Michigan: Our Land, Our Water, Our Heritage

Edited by John Knott

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It’s all about connections” you’ll hear people say. It is true. We are all connected. We are people whose hearts have been captivated by Michigan’s forest, water, and shoreline, and our history has been shaped and dominated by them. We belong to a region that provides breathtaking beauty, working lands that sustain us, and a rich culture defined by our relationship with land and water. And we are part of the largest freshwater system in the world, the Great Lakes. Together, we must understand the deep interconnections of the natural world, our culture, our economy, and our future.

The Nature Conservancy is working to protect the plants, animals, and natural habitats that ensure our very existence and enhance our quality of life across the world—and we are all connected by a vision of a world in which forests, grasslands, deserts, lakes, rivers, and oceans are healthy and vibrant; where their connection to the quality of human life is recognized and valued; where places that sustain both nature and people endure for generations. In this beautiful book, you will visit some of these places—places that embody our heritage and will endure because people will continue to act, steward, and understand how to balance the natural, economic, and cultural needs of our communities, the Great Lakes, and the world for the future. Yet each of us connects to places differently, as our writers did, and as you will when you experience the photographs of places that will endure because of The Nature Conservancy’s efforts in partnership with so many. The connection to place is a powerful one. I have never had a good answer to the question “What person has inspired you most in your life?” It is places that have had the greatest influence on me and that feeling of connectivity with the world that those places brought me. We are all connected by a sense of place in Michigan. It is our land, our water, and our heritage. And we are connected in our responsibility to assure that these places in Michigan, these Great Lakes, endure—five Great Lakes, two countries, and one chance to protect them.
A project of this nature would be impossible without the efforts not only of the writers and photographers whose work it features but also of a large supporting cast. Members of the staff of The Nature Conservancy consistently found time in very busy schedules to provide essential help. State Director Helen Taylor conceived of the project, found the necessary support, and was its guiding spirit. Melissa Soule was the liaison who opened doors, solved problems, and got photographers to the right places at the right times. She was assisted by Andrea Strach, Will Elkins, Jake Woods, and Carol Navarro, who provided valuable help finding photographs. Cathy Clifford wrote the introductions to each section of the book, and Steve Sobaski prepared the maps. Denise Copen helped everyone stay on time and track things down throughout the process.

The writers and the editor profited greatly from the expertise of field staff who guided them through Conservancy preserves and patiently answered their questions. These included John Legge, Lisa Niemi, and Andrea Kline, as well as Patrick Doran, Doug Pearsall, Jack McGowan-Stinski, Danielle Miller, Rebeccah Hagerman, Lara Rainbolt, Craig Burns, Matt Kleitch, Julie Stock, Jeff Knoop, and Steve Woods. Volunteers Nadine Cain, Gina Nicholas, James Diem, and Gary Stock generously shared their knowledge of particular preserves with the writers.

The book benefited from the hard work of many of the talented staff at the University of Michigan Press, including editor Mary Erwin, who offered encouragement, support, and unfailing good sense. Kevin Rennells of the Press played an invaluable role in helping to select photographs for the book, lending his experience and good eye.

There always have to be individuals who believe in the vision behind a project and are willing to provide the support necessary to realize it. Those people are Rick and Sue Snyder, who understood the power of the words and images this book could make available. It would not have happened without them.
Thanks to The Nature Conservancy, majestic forests and breathtaking shorelines—magical places that have inspired novels and paintings and generations of hunting and fishing and hiking vacations—will still be a reality and not just a fond memory. ～ Governor Jennifer Granholm