

THE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF TIMBERMEN

DECEMBER 2025

TIMBER TALK

Dedicated to Representing the Needs of Small Businesses in the Forest Products Industry

INSIDE

Remembering Warren Suchovsky:
A Lifetime of Service to our Industry

Industry Workforce Development Efforts Expanding

MAT Hosts a "Day in the Woods" for Legislators

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MAT Board of Directors at Work

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Stewards of Michigan's Forest Resources

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PRESIDENT

Vaughn West

Michigan Association of Timbermen

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

12-3-25

Hello to all our Members and Followers,

Where did this year go, here we are with snow on the ground, Year end is closing in fast and the busy holiday season is upon us. It happens every year and yet it still sneaks up on us.

Just a small recap as to what we have been up to, back on October 27th some of our Board met with eight state legislators; we took them on a tour to an active logging site in Missaukee county, and showed them what is all involved and how it all works.

It gave them a better understanding of what the machines are capable of and how many trucks it takes to move wood. Then we went to Biewer Lumber for a cookout sponsored by AIS Construction Equipment. After lunch we did a walking tour of the whole Biewer Lumber sawmill. Thanks to Wes Windover and his team for showing us around. The feedback from the legislators and their staff was very positive, and they learned what all is involved to make a 2x4.

In other news, I want to let the industry know what a huge loss we had with the passing of our board member Warren Suchovsky. Warren was an active member and a huge advocate for the logging industry for the 30 years that I have been involved with it and just a wealth of knowledge. Our thoughts and prayers are still going out to his family and friends.

Finally, our staff is still working hard on the April convention in Boyne Falls and the Equipment show in August. We appreciate all the hard work they put forward for this. They are working with the "Forest to Mi Faucet" program on some new projects for expanding our membership in the state also. We are always looking for new and creative ideas for promoting the forest industry so if you have some new ideas, please let us know and we will help you work towards accomplishing the task.

Looking forward to meeting all of you and promoting the forest industry.
Thanks.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Justin Knepper

Michigan Association of Timbermen

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Happy Deer Season, Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas!

It's a wonderful time of year - in terms of celebrating the holidays - may not so much when it comes to shoveling and plowing, at least for us up further north. But, the woods come alive with critters moving about, forestry equipment softly treading through the snow, families coming together to give thanks, and the birth of Christ being celebrated.

Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday - my Norwegian side over in northwestern Wisconsin always got together with upwards of 40 cousins, aunts and uncles, and ate lots of standard Thanksgiving fare, but mixed it copious amounts of Lefse and a little bit of Lutefisk. More than that, we remembered to give thanks for everything we've been given in this world - from the air we breathe, to the food we eat, to the roofs over our heads - we've been blessed with plenty in the USA, thanks to God and his Providence.

In Timbermen's news I was blessed to have the opportunity to attend Warren Suchovsky's funeral. I met his children and grand children, and listened to wonderful eulogies about his life of forest industry advocacy and education, as well as the personal impact he made on people's lives. He was generous and humble. Those are two great attributes to strive for. I think it is fitting to place his picture on our front cover this edition, because he went above and beyond for our industry from many, many years.

Otherwise, we're gearing up here at the MAT office for an insane 2026 - new staff starting soon, major grant-funded projects beginning, a big convention at Boyne Mountain, our second biennial Michigan Forest Products Show, and so much more.

We're also seeing new members join, and we're actively working on new programs and benefits to make your annual investments worthwhile. Thanks again for all your support!





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Early (Now through 3/30/26): MAT Members/Spouse: \$260/\$170 | Non-Members: \$335

Regular Registration (After 3/30/26) or At the Door: MAT Members/Spouse: \$300/\$215 | Non-Members: \$430

Other Options: Friday Banquet Only: MAT Members: \$160 | Non-Members: \$190 | Children (under 18) \$30

Exhibitor Registration: Indoor Exhibit \$300 (after 3/30/26 \$450) | Outdoor Exhibit: \$350 (after 3/30/26 \$550)

Exhibitor Meals: MAT members: \$130 (after 3/30/26 \$165) | Non-Members: \$175 (after 3/30/26 \$200)

(Exhibit spaces are first come, first serve with sponsors receiving top choice.).

Please return form with payment to MAT by March 30, 2026 for early registration.

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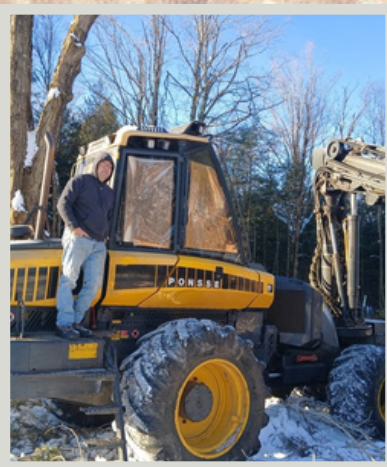
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SPOTLIGHT

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MAT Members Volunteering: True North Logging Represents Industry at the Alpena EcoCareers Expo



Kelli Francisco and her father Nathan Stevens volunteer at the EcoCareers Expo in Alpena, MI

Nathan and Kelli took time out of their work days to share their expertise and experiences in the logging industry, helping students understand sustainable forest management, the skills required in the field, and the importance of safety and teamwork. Their willingness to engage with students and offer a real-world perspective on timber and natural resource careers demonstrates the kind of leadership and community commitment MAT members are known for. Thanks again, True North Logging!

The Michigan Association of Timbermen would like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to MAT members Nathan Stevens and his daughter Kelli Francisco of True North Logging for volunteering at the Alpena EcoCareers Expo this past October. Hosted by the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (NEMIGLSI) in partnership with the MiSTEM Network and Michigan Works!, this hands-on event gave eighth-grade students an up-close look at careers in conservation and natural resource fields.

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Sault Ste. Marie Provides 2025 State Capitol Christmas Tree



October 30, 2025 was a truly special day for Michigan's timber community! The Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association and the Michigan Association of Timbermen came together again to celebrate the annual harvesting of the State Capitol Christmas tree—right in the heart of Sault Ste. Marie.

Ron Papin, owner of Grade A Logging LLC in DeTour Village near Drummond Island, along with his sons, traveled to Sault Ste. Marie to fell his year's State

Capitol Christmas tree, showcasing the skill and tradition of Michigan's logging professionals.

Once the tree was down, it was time for transport. MAT member Chris Muma Forest Products, Inc., based in Gladwin, sent one of their beautifully painted log trucks, expertly driven by Ray Good, to haul the tree all the way to downtown Lansing. There, it was featured at the Silver Bells in the City event—a terrific example of Michigan timber and community spirit coming together. Thanks to Chris Muma, Ray Good, and the entire team at Chris Muma Forest Products, Inc., for their investment of time and resources in this cherished tradition!

Many individuals and organizations played key roles behind the scenes to make this event a success. Denny Olson of the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association has been collaborating with Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget staff for decades, ensuring the tree-harvesting tradition goes off without a hitch each year. This year's State Capitol Christmas tree event continues to build on our holiday tradition—celebrating Michigan's logging heritage, community cooperation, and the skilled men and women who bring our state's forests to life.



Chris Muma Forest Products driver Ray Good crossing the Mackinac Bridge

Photos courtesy of Silver Bells in the City

A Lifetime of Dedication



REMEMBERING WARREN H. SUCHOVSKY - A Lifetime of Service to Michigan's Forests and the Timbermen

Warren Suchovsky, one of our industry's most impactful and dedicated voices, passed away at 85 years old on November 14, 2025. Warren's story begins long ago — the son of a dairy-farming family in Michigan. He was born in Bark River in 1940, and was a graduate of Stephenson High School where he excelled in football, track, and baseball.

A Life Rooted in Community and Family

Warren Suchovsky was extremely active in the Stephenson community and Menominee County. He taught at Stephenson High School for nearly a decade. He coached football and later launched the School's forestry program. He was active in many local organizations over the years, including his local Soil Conservation District and the Mellen Township Volunteer Fire Department. He loved reading, woodworking, canoeing, skiing, and hiking. He also loved his family, and enjoyed spending time with them and doing things or building things for them. He is survived by his son Karl Suchovsky, two daughters, Sarah Suchovsky and Jennifer James, seven grandchildren, and three great grandchildren, as well as his brother Clark.



Warren working in the woods with his son Karl

From Farm to Forest

Dairy was a big part of his childhood and was the focus of his higher education. He earned a B.S. in Dairy Production from Michigan State University in 1962, and went on to earn an M.S. in Agricultural Economics from North Carolina State University in 1965 — formal credentials that would give him a strong foundation for managing land, business, and natural resources responsibly.

Yet for Warren, forest and farm life often went hand in hand. Even while farming, he spent time working in the woods — and logging became more than a side project: it turned into a calling. Over a career that spanned more than six decades, Warren evolved with the industry. As noted by colleagues,

he began with traditional tools and methods as a youth — “a Finn saw and horse” — and eventually mastered the full shift to modern practices: operating cut-to-length harvesters, forwarders, and other mechanized logging equipment. Over the years, he managed more than 500 acres of forest land — and leased several hundred acres of farmland. That dual role — logger and landowner — gave him a deep understanding of both the economy of timber and the long-term responsibility of forest stewardship.

Warren's land-stewardship ethic was widely recognized: he was the first private landowner in Michigan to achieve verification under the state's "Forest, Wetlands and Habitat System" via the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). That was a milestone demonstrating his commitment not just to harvesting timber — but doing so in a way that respected soil, wildlife habitat, and long-term ecological health.

Advancing Forestry: From Hands-On Logger to Industry Leader

Warren's influence did not stop at his own logging business. He became a prominent figure in forestry policy, certification, and advocacy — working to shape responsible logging and land management across Michigan. He played a key role in the creation and early development of the Michigan Master Logger Certification Program (MMLC), a certification system designed to recognize and reward logging operations that follow sustainable, professional standards. As a veteran logger and proven steward, Warren helped establish the auditing templates and criteria that would become the backbone of the certification program — bridging old-school logging experience with modern forestry principles.

Beyond certification, Warren invested his energy in public service and community leadership. He served on multiple boards and committees involving forestry, conservation, rural township governance, and natural resource management. For example, he served as President, Treasurer/Secretary, and a board member for many years with the Michigan Association of Timbermen (MAT), guiding our organization to making an ever greater impact on behalf of the industry. He also served on the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (GLTPA) Board of Directors for many years, actively representing the industry at a regional level, and supporting many of GLTPA's efforts to strengthen the industry. He was appointed to the Michigan Forest Finance Authority (MFFA) to represent owners of private nonindustrial forestland — helping guide financing and policy for forest management statewide. He served several terms with the Michigan Townships Association (MTA), representing rural townships in District 3 (encompassing several counties including his home area). He has been treasurer of the Michigan Forest Biomaterials Institute (MIFBI) — showing his engagement beyond logging and forestry, into biomass, land-use economics, and resource stewardship. He has also served on Michigan Farm Bureau committees, and more.



Warren (right) discussing forestry issues



Warren Suchofsky (center) received the Distinguished Service Award in 2023 at the annual MAT Convention

Awards, Recognition, and a Mind Set Toward Stewardship

Warren's work didn't go unnoticed. He received multiple awards from many different organizations over the years, including MAT's Distinguished Service Award in 2023.

These honors recognized more than just ownership — they honored commitment: to caring for the land, managing it responsibly, and balancing timber harvest with ecological stewardship.

The Scholarship: Carrying Forward a Legacy of Stewardship and Education

Two years ago, while Warren was still active and among us, the Michigan Association of Timbermen renamed its annual scholarship program in his honor — establishing the Warren Suchovsky Scholarship Fund. The scholarship supports students enrolled at Michigan colleges or universities who are studying forestry, natural resources, forest products manufacturing, or related fields. It also supports non-degree training programs — such as timber-harvesting certificates or lumber-grading courses — so long as they contribute directly to Michigan's forest products industry.

Thanks to support from partners like GreenStone Farm Credit Services and the Michigan Forest Association, the scholarship amount has recently been increased — reflecting both the community's respect for Warren's legacy and the importance of investing in the next generation of forest professionals.

More than just financial aid, the scholarship embodies Warren's values: responsible forestry, education, community service, and the belief that Michigan's woods — and those who work them — deserve respect. Every student awarded the scholarship carries forward part of his legacy.

A Life with Lasting Impact

Warren Suchovsky's life was a living bridge between eras: from a Michigan where logging began with horses and saws, to a modern forestry industry with certification, environmental awareness, and sustainable harvesting standards.

His dual identity — as a working logger, landowner, and conservation-minded steward — gave him credibility and respect across every corner of the forest industry. He understood timber economics, forest ecology, landowner responsibilities, and community governance — and used that understanding to influence forestry policies, certification standards, and community representation.

Through the Warren Suchovsky Scholarship Fund, that legacy isn't just remembered — it's active. It inspires students to enter forestry or related fields with the same sense of respect, responsibility, and stewardship that Warren lived by.

For all he did — for the land, for the community, for future generations — the Timbermen salute Warren Suchovsky. His name lives on in the woods, in the board rooms, and in the hearts of those who will carry Michigan forestry into the future.



Warren Suchovsky (right) with Steve Anderson at St. John's Forest Products' school field day near Ralph, MI in 2023



Warren Suchovsky
Suchovsky Logging LLC

Kirtland Community College Receives \$100,000 to Launch Simulator Training Program

Michigan Invests in Forestry Workforce: Simulator Funding Positions Kirtland Community College as Statewide Training Hub

Northern Michigan's forestry industry is receiving a major boost that could reshape workforce training across the state. Michigan lawmakers have approved a \$100,000 earmark in the 2026 budget to fund a timber-harvester simulator at Kirtland Community College (KCC), positioning the school to become a central hub for modern forestry education.

A Smart, Safe Path Into Forestry

The funding — championed by Sen. Ken Borton (R-Gaylord, District 105) — allows KCC to purchase a state-of-the-art harvester simulator. The device will give students hands-on training with forestry equipment controls in a safe, controlled environment, long before they ever enter a real machine in the woods.

"It's going to allow Kirtland to build a curriculum to teach students to properly and safely operate equipment, before they start real work on a real harvester out in the forest," Borton said.

Barb Walden, dean of Occupational Programs at KCC, explained that the simulator features a full operator chair, realistic control panels, and a projection system that immerses trainees in a virtual forest. She said the design creates "a virtual-reality-type training opportunity" that allows students to practice cutting, maneuvering, and responding to site conditions without risk.



Senator Ken Borton



Kirtland Community College
Grayling, MI



Barb Walden, Dean of
Occupational Programs

Meeting an Urgent Workforce Need

KCC's new program — expected to be a 12- to 14-week or semester-long training track — is designed to bridge the gap in the workforce currently being reported across the State. Looking ahead to 2026, Erine Wescoat, Business and Industry Relations expert, highlighted broader statewide efforts to expand short-term, hands-on workforce pipelines: "Efforts are ramping up to bring together a hands-on short-term training across the state in 2026, that will provide candidates with skills that will prepare them to be polished and committed employees. Stay tuned!"

Sources

9&10 News, Traverse Ticker



Michigan Forest Products Council Launches Forest Industry Training (FIT) Program



Submitted by Luke Thiel, Acuitas LLC

Michigan has long been talking about the logger workforce shortage, every contractor in the state has felt it—too many machines sitting idle, too few people ready to step into the cab, and no reliable pipeline of trained operators moving in behind the older generation. What's finally changing is that the industry has a concrete plan to address these shortfalls, thanks to our U.P. Legislators, the advocacy work of the Michigan Forest Products Council, and leadership from State Rep. Will Snyder and his work to help the FIT grant come to fruition. The State of Michigan has now put its money where its mouth is. With grant funds available from now through 2026, industry partners have begun to implement a statewide program built specifically to generate an influx of new loggers: the Michigan Forest Products Council's Forest Industry Training (FIT) Program. Through hands-on experience, we want to ensure the next generation of loggers are taught the right way, by the right people.

Unlike past efforts that relied largely on individual contractors to shoulder the cost and risk of training new hires, FIT is designed to give the industry new opportunities to provide students with the training needed to succeed on the job. It does this through a mobile training and outreach system built around full-scale and compact harvester and forwarder simulators. This mobile training unit will travel to communities, schools, and training sites across the state drumming up excitement for the industry. These simulators are not video games—they are professional-grade units weighing 300–900 pounds, capable of teaching machine controls, boom handling, head functions, drive systems, and safe operating practices in a controlled environment. The program also includes a dedicated coordinator, something the industry has lacked: a full-time trainer whose sole job is developing the next generation of equipment operators.

FIT is built with logging crews in mind. The FIT Program is designed to reduce the financial burden contractors face when bringing in new employees. Grant funds support job-placement subsidies and wage support for new graduates for the first three months of an apprenticeship, improving retention for the participating crews. Any crew who participates is then eligible to have 50% of the compensation paid to the new-hire covered by the FIT program. The program combines hands-on education of basic machine operations and structured on-the-job training, with the goal of producing a handful of job-ready graduates per cohort for Michigan companies. After vetting a professional and committed student, we work to find a match between them and an active crew in their area, to begin on-the-job training. This is all in order to minimize training costs for the contractor, without significantly slowing down production.



For an industry that has long been asked to “train its own,” the FIT Program represents a turning point. Importantly, FIT isn’t being built in isolation. It’s backed by the Michigan Association of Timbermen and supported by major educators like Michigan State University, University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point, and several community colleges. The program is designed to serve both younger entrants, and older folks interested in making a career-switch. While we are in “pilot” mode, figuring out what works and what doesn’t, the goal remains putting as many “butts in seats” as possible, while driving down training costs for crews looking to hire a new operator. FIT delivers a statewide training system built around the machines loggers actually run, the skills contractors actually need, and the realities of today’s harvesting operations. Essentially, it finally puts Michigan’s logging workforce on the same playing field as other skilled trades, with the practical support loggers have been missing.



The Michigan Forest Products Council's FIT program will be utilizing Ponsse simulators for their program, as demonstrated in this photo.

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Michigan Forest Association Making a Difference for Landowners



The Michigan Forest Association (MFA) has had a big year of growth, and we are so excited to reintroduce ourselves as a resource for private landowners across Michigan.

Our mission is "... to inspire and empower people to sustainably manage, conserve and enjoy forests through education, advocacy and fellowship." We have existed for the past 53 years, but thanks to an influx in grant funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) we were able to hire the first staff in our organization's history. The IRA was a major Biden administration legislative effort that had

numerous goals along with providing federal funding to a lot of national efforts including clean energy, infrastructure development, and organizational support.

Due to efforts from our board and partnering natural resource professionals we were able to secure four, full-time staff that are supported by four targeted grants: Michigan Underserved Landowner Engagement Grant (5 year, \$500,000 award); IRA Michigan Carbon & Water Fund (5 year, \$4,000,000 award); IRA Michigan Carbon Stewardship Fund (5 year, \$4,000,000 award); and the Michigan Family Forests Market Participation Grant (5 year, \$500,000 award). These grants will provide much needed financial support through 2029 to better connect with Michigan landowners and advocate for sustainable forest management.



Nicole Frost

With these much-needed investments, MFA was able to build a team of dedicated staff to support our efforts. Nicole Frost (Nicole.Frost@MichiganForests.org) started in January 2025 as our Executive Director, and she brings leadership and development strategies from her 25 years working within local government. She was a 1997 Forestry graduate from Michigan State University and is thrilled to be returning to the focus of her undergraduate studies in this position and collaborating with contractors and landowners statewide.

Then Melissa Franquist (Melissa.Franquist@MichiganForests.org) joined the team in June as our Grant Accountant, and she has been instrumental in bringing programming and ideas to life by organizing and reporting on our newfound funding. She has a wide range of accounting experience with various government and nonprofit roles such as accountant, deputy administrator/ controller, and finance director, and has a BS in Accounting and Finance from Central Michigan University.



Melissa Franquist



Vic Lane

In July Vic Lane (Vic.Lane@MichiganForests.org) joined us as our Project Manager. He was also an MSU graduate, graduating with a BS in Wildlife Management in 1999, and brings years of experience working with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and land conservancies. His main objective will be overseeing the creation of the Forest and Water Fund. This will be a cost-share program aimed to support private landowners with different management projects like tree planting, invasive plant control, forest pest and disease mitigation, climate-adaptive forestry,

prescribed fires, and several other project types. He and Melissa will be working in close collaboration to get \$6.4 million back out the door to support forest stewards statewide with their forest management efforts.

Finally, we had Ellie Johnson (Ellie.Johnson@MichiganForests.org) join the team in September as our Outreach Forester. She will be collaborating with the professional community of public and private sector partners she has cultivated during her time working for conservation districts to bring educational events and materials to communities statewide. She brings a mix of education and expertise to the role, holding a BS in Environmental Biology and a BSe in Secondary Biology Education from Clarion University of Pennsylvania, an MS in Forest Resources from Clemson University, and is a Candidate Certified Forester for the Society of American Foresters. She has put on a couple of events since she started, including a timber casualty loss workshop and some guided hikes, but she's got several irons in the fire preparing for 2026.



Ellie Johnson

With a solid team, financial backing, an active board, and a lot of excitement, MFA is poised to connect and collaborate with partners and private landowners around the state. We hope to build off our rich history of advocacy and community to better connect with Michigan's 400,000+ private forest landowners and support partnering organizations' projects.

We enjoy collaborating with groups like Michigan Association of Timbermen and with them we have been honored to help provide the Warren Suchovsky Memorial Scholarship Fund to numerous students over the years. This scholarship supports students pursuing forestry and related degree fields. Together our organizations, with newfound support from Greenstone Farm Credit Services, are able to provide \$2,000 to selected applicants and will connect them to potential future employers in Michigan's forestry industry. To learn more about this funding opportunity, please visit Warren Suchovsky Scholarship Fund | Timbermen.

Submitted by *Ellie Johnson, MFA Staff*

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New No-Cost Portable Bridge Rental Program for Michigan Certified Master Loggers

A new opportunity is now available to support sustainable forestry operations across Michigan.

The Michigan Master Logger Certification Program (MI MLC), in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Sustainable Resources Institute (SRI), is launching a no-cost portable bridge rental program made possible through federal funding from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

Through this initiative, 40-foot portable logging bridges and timber mats have been acquired and are ready for deployment to Certified Michigan Master Loggers conducting timber harvest operations on private lands. These bridges are engineered and built in Michigan to protect streams and wetlands, improve in-woods access, and help operators meet Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality protection. The first three bridges are already in place in Crystal Falls, Newberry, and Grayling.

A huge thank you to Mike Smalligan with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for securing the \$1.5 million in funding through the U.S. Forest Service and DNR Forest Stewardship Program to support our Michigan Master Logger Program and secure these bridges! This funding—made possible by the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—will provide up to 35 portable bridges for use on private forests across Michigan.

Program Highlights:

Bridge Length: 40 feet

Rental Cost: Free of charge (for eligible Master Loggers)

Eligible Use: Timber harvest operations on private land in MI

Goal: Enhance water crossing practices, reduce sedimentation, support clean water initiatives

How to Participate:

Bridges are available on a first-come, first-served basis. All participants must complete a lease agreement and provide a \$500 refundable security deposit, returned upon the bridge's safe and undamaged return. Timber mats are also available to certified Michigan Master Loggers.

To reserve a bridge or learn more, contact:

Mike Elenz, Michigan Master Logger Coordinator
meelenz@gmail.com (989) 390-2559





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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

2025 Legislative Year-End Review

The 2024 election brought a change in leadership in the Michigan House of Representatives with the Republicans taking back control from the Democrats with a 58-52 split. The Senate was not up for re-election in 2024 so that chamber remained in control by Democrats which led to a much more divisive legislature to begin 2025. While only 30 bills have been signed into law this year-to-date, several big pieces of legislation were signed into law including a minimum wage increase, an Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA), a long-term road funding plan and the constitutionally obligated state budget.



2025 RECAP

In 2018, ballot initiatives were started in Michigan to increase minimum wage and created mandatory paid sick time for all employees in Michigan. The legislature at the time feared that if these initiatives were put before Michigan voters, they would be approved so the legislature and Governor at the time, “adopted and amended” the proposals. Essentially, they signed the proposals into law then changed them to make the legislation what they viewed as more business friendly.

Following years of legal jockeying, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that adopting and amending laws within the same legislative session is unconstitutional and ordered that the original ballot initiatives would become law on February 21, 2025 unless changed by the current legislature prior to that date.

The House and Senate came together and passed legislation on that date to make key changes to the new minimum wage law and Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA).

Minimum Wage Increase

The following chart is the new schedule for the minimum wage law in Michigan moving forward:

Date	Minimum Hourly Wage	Tipped Minimum Wage
February 21, 2025	\$12.48 (\$10.00 plus inflation adjustment)	48% of general minimum wage (\$5.99)
February 21, 2026	\$13.29 (\$10.65 plus inflation adjustment)	60% of general minimum wage (\$7.97)
February 21, 2027	\$14.16 (\$11.35 plus inflation adjustment)	70% of general minimum wage (\$9.91)
February 21, 2028	\$14.97 (\$12.00 plus inflation adjustment)	80% of general minimum wage (\$11.98)
February 21, 2029	Standard inflation adjustment	90% of general minimum wage
February 21, 2030	Standard inflation adjustment	100% of general minimum wage

Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA)

In 2018, Michigan ballot initiatives sought to raise the minimum wage and require paid sick time for all employees. Fearing voter approval, the legislature and former governor “adopted and amended” the proposals—enacting them into law, then immediately revising them to be more business-friendly.

After years of legal battles, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that adopting and amending laws in the same legislative session is unconstitutional. The Court ordered the original ballot initiatives to take effect on February 21, 2025, unless the current legislature acted beforehand. On that date, the House and Senate passed legislation modifying the new minimum wage law and the Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA).

Long-Term Road Funding

Following decades of attempting to come up with a long-term road funding plan, the Michigan Legislature adopted a proposal that’s estimated to dedicate over \$1 billion annually to road infrastructure. The long-term road funding plan was made up of a compromise over both new revenue and spending cuts. Included in the plan was:

- A new 24 percent wholesale tax on marijuana that is estimated to raise roughly \$420 million annually
- “Decoupling” the corporate tax breaks from the “Big, Beautiful, Bill” raising over \$500 million annually
- Increasing the gas tax from 31 cents per gallon to 51 cents per gallon while eliminating the sales tax on gasoline – which is predicted to be nearly revenue neutral
- Creating a “Neighborhood Roads Fund” that would direct part of the road funding package to local municipalities for upgrades
- Cut \$690 million from the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (DLEG)

State Budget

After a contentious nine plus months negotiation over the state budget, lawmakers were able to pass an \$81 billion 2025-26 Fiscal Year budget in the early morning hours on November 3rd.

While a “framework” for a deal was announced the week prior, it took roughly a week for the details to get hammered out which forced the legislature to pass a “continuing budget” from Fiscal Year 2024-25 to avoid a state government shutdown until the final budget could be finalized.

After decades of trying to pass a long-term road funding plan in Michigan, the legislature was able to dedicate over \$1 billion annually to road funding and infrastructure. Other budget highlights included the elimination of the Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve (SOAR) funding, an increase to K-12 funding, eliminating 1,800 unfilled state employee positions and expanding prescription drug cash payments for pregnant mothers and newborns.

Budget Focused on Transparency, Reducing “Enhancement Grants”

Aside from a long-term road funding plan, much of the discussion around this year’s budget centered around a more transparent budget process and less “enhancement grants” or one-time funding projects.

The House of Representatives required all one-time funding proposals from their members to identify the sponsor of the project, the public need for the project, the cost of the project and additional details that were posted to their website for the public to view. The Michigan Senate later followed suit and both chambers passed legislation requiring a process for proper disclosure and monitoring of earmark projects.

Following several embarrassing news stories on how earmarks in previous budgets were being spent and administered, one-time funding projects were reduced from \$1.3 billion in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 budget to \$168 million in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 budget.

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House and Senate Secure Priorities in Budget

Both chambers of the Michigan Legislature were able to secure key priorities in the budget that they outlined early on in the process.

Aside from making the process more transparent, the House of Representatives was able to eliminate 1,800 unfilled state employee positions and the Speaker of the House, Matt Hall said he will make it a caucus priority to focus on eliminating additional “Ghost Positions” within state government. The House was also able to get language in the budget to require that state departments prioritize in-office work as opposed to work from home policies that have been adopted.

On the Senate side, Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks was able to secure \$250 million for “RX Kids” which is a program that was launched to provide a \$1,500 cash payment to pregnant women and \$500 monthly for the first 12 months of the infants’ life.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

As we close in on the end of 2025, MAT will focus on key policy initiatives in 2026 as well as following potential new ballot initiatives to be put in front of the Michigan voters in the 2026 election. Next year will also be an important election year as many key seats are open in Michigan due to term limits and retirements.

-72-Hour Frost Law Notice

Many of our members struggle every year with moving equipment when frost laws are put in place with limited notice. Earlier this year, the MAT Government Affairs Committee met with Rep. Tom Kunse (R-Clare) to discuss the challenges that creates for our membership both logistically and financially.

Since our discussion, legislation has been drafted to require that road commissions provide a 72-hour notice before enforcing frost laws to allow our members to move equipment, if necessary.

Rep. Greg Markkanen (R-Hancock) has agreed to champion the issue for MAT after discussions with loggers from his district.

-ABC Test for Independent Contractors

Legislation has once again been introduced this year to create a three-part “ABC” test for subcontractors in construction to determine if the contractor is independent or a full-time employee.

Senate Bills 6 and 7 would require employers to use Federal standards when determining independent contractor status and prohibiting misclassification, establish penalties for withholding wage information or intentionally failing to pay owed wages or fringe benefits, and ensure employees can file confidential retaliation or discrimination complaints with the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO). It also authorizes the Attorney General to enforce LEO orders, requires advance written notice of court-ordered garnishment deductions, creates a Wages and Fringe Benefits Fund within the Department of Treasury, and transfers enforcement authority from the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) to LEO. This legislation is of concern to MAT, and has passed the Senate Labor Committee and awaits a vote before the full Senate.

Ballot Initiatives

The 2026 election will likely feature several ballot initiatives decided by Michigan voters. The signature threshold to get an initiative on the ballot is high and expensive, but several groups have started to collect signatures in the hopes of putting their measure before the voters next year.

Included in that are proposals to create a graduated income tax (as opposed to Michigan’s current flat 4.5% income tax), eliminating property taxes in Michigan and reverting back to the previously discussed minimum wage amounts from the 2018 ballot drive. With that, there are also rumors that a similar initiative will start to revert back to the original ESTA ballot drive.

Election

Next year’s election will be a historic one here in Michigan. With Governor Gretchen Whitmer being term-limited and the announced retirement of U.S. Senator Gary Peters, it will be the first time EVER since the direct election of U.S. Senators started in 1916, that Michigan has both an open U.S. Senate seat and an open Gubernatorial seat in the same election.

On top of that, Secretary of State, Jocelyn Benson (who is running for governor) and Attorney General, Dana Nessel are term-limited. Also, the entire Michigan Senate and Michigan House of Representatives are up for re-election in 2026.

The Senate Democrats currently hold a 20-19 majority in the Michigan Senate with a pending special election to fill the open 35th Senate District in May of 2026. Meanwhile, the House Republicans hold a 58-52 majority in the House of Representatives.

Considering that Michigan is traditionally a “toss-up” state that will go back-and-forth between both parties, there will be a boatload of money spent on political races in 2026 from both in-state groups and out-of-state groups. If you are not a fan of political ads, keep your television remote close starting in the spring of 2026.





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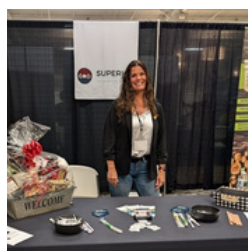
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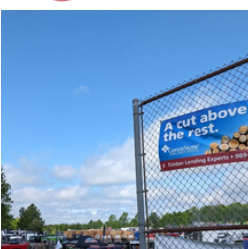


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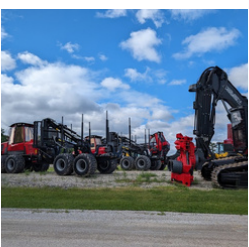
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MAT Hosts Legislative “Day in the Woods”

In late October the MAT Government Affairs Committee hosted a legislative “Day in the Woods” in McBain with legislators and staff from the Michigan Legislature. The retreat provided the opportunity to showcase first-hand the hard, blue-collar work done by the members of our industry along with the incredible investment from our employers.

The committee started the day by taking the legislators to an active timber cut being harvested by Legendary Forest Products, Inc followed by showing them an area of forest that had been clear cut years ago and the re-growth that had happened in a short amount of time.



Elected officials and MAT board members join Legendary Forest Products on a job site near Falmouth, MI

We concluded the day with a working lunch where we discussed our legislative priorities for the year and the challenges our industry is currently facing followed by a tour of Biewer Lumber.

Legislative participants included Rep. Ken Borton (R-Gaylord), Rep. Parker Fairburn (R-Harbor Springs), Rep. Tim Kelly (R-Saginaw Twp), Rep. Jerry Neyer (R-Shepherd), Jason Colella from the office of Rep. Will Snyder (D-Muskegon) and Noah Socha from the office of Rep. Samantha Steckloff (D-Farmington Hills).

The MAT Government Affairs Committee would like to thank the legislators and staff that participated as well as the member companies that helped to make the event happen.



Elected officials tour Biewer Sawmill in McBain



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