

# Green from Brown

Study says redeveloping contaminated land could help regenerate Michigan's economy

BY MEGAN FARHAT

Michigan State University researchers say installing solar panels and wind turbines on about 44,000 acres of Michigan's abandoned and contaminated land could power about half of the state's homes, generate more than \$15 billion in investment and create more than 17,500 construction and long-term jobs.

"This case study illustrates the size of opportunity Michigan has and it is considerable," said Charles McKeown, MSU's Land Policy Institute land-use informatics manager and the study's co-author. "If Michigan wants to be a positive renewable energy leader, then the potential redevelopment of brownfields for renewable energy is one of those places where you hit an economic sweet spot."

The MSU study proposes that developers place wind turbines and solar panels on Michigan's 3,600 brownfields — abandoned industrial lands that have the potential to release toxic chemicals into land, air and drinking water. These sites could produce about 4,320 megawatts of electricity from wind and solar power.

"I am a big fan of this movement. I think it's a win-win for these underutilized properties that are going to otherwise sit idle and vacant," said Jeff Hukill, a brownfields grant coordinator at the Department of Environmental Quality.

Michigan has one of the leading brownfield cleanup programs in the country, but its cleanup funding is nearly gone. Existing money is maintaining and cleaning sites considered potential threats to public health, said DEQ spokesman Robert McCann.

"What we don't want is for those sites that have already had work done to get any worse," he said, which means the agency cannot begin work on new sites.

When the money is available, the DEQ encourages alternative

energy and green infrastructure projects on brownfields, said Susan Erickson, chief of the agency's Environmental Stewardship Grants and Loans Unit.

"We do give brownie points to those types of projects that incorporate energy efficiency," she said.

Hukill said funding for renewable projects on brownfields could happen with or without DEQ incentives. Michigan Economic Development Corp., the state's official economic development agency, offers tax credits on projects that create jobs. Hukill hopes private developers will fund some of these projects.

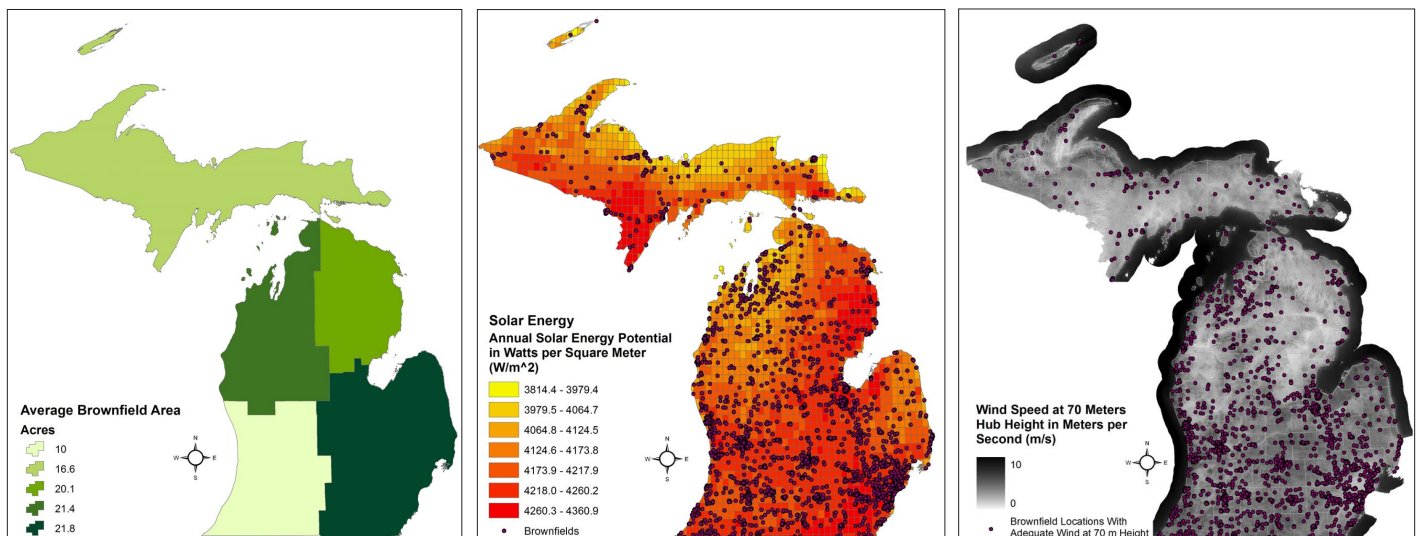
Michigan's \$7 billion of federal stimulus money could be another option. Gov. Jennifer Granholm said in February that she would direct stimulus money toward creating jobs and retraining workers to fill them. She also set a goal to reduce the state's reliance on fossil fuels for electricity generation by 45 percent in 2020.

The MSU study found Michigan's brownfields are well suited for developing renewable energy because of their proximity to energy users, the electrical grid and existing roads.

McKeown said while the state's overall economy is shrinking, its energy economy is growing.

"It should be a priority to utilize these brownfield sites that will then, after clean up, offer another avenue for us to package energy up for consumers," he said. "Michigan as a whole will benefit greatly from it." 🌍

Megan Farhat is a second-year journalism student at MSU. This is her first appearance in *EJ*. Contact her at farhatme@msu.edu.



Source: Michigan State University Land Policy Institute