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Media Contact: Paul Dailing, pdailing@elpc.org

60+ Groups Unite to Keep the U.P. Wild

Michigan environmental, recreation, academic, political, religious, and business organizations want Wilderness designation for four tracts of U.P. public land

MARQUETTE – More than 60 environmental, outdoor recreation, academic, political, religious, and business organizations from across the U.P. and Michigan want to Keep the U.P. Wild.

The Keep the U.P. Wild coalition is seeking federal Wilderness designation for four tracts of public land in the Upper Peninsula: the Trap Hills, the Ehlco Area, Norwich Plains, and an addition to the existing Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness area.

“As our population and associated development increase, the demand for resources on public lands will also increase. But so will the need to escape the stresses of an increasingly urbanized world,” said retired Ottawa National Forest Wilderness Ranger Doug Welker of Alston. “Action now will help ensure that those refuges will be available.”

The coalition includes environmental mainstays like the Michigan Environmental Council, the Northwoods Alliance, and Michigan Audubon and a wide array of concerned Michigan groups ranging from the U.P. Wild Church to the Michigan Municipal League to Founders Brewing Co.

Wilderness is [the highest level of protection](#) for public, federal land. It is reserved only for the most special of natural places, areas that, in the words of the 1964 Wilderness Act, are “untrammled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

Preserving these areas will ensure a continuous revenue stream for the region and enshrine special forms of recreation like hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, birdwatching, kayaking, canoeing, and snowshoeing.

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw more people immerse themselves in nature than ever before to rejuvenate their spirits, kindle friendships and stay fit,” said Conan Smith, President & CEO of Michigan Environmental Council. “It’s what makes our \$26.6 billion outdoor recreation economy ever-growing and Michigan a premiere outdoors state for residents and visitors alike.”

[A 2014 study](#) published in the International Journal of Wilderness found that Wilderness designation reaps \$9.4 billion a year – about \$85 an acre – in benefits for the American public. These are benefits that stay stable even during economic downturns.

Together, the Trap Hills, the Ehlco area, and Norwich Plains would create a nearly contiguous National Wilderness area of more than 40,000 acres. The Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness Addition would create

a contiguous Wilderness area of almost 17,000 acres. The areas are home to black bear, white-tailed deer, wolves, beavers, moose, and other flora and fauna.

Information on the campaign and on all four areas can be found at www.keeptheupwild.com.