifelong interest in our environment, but it became a career aspiration in 2012. I’ve been doing research focused on food and agriculture in my role on the Obama for America presidential campaign. I found myself really fascinated by the impact our agricultural sector has on our environment, so I made the decision to get my master’s degree in environmental policy, and I’ve been working to protect our environment ever since.

What led you to working with the Environmental Council? I previously worked with the Michigan League of Conservation Voters. They were (and are) an Environmental Council partner, so I got to know the organization’s reputation and its investment in the policy space. As a generalist at the League, the idea of digging into specific policy areas really appealed to me. I jumped at the opportunity to focus on energy issues here.

What do you think is Michigan’s most powerful example of environmental policy? The foundational environmental law in Michigan is our Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, or NREPA. It’s the law that established our state-level environmental protection programs. In 2008, we saw the birth of clean energy policy in Michigan with the enactment of a bill that set standards for renewables and efficiency. I consider those very definitive, bipartisan environmental laws.

What impact of the Environmental Council’s work do you hope to see realized? I think several things are realistic to see in my lifetime: all lead service lines replaced in Michigan; conversion to efficient electric heat and cooling systems and monumental, never leaving opportunities for a win on the table and keeping that vision of a better tomorrow keeps us going.

Creating safer, more comfortable, healthier homes

Priorities in Action: Energy

with Chief Policy Officer Charlotte Jameson

Charlotte Jameson, with the Environmental Council since 2017

Creating safer, more comfortable, healthier homes

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Priorities in Action: Sustainable Agriculture

with Water Policy Director Megan Tinsley

Megan Tinsley with the Environmental Council since 2021

Why did you choose a career in environmentalism?
Quite simply, to make a difference for the better somehow, someway. I gravitate toward the outdoors. I recharge there and experience wonder each and every time I head outside. It only feels natural to protect the opportunity for others to experience the same thing.

What led you to working with the Environmental Council?
When my family relocated from New Jersey to Michigan, I knew I wanted to continue environmental policy work. (I’ve previously worked for two statewide Audubon Societies.) The Environmental Council stood out for its strong presence in Lansing and its track record for advancing positive change.

What do you think is Michigan’s most powerful example of environmental policy?
As a new Michigander, I can’t offer a historical perspective, but I will say that Michigan’s commitment to testing for PFAS is more deliberate than most other states. This provides a better opportunity to know the extent of the problem and to address it adequately.

What impact of the Environmental Council’s work do you hope to see realized?
We should be making water use or pollution discharge permitting decisions based on the cumulative impacts all users and operations have in one area, rather than in isolation in a piecemeal fashion. I would like to see this approach as a norm instead of an exception. We also need a statewide septic code!

What will your environmental legacy be?
Environmental resources like water should not be taken for granted. For far too long, environmental protections have been an afterthought. I would love to know that I contributed to the environment being a top consideration in any decision projected to create impacts.

Protecting people and lakes through sustainable practices

In our work, every day offers a new discovery. It’s not always the good kind: a chemical spill; PFAS in our food supply or a new contaminant in drinking water. Being in a state of constant reaction to preventable problems is certainly challenging, but even more so, it is a driving force to keep doing what we’re doing.

For us as environmentalists, personal motivation tends to fuel our professional work, too. Now that I’m a mom, inclusive access to clean drinking water for all children has taken on a level of importance I could not have imagined before. It reinforces my connection to the Environmental Council’s work and helps strengthen my goal to be deliberative in our policy approaches.

In August, I brought to the Environmental Council 12 years of combined experience at two Audubon societies—first in Florida and then in New Jersey. In both places, the role the surrounding bodies of water played was undeniable, and it further enforced what we all know to be true here in Michigan: water is life and precious to all living things.

The impacts of our behavior on water matters. That’s what we strive to emphasize as we advocate to reduce the flow of nutrients from animal waste and farms into Lake Erie, a water body that provides drinking water for 12 million people. The toxic algae choking Lake Erie threatens the ecosystem, human and animal health, a $12 billion tourism industry, the local economy and safe drinking water supplies.

And yet, the State’s plans for Lake Erie rely too heavily on farmers to voluntarily adopt practices to reduce harmful nutrients, preventing Michigan from meeting its nutrient reduction goals. In response, we’re calling for a variety of approaches to chart a path toward a cleaner Lake Erie.

Last September, the Environmental Council, Michigan League of Conservation Voters, Environmental Law & Policy Center, Alliance for the Great Lakes, For Love of Water and Freshwater Future collaborated on a comment letter outlining our argument to establish numeric standards for the nutrients that contribute to toxic algal blooms, as well as microcystin, a dangerous type of cyanotoxin. Implementing such standards can improve monitoring of water bodies to determine if they are meeting their designated uses, such as for drinking water supplies and safe recreation.

We’re also continuing to address algae-fueling nutrient runoff from Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs). By intervening in a case contesting improved standards for these operations, we’re helping ensure CAFOs are safely storing and using manure. This is one of many examples of the Environmental Council’s ongoing commitment to improving current standards while we also work to ensure more environmentally protective measures on mid to small size farms as well.

Protecting water in Michigan is a complex network of intersecting issues, moving parts and stakeholder interests. The urgency behind finding solutions that navigate those complexities is a real race against the clock, and we need all the support we can get in this fight. We all face the personal and professional consequences of an inadequate response—this is what pushes me each day to advance change here at the Environmental Council.
It's hard to imagine, but lead poisoning prevention in Michigan is only a recent priority. Increasing legislative funding for lead cleanup programs was stagnant for decades. That changed in 2010 with the formation of the Michigan Alliance for Lead Safe Homes (MIALSH).

MIALSH is a coalition of health, housing, business, medical and environmental professionals committed to ending childhood lead poisoning in Michigan. As part of my work at the Environmental Council, I serve as MIALSH organizer, supporting the critical building of bipartisan support necessary to meet our lead poisoning goals. I believe in fostering relationships with allies across the aisle. I've used my years of environmental and public health expertise to ensure that an issue that was once considered a non-priority is now getting the attention it deserves. MIALSH's advocacy work is foundational in this space, driving $6.5 million in total funding for lead prevention programs through the Michigan Legislature, not including state match dollars that leverage over $100 million in federal funds.

We can attribute these successes to network building, close alignment with expert staff within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, developing media relationships, statewide membership, raising money to address the problem, giving the stage to impacted families to tell their stories, educating lawmakers and building solutions.

In 2021, the Environmental Council celebrated a big win for our 10-year effort by securing $2 million in seed capital for the Lead Prevention Fund, a loan loss reserve fund modeled after MI Saves, which will provide below-interest loans to landlords and homeowners to make their homes lead safe. Previously, there were no state or federal dollars available to help non-Medicaid eligible families with these often costly repairs. Now more low- to moderate-income homeowners will get the help they need, too.

This progress is significant and urgent. 70% of Michigan’s housing stock is old enough to be a lead paint and plumbing risk. Lead prevention is a statewide problem and demands a statewide response, which includes every at-risk Michigander. And that’s all of us.

It’s critical that we all share the same message: lead poisoning is totally preventable.

At the forefront of lead poisoning prevention, 10 years and counting

It’s a problem of aging and deteriorating housing stock, in urban and rural settings. Because the symptoms of lead poisoning are largely invisible, impacted children are often undiagnosed and therefore untreated. They don’t receive the additional nutrition and literacy support that they need. This lack of treatment and support can lead to lower learning potential, lower IQ, chronic health problems, greater risk of incarceration and increased likelihood of not finishing high school. We can’t stay silent. It’s on each of us to demand that no more children in Michigan experience the consequences of lead poisoning.

The bipartisanship around lead prevention is steering this massive ship in the right direction. Lawmakers across the aisles have come together in support of this common sense lead policy because health should not be a political issue.

One example of that bipartisanship in action is the Lead Bill Package. Introduced in 2021, it is a series of important changes to facilitate a number of outcomes, covering everything from lowering thresholds for elevated blood lead levels, to equipping the health care sector with lead exposure solutions, to updating antiquated home inspection standards. It largely follows the priorities of MIALSH, and it was influenced by the alliance’s members.

We know our advocacy is also working beyond the Legislature. Participation in our annual Lead Education Day has increased exponentially over the years, growing from ten people the first year, to around 100 each of the last three years. It’s a day to engage with state lawmakers about lead poisoning prevention and it represents the voices of lead impacted families, research institutions, clinicians, building contractors, lead professionals and state and local public health agencies across Michigan.

The wins of 2021 have provided us with an opportunity to reflect on how far we’ve come on the issue of lead—but there is still so much work to do. As the Environmental Council and MIALSH build confidence through data and action, we embolden our stakeholders with this simple message: "The world is a better place, and I chose a career that I can feel good about each and every day without fail."

What led you to working with the Environmental Council? When I joined the Environmental Council over a decade ago, it was a veteran organization that was non-partisan, pragmatic, policy minded and sought consensus and solutions. We were expert, trusted thought leaders in the environmental space—and we still are to this day.

What do you think is Michigan’s most powerful example of environmental policy? The most powerful example I can think of is not a positive one. When the “polluters pay” law was abolished in 1995, the burden was shifted to the state to prove liability on a site instead of its owner. This has led to abandoned and contaminated sites all over the state and not enough tax dollars in most cases to clean them up, putting the communities in their wake at risk every day. Prior to this, Michigan had the strongest law of its kind in the country, spearheaded by Senator Lana Pollack, who would later serve as the CEO of the Environmental Council. The Educational Council Today is dedicated to finding common sense solutions to this issue, and getting our state to renew its commitment to cleaning up old contaminated sites.

What impact of the Environmental Councils’ work do you hope to see realized? I would like to see a breakdown of silos between environmentalists and health clinicians. The environmental community, public health professionals and medical practitioners should all be on the same page and same team to address environmental threats to health. We can accomplish so much more if we work together.

What will your environmental legacy be? The legacy to listen and be inclusive. I am a big supporter of coalition work to both identify and work to right a barrier or obstacle. Having a diverse and representative table makes for better policy and lasting equitable solutions for all involved.

Tina Wahl, with Health Policy Director Tina Wahl
Priorities in Action: Clean Water

Becca Maher with the Environmental Council since 2020

Why did you choose a career in environmentalism?
My passion for my work is rooted in all of the amazing natural places I've had the privilege of experiencing. Our great outdoors is one of the reasons I love living in Michigan. Working to protect our environment is my way of ensuring future Michiganders can experience the same—or better!—Michigan outdoors I have been able to.

What led you to working with the Environmental Council?
When I worked in the Michigan Legislature, I was always so impressed by the deep knowledge and expertise the Environmental Council staff regularly brought to the table. I was excited about the opportunity to learn from and contribute to that kind of team when I joined.

What do you think is Michigan's most powerful example of environmental policy?
The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, established in 1976. I benefited from the parks and public lands funded by the program long before I learned about the landmark policy behind them.

What impact of the Environmental Council’s work do you hope to see realized?
Traditionally, we approach lawmakers to identify problems and policy solutions. With the question of school-based lead exposure, lawmakers came to us. We’ve since led the effort to draft, pass and fund the most cost effective and protective solution: “Filter First,” legislation that safeguards access to clean, lead-free drinking water for Michigan’s children.

What will your environmental legacy be?
Safeguarding clean, lead-free drinking water for Michigan’s children

Filter First builds on the Natural Resources Defense Fund’s model legislation for filtration and testing. With bipartisan sponsorship from Senators Jim Ananich (D) and Curt VanderWall (R), Michigan Senate Bills 184 and 185 put certified lead-removing filters between the source and children’s mouths. It calls for installing filtered drinking water stations or on-tap filters in all schools and childcare facilities.

Advancing Filter First has been an opportunity to collaborate with organizations the Environmental Council doesn’t often have a chance to work with. Over the last two legislative sessions, we’ve built an implementation strategy, testified extensively, testified in committee and activated support from some 30 additional stakeholders. We joined forces with health, clean water, child and education advocates to build awareness and momentum for this water filtration effort. Leveraging these relationships strengthens our organization and adds legitimacy to the bills.

In the last few months, the Environmental Council celebrated two significant wins for Filter First, demonstrating that protecting our kids from lead in schools is a bipartisan issue. In late 2021, both bills passed out of the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality without opposition, and funding for Filter First was included in the bipartisan budget plan passed and signed in March 2022.

By the end of the 2022 legislative session, we hope that 1.5 million Michigan children will be one step closer to drinking lead-safe water in their schools and childcare centers. With the funding secured, we will be working hard over the next few months to pass the implementation bills out of the Senate and get them through the House.

As we celebrate the progress these bills have made and the organizations that came together to get us this far, we know it’ll be our job to make sure this important legislation is implemented quickly and effectively if signed. Filter First is a critical investment in our children’s health today and in their potential tomorrow. The Environmental Council will follow it through however long it takes.

Prior to the water crises in Flint and Benton Harbor, access to clean, safe drinking water was easy to take for granted. As Americans, we expected our faucets to simply provide it on demand. As Michiganders, the value of fresh water is stamped into our DNA.

That changed when our neighbors learned they were being poisoned by lead in their drinking water—that is something we can’t collectively unsee.

There is no safe level of lead exposure. Lead poisoning is permanent and particularly damaging for children. That’s why the Environmental Council is working to put an end to it.

One of our primary efforts focuses on drinking water lead contamination in schools and childcare centers, the places children spend a lot of time. Lead is in the plumbing of both old and new schools—even modern, “lead-free” plumbing can have a percentage of lead. Corrosion control in these buildings is ineffective and the “test and chase” method of screening is unreliable.

Becca Maher

with Strategic Campaigns Director Becca Maher

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Sandra Turner-Handy with the Environmental Council since 2008

Why did you choose a career in environmentalism? It chose me!

What led you to working with the Environmental Council? Detroiters were experiencing a high rate of health issues due to environmental policy and procedures. Joining the Environmental Council team provided the platform and resources to broaden the impact, amplifying advocacy around environmental injustices and the increased health impacts that negatively influence the lives of Detroiters.

What do you think is Michigan’s most powerful example of environmental policy? I don’t think it’s happened quite yet. Until we see State departments like EGLE rise as one of the strongest enforcers of clean-in-the-sand laws—really prioritizing preventing harm to Michiganders through protecting the environment in which we live—I don’t see us realizing true environmental justice. People are our greatest asset, so we need equal passion for the environment and our people. You cannot save one without saving the other.

What impact of the Environmental Council’s work do you hope to see realized? Continuing to learn how they can advocate for developing policy through an environmental justice lens. We aren’t there yet, but I think we can be well on our way if we prioritize talking with and listening to the people impacted by their environments and the policies intended to help them. We can’t provide the solution if we don’t know the story.

What will your environmental legacy be? That I was authentic in my work and life in influence the lives of Detroiters.

People at the core: Reflecting on environmental justice in Detroit

For 13 years, Sandra Turner-Handy has been the driving force behind the Environmental Council’s work to put environmental sustainability, health and justice front and center in Detroit’s resurgence. In honor of Sandra’s long, impactful tenure at the Environmental Council and as she looks forward to retirement later this year, we’re taking the opportunity to hear firsthand about her experiences along the way.

I love my city and its people. I was born and raised in Detroit, and I have lived all over this city—from the east side to the west side. I raised my family here and now have great-grandchildren here. I landed in environmental advocacy by accident, but all it took was one hot afternoon in the middle of July. At the time I was chief of staff for a senator and was called to help residents in a neighborhood suffering from untreated wastewater being discharged into the sewer system. I looked at what was happening to the residents and that was enough. It called me into the environmental space and taught me what environmental justice really meant.

Detroit is the largest city in the state; it is also the most polluted. Cleaning it up and defending Detroiters’ right to live healthy, safe lives required approaching the problem through an environmental lens. That’s where the Environmental Council comes in. The Environmental Council was not only able to impact environmental policy at the state level but it strengthened the impact by hiring a Detroiter to work on the local level. And that was me.

The grassroots and grasstops relationships I’d established in my previous political work allowed us to enter spaces and conversations we might not have otherwise. It took a couple of years to get the Environmental Council established in the city as a viable environmental and environmental justice organization, but we got there and started seeing major wins as a result.

We win have made a direct impact on Detroit and its people. Over the years, we’ve seen a higher quality of life for all Detroiter that is increasingly moving toward equity in social, environmental and economic areas. On the individual level, that looks like a decrease in asthma rates, an increase in green space and infrastructure for gardening or community gathering places, vacant land reuse, growing residential involvement in building their healthy city and so on. It’s not where we want it to be quite yet, but the shift toward those outcomes is noticeable.

One of my favorite examples is the increased pride and joy associated with community development. In 2021, we celebrated the 13th year of ARISE Detroit! Neighborhoods Day, a celebration of all the great work block clubs, churches, schools, community groups and local businesses do in the city. There were maybe 10 neighborhoods when ARISE started, now it’s close to 200.

When I think about community impact, I immediately turn to our Denby neighborhood kids—the ones who said that when they turned 18, they were leaving and never coming back to the city. We now have two of those young people leading community projects and one who is working with different community groups in their role at a foundation.

This community pride and joy is part of the legacy I want to leave behind. When I go to these events and see people and communities take ownership of their city and their experiences, it feels like I’ve done part of my job. There’s more to do, of course, but our people bring their voice and passion for the city and their communities to the table makes me so proud.

On a government and policy level, I’ve had the opportunity to enact change as a cofounder of the Detroit Environmental Agenda (DEA), a coalition dedicated to the environmental issues impacting our residents. In 2012, we called for the development of an office of sustainability in the city. We needed sustainability for our natural and built environment, and this moved us in that direction. In 2017, Mayor Duggan created the Office of Sustainability, which then developed a community-driven sustainability action agenda. And for me, the DEA’s biggest success was the creation of an educational voters guide to help inform residents about the environmental viewpoint of those running for local offices.

Continued >>
Together we also created Zero Waste Detroit, which allowed us to bring residential curbside recycling to the city and eventually led to the shutdown of the Detroit incinerator in 2019. The incinerator had long been a source of air pollution, and we helped get the State to do a consent judgment against the facility, imposing large daily fines when it was out of attainment. When the incinerator finally closed down, it greatly improved the quality of life for the people living in its shadow.

We still play an active role in the DEA, and my hope is that it will be one of the many ways we continue to push for the equitable environmental change that matters most to Detroiters.

In 2021, the Environmental Council doubled down on its investment in the city and celebrated the launch of its revitalized Detroit Program, an effort to build on the work we’ve already done in strategic and meaningful ways, because we know what’s good for Detroit is good for Michigan. It needs to be our responsibility to make sure the voices of our impacted communities are heard in Lansing, because the consequences of not doing so are too great. Decisions get made at the Capitol without an equitable lens—these are decisions made on behalf of Detroiters based purely on data, which cannot possibly tell the whole story. Data doesn’t reflect the personal generational stories and power stripped from so many Detroiters.

We are all born with equal power. When we come onto this earth, no one has any more power than anybody else. It is just how we utilize that power. We know that for a lot of residents that power has been deleted—they’ve been marginalized. When their voices are not heard, they become quieter and quieter. They sit back because no matter what they do, it’s not going to matter. They’ve been quieted into not being able to be active participants in the life that goes on around them. But the power is there. You cannot empower someone, because they have just as much power as you—the difference is they haven’t been able to utilize it. When we re-energize that power, we begin to move things in our lives.

That is why it’s so important that the voices being re-energized are in the circles we have been pushed out of for a long time. We belong in the Capitol halls and in the offices in Lansing, speaking out against decisions being made on our behalf and without us at the table.

The groundwork has been laid and the relationships have been made in Detroit. The Environmental Council has a real presence here. My hope is that we can keep this moving forward, because it’s made a difference. We can’t go back, and we can’t stop now. I’ll stay on this trek from my city to the Capitol alongside the Environmental Council, even as I step back from out front. I will continue to use my voice on behalf of my community.

I’m also hopeful that the Environmental Council, through this program and more generally, will continue to inwardly and outwardly invest in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in a way that prioritizes environmental justice in policy development every step of the way. DEI is much more than practices and policies or human resources. It’s believing lived experiences matter and understanding being equal is not being equitable—and we must build equity.

Our planet is just a beautiful, beautiful diamond. But as residents of this world, we have to polish it up sometimes to keep the sparkle and shine. The only way future generations are going to get to enjoy this diamond is if we stay steadfast in protecting our environment and preventing harm to our people. That’s how we keep the diamond sparkling.
Upon retiring to the Grayling area in 2006, Karen Harrison decided to try volunteering on a local river-restoration effort. She hasn’t stopped since. In fact, she went on to join several conservation groups, including Michigan Trout Unlimited’s Mason-Griffith Founders Chapter.

For the last eight years, Karen has served as the chapter’s service-oriented president, amassing impressive accomplishments to preserve and protect the Au Sable and Upper Manistee rivers and watersheds. She has planned, directed, and participated in restoration and enhancement projects. She has raised about $1 million to fund them. She has forged partnerships with community groups, local governments, and residents to maximize their positive impacts. Plus, her outreach strategies have attracted more members.

Today, Mason-Griffith is one of the most active and successful of Trout Unlimited’s 387 chapters. Karen must be one of its most engaged members. As colleagues will note, it’s rare not to see her immersed in any of dozens of chapter events held each year, whether it is a fly-tying class, an insect survey, a cedar tree planting, or stream access improvement effort. Such a ceaseless commitment to conservation is remarkable. And its led to impressive enhancements for these two special rivers.

Frank Ettawageshik focuses on possibilities, not obstacles. And this positive, big-picture perspective has fueled an impressive four-decade career. Working with countless causes and initiatives, he helped realize many advances for water and wildlife preservation, climate change protection, and tribal sovereignty, while elevating Indigenous peoples’ voices.

Frank got his start in a transformational, 16-year tenure as chairman of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. Among other accomplishments, he had a hand in two key highlights: a 2004 accord that required U.S. tribes and Canadian First Nations be involved in government actions to protect the Great Lakes and a 2007 international declaration to promote native peoples’ common climate change interests. In the years since, he’s advocated in arenas far and wide, including the United Nations Paris climate conference, where he worked to ensure Indigenous rights and interests were addressed in the resulting agreement.

But he’s far from done. Frank now leads the United Tribes of Michigan and serves with many nonprofits and governmental entities like the Michigan Water Use Advisory Council. Recently, he was appointed to the advisory board that oversees the important Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which he had helped create. His focus on what’s possible isn’t waveri.
Interconnectivity in action.

Conan Smith became the Environmental Council’s president and CEO in May 2019, but he also worked with the organization from 1998 to 2004.

As a child I only saw the simple parts of a forest: a budding trillium, a leafing maple.

Coming back year after year, I learned the trillium doesn’t thrive without the shade of the maple. Everywhere I walked I saw another organism, another relationship, all held in delicate yet resilient balance. In a balanced ecosystem, even destruction and violence seem more acceptable. The mouse gnaws at the flower seed, the owl swallows the mouse.

But as a species, humankind has an amazing propensity for destruction. Our inexorable need to take up more space, gobble up more resources, control more of the natural world—and the speed with which we inflict these changes—have put our planet in peril.

Our human social and political systems are fully capable of advancing our species without continually soiling our home, but powerfully selfish interests stand between us and sustainability. To counter them, our movement must become more effective at tapping into Michiganders’ innate love and respect for the environment. We need to better understand and leverage the collective power of thousands of advocates to insist that policy makers fundamentally and systemically transform Michigan’s approach to environmental stewardship.

The ECOsystem

Over the past two decades, I’ve learned a lot about network theory and movement building, both in an academic context and through the school of hard knocks. I can say definitively that no one person—not a governor, not a business leader, not a bright-eyed silver-tongued activist—is going to guide Michigan’s environmental movement to such a state of undeniable influence. Nor should we want that. In a movement full of brilliant and effective leaders, we need systems and tools for them to elevate their excellence and compound it with that of their peers. Rather than leadership, rather than “control,” our movement needs stewardship.

Continued >>
In 2022 the Michigan Environmental Council is embarking on what will certainly be a years-long effort to understand, support and strengthen the network—the system of "environmental and conservation organizations" (ECOs) in Michigan. More than 1,500 nonprofits across our state, ranging from garden clubs to state chapters of powerful national organizations, make up our movement. Together we would be a powerful social and political force.

The curiosity about our interconnectivity that I held as a child extends now to this unheralded latticework of advocates, stretching and intertwining beneath the surface like the roots of an ancient aspen stand. Where are these 1,500 organizations? What do they work on? How many staff and volunteers do we have together? How do we connect to each other? And what can we do to radically escalate the frequency and quality of interactions amongst us all?

The Environmental Council will be working with allies like the Michigan Nonprofit Association and the Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University to research and document the state of Michigan’s ECO movement, and we hope to engage many of you—organization leaders, activists, funders—in shaping the ways we come together more powerfully and intentionally.

Race + Our Environment

Intrinsically connected to this work is the Environmental Council’s own quest for greater racial equity—in our organization, in our movement and in our collective impact. The environmental movement is critically monocultural. At the national level, the nonprofit Green 2.0 has helped shed light on the racial makeup of environmental organization boards and staff, and the C.S. Mott Foundation is driving demographic data collection among its grantees through Guidestar. Leadership like this will support us in doing state-based assessments and designing tools for diversity that work across our movement.

Understanding and improving diversity in our field is critically important because it underpins more substantive work to address environmental injustices in communities of color and the racialization of environmental and conservation issues that should be of serious concern to all of us.

For the Environmental Council, much of this work manifests through our newly refreshed Detroit Program. While just 6% of the state population, Detroit is home to more than 10% of our Latinx residents and 36% of our Black residents. No movement work on diversity, equity and inclusion will be authentic without an understanding of the interests of Detroiter. Our Detroit program will focus on networking the city’s ECOs, building relationships through shared projects and amplifying local priorities in state policymaking.

The challenges we face as environmentalists are as vast and diverse as Michigan’s ecosystem itself. But ours is a movement with extraordinary untapped potential, and our cause is not only just but essential to the survival of our species—and the millions of others with whom we share this planet.

Let’s stand together to explore, energize and elevate Michigan’s environmental and conservation movement! We’ll look to a future where no Michigan resident lives with poisoned air or tainted water, where our cities are strong and healthy, and where this precious place, this jewel of the Great Lakes, is an even better home for those who come after us.

Forward together,

Conan Smith
President & CEO
## 2021 Statement of Activities

### Revenue
- **Grants**: $1,232,680
- **Donations & Events**: $614,888
- **Endowment Support**: $116,732
- **Member Dues**: $5,000
- **Interest & Misc.**: $271,311
- **Paycheck Protection Program**: $274,100
- **Total Revenue**: **$2,454,711**

### Expenses
- **Personnel**: $1,316,260
- **Operations**: $115,812
- **Partner Grants**: $51,097
- **MPSC Interventions**: $158,582
- **Professional Fees**: $299,478
- **Travel & Events**: $39,723
- **Total Expenses**: **$1,980,952**

## 2021 Statement of Financial Position

### Assets
- **Unrestricted Cash**: $2,482,069
- **Grant Restricted Net Assets**: $81,398
- **Accounts Receivable**: $37,082
- **Other Current Assets**: $500
- **Building & Equipment Net (unrestricted)**: $491,801
- **Endowment Assets at Fair Market**: $1,969,878
- **Action Fund Assets at Fair Market**: $118,819
- **Total Assets**: **$5,181,547**

### Liabilities
- **Grant Restricted Net Assets**: $821,000
- **Endowment Net Assets**: $2,551,809
- **Action Fund Net Assets**: $128,702
- **Total Unrestricted Net Assets**: **$622,183**
- **Net Surplus**: **$473,770**
- **Total Net Assets**: **$4,597,454**

## 2021 Endowment Report

### Endowments
- **Environmental Action Fund**
  - **Beginning Balance**: $129,379
  - **Net Contributions**: $0
  - **Earnings and Capital Appreciation**: $14,844
  - **Management Fees**: $0
  - **Ending Balance**: **$144,857**
- **Pere Marquette Fund**
  - **Beginning Balance**: $2,505,288
  - **Net Contributions**: ($67,230)
  - **Earnings and Capital Appreciation**: $296,635
  - **Management Fees**: ($12,228)
  - **Ending Balance**: **$2,721,465**

### 2021 Revenue
- **Paycheck Protection Program**: 9%
- **Member Dues**: 0.2%
- **Interest & Misc.**: 11%
- **Endowment Support**: 4.8%
- **Donations & Events**: 25%
- **Grants**: 50%

### 2021 Expenses
- **Personnel**: 66%
- **Operations**: 6%
- **Professional Fees**: 15%
- **MSPC Interventions**: 8%
- **Partner Grants**: 3%
- **Travel & Events**: 2%
In 2021, the Environmental Council broke records for the best fundraising year in its history. We want to extend our sincerest gratitude to the supporters that made our work possible this year—your generosity makes all the difference.

### Grant Supporters

- Building Equity and Alignment for Impact
- Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan
- Crown Family Philanthropies
- Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation
- Energy Action Fund
- The Energy Foundation
- Fresh Energy
- The Joyce Foundation
- The Kresge Foundation
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- State of Michigan

### $20,000 & above

- Conrail
- DTE Energy Company
- DTE Energy Foundation
- Jerry Jung
- Scott & Lanette Van Wagenen

### $10,000--$19,999

- Vivian Day & John Stroh III
- Vivian Day & John Stroh III
- Vivian Day & John Stroh III
- Vivian Day & John Stroh III
- Vivian Day & John Stroh III

### $5,000--$9,999

- Gloria & Kevin Brushwyler
- Cherry Republic
- Paul & Anne Glenden
- Olson, Bzdok & Howard P.C.
- Schupan Recycling
- Conan Smith
- TOMRA North America
- Trout Guerillas

### A Year of Historic Support

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- Cherry Republic
- Paul & Anne Glenden
- Olson, Bzdok & Howard P.C.
- Schupan Recycling
- Conan Smith
- TOMRA North America
- Trout Guerillas

**$2,500--$4,999**
- Joan Binkow
- Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice
- Steve & Judy Dobson
- Dusty Fancher & David Kletke
- Robert Lierle
- P3 Petiopren & Jim Laurain
- Lana & Henry Pollack
- Richard Rediske
- Nancy Wheeler

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**$500--$999**
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- The Garden Club of Michigan
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- Great Lakes Meditation
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