

*Ruin & Recovery*



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Michigan's Rise as a Conservation Leader

Dave Dempsey

*Foreword by* William G. Milliken

Ann Arbor

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS**

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Published in the United States of America by  
The University of Michigan Press  
Manufactured in the United States of America  
© Printed on acid-free paper

2004 2003 2002 2001 4 3 2 1

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*A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dempsey, Dave, 1957–

Ruin & recovery : Michigan's rise as a conservation leader / Dave Dempsey ;  
foreword by William G. Milliken.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. )

ISBN 0-472-09779-2 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-472-06779-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Nature conservation—Michigan—History. I. Title: Ruin and recovery.

II. Title.

QH76.5.M5 D46 2001

333.7'2'09774—dc21

2001027378

*To Michigan's conservation  
and environmental heroes  
past and present, who have  
often fought alone and  
always against enormous  
odds to protect Michigan's  
majesty in a future they will  
not live to see.*



## Foreword

Michigan has a long and proud history of conservation. The country's second national park was established in Michigan. We were leaders in banning PCBs and DDT. We took the lead in protecting the future of our tremendous Great Lakes resources.

The people of Michigan adopted bond proposals to increase recreational opportunity and spent their hard-earned dollars to clean up the state's waters and lands in 1968 and 1988. The people of Michigan also amended the state's constitution to protect the heritage of the Natural Resources Trust Fund in 1984 and adopted the "bottle bill" in 1976.

Michigan citizens have always held natural resources and outdoor recreation among their highest priorities. And they are willing to make—and indeed insist on making—sacrifices to improve and protect their environment.

We must be concerned about what our landscape will look like in the future and the opportunities it will provide to future generations of our citizens. That means *all* our citizens—whether they live on farms, in rural areas, or in our cities.

One of my great regrets is that despite extraordinary efforts by organizations like the Michigan United Conservation Clubs and the Farm Bureau, by Attorney General Frank Kelley, and by members of my own administration, we were never able to achieve legislative adoption of laws to give proper incentives and tools to allow local units of government to properly manage growth.

While there have been exemplary initiatives at the local level—like the remarkable achievement on Old Mission Peninsula in Grand Traverse County to preserve the character of that area—state government simply has not done enough.

Recently, I have been reading a good deal on the subject of land use and more specifically about the trends here in Michigan. I ran across one absolutely stunning statistic. A report by the Michigan Society of Planning Officials predicts that if things do not change here in Michigan, in less than 25 years we will increase our state's population by a little over one million people. But the land area that will be converted for residential and commercial use to serve those one million new citizens will be equal to the amount of land that *nine* million people lived on when I was governor in 1978.

Our present system of land use decision making is not good for the environment; it is not good for our economy; it is not good for urban centers; it is not good for farmers; it is not good for hunters, fishers, and other outdoor enthusiasts; it is not good for industry; it is not good for taxpayers. Indeed, the only groups that benefit from the present system are those who speculate in land and whose profits are derived at the expense of the general public.

Sprawl is a plague on the land.

In recent years, it has become almost unpopular to talk about the quality of life in our state. It is as if somehow dollars and development are now the only measures of our state's success. This is evident not only in the lack of attention to natural resource matters but also in many other areas of government decision making.

I believe that we should not measure human progress solely on the basis of what we have built but also on what we have preserved and protected.

In recent years, I believe, we have begun to turn away from the great conservation legacy that so many have built before us.

The simple truth is that Michigan has always been and will always be a "quality of life" state. The truth is that the quality of human life in Michigan depends on nature. The natural beauty of Michigan is much more than a source of pleasure and recreation. It shapes our values, molds our attitudes, feeds our spirits.

In this volume, Dave Dempsey has sketched the story of how Michigan's leadership in protecting its natural heritage came to be. He illustrates the way in which Michigan's beauty shaped a matchless movement of citizens and public officials determined to protect that heritage. For more than one hundred years, that movement has worked to build a legacy that is the envy of the nation.

This is a remarkable work: Dave's research is impressive, his writing is lucid and eminently readable, and the message is like a clarion call. It is my hope that Dave's book will inspire others to carry on this conservation tradition and to assure the quality of life and beauty of landscape that we know in Michigan far into the future.

William G. Milliken  
August 2000

## *Acknowledgments*

Three people deserve a special acknowledgment and my almost inexpressible gratitude for making this book possible. Dozens of others have also given selflessly of their time and thoughts to help it along.

Lana Pollack, president of the Michigan Environmental Council and a longtime hero of mine, supported the idea of the book from its first mention in her presence and raised the funds to enable me to research and write it. But just as inspiring to me are her long and selfless career of public service and her sometimes overlooked contributions to the state.

Rick Jameson, the late executive director of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, is also responsible for the book through the example of his life's work. To his last day he worked to reconcile Michigan's environmental and conservation movements and to assure an outdoor legacy for Michiganians of the future.

My late father, John Dempsey, was also a source of inspiration for this book. Part of a generation of men and women dedicated to building a better Michigan, he taught me the value of public service and the importance of learning from history.

Of particular help in reconstructing the growth and development of Michigan's environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s was Joan Wolfe, a founder of the West Michigan Environmental Action Council. Her devotion to detail is as unflinching as her devotion to the earth, and her careful review of sections of the manuscript helped prevent errors and enrich the text.

Wayne Schmidt, the former staff ecologist at the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, supplied an important and unusually candid memoir of his service in the Michigan conservation movement, which was also indispensable in constructing the environmental history of the 1970s.

Two women deserve special recognition for their professional and personal support of this book. Marlene Fluharty, a former member of the Michigan Natural Resources Commission and executive director of the Americana Foundation, provided the seed money and moral support to get the project off the ground. Lois Debacker, grant officer at the C.S. Mott Foundation, helped spearhead the private fundraising that paid for much of my time in research and writing. Both are cherished friends as well as important contributors to the beauty and health of Michigan.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Persons who gave generously of their time to meet or speak at length with me and ransacked their files, attics, and minds for helpful memories include Jack Bails, the former deputy director of the Department of Natural Resources; Merrill “Pete” Petoskey, the former DNR wildlife chief; Verna Courtemanche, who battled the Berlin and Farro waste site across the street from her home; Don Wilson, who championed the protection of the Bridgman sand dunes; William G. Milliken, the former governor of Michigan and the only acclaimed environmental leader to hold that job; and Andrew Hogarth, the assistant division chief of the Department of Environmental Quality’s Environmental Response Division, who took special pains to assure the accuracy of the text on chemical contamination. I also want to thank Patrick Diehl, my colleague at the Michigan Environmental Council, for his patient proofreading of early drafts of the manuscript; no one cares more about getting it right than Pat.

Thanks also to the friends who have supported, tolerated, and encouraged me in my environmental work and in life: Derwin Rushing, Tom Vance, Joe VanderMeulen, Kathleen Aterno, Libby Harris, Carol Misseldine, Leslie Brogan, and Margaret Schulte. My mother Barbara and my brothers, Thomas and Jack, have also loyally supported me in the face of logic to the contrary. My apologies to the many unnamed others who contributed to this book in large and small ways. I will thank you personally all the rest of my life.

Of course, I cannot overlook the important role in my personal and writing life of two dear people—Pam Omer and her son, Taylor. They have personally endured my own ruin—and what I hope is a recovery; they accepted and supported me when they had little reason to do so. I owe them an immeasurably great debt. I respect and cherish these two, who have the fierce hearts of wolves, the discerning intelligence of owls, and the playful humor of river otters. Their love of the natural world and its animal inhabitants has deepened mine.

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