

Embargoed until: (Tuesday, April 7, 2015: 9:00 am)

**Contact: John Austin, 734.474.3110
Alan Steinman, 616.331.3749**

Michigan's Blue Economy

New Report Details Opportunity for Michigan Economic Growth as Global Freshwater and Freshwater Innovation Center

A new report documenting Michigan's Blue Economy was released today by the Michigan Economic Center at Prima Civitas and Grand Valley State University's Annis Water Resources Institute. The interactive report, available at www.michiganblueeconomy.org, is designed to spur strategic actions to expand and grow the State's already impressive Blue Economy, and help Michigan to become the world's freshwater capital and water innovation center.

"More than 1 in 5 Michigan jobs are already linked to water, and given Michigan's unique natural water, and water innovation assets, we can be the world's center of water work and seize more than our share of growing global water solutions business and related jobs," said John Austin, lead author of the report.

"There is only so much waterfront real estate, and with 3,000 plus miles of Great Lakes freshwater coast, 11,000 inland lakes, hundreds of rivers, coastal and inland wetlands, Michigan is a magical place to live, work and play if the water is clean, you can get to it, and we use it in a sustainable fashion", said Alan Steinman of Grand Valley State University, co-author of the report. "Taking advantage of our incredible water resources has become an exciting priority for communities across Michigan who are reclaiming and reconnecting to their waterfronts, making them the Main Street of their communities."

The Michigan Blue Economy report defines the five ways that water matters to jobs and the economy—and details the economic impact of Michigan's water-based economy, including:

- Transportation, ports, shipping: contributing over 65,000 jobs and \$3 billion dollars annually
- Big water using sectors such as farming and manufacturing, which account for 581,000 Michigan jobs
- Emerging water growth sectors, including water technology product and service firms that account for 138,000 jobs
- Economic activity driven by water placemaking: water cleanup, waterfront development and recreation and enjoyment, which collectively account for more than 175,000 jobs and \$12.5 billion annually
- Water research, education centers and conservation organizations: the URC research universities alone conducted \$300 million worth of water research over recent years. Water conservation organizations employed 2,700 people and contributed \$80 million to incomes.

The report tells the stories of how Michigan companies like Ford Motor Company became one of the greenest companies in the world through smart water use; Dow Chemical claims worldwide water technology innovation leadership, Whirlpool finds a future in making hyper-water efficient appliances and kitchens; auto parts makers like Cascade Engineering re-engineer to make life-saving water cleaning products for developing countries, and Steelcase pioneers water and energy conservation tools in its global supply chain. Newer firms are emerging as Blue Economy leaders, too, including Somnia Global, who finds innovative ways to clean hospital waste and manufacturing water-byproducts, and Limnotech, who engineers water cleanup and ecosystem management efforts worldwide.

"Michigan is already a leading center of water R&D, invention, and new smart water technologies and business development", said Austin. "Michigan can show the rest of the world how to be smart stewards of freshwater, and become the nation's leader in water-based jobs and economic development.

The report also documents the work of over 40 Michigan communities focused on water placemaking for economic development, including Manistee, Grand Rapids, Marquette, Muskegon, and the necklace of Southeast Michigan communities from Port Huron to Monroe. All are reclaiming once-industrial waterfronts, and re-orienting community life to face and enjoy the water.

“Our water and natural resources first propelled our economy, today Michigan communities are cleaning and reconnecting to their waterways as a central strategy for community revitalization” said Austin.

The report features the significant water research, innovation and education programs at Michigan’s colleges and universities, like Northwestern Michigan College, the University Research Corridor institutions (Michigan State University, University of Michigan, and Wayne State University), Central Michigan University, Delta College and Grand Valley State University, who are pioneers in solving local, Great Lakes and truly global freshwater challenges. In the process, they are educating the water problem solvers, and providing future stewards that the world needs.

“With 9 university water research centers, 190 water programs, and 18 community colleges training water workers from scientist to environmental engineer, from waste water technicians to marine submersible operators, Michigan is already a center of excellence in water education and research,” said Steinman. “We can market Michigan as the place to solve global and local water challenges, and train the water talent the world needs.” said Steinman.

The report also provides a set of recommendations for strategic actions by state and local public officials, business, non-profits, education and philanthropic leaders that can accelerate Michigan’s already impressive Blue Economy growth and leadership including:

- Create a business-led “Blue Economy Council” to forge public-private partnerships bringing companies and researchers together to solve thorny water treatment and new technology development issues, and spur new business lines and companies;
- Create a New State Office of Water Innovation to re-fashion water use, regulatory standards and financing tools to encourage new sustainable water technology deployment and business growth;
- Organize a Pure Michigan Water Technology Innovation fund: a catalyst organization to commercialize new water product and services, and develop new firms;
- Market Michigan as the Center of Water Education and Research Center of Excellence, and expand its footprint;
- Develop World's Freshwater Innovation Center in Detroit – where Michigan’s leading research universities, corporations and philanthropies focus water research, innovation, and commercialization of new ideas and technologies;
- Create Blue Economy Compacts: challenging communities and regions to organize around their Blue Economy as a priority economic development opportunity;
- Put Blue Economy building at the core of Michigan's state regional and community placemaking and development strategy;
- Create a Blue Economy "Prize" for innovative community water and Blue Economy development strategies; and,
- Extend and make more flexible the Natural Resources Trust Fund to support Blue Economy building.

“Water is our history, and water is our future if we reconnect our communities to it and leverage the innovation horsepower in our companies, colleges and universities”, said Austin. “Pure Michigan is our calling card and we can use it and our waters can once again propel us to the economic front ranks.

Michigan Economic Center at Prima Civitas

The Michigan Economic Center is a center for ideas and a network of state and local leaders and citizens working to: Advance a vision for Michigan’s economic renewal; Provide policy ideas and solutions that realize the vision; and Engage and support a diverse network of citizens, leaders, and organizations in advancing the vision and making ideas for a more competitive, innovative, and global Michigan a reality. More information is available at www.MiEconomicCenter.org

The GVSU Annis Water Resources Institute

The Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute (AWRI) is a multidisciplinary research organization committed to the study of freshwater resources. The mission of the institute is to integrate research, education, and outreach to enhance and preserve freshwater resources. More information is available online at www.gvsu.edu/wri.