

Michigan Wildlife Council
Minutes
April 10, 2025

The Michigan Wildlife Council (MWC) met at the Rose Lake Shooting Range, 14500 Peacock Road, East Lansing, Michigan 48823.

Attendees

Nick Buggia, Chair, MWC

Beth Gruden, Vice Chair, MWC

Daniel Cooke, MWC

Dawn Levey, MWC

Jon Spieles, Department of Natural
Resources (DNR)/MWC

Samantha Labadie, Fusion92

Sue LaRue, Fusion92

Jay Fetterman, Fusion92

Franklin Hayes, MWC

Absent: Brent Pike

Virtual: Daniel Ulfing, MWC

Virtual: Jason Garvon, former and pending MWC

Chairperson Nick Buggia called the meeting to order at 10:13 a.m.

Introductions were made by all present.

Gruden made a motion to approve the agenda.

Franklin Hayes seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Buggia made a motion to approve the MWC meeting minutes from February 21, 2025, and **Dawn Levey** seconded. The MWC meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Sue LaRue, Fusion92 presented background and methodology for the evaluation of the three creative concepts as planned. LaRue described the makeup of the six focus groups of Michigan residents including four non-hunters/anglers and two with hunters/anglers.

A few general learnings from those who don't hunt or fish were discussed. First, Fusion92 wanted to make sure the council understands the difficulty of getting the attention of people that don't participate and don't know many people that participate. This audience is not generally opposed to hunting and fishing, but they don't really perceive of a notable positive benefit to them or the state from the activity. They also vastly underestimate the number of dollars hunters and anglers contribute to conservation through purchase of hunting and fishing licenses. The \$95 million figure used in the MWC marketing campaign was viewed as a most adequate sum by many of the participants. Several of the participants (both those that hunt and fish and those that do not) started to wonder what was happening with the money and related a disconnect around the actual cost of natural resource management across the state.

Fusion92 related the opportunity to use that surprise in the amount of funding supplied by hunters and anglers to help people learn more about how funds are used. Once we capture attention, we should be focused on making it easy to teach about the positive impact of conservation work. Many of the participants were left looking for an action or specific ask from the campaign.

The three campaigns were presented with finding and recommendations.

Go Wild for Michigan was engaging and has the potential to excite our audience. The familiar music was noted as Michigan-made and evoked a strong sense of responsibility or the need to do your part to conserve the resource. The message was the strongest among hunters and anglers. Some pieces of the campaign were not clear to participants, like “miles and miles of nothing” and “wild and free isn’t free”.

Recommendation: Given the amount of rework required to optimize this campaign, we do not recommend moving forward. It is unlikely to provide a strong enough “bang for the buck” with nonHunters/Anglers, and our Hunters/Anglers don’t see themselves in it.

Protecting Michigan’s Legacy really did evoke the peace, quiet and beauty of the natural spaces in Michigan and worked to use silence and natural sounds as an attention-getting tool. The presence of kids in the campaign felt warm, created nostalgic feelings, and evoked a desire to protect the land for generations to come.

We consistently heard that there were multiple messages being delivered across the different campaign elements, which sometimes felt less complementary to each other and/or inconsistent or disconnected. The campaign felt less visually distinctive or ownable to MWC in that it felt like it could be a tourism campaign (“Pure Michigan”) or was inviting people to come out and fish, visit a specific park, take a vacation up north, etc. The impact can be lower for those who don’t spend time in outdoor spaces and don’t see themselves in these moments. The current whisper voice-over on the spot and some social elements were often dubbed “creepy” although that is likely a production issue.

Recommendation: To consider this campaign for development with optimizations. It evokes an appreciation for the nature you are conserving and portrays hunting/fishing heroically. Suggested Optimizations include: 1) The auditory branding via the use of quiet and bird/nature sounds is strong; there may be a need to create a visual branding connection for elements like the outdoors that don’t have an equivalent audio component. 2) The whisper voice is likely more of a production issue than a real consumer issue, but the team may want to consider how important a VO is or how best to deliver a VO that complements the quiet environment. 3) Consider streamlining the core message to clearly focus on the benefit that is being provided to Michigan. 4) Currently, the variety of takeaways is diluting the core. Are we communicating the Hunter/Angler as a quiet conservationist? The cultural importance of handing down hunting and fishing to the next generation? Or how licenses benefit Michigan’s natural spaces?

The Support is Real was seen as the most simple, direct and clear messaging, paired with a lighthearted tone. The line “The support is real.” worked well with the \$95M figure as proof of just how “real” and tangible it is. This campaign had a fairly broad appeal among both Non-Hunters/Anglers and Hunters/Anglers. Mythical creatures, or “cryptids” as many of our respondents knew them as, are popular in culture today; a few connected them to childhood memories “up north” as well. This campaign was often deemed the most attention-getting because of the use of those creatures. Has the potential to be appealing to a younger generation/newer entrants (whole family appeal).

Fusion92 describes a few of the weaknesses that emerged during the focus testing. There is some risk of the campaign being taken as more about license acquisition than as an educational campaign. Most of the mythical creatures were not familiar as Michigan-specific

creatures, especially for those without “up north” experiences — for example, awareness of Dogman or Pressie was low in these groups, and Big Foot was familiar, but not necessarily as a Michigan-specific phenomenon. The campaign also did not resonate with a couple of older Hunters/Anglers specifically.

Recommendation: Consider this campaign for development. It has the biggest opportunity to not only breakthrough but also create earned media buzz. It is culturally relevant to our younger audience and delivers the most straightforward message. Recommendations for Optimizations include: 1) The presence of cryptids in books/movies has a pop culture appeal that this campaign could build on further by showcasing Michigan-specific creatures. Finding ways to seed the mythical creatures or anchor them more overtly in Michigan lore as a precursor to, or as part of the campaign, should help to drive that impact. 2) Ensuring that there are ample opportunities to deliver the conservation stories/facts behind the \$95M in Paid Social, Owned and Earned Media should allow the campaign to be the lever that creates interest and engagement.

Chairman Buggia opened the floor to discussion following the presentation. He commented that the Legacy would appeal more to those who hunt and fish because it showed people hunting and fishing and that’s what we have been trying to get to.

Hayes opened with positivity around the Legacy and Support is Real campaigns and suggested Fusion92 and the council could find ways to connect the campaign to fishing opportunities around southern Michigan that this audience has opportunities to participate in. He specifically called out the walleye and striped bass fishing on the Detroit River and other inland opportunities for bass fishing.

Cooke asked about the longevity of this creative campaign and Fusion92 responded with a 3-year recommendation. Dan then stated his concern that the Support is Real campaign would not have that much staying power and did not have the flexibility of the Legacy campaign.

Buggia agree and felt that the Legacy campaign would be more impactful for the long run and would have the added benefit of appealing more with those that hunt and fish.

Hayes agreed with Cooke’s comment and added that the campaign could more easily reflect the seasonal changes in recreational opportunities.

Spieles commented following a question from Fusion92 that he felt the MWC campaign should remain focused on improving attitudes around hunting and fishing, and that a secondary goal of gaining participation would water down messaging.

Ulfig commented virtually that he liked the longer runway that the Legacy Campaign provided and thought there would be more angles to work. He suggested that there could be more than one spokesperson which would appeal to a wider audience.

The council received additional input from Kristin Phillips, Administrative Deputy, DNR, Marcee Wardell, Communications Representative with Fisheries Division, DNR, Russ Mason, Nimrod Society, Jason Garvon, former MWC member.

Discussion continued around the potential to combine campaign strengths or use elements of the Support is Real in the Legacy campaign. LaRue explained the difficulty running two separate and very different campaigns and advised the council to pick a direction and put all of

our available resources into making that one as powerful as possible.

Buggia made a motion to direct Fusion92 to proceed with the Legacy Campaign with the following optimization efforts: 1) streamline the core message to ensure a clearer throughline among the campaign elements. 2) create a visual branding connection for elements in the campaign that don't have an audio component. 3) re-evaluate the whisper voice to consider how important a VO is or how best to deliver a VO that complements the quiet environment. Offer alternatives to the whisper if subsequent feedback suggests liability. Cooke seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

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Chairman Buggia dismissed us for lunch at 12:00 p.m. and called us back to order at 12:30 p.m.

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Spieles made a motion to accept the financial report **Buggia** seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Gruden motioned to accept the Semi-Annual Report to the legislature for the first half of fy25 and **Cooke** seconded. With two corrections noted, the motion passed unanimously.

Hayes motioned to accept the FY2025 Operational Plan as written and **Buggia** seconded with the motion passing unanimously.

Public Comment

Buggia paused the meeting at 1:00 p.m. for public comment. There was no public comment.

Buggia made a motion to adjourn the meeting, **Levey** seconded it, and the motion was passed unanimously. The MWC meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

The next meeting will be held on June 6 at the Rose Lake Shooting Range with Gud Marketing.