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March 10, 2022

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Keep the U.P. Wild Coalition Passes 300 Members

Environment, recreation, trade, tourism groups among Michigan mainstays seeking Wilderness designation for U.P. lands

MARQUETTE – Since launching in June with just over 60 members, [the Keep the U.P. Wild coalition](#) on Wednesday topped 300 partner organizations calling for Wilderness designation for four areas of the Upper Peninsula.

While Michigan's strong environmental community is represented in the coalition through groups including the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition, Michigan Environmental Council, Michigan Nature Association, Michigan Audubon and the Environmental Law & Policy Center, Keep the U.P. Wild looked also to the economic, tourism, spiritual, academic and recreation benefits of the federal designation.

[Watch: The Michigan Nature Association teamed with award-winning, Michigan-based videography team Fauna Creative to produce a video exploring the areas and the project.](#)

Groups ranging from Founders Brewing and American Spoon to the Michigan Duck Hunters Association and Rivers North Guide Service, from the Upper Peninsula Travel & Recreation Association to Patagonia and Moosejaw are all part of this wide, diverse partnership.

Although these groups have different focuses and purviews, all 302 agree on one thing: In Michigan, our Wilderness *is* our economic strength.

"This is an opportunity to expand the Wilderness opportunities on the south shore of Lake Superior," said **Horst Schmidt, President of the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition**, a founding member of Keep the U.P. Wild. "We want future generations to be able to experience the wonder and beauty of these majestic areas."

Wilderness is the highest level of protection for federal lands, one that would protect these areas in perpetuity, free from the whims of future administrations in D.C. Three of [the four areas Keep the U.P. Wild is working to protect](#) – the Trap Hills, the Ehlco area and Norwich Plains – would create a nearly contiguous National Wilderness area of more than 40,000 acres. The fourth area would add 2,000 acres to the existing Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness area.

[See: Download photos of the four areas seeking Wilderness designation](#)

"The Keep the UP Wild campaign to protect tens of thousands of acres of contiguous protected Wilderness in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan is a critical step toward protecting our nation's biodiversity and wildlife corridors, and will help mitigate the effects of a changing climate," said **Lauren Berutich, Associate Director of Great Old Broads for Wilderness**. "With less than 4% of America's original forests remaining today, it is essential we do everything we can to preserve these lands to sequester carbon, and provide clean air and water for generations to come."

As set in the 1964 Wilderness Act, areas designated as federal Wilderness are "untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." The four U.P. areas under consideration are home to black bear, white-tailed deer, wolves, beavers, moose, and other important flora and fauna.

"To curb the mass extinction crisis and address climate change, scientists and conservationists urge that we protect more of the world's land and water by 2030," said **Jessica Bills of Patagonia**. "Patagonia supports the Keep the U.P. Wild coalition and their efforts to seek a Wilderness designation for parts of the Upper Peninsula. This special place is a gem that we need to protect for generations to come."

Preserving these areas will also help encourage a consistent stream of tourism for the region and enshrine special forms of recreation like hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, birdwatching, kayaking, canoeing, and snowshoeing.

"The Michigan Duck Hunters Association supports the Keep the UP Wild initiative because we understand that quality waterfowling comes from more than just digging ponds and flooding fields," said **Brenton Fetting, President Emeritus of the Michigan Duck Hunters Association**. "It takes holistic habitat management and stewardship. It takes concentrated efforts to maintain continuous, natural nature."

[Engage: The Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition's yearly Celebration will highlight the campaign from 3:30-4:30 p.m. March 12. Watch the free, two-day Celebration live on Zoom or Facebook.](#)

In 2012, visitors spent [half a billion dollars in communities adjacent to Wilderness areas](#), generating 5,700 jobs. When you count secondary economic impacts like a restaurant having to purchase more ingredients or employees spending their paychecks, the local impact of Wilderness topped \$700 million that year alone.

Michigan has a strong and growing \$26.6 billion outdoor recreation economy. [Research from the Michigan United Conservation Clubs](#) shows hunting and fishing related purchases alone generate more than \$11.2 billion annually for our state and more than 171,000 jobs, first among all Great Lakes states.

The coalition has also received the support of the Conservation Alliance, a coalition of more than 250 businesses that promotes community-based campaigns to protect threatened wild habitat and outdoor recreation.

"As a Michigan-based outdoor retailer and Conservation Alliance member, Moosejaw strongly supports Keep the U.P. Wild's important work to protect our greatest outdoor spaces for generations to come," said **Moosejaw CEO Eoin Comerford**.

More information, including a full member list, can be found at www.keeptheupwild.com.