

THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY



Winter 2012

Preserve Today, Ensure Tomorrow

Issue 55

Celebrating 15 Years With an Exciting Challenge

Over fifteen years ago, a group of dedicated community leaders saw an increasing need for conservation along the rivers that flow throughout Midland County. Those volunteers donated their time and energy to found The Little Forks Conservancy.

Today, we're celebrating 15 years of local land conservation success. Thanks to the support

of our members, area foundations and corporations, the Conservancy has now conserved over 2,600 acres and 17 miles of river frontage. But most importantly, we have helped 25 families achieve their goals of permanently protecting their land.

The Conservancy is thrilled to announce that the J.A. Woollam Foundation has awarded

OUR FOUNDING BOARD



Seated (from left): Elsie Misner, Eugene Kenaga, and Denise Spencer. Standing (from left): Dean Scott, Eileen Starks, Tom Misner, Ed Elliott, Paul Pounders, Dick Touvell, Hugh Starks, and Bill Gibson.

Our 15th Anniversary Challenge

The J.A. Woollam Foundation has provided a \$15,000 matching grant for donations in 2012. The Foundation will match every dollar that meets one of the following requirements:

- Contributions from first-time donors
- Donations from individuals who did not give in the past year
- Donations by individuals who increase their giving (the increased portion will count)
- Donations above \$500

How You Can Help

Join the 15th Anniversary Challenge today by donating to The Little Forks Conservancy!

Donations can be made online at:

www.littleforks.org

a \$15,000 challenge grant in honor of our 15 years of conservation work.

The Foundation will match every dollar donated to the General Operating Fund in 2012 that meets one of the requirements highlighted in the box found on the left.

“We are very honored to receive this challenge from the J.A. Woollam Foundation,” said Eric Brubaker, Conservancy

board president. “This challenge not only honors what we’ve already accomplished, but gives us resources to accomplish so much more.”

To join the 15th Anniversary Challenge, use the enclosed envelope to mail your donation. Gifts can also be made online at www.littleforks.org. To make sure your gift counts, select “General Operating Fund.”

OUR MISSION:

The Little Forks Conservancy permanently protects land with natural and cultural resources that add to the quality of life in our community.



From the Director: Finding Common Ground on Our Environment



During the last couple of weeks I had the fortune of attending two different workshops that oddly enough talked about the same sort of issues. While that may not seem so incredible, when one considers the traditional positions of the two groups hosting the events, one would usually assume them to be in direct opposition in their world views.

The first meeting was held by the Heart of the Lakes Center for Conservation Policy (Heart of the Lakes, for short). Heart of the Lakes was formed by the land conservancies in the State to act primarily on two fronts. First, to deal with policies and laws before the State legislature that will have an impact on the conservation of our natural resources. Second, to serve as facilitator for training and education opportunities for the 40 land trusts found throughout the state. The purpose of the meeting

was to establish a strategic direction forward for Heart of the Lakes on both fronts.

The second meeting was part of my participation in the Great Lake Bay Regional Leadership Institute. The Institute is a regional effort lead primarily by the three local chambers of commerce. Several of the presentations for this session focused on the steps that should be considered to make our region attractive to young professionals. While the typical responses of improving education and transportation resources were discussed, I think the most eye-opening presentations highlighted the unique natural resources that help define our region's quality of life. Our rivers, forests and farmland create the context in which we build our communities and all feed into the greatest natural resource – our Great Lakes.

It seems that the newly emerging generation of workers (the “millennials”) has a high affinity for living in a place that offers both cultural opportunities and access to natural resources. That access is not just about hiking or biking through a field or forest, but it includes access to healthy locally grown food and, of course,

access to clean water.

While it is difficult for us to compete with cities like Chicago or Minneapolis for the cultural advantages, we can compete on several desirable community attributes that the new, young talent is seeking out.

That is where I found the overlap between the Heart of the Lakes and the Chambers. Land conservation, the protection of key properties that can define a community and preserve the “sense of place” for our region, is a mutually desirable goal. Protecting 200 acres of mature forest along one of our major rivers or a 40-acre farm providing local produce through a Community

Supported Agricultural business both play a role in making this region a better choice to move to, or stay, and grow a community.

The politics of today typically pit business or industry against the environment. However, those of us working for the conservation of our natural resources understand that a community that respects and cares for the land will have a competitive advantage. Together, we can create an environment that not only fosters our natural resources, but also future generations of innovators and entrepreneurs. At least that is one message that fits comfortably into both meetings.



We Want to Hear From You!

We're preparing for a new Strategic Plan, and we need your help!

We want to make sure that we are serving you. Log on to our website and take a brief survey. Your responses will help us plan our activities for the next few years.

**To take the survey,
visit www.littleforks.org
after February 15**

Project Partners

-1999-

- Don Blades, 274 acres

-2000-

- Hugh & Eileen Starks, 40 acres
- Borys & Lubo Zura, 44 acres

-2001-

- William H. Meek, 75 acres
- Glenn & Carol Sanford, 20 acres

-2003-

- Ceo Bauer, 236 acres
- The Midland Area Community Foundation, 41.5 acres
- Nancy Steiner, 9.8 acres

-2004-

- Phil & Janet Hehnl, 5 acres
- Dr. Kyung-Sik Ahn, 31 acres
- Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, 39 acres
- George & Sue Lane, 191 acres

-2005-

- Ceo Bauer, 78 acres
- Scott & Kathryn Whalen, 119 acres

-2006-

- Blanche Stark, 79 acres
- Shellenbarger Land Company, 80 acres

-2007-

- David & Anna Spencer, 154.5 acres
- Norman & Patricia Engel, 190 acres
- George & Sue Lane, 80 acres
- Robert & Susan Piesko, 140 acres
- Richard & Kathy Shellenbarger, 73.4 acres
- Jon & Elizabeth Ringelberg, 70 acres
- Gerald & Pamela Schmiedicke, 80 acres
- Elizabeth Levi, 8.5 acres

-2008-

- Robin & Ardith Arbury, 219 acres
- L. Charles Christensen, 200 acres

-2010-

- Robert & Cheryl Duda, 24 acres
- Michael and Kathy Helmick, 30 acres

-2011-

- The Hubert Family, 40 acres

Have You Seen the Bald Eagles?

Recently one of our preserve monitors, Randy Kursinsky, sent us a photo from his visit to Riverview of seven bald eagles perched in the trees along the Tittabawassee River. It is hard to imagine that just a few years ago seeing a Bald Eagle would be a rarity. Now, seeing these majestic birds is almost a daily occurrence for preserve users.

This species, once on the brink of extinction, has now recovered to be delisted as a threatened and endangered species.



The protection of mature forestland along rivers provides important hunting and breeding habitat. Bald eagles like to be close to water, which provides some of their primary food source – fish.

In addition to fish, bald eagles will also feed on waterfowl and small

mammals. They have been known to steal food from other scavengers.

If you have ever been lucky enough to see a bald eagle nest, you definitely would not forget it. Nests are often located in large trees such as white pines. These large homes reach sizes of ten feet deep and twenty feet across.

So next time you visit Riverview, keep an eye out for an eagle flying overhead or perched high up on tree. If you see one, be sure to email us or post it to our Facebook page.

Newest Program Off to a Great Start

Our latest conservation program is up and running, recognizing private landowners for doing good things on their land. In the summer of 2011, we kicked off our Sustainable Lands Partner program.

Currently, lands enrolled in the program have mature woods, wetlands, wildlife habitat, mature forests and streams.

Our initial focus of the Sustainable Lands Program was the Cedar River watershed. Since then, we have decided to expand the program to all landowners in our watershed.

Our Sustainable Lands Partners agree to manage their properties to preserve the natural features,



inform the Conservancy if they sell the land, and let us know of any activity that would significantly impact the natural features of the land. This program is entirely voluntary.

Landowners who participate in our program receive a natural resources report for their land, receive a sign to display, and will be invited to exclusive events for our sustainable lands and conservation easement partners.

“Getting involved in the program is simple,” commented Elan Lipschitz, land protection specialist. “The first step is setting up a site visit to look at the natural features of the land and to learn about the landowner’s objectives for the property.”

If you are interested in learning more about the Sustainable Lands Partner program, please contact Elan Lipschitz at (989) 835-4886.

Thank you!

The Conservancy thanks our 2011 donors for their generous support. Their contributions were greatly appreciated. We apologize for any errors or omissions.

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THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY

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On the Land: For a New Way to Look at Nature, Take a Kid Outdoors

This is the second in a series of stories about Riverview Natural Area by Greg Dardas, a Conservancy board member. To read the complete story or other posts, visit our website at www.littleforks.org.



Last month I explored Riverview Natural Area alone and was nurtured by the silence and took the opportunity to linger for periods of time not possible when visiting with others.

This time two friends and a total of 6 children came along. So the visit was anything but silent, and the pace and destinations were very different!

In the woods, kids are allowed to run and play and to explore. It's not so important to "use your inside voices" and maybe even to get a little dirty. Kids seem to respond to these conditions almost as if they are responding to certain commands which adults no longer hear or have forgotten about. One of the best parts of this particular visit to Riverview was being able to witness kids under these less structured conditions.

It was nice to be reminded those days as

a kid when we heard and responded to those situations.

From the moment we parked, the kids scrambled out of the car and to the trail's origin. A few stopped to check out the welcoming sign and looked for familiar names among the donor list, then on they went picking up leaves, sticks and anything else that caught their attention.

The leaves had all nearly fallen from the deciduous trees so it was especially easy to keep track of everyone as they strayed now and again off the trail in pursuit of a particularly interesting mushroom or other item. It's so fun to see the things might be of interest to kids. Seeing me with a camera, I was presented with various sticks and rocks which they thought I might like to photograph. "This one looks like a heart!" "Take a picture of *this*, it looks like a face!"

The fallen trees – which to adults look like fallen trees – we look at them and might wonder how long they'd been there or perhaps might speculate upon whether they'd been felled by lightning or a less dramatic demise. Kids, on the other hand, apparently hear a signal loud and clear – to climb!

When we came to a particularly broad trunked fallen maple, the group swarmed it like a flock of little birds, each perching on his or her little spot as they searched rapidly with their eyes to see if the other might be in a preferred place, or better still, could they find an even better one. From their positions each called out for us to look at them as they enjoyed the rare chance to view the world from a higher vantage point.

Upon arriving near the edge which slopes down toward the river's edge another signal (again, inaudible to adults) must have sounded which caused the kids to immediately look down from wherever they were and to find objects which they intended to throw in

order to see if they could see them splash into the water.

Rocks, sticks, pine cones and so forth hailed for quite a while in the general direction of the water, most falling short or striking tree branches. One by one, as their arms tired and as accessible items began to run out, the assault on the river dwindled and attention drifted to the collection of turkey feathers.



I don't recall which child found the first one, but soon after the discovery was shared via a top of the lungs announcement

"I found a huge feather!" It was like an Easter Egg hunt, but for turkey feathers! Each kid tried to outdo the others as they scrambled around looking for the most and/or biggest feathers they could find. We found a couple spots which were obviously places where a couple of turkeys must have had a very bad day (and probably their last!).

Even the adults got into the act, not being able to resist the temptation to find our own feathers.

To continue reading, visit www.littleforks.org.

Stewardship Doesn't Stop in the Winter

Winter may be a quiet time at our preserves for workdays, but it is a great time for getting out and exploring our trails and the natural features of the land. Stop by our office for a trail guide. You can also download maps and guides at www.littleforks.org.

Planning for the stewardship season has already begun at the office. In early April our Tuesday afternoon work crew will resume working at the Averill Preserve. This dedicated crew is on their fourth year of projects. From April to November, they work on a wide variety of tasks from invasive species removal, planting native

wildflowers, clearing and maintaining trails, and basic repairs to our property as needed.

At Riverview Natural Area, we are planning several erosion control activities in 2012. We recently received funding from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife program to repair a gully located in the middle of our agricultural field. This area has been eroding over the years and is in drastic need of repair. Working with USFWS, we will design a project to restore the area to herbaceous vegetation and re-contour the land to fix the erosion.

Two other erosion sites



We might not be able to plant right now, but we're already planning our stewardship activities. Restoring native plants (as pictured here) is an important, and frequent, task.

along the Tittabawassee River will be repaired though the United State Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. This program is administered by

the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS staff has been out surveying the eroded area and putting together a design.

Stay tuned for more stewardship news.



In partnership with the Chippewa Nature Center, this new watershed awareness sign was placed along the Chippewa Trail. Funding for this project was generously provided by the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network.



Donate Your Time to help our preserves

Many of our stewardship projects are completed thanks to the help of volunteers.

These generous individuals donate their time to keep our preserves open and safe for visitors. Whether they pull invasive plants or help maintain our trails, the hours they spend are critical to the stewardship of our preserves.

We are currently looking for volunteers to assist us in constructing boardwalks. This would be a great service project for a local group or as a scout project.

To volunteer, contact our office at (989) 835-4886 or info@littleforks.org.



The Little Forks Conservancy
105 Post Street
Midland, MI 48640

An evening to celebrate land conservation

The Little Forks Conservancy invites you to our third



SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 2012 • 7 P.M.

HOLIDAY INN
810 Cinema Dr., Midland

Many thanks to our sponsors
for their generous support:

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Sample a buffet of delicious hors d'oeuvres.
Cash bar available.

Music by Empty Canvas

Enjoy the music of Empty Canvas as they create a painting to be auctioned LIVE later that night!

Silent and Live Auction

Get ready to bid on an exciting collection of outdoor experiences and nature-inspired art! See auction items at www.littleforks.org.

Proceeds will benefit

The Little Forks Conservancy
and our mission to conserve land that adds to the quality of life in our community.

Dress is semiformal.

Green ties are encouraged.

Tickets \$50/person

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