



Spring 2020

# UPEnvironment

## UPEC, THE UP, AND COVID-19

In difficult times, we have to seize opportunities, not dwell on difficulties.

Horst Schmidt

*“If you commit yourself wholeheartedly to endless pressure endlessly applied, you’ll succeed.”*

—Brock Evans, environmental activist (*Fight & Win*, p. 26)

As I write in early May, the UP, like the rest of the state and the nation, is having to cope with COVID-19 infections. Since I started on this piece in April, I’ve had to write several opening sentences for it—that’s how quickly the changes are coming. Despite our low population density and relative isolation, the UP is not exempt from this stealthy disease. Most UP residents are following the stay-at-home rules set by our governor. As the weather warms, we do not know how people will spread the virus, nor what and how much further harm it will cause. We don’t know when efficacious measures to stop the disease will be in widespread use. Most importantly, no one knows the timeline for a safe vaccine, available to everyone.

It’s almost impossible to describe the magnitude of the changes COVID-19 has brought to human society. One can look at the pandemic through positive and negative lenses. For an activist, it looms as a catastrophe, along with the Administration’s attempt to dismantle our environmental safety net. On the other hand, the vast reduction in air pollution due to shutting down sections of the world economy is a good thing.

People want to get back to normal. Can we say the new normal will be? The corporate elite see it as a transition to high growth with little concern for pollution. The environmental community sees it as an opportunity to move forward to sustainability. What will the turmoil of the past three years, now magnified by COVID-19, bring us?

Let me end this speculation. UPEC does not see the future in black-and-white terms. Wherever there is darkness we will educate. Where we see sunshine, we will support those efforts.

When I look at our position papers ([upenvironment.org/issues](http://upenvironment.org/issues)) on issues where we have announced a stand—for or against forest projects, Line 5, the proposed Aquila Back

40 mine—they revolve around the air, water, and land from which springs our wildlife and forests. What has changed is the rapid warming of our climate, with Lake Superior, for example, becoming two degrees warmer over the last few decades. When a huge body of water increases in temperature, it has a cascading effect upon our ecosystems. We see what effect shutting down a vast part of our global economy has had on our weather. Certainly we can do this reduction in emissions in a less deadly, less drastic way.

The UPEC board started the process of reviewing our priorities during the summer of 2019. We focused on mining, energy, public lands, and, later, water and wetlands. The UP is where we live, and sustainability is now the watchword for the way of life we must lead. It is expressed as The Seventh Generation Principle by Ojibwe and other Indigenous peoples in which today’s decisions enable descendants seven generations later to live sustainable lives. Today, we’re also looking at the long term in the UP.

As part of the process, we seek your input. The basics don’t change: protect our air, land, and water. However, new projects, problems, and issues arrive on the scene. For example, a number of years ago there was enthusiasm for biomass fuel for energy generation. Announcements came for months about new power plant projects across the UP. “Burning wood is equivalent to leaving it decay on the forest floor” was the hypothesis promulgated by the EPA. Wood is a renewable resource. Government subsidies were available. But gradually, the flaws in the original concept became clear. Announced plans did not materialize. Many biomass plants closed, not being able to compete with other energy sources. With realistic renewable forms of energy now beginning to forge ahead, will biomass fall by the wayside, as has coal? Questions are raised about other projects such as Line 5, resilient communities, education and employment, the repercussion from the proposed Soo Lock expansion, manifold energy issues, and new mining pollution threats.

There are no quick and easy fixes. Communities need to be involved, making decisions with science-based evidence.

If citizens take the initiative to balance long- and short-term goals, they will be happier and healthier without threatening their own existence. The balance between government and business needs to be realigned to benefit all people.

We must start now. We must continue to challenge the status quo, to offer alternatives.

***We welcome and value your comments. Please send them to us by email to [upec@upenvironment.org](mailto:upec@upenvironment.org), or write us at P.O. Box 673, Houghton, MI 49931. Your comments will be forwarded to the Board as part of its deliberations during these tumultuous times. Stay safe.***

*Horst Schmidt is President of UPEC. This article expresses his personal views, and does not necessarily reflect official positions of UPEC.*

“Persistence is everything,” says Brock Evans. Thanks to your support, UPEC has been persisting for over four decades. We continue to defend our land, water, and air.

Please let us know your thoughts on the issues raised in this article, and what you think UPEC’s highest priorities should be.

## FIRST IN SHOW: THE 2020 UPEC PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

In our last newsletter, we shared the runners-up in this year’s Photo Contest. Now, here are the best of the best: the top photos, out of a field of nearly 100 entries, in each of four categories. We’ll be announcing the 2021 contest in the fall, so don’t forget your cell phone or camera next time you’re out hiking or paddling in the UP!

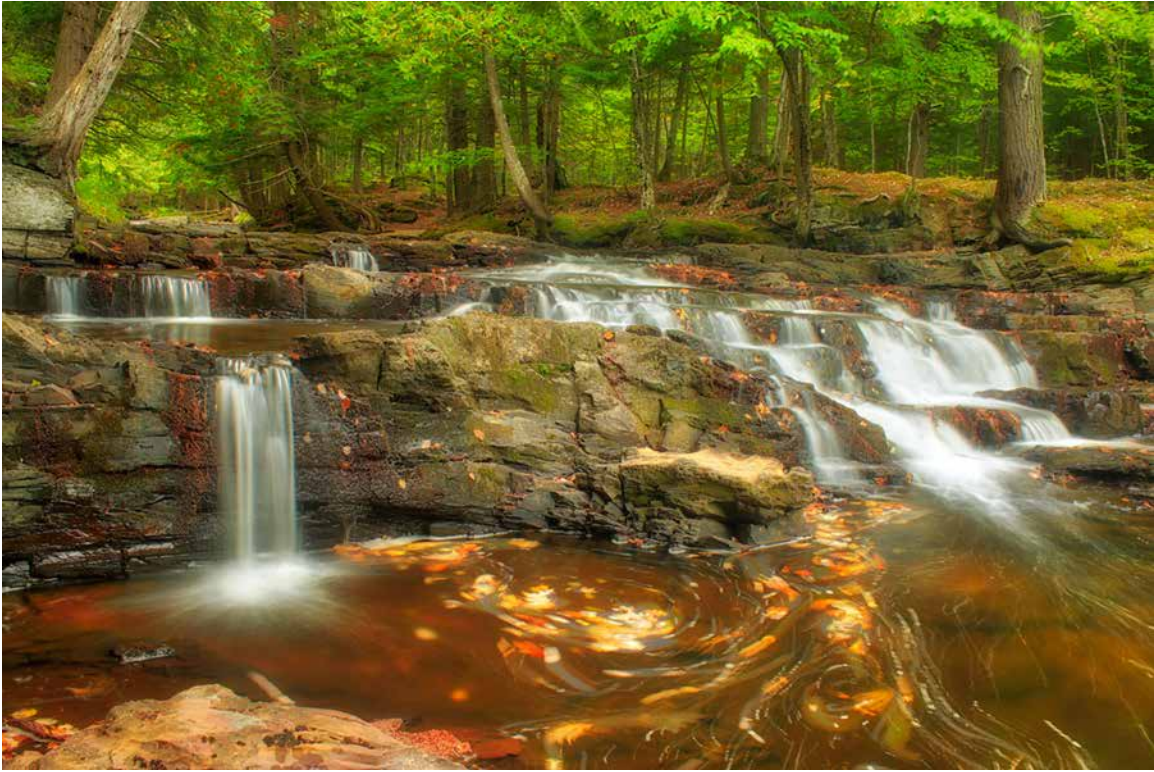


“Rock awe,” Phil Bellfy (Humans Engaged)

“Swan song,” Elizabeth J. Bates (Hidden Beauty)







"Autumn swirls," Joan Haara (Fluid Water)



"Grand view," Jeffrey A. Weir (Nature Panoramas)

## CAUTIOUS REACTION TO MEETING WITH UP'S NEW LARGE PRIVATE TIMBER COMPANY

On January 29 a number of UP environmental groups, including UPEC, and other stakeholders attended a get-to-know-you meeting with representatives of Lyme Timber Company ([lymetimber.com](http://lymetimber.com)), which became the largest private timberland owner in the state when it bought out Weyerhaeuser's surface holdings (but not all of its mineral rights) late last year—some 555,000 acres in the UP. The company, which is based in New Hampshire, presents itself as an environmentally sensitive partner with local communities.

The meeting with Lyme was hosted by the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, and afterwards KBIC sent a follow-up letter laying out its priorities, which are forests that provide clean water, air, food, and medicine for people, and healthy habitat for wildlife; maintain diversity and resiliency in the face of climate change; and offer gathering, hunting, and recreational opportunities in the context of treaty rights in the Ceded Territories of the UP. “Our meetings with Lyme Timber Company were a welcome contrast to our experience with Weyerhaeuser,” said KBIC’s Jeffery Loman, who spearheaded the meeting. “Without ever consulting with a single stakeholder, Weyerhaeuser partnered with a large wind energy company on a project that would have had significant negative impacts to tribal trust resources. I’m glad Lyme Timber Company is now Michigan’s largest private landowner.”

Environmentalists who attended generally struck a cautious tone. Here is a sampling of quotes.

“Industrial timber companies regard UP land holdings as an investment that must pay for itself, one way or another. That profit can be in timber, or real estate, or even a forestland wind energy project, as we have learned in L’Anse Township. These companies want to see a profitable balance sheet in 10 years, not 100 years, so compared with conservancies thinking long term, they tend to be an impatient lot,” said Jon Saari of the UPEC Board of Directors.

Fellow UPEC Board member Steve Garske said that “it was a bit of a shock to realize that huge swaths of forest land in the UP and northern Wisconsin are now being managed by a timberland investment company representing private investors from around the world. Recreational leasing, sale of carbon-offset credits, and working forest conservation easements make up a significant part of their business plan. Timber harvests will continue to be conducted under the timber industry’s notoriously weak Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). Our hope is that they will manage these lands with their environmental health and integrity in mind. Time will tell.”

“Lyme is listening, but also with an ear to make their monetary goals. That they were even there and willing to



LYMETIMBER.COM

hear our concerns speaks loudly,” said Rochelle Dale of the Yellow Dog Watershed.

“I found the Lyme presentation interesting in that they appear to have a unique business strategy to make money off the timber land, not only by timbering the property but by also selling conservation easements to individuals, corporations, and government agencies that could have the effect of protecting the land for future generations,” observed Burt Mason, president of the Friends of the Huron Mountains and the Huron Island Lighthouse Preservation Association. “Only time will tell how this business strategy will play out on the properties in our areas.”

Linda Rulison of Friends of the Land of Keweenaw said, “Those of us from FOLK attending the meeting were disappointed, but not too surprised, as the meeting was all about this East Coast Company’s wonderful portfolio and their focus on identifying conservation easements. They did not have much to say about their forest practices but they will keep current employees.”

“In spite of the respectful attention given to the (40+) attendees, I am concerned how Lyme Timber is going to fulfill the financial expectations of its investors, within a 14-year timeframe, without adding to the pervasive degradation of the forest landscape wrought by previous short-term corporate landholders,” stated Catherine Andrews, resident of Baraga County.



# CORONAVIRUS: A SYMPTOM OF ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE

*Jeff Towner*

The novel coronavirus pandemic that is sweeping through the world likely originated in a “wet market” in Wuhan, China. The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes COVID-19, is suspected to have crossed over to humans from bats or pangolins (Ensia, March 17, 2020; (<https://ensia.com/features/covid-19-coronavirus-biodiversity-planetary-health-zoonoses/>)). Pangolins, mammals that are otherwise known as scaly anteaters, have large, overlapping armor-plated scales. Several species occur in Africa and Asia. The meat is eaten in Asian countries as a luxury item, and the scales are used, without evidence of efficacy, in traditional Asian medicine. Recent research indicates that pangolins may be an intermediate host for the SARS-CoV-2 virus between horseshoe bats and humans.

Wet markets, which historically have had little, if any, effective health inspections or controls are places where raw meat is butchered and sold in the open air. These markets also often offer for sale a wide variety of animals that are harvested from the wild or grown in cages. SARS-CoV-2 and other such zoonotic viruses can exist in populations of wildlife with few, if any, ill effects (Mother Jones, March 29, 2020; <https://www.motherjones.com/food/2020/03/the-surprising-history-of-the-wildlife-trade-that-may-have-sparked-the-coronavirus/>). When such a virus crosses over

to humans, it can spread quickly from close personal contact, with deadly consequences, as we are sadly witnessing.

We have seen this phenomenon before. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fruit bats are the most likely reservoir species for the Ebola virus, which first appeared in humans in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with monkeys and apes as “dead-end” hosts. According to the World Health Organization the SARS-CoV virus crossed over to humans in 2002 in Guangdong Province, China, likely from fruit bats or civets. Civets are

SOGGYDAN BENENOVITCH / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



An endangered Bengal slow loris offered at an illegal wildlife market in Mông La, Shan, Myanmar (Burma).

medium-sized mammals often compared to cats, but that are more closely related to mongooses. They occur in tropical forested areas of Africa and Asia. Some viruses mutate and are transmitted by domestic animals. Avian influenza, also known as bird flu and H5N1, which first appeared in Asia, and related avian viruses occur naturally in waterfowl with little ill effect, but the viruses can be transmitted to domestic poultry, and then on to humans.

The greatly increased exploitation of wildlife for food and traditional medicine is a major contributor to the ex-

in wire snares, poisoned, or shot and left to die an agonizing death. This illegal harvesting of wildlife for the pot is more often than not conducted in areas where wildlife is protected under national and international laws. Courageous park rangers in these areas risk—and sometimes forfeit—their lives in combatting these activities.

One might question the propriety of those of us in a rich nation criticizing other cultures for utilizing wild-caught and captive-bred wildlife for food. After all, wildlife fills a real need for animal protein. But these practices are unsustainable and cruel, and we must find alternatives. Small animal husbandry and small pond fish culture can provide part of the answer.

There is some movement and public support to ban wet markets. In late February, the Chinese government announced a comprehensive ban on the consumption of wild animals for food (but not for traditional medicine) following the new coronavirus outbreak (it did the same after SARS, and then let the restrictions lapse) (theatlantic.com, April 10, 2020). Enforcement will be the key to effectiveness of these measures. Senators Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Chris Coons (D-Del.) have called on the Chinese government to immediately close all operating wet markets (The Hill, April 9, 2020).

To gauge public opinion in places where such markets operate, in March the World Wildlife Fund commissioned an independent survey of 5,000 individuals in Hong Kong, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam (worldwildlife.org, April 6, 2020). Highlights of that survey include:

- There is almost universal support—93% of respondents—across these parts of Asia for government action to eliminate illegal and unregulated wildlife markets.
- Respondents predominantly believe that wildlife is the source of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Market closures were seen as an effective measure to help prevent similar outbreaks from happening in the future by 79% of respondents.
- Eighty-four percent are unlikely or very unlikely to buy wildlife products in the future.

Meanwhile, global warming is destroying the Earth's ecosystems and the human population is exploding. We are part of, not apart from, these ecosystems. We are witnessing ecosystem collapse, and the novel coronavirus ravaging the U.S. and the world is one symptom of that collapse (alja-



Various snake species and pangolins (foreground) offered at an illegal wildlife market in Möng La, Shan, Myanmar (Burma).

inction or approaching extinction of many species. Wildlife is also exploited for art (e.g., elephant ivory); supposed cures for complaints such as fever, headache, and erectile dysfunction; social status, such as the eating of rare species in Asia (nationalgeographic.com, February 27, 2019; December 14, 2014) and the making of dagger handles carved from rhino horn for export to Yemen (*Run Rhino Run*, Esmond and Chrysee Bradley Martin, pub. Chatto & Windus, London, 1982); and trophy hunting of rare species by well-to-do Westerners.

As with most things, first-hand experience typically deepens understanding. During my five years living in several African countries, I witnessed a number of markets where wildlife such as monkeys, porcupines, cane rats, antelope, buffalo, and many other species were offered for sale as food. The carnage evident in these places is appalling, and the impact on wildlife is indisputable. In anti-poaching work I did in concert with local park rangers in two African national parks, I saw the illegality, cruelty, and devastating ecological impact of capturing and killing wild animals for commercial sale. Wildlife was and is frequently left to suffer



zeera.com, March 30, 2020). The SARS-CoV-2 virus and the COVID-19 disease it causes gives us insight into how intimately connected we are to the environment. Many of our elected leaders are insufficiently cognizant of these connections. We need and deserve leaders who don't treat deadly pandemics and planet-altering climate change as foreign hoaxes and fake news. We need and deserve leaders who won't gut our bedrock environmental laws and regulations, but will instead strengthen them. And we need and deserve leaders who inspire and give hope to our young people.

Most of us have limited influence on the setting of policy. So as citizens who love the U.P., what can we do to effect

global change? As the old saying goes "Think globally, act locally." We can try to live simply, drive less, eat less meat, consume sustainably sourced forest products that have been environmentally certified by an organization such as the Forest Stewardship Council, eat seafood certified by such organizations as The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program, and drink certified shade-grown coffee as reviewed by the Audubon Society or the Cornell Lab. We can reject the myth of unlimited growth and ever-increasing consumerism. We can also give of our time and money to organizations and candidates for office that share our views and values. And we can vote.

*Jeff Towner is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and a member of the UPEC Board of Directors.*

## NOCTURNAL MICHIGAN WILDLIFE ACTIVE DURING MAPLE SYRUP SEASON

*Bill Ziegler*

Maple syrup production has been our family tradition since the 1870s. Maple sap can be collected from maples in the early spring when the snow recedes from the bases of the trees. Our family maple syrup production in lower Michigan operated in a large commercial fashion until 30 years ago when I moved the operation to our home in Crystal Falls. Even with downsizing the operation we collect enough maple sap that it usually has to be boiled down through the night to get it down to the concentration of pure maple syrup before it deteriorates. Boiling down the sap needs to be watched closely, especially on a wood fire, when you get close to point where it is concentrated and near syrup. An inattentive person can easily burn the syrup, ruining many hours of work and possibly destroying expensive maple syrup evaporation pans.

During many nights in the family sugar house with my dad, he related stories of the nocturnal animals he would hear and see while tending to the sap evaporators and firing the stove. Some of the stories were passed down in the family from our earlier ancestors who also manned the night shift in the wood and sugar house. For the last 40+ years it has been my turn to watch the maple sap evaporation during the night.

It makes the long evening and night hours outside more interesting to document a few of the creatures that I hear and see. I have some modern cameras to help document those mostly nocturnal creatures. Most of us in Michigan see wildlife that are partially nocturnal, like deer, ruffed grouse, rabbits, etc. However, some animals, like flying squirrels and owls, are almost completely nocturnal in their movements. Most of us do not see those nocturnal species in any regularity, making any sighting more unusual.

Most of us know there are numerous red and grey squirrels in most wooded areas around the UP. If you spend considerable time in the woods (even if it is behind your house) at night you may get a glimpse of the extremely fast-gliding flying squirrels as they move around at night from



BILL ZIEGLER

Two raccoons near our maple sap boiling site that I observed while gathering wood in the early morning hours.



Flying squirrels are much more common in UP woodlands than most people think. Rarely seen during the day, this nocturnal squirrel glides through the edges of woodlands and main woodlands quietly searching for food. The only sound I have heard is when they land on a tree very close to you during the night.

tree to tree and feeding area. They are even more apparent if you have a bird feeder close by your house and you turn an outside light on during the night. My best indicator that the flying squirrels are fairly common is that I have a number of motion-sensor game cameras deployed most of year. The game cameras are triggered as the flying squirrels glide by. I get numerous low-quality flying squirrel photos on my game cameras at both my home woods (sugar bush) and our deer camp. By staking out a food source (bird feeder) near my sap evaporator, I was able to finally get a decent photo of these extremely fast-moving animals. Occasionally if one glides down to a tree close to you can even hear them land on the tree.

Many of my family wildlife encounters during the night at the sugar house were listening to owls calling. The most common owls at the family farm sugar bush were great horned and screech owls. The loud call that a screech owl makes was the most memorable, especially when it was made very near to the sap boiling house in the middle of the night. We would also hear distant great horned owls hooting. A pair of great horned owls regularly nested in the farm sugar bush woods during maple syrup season. I was extremely excited as a young hopeful naturalist when a team of ornithologists came to band our great horned owl young for several years. The banding always occurred during our maple syrup season. It is pretty impressive to a young boy to watch the ornithologist use tree climbing gear to climb to the top of an old-growth, tall sugar maple tree to collect the young owls. They had to be roped down to be banded on the ground and then replaced unharmed, but banded, in their nest.

The barred owl is a very common owl in the UP. They are very vocal and can be regularly heard while spending time in the woods at night. It appears to me that they call even more during their spring nesting time and can sometimes be heard in early morning and evening. Barred



The call of the barred owl is a very common sound in the late winter/early spring maple syrup woods.



owls nest near both my son's maple woods and our maple woods where we collect sap and boil it down now. Their calls are a pleasant reminder of their presence even though we only see them once in a while.

When I am on the maple sap boiling watch in the pre-light hours or the morning, I often hear nearby wild turkeys gobbling. Wild turkeys were native in lower Michigan but their range has been extended northward in Michigan by introductions by the DNR Wildlife Division in the southwest UP. The wild turkeys have been very prolific and have extended their range much further out from the original introduction areas of Menominee, Dickinson, and Iron Counties. They have become quite common, especially in southern Iron County where our sugar bush is located. In the pre-dawn hours they typically are the most vocal in their 24-hour period.

Ruffed grouse are typically drumming and can be heard at a distance during the maple syrup season. Sometimes active drummers will continue all night carrying out this audible courtship behavior. I located two active male grouse drumming logs last spring near our two maple woods. I observed that the most active grouse I photographed normally drummed from about 3 AM until 11 PM with short breaks, presumably to interact with females and eat.

Of course, deer, racoons, snowshoe hare, and in some cases cottontail rabbits are common to the sugar bush areas. We often see a glimpse of those species as we go out to grab more wood from the wood pile to feed the fire.

Coyotes can occasionally be seen during the day, typically for short glimpses as they are very skittish. They are common in the UP and are very active at night. Coyotes were reportedly not native to Michigan. Wildlife biologists



BILL ZIEGLER

In recent years as their population has increased in the UP, wild turkeys gobbling and hens clucking have become more common sounds in the pre-dawn hours of many woodlands.





Male ruffed grouse drum to attract female grouse during mating season in the spring, starting in maple sap boiling season. This active male grouse drummed from about 3 AM to 11 PM during any given day. This photo shows the grouse drumming on its drumming log near our maple woods in the early light of morning, which I enjoy hearing as I tend the sap boiling fires.



Coyotes calling during the night have been a common sound for many years in the UP. I often heard them while gathering sap and boiling it down during low-light hours.

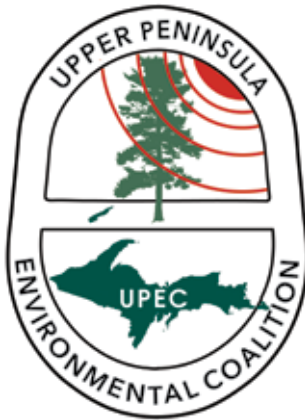


As native wolves become more abundant they displace coyotes that were reportedly not native to the woodlands of the Upper Great Lakes region, with wolves again filling that niche. Perhaps as native wolves become completely established in the UP of Michigan, their howls will become more the norm and there will be fewer calls by their competitor, the coyote. This wolf was hunting at night near our camp in Iron County.



report that coyotes moved east into former woodland states as wolf populations declined after “European development.” My relatives described hearing coyotes calling at night as one of the regular sounds of the nighttime sugar camp. It has been common to hear coyotes calling in the low-light hours and during the night in our present maple syrup operation. Wolves have re-established in the UP above the early goals for their population re-establishment. Perhaps as more wolf packs are established after all these years, we will be hearing a distant wolf howl at night while we tend our maple sap boiling fires.

*Bill Ziegler is a frequent contributor to UP Environment. [Ed. note: Several of Bill’s photos are nocturnal shots, and we have tried to stay close to his original exposures to convey the feeling of being out and about in the night.]*



## UPEC’S LOGO, REFRESHED

You may have noticed a change to the masthead of this issue of *UP Environment*. That’s because we debuted a new logo at the 2020 Celebrate the UP! event. The original logo, seen at left, had changed very little since UPEC’s founding in 1976. It was created by hand (yes, those were the days before personal computers) and eventually scanned to digital. But some residual technical problems remained, and so earlier this year the Board of Directors OK’d the new design, at right. As you can see, it’s simpler, with a stylized UP map, a green border (suggesting our mission of protecting the UP), and a blue wavy line to suggest the Great Lakes and inland waters that define our home. Unlike the older logo, this natively digital version is continuously scalable, so we can make it any size we want without losing quality. All in all, it makes our “look” a bit more up-to-date.

**Going shopping? You can help UPEC at the same time!**



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##### Michigan Senate

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