

# Michigan

## **Keweenaw forest protection effort lands full \$5M recommendation**

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LANSING – A large swath of Northwoods near the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula is another step closer to being protected forever from future development and preserved as a critical carbon sink deep into Michigan's Upper Peninsula wilderness.

The largest land purchase recommendation from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund board for 2023 was \$5 million to buy land for the state's public trust in the Keweenaw Peninsula. The board's recommendations on Dec. 14 totaled \$15 million for land acquisition grants and \$8.3 million for project development grants next year.

The trust fund grant recommendations will go before the Michigan Legislature for approval.

In Keweenaw County, Don Piche said the recommended state funding is good news for his community, where he serves as county board chairman. The land being protected from future development and being open to the public forever are both solid wins, he said.

"And not only that, but it's also going to pay a lot of taxes which is going to help our little county out a lot," Piche said.

Andrew Ranville, outreach coordinator for nonprofit Keweenaw Outdoor Recreation Coalition, said the group members celebrated the state funding recommendation news, and are eager for the next round of trust fund grants to continue the land preservation effort. The organization worked to raise funds to preserve the land when it was listed for sale by its hedge fund owner.

The \$5 million state trust fund grant recommendation is part of a larger, \$27.2 million land purchase deal with international nonprofit The Nature Conservancy for more than 31,000 acres of unfragmented and expansive forestland in the most remote stretches of the U.P.

The agreement calls for the state grant dollars to purchase as many acres as possible for the public trust, while the nonprofit holds the remainder as privately preserved land.

Rich Bowman, policy director for The Nature Conservancy in Michigan said the organization is incredibly grateful the trust fund board awarded the full \$5 million request for the Keweenaw Heartlands project.

"We look forward to working with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the community to put these dollars to use and help protect this gem that is critical to the economy and culture of the Keweenaw Peninsula and the entire Great Lakes region," Bowman said.

Related: 31k acres of Keweenaw Peninsula forest preserved forever in \$27M deal

Meanwhile, the nonprofit conservancy group announced on Dec. 22 that it finalized the purchase of the remaining 9,769 acres in its Keweenaw Heartlands project that were not negotiated in the first land deal. That puts the total acreage protected in the effort at more than 32,000 acres.

Dan Eichinger, director of the state Department of Natural Resources, said the trust fund program leverages critical matching dollars and plays a vital role for both economic and quality of life reasons.

"Michigan residents and visitors continue to depend on accessible outdoor recreation, like trails, playgrounds, sports fields and parks, to connect with nature while enjoying a break from their daily routines," he said in a released statement.

In addition to the grant recommendation for the Keweenaw land preservation project, trust fund board members also approved \$1.75 million to acquire Sturgeon River riparian corridor in Otsego County; \$1.65 million to expand Rosy Mound Natural Area in Ottawa County; \$1.3 million to expand Crow Island State Game Area in Bay County; and 11 other land purchases.

Project development grant recommendation include efforts to renovate a canoe and kayak launch in Delhi Metropark in Washtenaw County; extend the Iron Ore Heritage Trail in Marquette County; build a bath house at Pioneer Park in Muskegon County; improve the playground at Orchard Beach State Park in Manistee County; build Richfield Park along the Iron Belle Trail in Genesee County; and 25 additional parks and recreation projects across Michigan.

Source: <https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2022/12/keweenaw-forest-protection-effort-lands-full-5m-recommendation.html>