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Sierra Club Calls For Urgent Action on Snyder Water Plan, Probe of Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, October 2, 2015

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LANSING—Sierra Club today called on Gov. Rick Snyder to act decisively and urgently to implement plans to end the public health crisis in Flint and to support an independent investigation into the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality’s oversight of federal drinking water laws.

“Given the clear risks to vulnerable populations and the state’s public health responsibilities this is a time for strong leadership and accountability from state public health authorities and the governor,” said **David Holtz, Sierra Club** Michigan Chair. “The governor, finally, is assuming direct responsibility for responding to a crisis that every day is damaging the health of Flint’s children. His actions should be much stronger, however, and he needs to find out how we got to the point where Flint children are drinking lead and what the MDEQ’s role was in those decisions and actions.”

The Snyder administration today outlined a series of steps they will take to address Flint's public health crisis. They include accelerated and expanded water treatment, providing filters to some residents, expanded testing of residents and an examination of whether to temporarily switch back to the Detroit water system. Replacing Flint's lead pipes over time were also on the administration's to-do list.

Sierra Club Michigan Director **Gail Philbin** said only independent testing of Flint's water for lead will be credible because of questions raised regarding the city and MDEQ's handling of past test results.

"Parents need to know drinking water is safe for their children," said Philbin. "Immediately they need credible testing for lead and alternatives to contaminated water. The likely best way to ensure safe drinking water in Flint is to change to a safe and reliable drinking water source and that's Detroit's water system and to eliminate lead pipes."

Investigations by the ACLU and nationally recognized drinking water expert Marc Edwards at Virginia Tech University have pointed to failures in testing and enforcement of federal drinking water standards by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. An MDEQ spokesman reportedly attacked Virginia Tech's results and complained about the "near-hysteria" over Flint's water supply. The Virginia Tech researcher documented what he called "mistakes and deception" involving the MDEQ's handling of Flint's drinking water problem.

"Along with ensuring Flint residents aren't drinking lead, we need for the governor to ensure that the public gets answers to what happened and why we ended up with a public health crisis in Flint," said Holtz. "That will require an independent investigation. If that's something Governor Snyder is unwilling to do we need federal authorities to determine to what extent, if any, state officials who are responsible for implementing federal drinking water standards are accountable for the public health crisis in Flint."

The Greater Flint Health Coalition, a group of health professionals in the Flint community, has concluded that Flint's drinking water is unsafe because of elevated lead blood levels. The city of Flint began using the Flint River as a water source in April 2014 following a decision made by emergency manager Darnell Earley.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studies show that lead in drinking water can cause serious health problems and that the greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children and pregnant women. Scientists have linked the effects of lead on the brain with lowered IQ in children.

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