

Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy Annual Report–2014

Mission

The mission of Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy (MMLC) is to protect natural land and farmland in mid-Michigan and to promote the protection of these lands. MMLC does this by (i) assisting landowners to place conservation easements on their natural land and farmland, (ii) acquiring selected parcels outright, that is, MMLC owns the parcels fee simple, to be held as nature preserves, and (iii) making people aware of the importance of protecting natural land and farmland. Our area of coverage is Ingham, Eaton, Clinton, Ionia, Shiawassee, Hillsdale and Jackson counties. MMLC is a qualified land conservancy as recognized by the State of Michigan and the Internal Revenue Service and is covered by Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. It is qualified to receive donations of conservation easements on land, donations of land, monetary donations, and other donations. The donors can use these donations as deductions on their federal and state income taxes to the extent allowed by law.

Protection of Land

In 2014 one of our main goals was to remove a partially completed house from the Bunker Nature Preserve (near Mason, Michigan) and to develop a parking area and construct an interpretive walking trail for the Preserve. The removal of the house was accomplished in 2014 and good progress was made on the parking area and the interpretive walking trail. Restoration of wetlands on the property was also started and excellent progress was made on this. Bunker Nature Preserve is a 130-acre natural area in Ingham County that is owned by the Conservancy and will be opened to the public as soon as these basic facilities are completed. The land was donated to the Conservancy in 2013.

A second significant goal was to complete the donation of a 75-acre property in Ingham County to MMLC. This goal was reached on October 28, 2014 when the deed was signed. The property is a nicely wooded parcel with a mixture of hardwood and conifer trees and with a very attractive stream flowing through a large portion of the property. We also plan to open this parcel to the public once we have some basic facilities in place.

MMLC now has 1,882 acres under protection in our service area through 16 conservation easements and 3 properties that MMLC owns outright, i. e., fee simple. A description of these properties can be found on our website, www.midmilandcons.org.

The properties we protect with conservation easements were all monitored or were in the process of being monitored by MMLC board members in 2014. All landowners were following the provisions of their conservation easements. Typically, these properties are monitored about once a year.

Additional Activities

In 2014 we worked with four (4) other landowners who are in the process of protecting their land with a conservation easement or through donation to MMLC. This work is continuing in 2015.

MMLC's Strategic Conservation Plan (SCP) for the seven counties we cover was modified and the revised Plan was approved by the MMLC Board. The plan is based on scientific criteria and will be used for identifying natural lands in our area of coverage that are of high biological significance. Presentations to the public will be given first in those areas of high biological significance. The plan will also be used to notify individual landowners who have properties of high biological significance within these areas of the presentations.

A newsletter was prepared and mailed to all members in the Fall of 2014. Our website was kept current throughout 2014 and our *Annual Plan–2015* was prepared. Our membership at the end of 2014 was 62. Membership has increased each year.

Annual Plan–2015

The board has developed our *Annual Plan–2015*, which will guide our activities in 2015. In 2015 we plan to: (i) continue preparation of the Bunker Nature Preserve for public use, (ii) respond to all land inquiries for placing conservation easements on land and for donation of land, (iii) prepare conservation easements

and baseline documents for landowners who want to protect their land (iv) use our Strategic Conservation Plan to identify Focal Areas (areas of high biological significance) in Clinton and Hillsdale counties and then notify and give presentations to landowners on the value and process of protecting their land with conservation easements, (v) publish our next newsletter, (vi) prepare our *Annual Report–2015* and our *Annual Plan–2016*, (vii) continue to expand our membership, and (viii) inform more public and private organizations in our coverage area about MMLC and its mission,.

Information on Tax Benefits for Landowners Who Are Considering Protecting Their Land with a Conservation Easement

The enhanced federal tax incentive for the donation of a conservation easement to a land conservancy expired on December 31, 2014. Efforts to get this incentive reinstated for 2015 and beyond are currently in progress and are being led in Washington, D. C. by the Land Trust Alliance. The regular tax benefits for the donation of a conservation easement to a qualified conservancy are still in effect. Further information on tax benefits for landowners who are considering protecting their land with a conservation easement can be obtained at www.lta.org, the website of the Land Trust Alliance, or by contacting MMLC.

An important state property tax benefit for protecting land was enacted by the Michigan legislature in December of 2006. Michigan Act 446 of 2006 eliminates the “pop-up” of property tax on land covered by a conservation easement when ownership of the land is transferred, for example, sold. The taxable value that the land had before the transfer (sale) occurred is retained by the new owner after the transfer occurs. This makes land covered by a conservation easement attractive to new owners since the property tax for the new owner should not increase significantly or at all on transfer. The exemption does not apply to buildings or other structures on the land.

Affiliations

MMLC is a member of Land Trust Alliance, a national land protection advocacy organization for land conservancies, and Heart of the Lakes, a Michigan land protection advocacy organization for Michigan land conservancies.

Meetings and Website

The Board of Directors of MMLC meets approximately 9 times a year. The meetings are open to the public. More information about MMLC is on our website, www.midmilandcons.org.

Board of Directors

The members of the MMLC Board in 2014 were: Stephen Buzby, Eckhart Dersch, Paul Kindel, Seth Martin, Michael Rhodes, Ken Rosenman, Edward Schools, Jody Simoes, and Robert Zbiciak. Paul Kindel, Michael Rhodes, Jody Simoes were re-elected to the Board in 2014. Officers elected in 2014 were: Paul Kindel (President), Edward Schools (Vice-president), Jody Simoes (Secretary), and Stephen Buzby (Treasurer). Board members and officers serve 3- and 1-year terms, respectively. Carl Harmon became an Emeritus Board Member in 2014.

Protection of Land

We are glad to speak with any landowners who would like to protect their land. Feel free to contact MMLC (P. Kindel). We can provide information on and assistance with protection of their land.

If you, or someone or some group you know, would like MMLC to give a workshop for landowners on land protection and its benefits, including the tax benefits, we would be happy to do so.

Contact me by e-mail (kindel@msu.edu), postal mail (2915 Margate Lane, East Lansing, MI 48823), or telephone (517-332-3091) to arrange these presentation or to obtain information on protecting land.

Paul K. Kindel, President,
Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy
On behalf of the Board of Directors
East Lansing, Michigan
January 28, 2015