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### **Senate Great Lakes protection package leaves waters vulnerable, shuts citizens out**

Proposed Senate legislation to protect the Great Lakes is inadequate, a coalition of environmental, conservation, business and religious groups said today after hearings on the bills.

“Despite unanimous agreement that Michigan’s water is a world-class asset, the current Senate legislation inexplicably falls well short of world-class protection,” said Cyndi Roper of Clean Water Action.

The bills would leave large percentages of rivers and streams available for withdrawal by water takers; limit opportunities for public input into water withdrawal proposals; and fail to acknowledge that groundwater is a public resource rather than a private commodity.

“None of this is acceptable,” said Grenetta Thomassey of the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council. “The Great Lakes contain 20 percent of the world’s fresh surface water, and we should be defending them vigorously. We look to Michigan’s staunch defenders in the Senate to say no to this lukewarm protection package.”

The package includes ratification of the proposed Great Lakes Compact which has strong bipartisan support in Michigan. The rest of the package implements the Compact through weak protection measures that determine who may take large quantities of Michigan water from rivers, streams and groundwater, and under what conditions.

The process needs to better reflect community values and what is important to local residents when it comes to protecting water, said water protection proponents.

“A withdrawal in Van Buren County may be viewed differently than one from the headwaters of the Au Sable River outside of Grayling,” said James Clift of the Michigan Environmental Council. “The process needs to be able to recognize the difference, take input from the public and make the right decision. If this package is not changed, then citizens from those areas will be barred from the process and unable to provide public comment – whether they support or oppose the withdrawal.”

Lake levels are near record lows. One of the decisions our lawmakers are being asked to make is what further reduction of flows in our lakes and streams are Michigan residents willing to allow, and under what circumstances.

The Senate package allows up to 25% of the summer flows of rivers and streams to be removed. A permit would only being required for withdrawals in excess of 2 million gallons a day.

To meet standards necessary to protect Michigan waters, the package must:

- Ensure ground water is recognized as a public resource, subject to meaningful public trust protection.
- Ensure large water users in sensitive areas are required to participate in a permit process.
- Ensure the new water withdrawal assessment tool is utilized conservatively. It should not allow unreasonably large withdrawals from our rivers and streams.
- Ensure the public has the opportunity to submit relevant, site-specific local information when reviewing potential impacts to natural resources.

“We are at a critical juncture for the future of the waters that sustain our economy, health and way of life,” said Clift. “How this legislation plays out will help determine the environmental legacy that these Senators leave behind.”

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