



Michigan House Natural Resources Committee

Testimony in Support of H.B 5255 Prohibiting Commercial Net Pen Fish Farming in the Great Lakes

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Chairwoman LaFontaine, Ranking Member Kivela, and Members of the Committee, my name is Marc Smith and I am the Policy Director for National Wildlife Federation's Great Lakes Office. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5255, a bill to prohibit commercial net pen fish farming in the Great Lakes. The National Wildlife Federation supports this bill.

The National Wildlife Federation is a wildlife education and policy organization. NWF was founded in 1936 as the national voice of state and local conservation groups, and has since emerged as one of the nation's foremost grassroots conservation organization with close to 6 million members and supporters throughout the United States. The mission of National Wildlife Federation is to inspire Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

For over 80 years, National Wildlife Federation has sought greater protection and restoration of our Great Lakes. With over 230,000 members and supporters alone in Michigan, our efforts are based on sound science and finding common sense solutions to the challenges facing the wildlife and resources of the Great Lakes region. National Wildlife Federation is proudly affiliated with Michigan United Conservation Clubs.

We would like to thank the sponsors of HB 5255: Representatives Jon Bumstead, Pscholka, McCready, Kivela, Garcia, Pettalia, Cochran, Irwin and Rendon.

National Wildlife Federation is very concerned about the risk and impacts that net pen fish farming poses to our Great Lakes. Simply put, commercial net pen fish farms are CAFO's in the Water. This is a bad idea. They pose disease, escapement and effluent risks to our Great Lakes and the Great Lakes fishery. The Great Lakes support a \$7 billion commercial and sport fishery. Michigan alone is approximately \$4.3 billion. Why would we put that at risk? Fortunately, HB 5255 will end that risk by banning fish farming in our Great Lakes. We strongly encourage the Committee to pass this bill.

Specifically, National Wildlife Federation opposes Great Lakes net pen fish farming for the following reasons:

Economics:

The economic analysis completed by Michigan State University identifies a potential boost of \$4.3 million to Michigan's economy. Michigan's sport fishery, the resource most at risk by this venture is, presently, 1000 times more economically valuable at approximately \$4.3 billion. That in and of itself should be sufficient to end the discussion on whether or not Michigan should allow net pen fish farms in our Great Lakes. Unfortunately, it has not been.

Ecological:

Last fall, the science panel report identifies a myriad of ecological issues from disease, escapement, genetic degradation of wild/naturalized fish, water quality impacts, and the like. We should accept nothing less than a much greater command of those impacts before proceeding with this idea. The unknown impacts that this will cause is a far greater risk than what should be tolerated by any agency with a public trust responsibility.

Current Regulatory Framework:

The current regulatory framework in Michigan is inadequate to begin to address the concerns outlined in the science panel report. Moreover, we do not believe that state and federal agencies are adequately funded to develop and sustain adequate regulatory oversight for such a complex endeavor. Additionally, no enforcement actions, fines, penalties, are presently sufficient to compensate the public for the violation of any terms of a permit or other environmental regulation for the losses the public could suffer. Given these inadequacies, this should be sufficient to shut off further consideration of this idea.

Conclusion:

Taken together, the economic and ecological risks compel no other conclusion other than that net pen aquaculture in the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes is bad business. This is bad for the environment, fish and wildlife, and equally bad for the people of Michigan. We are opposed to the concept of a private interest having the right to degrade wild fish and public waters for the advancement of their meager economic interests.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 5255 and the future of our Great Lakes. National Wildlife Federation is committed and ready to work with Members of this Committee, MI DNR, the Governor and all related stakeholders in protecting our Great Lakes, which are so vital to the health of Michigan's wildlife and economy.

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