

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
REGENTS COMMUNICATION

ACTION REQUEST

Subject: New School for Environment and Sustainability

Action Requested: Creation of a new School for Environment and Sustainability

Effective Date: July 1, 2017

BACKGROUND

The study of natural resources and the environment has been a core part of the University of Michigan for more than 100 years. From its beginnings in 1903 as the University's Department of Forestry, the School of Natural Resources and Environment (SNRE) has been adapting to and anticipating the needs of society and environmental leaders for decades. From the establishment of one of the first schools of natural resources in 1950 to today, SNRE continues its global leadership in research and education, preparing students to be innovative and effective stewards of the environment.

Now, more than ever, the world's increasingly complex and dynamic environment and sustainability challenges call for the continued evolution of the University of Michigan's programs.

In the fall of 2015, an external committee of faculty experts was charged with reviewing the environment and sustainability programs at the University, including SNRE, the Graham Sustainability Institute, and the Program in the Environment, a joint program between SNRE and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA). That review identified significant strengths and enormous possibilities within the various programs, and recommended that we build on those strengths by developing new modes of coordination and advanced approaches to education.

Following the work of the external committee, a committee of 14 U-M faculty members from 10 different units was charged with reviewing the findings and exploring a new structure that would include a significantly greater degree of integration of U-M's academic programs. The Committee on Academic Programs in Environment and Sustainability gathered feedback from faculty, staff, students and alumni through a variety of channels including meetings, town halls, surveys and email. A new school, which would address global sustainability challenges at the intersection of environment and society through research, teaching and civic engagement, was among the key recommendations in the committee's report.

The university's new structure for environment and sustainability programs will give students and society the tools needed to help solve some of the world's gravest problems.

Addressing our global environmental challenges and preparing future leaders in this field inevitably requires working across conventional disciplines and adopting diverse, innovative approaches to problem solving. The new school will organize its research and curriculum around disciplinary clusters (stable, long-term, discipline-based faculty groups that provide the expertise required to foster interactions and student training within closely-related fields of scholarship) and sustainability themes (flexible, interdisciplinary topics that will be reviewed at regular intervals and updated as societal and funding priorities evolve) that will foster interdisciplinary excellence in select topics.

The new school will include the current SNRE faculty, build on that school's strengths, have a broader mission, and be structured to engage faculty from across the university. It will have porous boundaries so it can provide leadership and work collaboratively with other schools, institutes and programs at the university to develop solutions to the most challenging global sustainability issues. And it will adopt innovative approaches to teaching, including the expansive use of the campus and the community as a living laboratory. The search for the inaugural dean of the new school is underway.

#### NEW SCHOOL NAMING PROCESS

In the fall of 2016, the existing SNRE faculty was charged with recommending the name for the new school. They conducted a thorough and inclusive process, seeking input from a wide range of constituencies including students, staff, alumni, and faculty in and outside of SNRE. The faculty then voted overwhelmingly in favor of the recommended name: School for Environment and Sustainability.

#### RECOMMENDATION

I am pleased to recommend the creation of a new School for Environment and Sustainability effective July 1, 2017. This new school will replace the existing School of Natural Resources and Environment with the expanded scope and mission described above.

Approval of this recommendation will require a revision of several Regents' Bylaws that refer to the School of Natural Resources and Environment. These proposed revisions will be forthcoming in accordance with the *Procedures for the Revision of Regents' Bylaws*.

Respectfully submitted,



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Martha E. Pollack  
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

December 2016