

Statement of former Governor William G. Milliken  
On Conservation of Michigan Wetlands

March 13, 2009

As the Governor and Michigan Legislature review the status and determine the future of Michigan's Wetland Protection Act, I would like to urge them to take the long view of what is best for the state and its natural resources.

I am proud to have signed the Wetland Protection Act into law in 1979. Enacted with bipartisan support, the law has protected large amounts of valuable wetland resources from alteration and destruction. Estimated annual losses of wetlands covered by the law have slowed from thousands of acres per year to a few hundred. Where alteration or destruction of wetlands has occurred, the law has required the creation of wetlands and the permanent protection of existing undeveloped wetlands.

These are important steps in correcting our historical mistreatment of wetlands. Thanks to modern science, we understand now how important wetlands are economically as well as environmentally. Wetlands provide water quality benefits and help reduce flood damage while also furnishing critical fish and wildlife habitat. Wetlands benefit the people and the economic health of our state.

Although I understand the need for increased efficiencies in state government, I do not believe the relatively small amount of public funding saved justifies the repeal of the Wetland Protection Act. This law, 30 years after its passage, remains a national model. Federal agencies simply do not have the authority nor the funding to administer adequately the protection of Michigan wetlands. Repeal of the law would be a huge setback to this and future generations.

Abandonment of the commitment this law represents is not in the interests of Michigan. Our state cannot claim to be a thoughtful steward of the Great Lakes if it neglects the wetland resources that are critical to their health. I therefore urge the Governor and Legislature to affirm the importance of wetland conservation as a core Michigan value, maintain the Wetland Protection Act, and work together to seek adequate resources for its effective administration.