



THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY

Protecting the places we love for future generations

Summer 2002

Issue 23

Serving the Tittabawassee, Chippewa and Pine River Watersheds

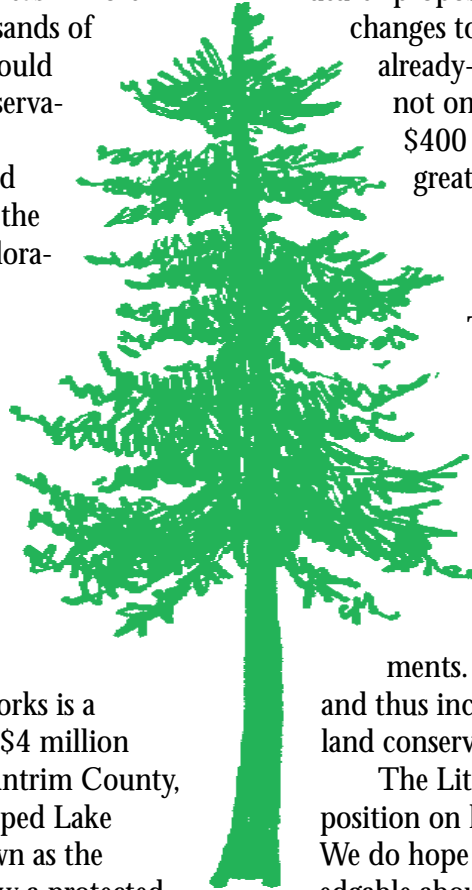
Funds For the Future

In the mid-1970s a battle brewed over a proposal to drill for oil and gas in one of the more pristine and undeveloped wilderness areas in northern Michigan. The struggle over thousands of acres in the Pigeon River watershed would create one of the most significant conservation funds in the country.

The Natural Resources Trust Fund was established as a compromise with the oil and gas industry to permit the exploration for and extraction of oil and gas deposits in the Pigeon River region. A portion of revenues from minerals extracted from under State-owned land is directed into the Fund. Earnings and a portion of the revenue stream are granted to local governments for the specific purpose of buying high quality, undeveloped land for conservation or recreational needs.

One example of how the Fund works is a project on which I worked directly. A \$4 million grant was made to Banks Township, Antrim County, to purchase over one mile of undeveloped Lake Michigan shoreline. That land is known as the Antrim Creek Natural Area, and is now a protected treasure for all the citizens of Michigan. For that project, the owner of the property donated the 25-percent matching funds that are required for local project grants.

Between 1978 and 2001 over \$500 million has been granted from the Natural Resources Trust Fund to purchase conservation and recreational lands throughout Michigan, including more than \$1 million spent in Midland County.



On the August 6 primary ballot, voters will be asked to consider Proposal 2, known as the “Funds for the Future” proposal. You will be asked to approve several changes to the management structure of the already-existing Fund. The changes involve not only raising the cap of the fund from \$400 million to \$500 million, but also give greater flexibility in investing the principal.

Because the fund is built by royalties from publicly owned resources, there are no tax dollars going into the fund. Therefore, any changes to the Fund’s management will not increase taxes.

Proposal 2 will read very technical. What is important to know is that the proposal makes a change to the Michigan Constitution to allow the investment of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund in a wider variety of investments. This should generate a higher return and thus increase the funds that are available for land conservation and recreation.

The Little Forks Conservancy does not take a position on how you should vote on the proposal. We do hope you are now a little more knowledgeable about Proposal 2 when you step into the voting booth on Tuesday, August 6!

***Proposal 2 will increase funds
for land conservation.***

Bald Eagles, Wood Turtles and More...

Go Figure. Hold an annual picnic in the middle of May and everyone attending is looking for the woodstove to warm up next to!

Despite the unseasonably “cool” temperatures, the brief bit of sleet and the general lack of sunshine, more than 50 members and friends of The Little Forks Conservancy braved the conditions for a wonderful day of camaraderie and excitement at Don Blades’ farm in southern Gladwin County.

Guests were treated to a bald eagle soaring overhead as it tried to escape a pesky hawk that was trying to steal its lunch of fish that hung gingerly from its talons. A state threatened wood turtle was

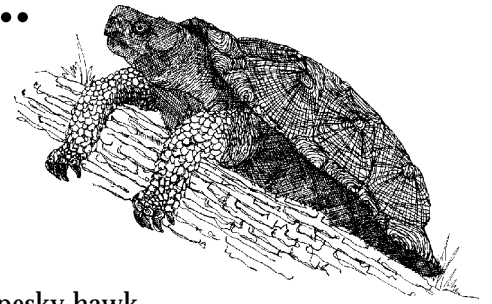


Photo courtesy of Carol Monaghan

LFC Members explore Don Blades’ protected floodplain.

found. Large trilliums were in bloom. Ducks, turkeys, rose-breasted grossbeaks, northern orioles and many other species of both fauna and flora were identified thanks to a guided tour by Chippewa Nature Center staff member Tom Lenon.

Members were also treated to a wonderful presentation by Denise Spencer, President and CEO of the Midland Area Community Foundation, as well as updates from LFC Executive Director Doug Koop and Board President Dan Cline.

Thank you to all who attended, and maybe next year the weather will be warmer!

Greenway Discovery Day a Success

More than a hundred people stopped along the Pere Maquette Rail Trail for the first Tittabawassee River Greenway Discovery Day held on May 4. Despite a cold morning residents and visitors explored, discovered and learned a little more about the unique stretch of land between Sanford and Midland.

As one of the last undeveloped stretches of Tittabawassee River, there are miles of natural shoreline that offer this community the chance to preserve a significant natural resource right in our own backyard.

The Conservancy will be exploring additional opportunities to highlight the habitat, river shoreline, wetlands and open fields that give Midland and Sanford the sense of wilderness right out our backdoor.



Greenways discoverers learn about the Arbutus Bog from Chippewa Nature Center naturalist Phil Stephens.

CONSERVANCY ASSISTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STURGEON CREEK WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

Over the past several months, The Conservancy has been involved in working to develop a watershed plan to improve water quality in the Sturgeon Creek. In the summer of 2001, the Midland Conservation District was awarded a grant with funding provided by Section 319 of the Federal Clean Water Act. The purpose of this grant is to develop a Sturgeon Creek Watershed Plan.

The process has involved working with local stakeholders, including The Conservancy, in this planning process. In addition, there have been public meetings held at various locations in the watershed to inform residents of the project. At these meetings, Elan Lipschitz, land protection specialist, was on hand to talk about a variety of topics ranging from greenways to land conservation options.

The Sturgeon Creek Watershed is unique in its variety of land uses. The watershed consists of approximately 11,148 acres of agricultural land, 20,867 acres of forests, 1,943 acres of wetlands, 3,300 acres of AuSable State Forest, 5 townships and 3,157 acres of the City of Midland.

Also unique is the variety of stakeholders who are participating in the process, including governmental entities, private citizens, landowners, educational institutions and non-profit organizations.

Former Little Forks Conservancy project coordinator Debbie Anderson has recently stepped in as watershed manager to coordinate the project. The project has involved conducting an inventory of the watershed to identify sites negatively impacting water quality. Some of these sites identified are bank erosion, rill and gully erosion, algae blooms, and trash and debris in the waterways.

From the inventory, a plan has been drafted to be implemented to improve water quality. "This plan will help Midland landowners prevent further pollution of the Sturgeon Creek and to make wise management decisions about their property. There are many avenues for property management, and we are proud to have The Little Forks Conservancy as one of the options we can suggest," says Ms. Anderson.

The Conservancy has a unique role in the planning process by being able to look not only at the sources of pollution impacting water quality, but at the existing land-

scape and ecological features. By assessing the lands of the watershed, significant areas with high quality natural features have been identified in hopes of finding ways to preserve them.

Critical areas are present in the Sturgeon Creek Watershed and the protection of these areas will go a long way in preventing further degradation of water quality. These so-called "Areas of Protection" include such areas as land adjacent to the Sturgeon Creek with significant forested buffers, land within the boundaries of the Au Sable State Forest, areas adjacent to already-conserved lands, and wetlands.

One of the key tools available for the protection of land in the Sturgeon Creek Watershed is the conservation easement. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between the landowner and The Little Forks Conservancy that permanently protects the conservation values of the property by limiting a property's use in order to protect its resources. The restrictions are designed to meet the landowner's specific needs while conserving and protecting the resources of the land.

Landowners who place a conservation easement on their property may be entitled to significant financial benefits including a charitable income tax deduction, reduced estate tax and a possible property tax reduction.

So next time you go past Sturgeon Creek, think about all that is happening to improve this valuable resource to Midland County. Be proud that an organization you help support is a part of this process.

For additional information about the Sturgeon Creek Watershed Management Project contact Debbie Anderson at 989-687-9760.

If you own land in the Sturgeon Creek watershed, or in any of Tittabawassee River's sub-watersheds, and would like to learn about your conservation options, contact Elan Lipschitz at the Conservancy office, 989-835-4886.

Going to the Fair?

Stop by the LFC booth at the Midland County Fair, August 11-17, to learn more about our work to protect the Sturgeon Creek watershed. Also, learn about our efforts to build a network of Greenways in the Tri-County region.

ALMOST THERE!

We continue to approach our goal for the endowment matching grant provided by the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation. As a reminder, our challenge is to raise \$500,000 by December of 2003. Each dollar donated for The Little Forks Conservancy Endowment Fund, held at the Midland Area Community Foundation (MACF), will be matched by the Dow Foundation up to \$500,000.

Contributions made directly to the MACF can qualify for the Michigan Tax Credit. For example, a couple donating \$400 can receive up to a \$200 credit on their Michigan State income tax return. You may also get additional benefit by itemizing the gift on your federal return. When you consider the dollar-for-

dollar match and the charitable deduction, a contribution to the endowment fund is heavily leveraged.

The Conservancy receives income from the earnings on the endowment fund, which provides an annual source of operating revenue to help meet a portion of our permanent commitment to the land and community.

Please consider a special gift to the endowment fund to help close out the challenge this year! To qualify for the Michigan Tax Credit, checks must be made out to the Midland Area Community Foundation, with the Little Forks Conservancy Endowment Fund written in the memo line.

COMING THIS FALL!

LFC will be running a series of advertisements in the *Midland Daily News* to attract new members. Please take advantage of this opportunity to share information about the benefits of land conservation with your neighbors and friends.

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MISSION

The Little Forks Conservancy serves to assist the community to voluntarily protect natural and cultural resources.

**THE LITTLE FORKS
CONSERVANCY**

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