



THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY

Protecting the places we love for future generations

Spring 2003

Issue 25

Serving the Tittabawassee, Chippewa and Pine River Watersheds

GREENWAYS FIRST PHASE NEARS COMPLETION

The Saginaw Bay Greenways Collaborative, a collection of individuals who represent a variety of community interests from Midland, Bay and Saginaw Counties, is putting the final touches on a two-year project funded by the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN).

The Conservancy has played a lead role in the preparation of the report to identify the best potential land for conservation in the tri-county region. The key criteria for land to qualify for focused conservation efforts is whether it can provide a linkage to other lands already protected. For this project, publicly held lands, conservancy lands, and even some private "club" lands were considered under protection, i.e. used for their natural resource values and likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future.

Through a process of data collection, computer analysis and public input, a vision for the three-county region was created to show where efforts for land conservation would be most beneficial to the community. The use of a powerful Geographic Information System (GIS) helped team member Jonathan Jarosz sort through gigabytes of data from satellite imagery to aerial photography to thematic maps

obtained from government agencies. Jonathan's work was crucial to bringing the data to the public in a clear and understandable format.

The map shown here is actually the front side of a newly created poster. The reverse side of the poster contains a tremendous amount of information on the project, on the opportunities for conservation in the three-county region,

and basic educational information about greenways and green infrastructure planning.

The Conservancy would like to distribute as many of these posters as possible. If you would like to help



share the results of this project with others in your community, please call the Conservancy's office at 989-835-4886.

From the Executive Director

The Little Forks Conservancy is beginning the new year with changes and a great challenge.

We have already shared one of the big changes with you and that is our new office location. In January we moved into the upper



DOUGLAS L. KOOP

floor at 414 Townsend Street. After a couple of months we are still putting things away and taking things out, but I think we are

starting to feel much more comfortable in calling this home.

We have also added a new contract staff person to our organization. Ms. Jennifer Olsen will be working part-time through December to help implement several of our membership building initiatives.

Jennifer will be the LFC's new Outreach Coordinator, hired through a grant from the Land Trust Alliance. Her primary goal is to assist in the acquisition of new supporting members. Jennifer brings a marketing background to us and has held a variety of positions throughout the country. She is a native of North Carolina but has lived in Washington D.C., Ann Arbor and recently, Manhattan.

As an added incentive to increase membership, the Charles J. Strosacker Foundation has challenged us with a matching grant whereby they will match all new member contributions in 2003 and 2004 up to a total of \$20,000.

If you believe you might be able to help us find new members among your friends,

neighbors, co-workers, or service club affiliates, please call our office to discuss these opportunities.

We are also finishing the framework of a strategic plan that we began developing in December of last year. For the next three to five years the Board has decided that we will focus on five primary conservation areas within the Tittabawassee River watershed. (Please look on page 3 for greater details in an article by Land Protection Specialist, Elan Lipschitz.)

We are also near completion of two projects on which we have assisted. **The Sturgeon Creek Watershed Plan**, prepared by the Midland Conservation District, is in its final stages of review and approval by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

The Saginaw Bay Greenways Collaborative has produced another product. The Collaborative has created a map of Midland, Bay and Saginaw Counties that depicts a vision for conserving the green infrastructure of these communities. We hope you enjoyed the cover article about this long range project.

In the first major change to affect the organizational structure of The Little Forks Conservancy since our incorporation in 1996, we will say good-bye to four original board members. **Bill Gibson, Gene Kenaga, Eileen Starks and Hugh Starks** have each elected to vacate their seats as directors of the organization.

For those of you who know these individuals, you are aware of the hours and hours of time they have put into building a better

community and, in our instance, building a better environment.

I do not have nearly enough space on this page to thank them for the support and leadership they have provided.

There is always a touch of sadness when a founding member moves on. It is especially tough when a whole group leaves. While serving as directors for nearly seven years (not to mention the many years prior to starting LFC) these wonderful people were vital in elevating the issue of land conservation and making the Conservancy a viable community based organization. Please join us **May 17th at the annual picnic** to say thank you.

To fill the vacancies for the Conservancy's board of directors, we have tapped five individuals who hold a wealth of knowledge and a strong commitment toward conserving land to build a stronger community.

We welcome **Judy Enger, Carol Feider, Steve Kin, Elyse Rogers and Chris Velasquez**. Each will bring a perspective and strength to The Little Forks Conservancy board that will help us serve the community and landowners who are seeking to protect their land.

These incoming directors are already hard at work by joining with the current board at our final strategic planning session held on April 16. I look forward to the new energy and new perspectives that this group will bring.

STRATEGICALLY ASSESSING LAND

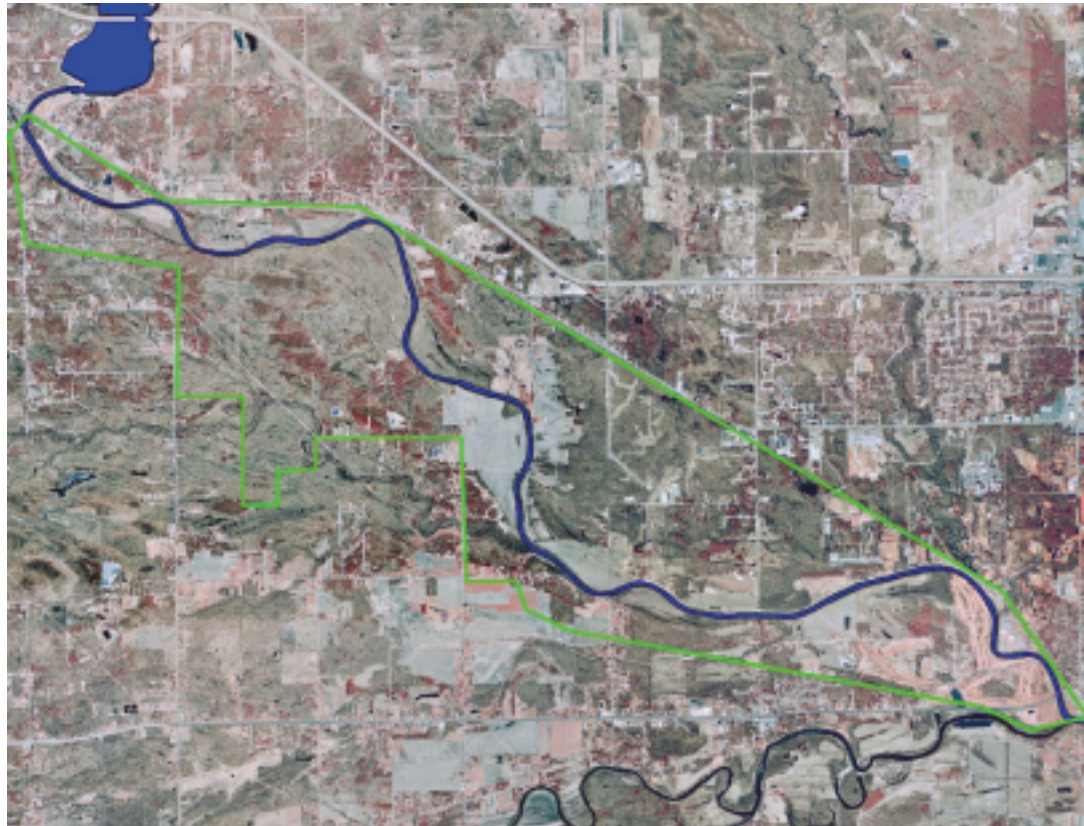
Where are the critical lands in the Tittabawassee River Watershed? What conservation options should be used to achieve our land conservation objectives?

These are two of the central questions being answered as part of a mentoring process the Conservancy is currently participating in to renew our strategic plan.

With assistance from the Land Trust Alliance Midwest Office, the Conservancy is taking a strategic look at the wealth of important natural resources in the Tittabawassee River Watershed.

There are miles of rivers and streams, large expanses of forests and wetlands, and precious open space. These features define the character of our community. Through the mentoring process the Conservancy sought to locate these features within the Tittabawassee Watershed and adjacent lands.

The first step in identifying these areas was prioritizing the critical features that were important. Features identified in the discussion were rivers, wetlands, biodiversity, forests and green infrastructure. The next step was to determine the geographic boundaries of areas which contain these critical features. After a presentation on the natural features of the watershed and location of the critical features by LFC's staff, the board identified focus areas in the Tittabawassee River Watershed and Midland County.



Aerial photographs such as this (Tittabawassee River Sanford to Midland) are being used within the Conservancy's Geographic Information System (GIS) to analyze and locate strategically important natural resources.

Five areas within the watershed were identified as warranting special attention by the Conservancy over the next three to five years. Each of these focus areas will undergo additional analysis by the Conservancy land committee to identify critical properties and select the tools that may have the greatest success at achieving land conservation in that particular area.

One area identified in the mentoring process was the Tittabawassee River corridor from Midland to Sanford. This relatively undeveloped stretch of river is home to a variety of wildlife (including bald eagles), mature hardwood forest, and emergent and forested wetlands.

The focus areas are not limited to rivers only. Entire landscapes of the region were included. One such

area, comprising over 50,000 acres, is located in northern Midland County as well as portions of Gladwin and Bay Counties. This area has a wealth of wetland resources, forests, and rivers and streams. While much of this land is under the ownership of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources land, there are several large parcels of privately held land including hunt clubs which are well suited for land protection in this focus area.

If you are interested in learning more about the process or helping with the Conservancy's land protection efforts in these areas please contact Elan Lipschitz, our Land Protection Specialist.

ANNUAL PICNIC DATE SET

This year we will hold our annual members' picnic at noon on Saturday, May 17th at the historic Averill banking grounds between Midland and Sanford. This year's luncheon will feature BBQ pork sandwiches and chicken furnished by Billy Bones BBQ. The cost will be just \$10 per person, although children 12 years and younger will be free. A separate flyer with event details will be sent shortly.

Join us after the picnic for a natural history hike around this historic property to learn a little about the natural resources of the property and some history associated with the logging of Michigan's forests.

Or, join staff from Chippewa Nature Center to canoe or kayak down the Tittabawassee River from Sanford back to the Averill property.

Also, this year we are encouraging you to bring a friend who is not yet a member of LFC, but who may be interested in supporting the conservation of lands such as the Averill site and surrounding properties.

LFC SUPPORTS BIOBLITZ

Come see live birds of prey and mammals! Be a research assistant to well-known scientists for the day! You can do all of this and more at BioBlitz 2003.

BioBlitz is a 24-hour race, May 30-31, to count as many species as possible at Chippewa Nature Center. Scientists are invited from around the region to focus on counting species within their area of expertise. You are invited to observe and interact with the scientists as they count species in the field and at "Base Camp," where programs, identification, and the official tally will occur.

Friday programs will start at 6 p.m. and continue until 11 p.m. Activities will resume early Saturday morning and continue until 9 p.m. Counting of species will occur 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday. BioBlitz will go on rain or shine and there is no fee for admission. Don't miss this opportunity to explore the biodiversity of mid-Michigan!

Dr. Jim Harding, Michigan State University professor and author of *Amphibians & Reptiles of the Great Lakes Region*, will serve as the keynote speaker immediately

following the species count. Dr. Harding's book, as well as books by many other participating scientists, will be available for purchase and authors will be on-hand to sign copies.

For more information on BioBlitz or the schedule of activities, contact Tom Lenon or Rachel Larimore at Chippewa Nature Center: 989-631-0830.

LFC Board of Directors

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Tom Bradley	Glenn Sanford
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Ed Elliott	Eileen Starks
Bill Gibson	Hugh Starks
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