



THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY

Protecting the places we love for future generations

Winter 2004 Issue 28 Serving the Tittabawassee, Chippewa and Pine River Watersheds

The following article was recently passed on to us by a fellow conservancy staff member in Northern Michigan. We would like to share it with you, and hope you can find some common experiences with the author.

Editor's Note by Deborah Wyatt Fellows, Editor in Chief, from the December 2003 issue, TRAVERSE, Northern Michigan's Magazine.

Our four kids were ahead of us on the trail, spurred on by assurances we were near the top. Animated voices drifted down to us, exclamations about what we were to see: the view, the sky, the water below, the fallen tree. My husband, Neal, and I arrived at the top just in time for all of us to come eye-to-eye with a flock of Canada Geese.

"We're so lucky to see this," I commented.

"I don't believe in luck," said my son, Peter, who is 10. "I only believe in skill."

It was such an odd sentiment coming from our whimsical second son that it got me thinking. I've not left much to luck in my life, but I so freely call upon it when we are outside. I call us lucky when we are floating a quiet river and flush a heron. I speak of luck when we round a corner on a hike and come upon a canopy of fall colors. I know how lucky I am to have quiet places outside where we're all



The Chippewa River as it flows through the Sanford property, protected with a conservation easement in 2001.

together or as I watch the four of them flinging themselves with abandon into clear, clean water. I call upon luck to sum up the feelings of friends and family around a bonfire, a soft lavender sky in the west, the first stars in the twilight of the east. One of the luckiest feelings I know is to come upon the wonder of nature, alone or with people I love.

But I realized as I got to my feet that day to head back down the trail, while I might feel lucky in those experiences, it's not luck that ensures they are there to be had. It is skill, commitment and hard work, vision and perseverance. For every state park we wander, every natural area we explore or fresh body of water we dive

into, untold hours of time and effort went into making that experience possible. Sometimes it is from the work of the political process, sometimes through nonprofit organizations. But one common strain runs through every spot in nature open to the public that you may cherish or tread - those experiences would not be there were it not for legions of dedicated professionals and volunteers.

Picture yourself, for a moment, stepping onto the trail my family hiked that day, a trail in a nature area preserved by a conservancy. As is so often the case, it may appear that you are alone in that spectacular setting, but just imagine for a moment all the

cont. on p. 2

From the Director



With nearly a third of our 2003 contributors new to the ranks of the Conservancy, I thought it might be good to go back a little bit and fill many of you in on how we got to where we are today.

I was hired as the Executive Director just over six years ago, one year after the organization was incorporated (1996). The Conservancy formed to protect undeveloped river frontage throughout Midland County. The founders chose the name “Little Forks” to signify the confluence of the Chippewa and Tittabawassee Rivers, but the name can also signify the confluence of hundreds of streams within our watershed. We ultimately agreed to work throughout the Tittabawassee River watershed. After all, many landowners within the watershed are, or will be, seeking ways to protect their land.

Our first project, completed in 1999, was a donated conservation easement on 274-acres along the Tobacco River in Gladwin County. This was followed by the gift of a 40-acre property on the Chippewa River in Mecosta County. After that project we received the donation of

a 20-acre conservation easement just upstream of the previous project on the Chippewa River. In 2000, we closed our first project in Midland County, a 44-acre gift of mostly wetlands in Edenville Township.

In 2001 when asked by an LFC member to help him protect his 75 acres on the Midland County line, 15 minutes from our office but outside of the Tittabawassee River watershed, the board determined that the project met our primary mission—to *assist landowners in the voluntary protection of natural resources found on their property*—so we accepted a conservation easement.

You are aware of the three projects we completed in 2003, including two in Midland County and one in Montcalm County. We are currently working on projects in Midland, Gladwin, Clare, Isabella and Montcalm Counties. There is no way I can predict if any of these landowners will “sign on the bottom line,” but that is the nature of this business.

To learn more about our plans, turn to pages 4 and 5 to find out how we will be seeking out other landowners throughout our community.

—Doug Koop

For more information on LFC history and projects visit our website at www.littleforks.org

cont. from p. 1

people who are there with you: the landowner who decided it was worth it to explore options with a land preservation organization before selling it on the private market; the staffer who listened at the landowner’s kitchen table to all that was needed and whose passion for the process got the landowner inspired enough to go the next step; the staff and volunteer board members who met at the committee level to discuss the feasibility of purchasing the land and brainstormed ways to do it; the volunteer board that voted to purchase the land, fully understanding the effort it would take from everyone; the staff and volunteers who worked endless hours to find grant money and private donations to purchase the land; board members of foundations who reviewed and approved donating money; the hundreds of individuals who chose to donate their own money to preserve that land; the staff who walked the land, once purchased, to catalog what exists in the natural habitat and to map out and then create the best possible trails for the public; and the volunteers who go each month to clear

the trails of debris, make repairs and lead nature walks.

You know, somewhere on that spectacular trail you would probably stop, as I did, to pronounce yourself the luckiest of all people to be experiencing such beauty. But I can tell you, if you asked any one of those people who worked so hard to make that experience possible, they would say that they are the lucky ones for having had a hand in preserving the land you walked.

It takes a lot of skill and hard work to ensure our natural world is intact for all to experience. As this year comes to an end and as you look ahead to the next, please take a moment to think about what you might do to ensure that those who are yet to come have the chance to feel as lucky as we so often do. Write a letter, write a check, volunteer your talents. I promise you will feel no less lucky as you experience all those breathtaking surprises in nature. Quite the opposite. By contributing in some way, I think you will count yourself among the luckiest of all.

LFC in the News

LOCAL VOLUNTEER HELPS RE-WRITE NATIONAL PUBLICATION

Midland Daily News, Business Briefs

(November 27, 2003) Local retired attorney Thomas Misner was recently acknowledged by the Washington D.C.-based Land Trust Alliance (LTA) for his assistance in editing the latest update to a publication issued across the nation. Misner, a founding board member of The Little Forks Conservancy (LFC), offered changes to the 50-page booklet after he found out the LTA was planning to issue an update in late 2003.

The booklet, entitled Conservation Options: A Landowner's Guide, is one of the premier educational pieces distributed by the LTA and by many of the 1,300 local land trusts and conservancies across the country.

The Little Forks Conservancy works with landowners to establish voluntary protection of private lands primarily within the Tittabawassee River Watershed. LFC has completed 8 land protection projects that conserve natural resources on 742 acres with more than five miles of river shoreline in 5 counties in Mid-Michigan.

Little Forks Receives Grant

by Cecilia Potts, of the *Midland Daily News*

published in the Daily News on January 8, 2004 (partial reprint)

The Little Forks Conservancy was among six non-profit organizations that received a check from Midland's 3M Scientific Anglers.

"It was an unsolicited gift," said Doug Koop. He also said the conservancy was very surprised and happy to receive the check. "We weren't even aware they gave out grants like this."

The amount given to the conservancy was not made public but Koop said it would be put in the general fund. Staff at the Little Forks Conservancy work with local landowners to preserve their land--including forests, farmland, wetland, natural habitats and water quality.

To decide how to allocate the money available, 3M Scientific Anglers used an employee survey to get an idea where employee's interests and concerns lay, said Bruce Richards of 3M Scientific Anglers.

The results of the survey showed a number of employees had interests in conservation, and preservation of local...natural resources was important to many of them....

Give Your Time

As a Stewardship Volunteer

Do you have an interest in working outdoors?

We are looking for several volunteers to form a team of willing workers. While the tasks are varied, the work will range from easy to difficult. There should be something to do regardless of your age or experience. Projects include:

- Developing and constructing a hiking trail(s)
- Habitat restoration
- Removal of invasive/exotic species
- Ecological studies or inventories

No experience is necessary, just a love of the outdoors and a willingness to dedicate a few hours of your time to improve our preserves. For more information, e-mail Elan at elipschitz@littleforks.org or call the office to speak with him directly.



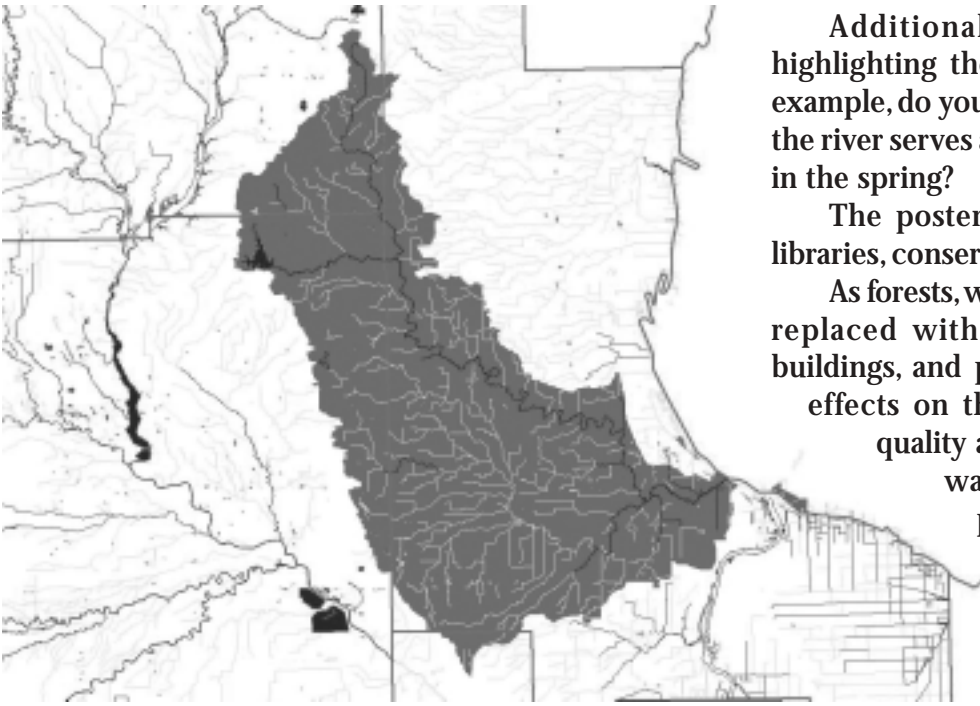
NPR Supporters Take Note!

To help build our name recognition and to continue fine programming on National Public Radio, we would like to underwrite the weekly edition of "Living on Earth."

This weekly program is approximately 60 minutes long and features nature stories from around the world. Our underwriting cost would be \$11 per episode. Our goal is to raise enough through this special appeal to cover one year of sponsorship (approximately \$550).

If you are considering this option for giving, please do it now so we may begin our underwriting campaign as soon as possible.

Conservancy to Manage Kawkawlin River Watershed Project



Additionally, posters will be developed highlighting the wonders of the watershed. For example, do you know that the northern branch of the river serves as a primary walleye spawning area in the spring?

The posters will be distributed to schools, libraries, conservation groups, and municipalities.

As forests, wetlands, farmland and meadows are replaced with highways, houses, commercial buildings, and parking lots there can be adverse effects on the hydrology, morphology, water quality and ecology of surface and ground waters. These “impervious” surfaces prohibit the movement of water from the land surface into the underlying soil.

Another key component will be the mapping of impervious surface in several smaller areas within the watershed. The

In January, the Conservancy began work on a project to educate residents of the Kawkawlin Riverwatershed on the effect of impervious surface on water quality and watershed health.

We are partnering with The Conservation Fund and the Kawkawlin River Watershed Property Owners Association to build awareness of land use issues in the Kawkawlin River watershed.

“Building awareness of the watershed and issues of land use is one key to reaching agreements with private landowners” commented Doug Koop, Executive Director.

The Kawkawlin watershed drains approximately 250 square miles and is located in Midland, Bay, Gladwin and Saginaw counties. The upper reaches of the watershed have large complexes of wetlands and forests, with agricultural lands being prevalent in the central portions of the watershed. As you reach the lower stretch of the watershed, urbanization from Bay City is prevalent along the banks of the river.

Part of the project is to place signs highlighting the Kawkawlin River watershed boundaries to see along the local roadways. “It is hoped these signs will be used as an educational tool to show people the land they live on, drive through or recreate in is part of a larger ecosystem,” commented Elan Lipschitz, Land Protection Specialist.

impervious surface analysis is vital to gaining an understanding of what is happening in the watershed.

As impervious surfaces increase above certain thresholds, there are impacts on local streams and waterways. When a watershed reaches 8-10% of imperviousness, streams and rivers start to show negative impacts. As imperviousness increases above these thresholds, water quality clearly degrades. “It is hoped that this study might be able to influence decision makers to think more strategically about how they can protect the water quality of their community” stated Mike Kelly, Project Coordinator for the Conservation Fund.

The Little Forks Conservancy brings the tool of voluntary land protection as one of the key messages to the project. To balance growth with environmental protection, it is important to work with landowners to preserve unique features of the land that may be adversely impacted by land use change.

This summer the Conservancy will host several public meetings to present the results to the community. If you would like to learn more about the project, contact Elan Lipschitz at (989) 835-4886 or email him at elipschitz@littleforks.org.

Land Committee Sets Priorities

Last spring the Conservancy participated in a mentoring program that was offered by the Midwest Office of the Land Trust Alliance. The program helped us develop a strategic plan for the next three to five years. The Board of Directors of the Conservancy evaluated our service area, determined our capacity as an organization and selected four focus areas where we would conduct a proactive outreach campaign.

The focus areas are: 1) the Tittabawassee River corridor from Sanford to Midland; 2) the Kawkawlin watershed and its wetland complexes in the northeast part of Midland County and southeast Gladwin County (see related article on previous page); 3) the riparian properties along the Chippewa River; and 4) the forests, wetlands and undeveloped lands that provide a connection, or greenway, between public lands in the central part of Midland County.

Over the summer and into the fall, the Conservancy's land committee, with the technical support of LFC staff evaluated the landscapes of each of these areas to further refine the priority properties and areas where significant conservation value and opportunity appeared to be present. We are now at the stage of beginning our outreach.

The process of a successful outreach campaign to landowners is one that must pay attention details. Once the key areas are identified, a database must be developed so we can contact the owners of special properties to inform them of our program and the benefits that landowners can achieve by working with us. We also need to develop an idea of who the key stakeholders are for projects in each region. This is critical if fundraising is required to complete a project. It can also create local advocates for us in the community.

This summer we will invite landowners to meetings at various town halls, community centers or even at private homes.

Several years back, research by the Land Trust Alliance showed that the average land deal takes three years to complete. Our experience indicates that once the decision is made by a landowner to move forward, it is a matter of months. We understand that we must be patient in all our projects.

We will announce dates, places and times for several meetings in our next newsletter. You are welcome to attend, or even volunteer to help host a meeting.

LFC Projects— Gaining Ground



By the end of 2003 the Conservancy completed 8 projects protecting 742 acres and over five miles of shoreline. The natural resources on these properties are numerous and varied. Our projects protect undeveloped shoreline, open fields, wildlife habitat, forests, wildflowers, river frontage, scenic overlooks and farmland.

The map identifies the wide area that we have covered to complete these projects. The shaded region is our primary service area and covers nearly one million acres in all or part of 12 counties, and the stars show where the projects are located.

To achieve our mission we use a variety of tools. The two most common are 1) the **conservation easement**, which establishes the level of future development on private property, and 2) **LFC ownership** where we manage the property ourselves to benefit the local community. Both of these tools protect the resource in perpetuity.

While we have extended beyond our primary service area twice to complete projects, we will continue to focus heavily on lands close to our home base as the story above explains.

On the Financial Front

It's hard to believe we are already one month into 2004. Just a few weeks ago I was pulling the final numbers together for the year end report to the board and for our 2004 budget. Looking back, 2003 was an exciting year and we can see that we made definite progress.

I reported to our board that we brought in over \$200,000 in revenue. Much of that was thanks to grants from several local foundations. But what really encourages me is that we almost made our projected "membership" revenue. You see, our goal for "dues" was over 50% higher than we had ever raised before. And we entered 2003 in a down economy. Our final result: a 35% increase!

We could not afford to be shy and it paid off. Along with \$33,000 in membership dues, our members also contributed an additional \$17,000 for our Land Acquisition Fund, which allowed us to purchase a 10-acre property on the Chippewa River.

What's in store for 2004? We need to continue to build our membership base. A lot of effort will be placed on getting our message out to the community.

Although we would like to see another 35% increase in membership dues, we have set our goal at a more reasonable 20% increase (\$40,000 in membership dues). Key to reaching that will be your continued support. And in order to keep that support we need to keep protecting land.

As the year progresses we intend to roll out more good news and more challenges to be met for the organization and the community.

If you would like to help us in this effort by sending letters to your friends and neighbors inviting them to join you as a member of LFC please let us know. After all that is how the vast majority of you signed on!

—Doug Koop

New tax incentives have stalled in Congress. Last year legislation was introduced to expand the tax incentives for donors of conservation easements. While the legislation passed the Senate, it did not receive any action from the House.

We have always referred to the charitable deduction for donating development rights as the icing on the cake for a conservation easement. While the primary motivation for each landowner who completes a project with us is the love of their land and a desire to see it protected, the financial implications of such actions are always a key concern.

The new legislation was designed to create a greater financial incentive to help those owners of land with conservation values important to the public.

The Land Trust Alliance has been leading the charge to shepherd these changes through the legislature. The proposed incentives LTA and its partners are seeking to have included in H.R. 7 are:

1. Expand the income tax deduction a landowner can take for donating a conservation easement on land.

A donor's deductions are now limited to no more than 30% of their adjusted gross income in any year, for up to 6 years. That means that if you make \$50,000 a year, you can only take a total of \$90,000 in deductions for your donation, even if the gift is worth \$1 million.

The Senate version of H.R. 7 would allow landowners to deduct up to 50% of their income in any year, for 16 years. Landowners whose income is predominantly from farming, ranching or forestry would be allowed to deduct 100% of their income – zeroing out their taxes — for 16 years.

No one would be able to deduct more than the appraised value of his or her gift - but this provision would mean that a donor does not have to have a high income in order to get a meaningful tax incentive for donating a conservation easement.

2. Cut capital gains taxes by 50% on the sale of land or a conservation easement to a land trust or conservation agency.

President Bush has proposed this in each of the budgets he has sent to the Congress. This proposal gives every landowner who wishes to sell his or her land a reason to consider a sale for conservation. The Senate version of H.R. 7 included a variation of this, but limited the reduction to a 25% cut for budget reasons.

To find out more on this issue visit the LTA website at www.LTA.org which is where we obtained the information for this article.

We welcome the following new members to The Little Forks Conservancy. Each of their gifts was matched by a grant from the Charles J. Strosacker Foundation. Donations received Oct. 16 to Dec. 31, 2003.

Charles Amble
 Chris and Sue Anderson
 Dick and Helen Anderson
 Todd and Sandy Anderson
 Thomas and Shelli Anderson
 John and Sandra Bartos
 Carol and Frederic Bergstein
 Philip and Helen Brown
 Roger Chaffee
 Brian and Kathy Chapman
 Gregory and Dawn Crawford
 Wilford and Virginia Dent
 Orville and Patricia Dobson
 John and Esther Frost
 Edward and Colleen Gannon
 Juan and Linda Garces
 Carl and Marilyn Gillett
 Robert Hartlein
 Kirk and Sandy Havel

Tami Heilman and Richard Adam
 Mike and Terri Hoggard
 Mitchell and Carol Jarosz
 Robert and Jean Julier
 Mike Kapp and Patricia Raines
 Joseph and Martha Keil
 Ed and Barbara Kerns
 Jeffrey and Lisa Lauer
 Marty and Jan McGuire
 Mark and Carol McPherson
 G. Edward Metcalf
 David and Barbara Metevia
 Dave and Carol Moore Miller
 John and Margaret Muste
 Mr. and Mrs. Allen Pankopf
 Mike and Nina Paquette
 David and Fran Reece
 Mr. and Mrs. Fred Rolf
 Charles and Barbara Roth

Dr. and Mrs. Charles Sanislow
 Ellie and Larry Schroeder
 Don and Angela Sheets
 A. Lee and Frances Smith
 Jack and Debbie Starling
 Greg and Karen Stiffler
 Bob Streadwick
 Kathy and John Susalla
 Mike and JoAnn Taylor
 Graham and Beth Taylor
 Curtis and Donna Thayer
 Bill Thomson
 Ira and Sue Thumma
 Michael and Sharon Tiknis
 Gary and Ruth Veurink
 Mr. and Mrs. Richard A Votaw
 William and Rebecca Wieland
 Dave Williams
 Mike Woody

We thank the following donors for their contribution to the LFC Land Acquisition Fund. Donations received Oct. 16 to Dec. 31, 2003

Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Hampton
 Mitchell and Carol Jarosz
 James and Linda Kevra

Steve and Mary Kin
 Doug and Marguerite Leng



Yes, I believe The Little Forks Conservancy is doing wonderful things! Please accept my contribution to help protect significant natural resources in my community.

Membership Level: Name: _____

\$1,000

Address: _____

\$500

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

\$250

E-mail _____

\$100

\$50

I would like to make an additional contribution of \$_____ to the Land Acquisition Fund.

\$25

Other: _____

Please send me information on protecting my land.



LFC OUTREACH CALENDAR

To keep our message growing, Executive Director Doug Koop will make presentations to several area groups in February & March. If you belong to a group who might like a program on LFC and its mission, please call the office at 989.835.4886.

- February 2:** Midland Kiwanis Club (Griswold Center)
- February 3:** Midland Lions Club (Midland Country Club)
- February 13:** Memorial Presbyterian Church Voyagers
- March 10:** Dow Chemical Retirees (Senior Center)

Last month we ran a photograph of mountains, and plenty of people noticed that it wasn't *exactly* a Midland landscape. We thought it might be fun to continue with a regular "pictorial puzzle" of scenic locations to challenge our members to guess where the photos were taken. This photo was provided by Judy Enger, who snapped it while on vacation. E-mail jolsen@littleforks.org with your guess!



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gene Arnold
Wendy Baker
Tom Bradley
Daniel J. Cline
Ed Elliott
Judy Enger
Carol Feider
Steve Kin
Elsie Misner
Tom Misner
Elyse Rogers
Glenn Sanford
Will Sears
Dick Touvell
Chris Velasquez

STAFF

Douglas Koop
Executive Director
Elan Lipschitz
Land Protection Specialist
Jennifer Olsen
Outreach Coordinator

Phone: 989-835-4886

Fax: 989-835-4895
www.littleforks.org
info@littleforks.org

THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY

414 Townsend Street
Midland, MI 48640-5266

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MIDLAND, MI 48642
PERMIT NO. 181