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My name is Chuck Nelson. For the past 20 years I have coordinated a coalition of non-profit, state and federal entities that have sought North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grants to restore, protect and enhance wetlands in Michigan. This has brought together many partners such as Ducks Unlimited, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Michigan DNR, the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, the Michigan Duck Hunters Association, the Michigan Nature Association, the Upper Peninsula Land Conservancy, tribal entities and many other organizations who have united in the common cause of restoring and protecting wetlands. Of all the organizations that have attended our meetings, only one has never proposed a single wetland restoration project or effort, the Michigan DEQ. Instead their representatives have often counseled about the challenge of getting permits to restore the hydrology of any degraded or former wetland, including sites drained for agriculture a century ago. To date the partners in the NAWCA grant development sessions I have coordinated have successfully received almost \$10 million in federal NAWCA grants matched by over \$20 million in other private and public funds. This has protected, restored and enhanced almost 30,000 acres of Michigan wetlands, often after months long wrangling to get permits from the DEQ. These non-profits, government organizations and individuals are the heart of conservation. They work with WILLING private and public land owners to restore wetlands for cleaner water, flood control, fish and wildlife habitat, ground water recharge and outdoor recreation. They need a partner in state government such as the DNR, not an adversary like the DEQ, to further restore wetlands.

From 2013-17, I was a board member of Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge and chaired the organization for three years. During that time, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposed and the Friends supported, obtaining grant funding to restore a 900-acre agricultural field (Trinklein Tract) on the Refuge to functioning wetland status. The field, farmed since the 1930s, was designated by the MI DEQ as a wetland, even though it had annually produced corn and other cash crops for 80+ years. Working with soil, water and wetland scientists, the FWS used hydrogeomorphic analysis to show the lay of the land, the deeper channels, the ridges, etc. pre-agriculture. The Friends helped fund this exhaustive and expensive process and fully supported the restoration. When the final analysis was provided to DEQ, they told then Refuge Manager Steve Kahl that any earth moved to restore the marsh to its original contours would constitute filling of a wetland that would need to be mitigated. In other words, a PENALTY for voluntarily restoring a vital wetland to its original state. The FWS resisted as they should have. Many of us wrote comments supporting the permit to restore the site, now named the Mannkiki Marsh. The DEQ also suggested that since it would sometimes impound water, the water could be considered FILL in a wetland. Water is NOT fill. It is water, a natural and important part of a wetland. Taking care of water is what wetlands do well. After a LONG struggle, the project was granted a permit by DEQ. The FWS was not forced to mitigate the RESTORATION of original contours and was not penalized for water as fill. Using this experience, most would not consider making the effort to restore wetlands. The easy course instead per the DEQ, keep farming former wetlands. This was and is a WRONG-HEADED approach.

I am here today because citizens, non-profit organizations and public and private landowners WANT to restore wetlands. The expertise in restorations is available and willing, so are the landowners. What is needed is a partner at the State of Michigan as the DNR has shown itself to be, not an adversary as the DEQ has regularly shown themselves to be regarding voluntary wetland restoration. I urge you to pass HB 5854 and HB 5855 to spur voluntary wetland restoration across Michigan.

Thank you.

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