

Senator Casperson offered the following resolution:

Senate Resolution No. 79.

A resolution to encourage the United States Forest Service to issue the owners of privately-held hunting camps on leased acres within the Ottawa National Forest special use authorization under the Recreation Residence Program or to renew or grandfather lease agreements with those remaining 104 leaseholders.

Whereas, Starting in the late 1950s, Michigan residents were offered an opportunity to lease privately-owned land from the Upper Peninsula Power Company (UPPCO) to build recreational hunting camps. In 1991, the UPPCO announced intentions to sell the land currently under lease to an intermediary who would simultaneously sell the land to the United States Forest Service (USFS). Existing leaseholders were offered an option to sign a 25-year, nonrenewable lease on the land that was to be sold or to immediately vacate the property. The leases were signed in March of 1992, and the United States Forest Service (USFS) took control of the land in June 1992. The land currently under private lease accounts for less than 1,100 acres in the Ottawa National Forest; and

Whereas, Hundreds of people have experienced the wonders of Michigan's great outdoors at these hunting camps. The Ottawa National Forest is almost one million acres of rolling hills, lakes, rivers, waterfalls, and abundant wildlife. Those who lease land in the forest have built outdoor recreational traditions with their families. The hunting camps allow them to experience the seclusion and isolated environment of the Ottawa National Forest while engaging in varied recreational activities including hunting, fishing, canoeing, and snowshoeing; and

Whereas, The USFS has informed leaseholders that leases will not be renewed at the end of 2016 because it is national policy not to lease national forestland to individuals. The holders of the active leases will have 90 days after the leases expire to remove the hunting cabins and return the land to its natural state; and

Whereas, The expiration of the leases will hurt local economies in Ontonagon and Gogebic Counties. It will result in over \$35,000 in lost lease fee revenue to the townships and almost \$10,000 in tax revenue to the counties. Even a greater loss will be realized by local businesses, including gas stations, grocery stores, hardware stores, and restaurants that benefit from the patronage of the camp families; and

Whereas, The expiration of the leases will eliminate refuge for people from the occasionally harsh and unexpected shifts in weather conditions. The Ottawa National Forest covers a large area in the western Upper Peninsula. Camp owners often leave their cabins or outbuildings unlocked to the relief of individuals stranded in the woods who have sought shelter. A Boy Scout troop once sheltered at the Twin Pines camp after being caught in a storm, and a group of snowmobilers is known to regularly rest at one of the camps; and

Whereas, The USFS Recreation Residence Program provides private citizens an opportunity to own single-family cabins in designated areas of national forests. Currently, 15,570 recreation residences occupy national forest system lands throughout the country. Converting the soon-to-expire leases to special use permits would allow the many families currently leasing in the Ottawa National Forest an opportunity that is provided to thousands of people elsewhere in the country. Converting to the Recreation Residence Program would also maintain a tax base for local governments, provide continuing support for the local economy, and ensure that hunting and recreational traditions held so dear by Michigan residents continue to be experienced in the Ottawa National Forest; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate, That we encourage the United States Forest Service to issue the owners of privately-held camps on leased acres within the Ottawa National Forest special use authorization under the Recreation Residence Program or to renew or grandfather lease agreements with those remaining 104 leaseholders; and be it further

Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Chief of the United States Forest Service and the members of the Michigan congressional delegation.