

Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy

Annual Report–2015

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 such lands. MMLC does this by: (i) assisting landowners in placing conservation easements on their natural land and farmland, (ii) acquiring selected larger parcels outright and maintaining them as natural areas open to the public, and (iii) making people aware of the importance of protecting natural land and farmland. Our area of coverage is Ionia, Clinton, Shiawassee, Eaton, Ingham, Jackson, and Hillsdale 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 when determining their federal and state income taxes, to the extent allowed by law,

Protection of Land

In 2015 we passed the 2,000-acre mark for land protected by MMLC. MMLC now has 2,001.3 acres under protection through 16 conservation easements and four (4) properties that MMLC owns outright, that is, fee simple. A description of these properties can be found on our website, www.midmilandcons.org. All properties that MMLC owns outright are kept as natural areas. All MMLC natural areas have Property Stewards. The Property Stewards are members of MMLC and are volunteers. A Property Steward for our most recently acquired property, the Ionia Natural Area, has not yet been appointed.

In 2015, one of our main goals was to continue our work at Bunker Nature Preserve. Bunker Nature Preserve is a 130-acre natural area in Ingham County near Mason that is owned by the Conservancy. It will be opened to the public as soon as the basic facilities needed by people when visiting are completed. In 2015, restoration work was carried out on the three wetlands on the property. The work was made possible by a grant from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The goals of the restoration work are to: (i) eradicate reed canary grass, a highly invasive grass that has significantly invaded the two largest wetlands, (ii) eliminate old drainage systems, and (iii) enlarge and increase the depth of the wetlands. The structural work on the wetlands was completed this past fall. The water-control devices installed in the berms of the wetlands are designed to eliminate the reed canary grass through a submersion process while also facilitating fluctuation of the water levels in the wetlands. Eradication of reed canary grass is important because it grows as a dense monoculture and reduces species diversity in wetlands. Enlarging and deepening the wetlands will further increase the diversity of plants and animals in the wetland. Fluctuating water levels also tend to increase plant and animal diversity in wetlands. In addition to the restoration work, an interpretive walking trail for the property was designed and construction was started. Construction of a parking area was also started. Work on both of these projects will continue in 2016. Our goal is to have the preserve open to the public in 2016.

The purchase of an outstanding 120-acre property adjacent to the City of Ionia by MMLC was completed on September 10, 2015 with the signing of the deed. The property was purchased with grant funds awarded to MMLC by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service through Ducks Unlimited. The funds were made possible by North American Wetlands Conservation Act. MMLC will hold the property as a natural area. The property is largely in the flood plain of the Grand River. It has about a half mile of frontage on the Grand River and is wooded except for approximately 40 acres that is currently being farmed. We plan to have the farming continue in 2016 as this will aid in the restoration work that we have planned for 2017. In 2017 the farmed area will be planted in native grasses and forbs. The Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail runs along the north boundary of the property and the Fred Thwaites Grand River Trail traverses the southern part. This latter trail has nice views of the Grand River from the property. The property is contiguous with farm and natural land to the east through which Prairie Creek, a tributary of the Grand River, flows. It is an excellent property to protect as a natural area.

Our third natural area property, the Iosco Natural Area, is a 75-acre parcel in Ingham County near Dansville. The property is a fully wooded parcel with a mixture of hardwood and conifer trees and has a nice

stream, Doan Creek, flowing through a large portion of the property. A trail is being constructed on the property, and it is more than half complete. We plan to also open this property to the public when the basic facilities are completed.

Our fourth natural area property is the Eureka Natural Area, a 2.4 acre parcel in northern Clinton County.

In 2015, we continued to work with four (4) landowners who are in the process of protecting their land with conservation easements. The properties are in Ionia, Clinton, Eaton, and Hillsdale counties. This work will continue in 2016.

The properties we protect, including those we own outright, were all monitored by MMLC members in 2015. All landowners are following the provisions of their conservation easements. Typically, these properties are monitored approximately once a year.

Additional Activities

Landowner presentations by MMLC personnel on how to protect your land with a conservation easement or through fee simple donation to MMLC were held in Hillsdale and Eaton counties. Hillsdale County is one of the areas that our Strategic Conservation Plan shows has considerable lands of high biological significance. The presentation in Eaton County was held jointly with Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy. Our website was kept current throughout 2015 and our *Annual Plan–2016* and this report was prepared. Our membership at the end of 2015 was 67.

Annual Plan–2016

The board developed our *Annual Plan–2016*. The plan will guide our activities in 2016. In 2016 we plan to: (i) continue preparation of the Bunker Nature Preserve and Iosco Nature Area for public use, (ii) respond to all land inquires for placing conservation easements on land and for donations of land, (iii) prepare conservation easements and baseline documents for landowners who want to protect their land with a conservation easement, (iv) develop and give presentations to landowners in the Maple River, Battle Creek River, and Flat River watersheds on protecting their land with a conservation easement held by a qualified land conservancy – the presentations to landowners in the latter two watersheds will be made working together with the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, respectively, (v) publish our next newsletter, (vi) monitor all properties we protect, and (vii) prepare our *Annual Report–2016* and *Annual Plan–2017*.

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

Great news! In December 2015, Congress and the President made permanent the enhanced federal tax benefit for the donation of a conservation easement to a qualified land conservancy. This benefit particularly helps landowners of more modest incomes and will greatly facilitate planning by landowners that are considering protecting their land with a conservation easement. Additional information on this tax benefit can be obtained at www.lta.org, the website of the Land Trust Alliance. Congress and the President also made permanent legislation that allows individuals to make charitable gifts from their traditional IRA accounts without incurring federal income tax on the withdrawals. For tax advice on these and other tax issues, contact your tax advisor.

An important state property tax benefit for protecting land was enacted by the Michigan legislature in December, 2006. Michigan Public 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, when 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 the Land Trust Alliance, a national land protection advocacy organization for all land conservancies in the United States. MMLC is also a member of Heart of the Lakes, a Michigan land protection advocacy organization for Michigan land conservancies.

Meetings and Website

The MMLC Board meets approximately seven times a year. The meetings are open to the public. If you would like to attend a meeting(s), contact P. K. Kindel. Contact information is below and on our website. Additional information about MMLC is also on our website, given above.

Board of Directors

We are pleased to have Andrea Polverento join the MMLC Board in 2015. The members of the Board in 2015 were: Stephen Buzby, Eckhart Dersch, Paul Kindel, Seth Martin, Andrea Polverento, Michael Rhodes, Ken Rosenman, Edward Schools, Jody Simoes, and Robert Zbiciak. Officers in 2015 were: Paul Kindel (President), Edward Schools (Vice-president), Ken Rosenman (Secretary), and Stephen Buzby (Treasurer). Board members and officers serve 3- and 1-year terms, respectively. Seth Martin and Jody Simoes stepped down from the Board in 2015.

Protection of Land

We are glad to speak individually with any landowner who would like information on protecting their land, or if you, or someone or some group you know, would like MMLC to give a presentation to landowners on land protection and its benefits, including the tax benefits, we would be pleased to do so. Feel free to contact P. K. Kindel by e-mail (kindel@msu.edu), telephone (517-332-3091), or postal mail (2915 Margate Lane, East Lansing, MI 48823) to arrange these.

Paul K. Kindel, President, Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy,
On behalf of the Board of Directors
East Lansing, Michigan
January 27, 2016