

## **Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy Annual Report–2016**

### **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) informing people of the importance of preserving 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. Donors can use these donations as deductions when determining their federal and state income taxes, to the extent allowed by law.

### **Protection of Land**

MMLC now has 2,028 acres under protection through 17 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](http://www.midmilandcons.org). All properties that MMLC owns outright are kept as natural areas, and all have Property Stewards. A search for a Property Steward for the Ionia Natural Area is in progress.

In 2016, one of our goals was to open Bunker Nature Preserve (BNP) to the public, and this was achieved in Fall, 2106. This 130-acre preserve is in Ingham County near Mason. A walking trail for the property was designed, and the first portion of about 1½ miles is complete and open to the public. A parking area is available. Increasingly bird watchers are being drawn to the BNP because of the varied bird life and habitat. In August, members of the Stewardship Network and Wild Ones were given a tour of BNP by two of our board members, Ed Schools and Eckhart Dersch. Consider visiting BNP. In Fall, 2016 a local farmer completed a 2-year crop cycle on 40 acres of BNP that was formerly fallow crop land. In Spring, 2017 the 40 acres will be planted with native prairie plants. The 2-year farming cycle reduced the weed content of the farmed land and this enhanced the possibility of successfully establishing a vibrant prairie of native plants.

A second natural area in Ingham County, Iosco Natural Area, is a 75-acre parcel near Dansville. A trail has been constructed on the property and the natural area is now open to the public. For the period September 15 through January 1 (following year) the natural area is open only to certified hunters. The hunting agreement was a condition of the donation of the property.

A third natural area, Ionia Natural Area, is located on the edge of the City of Ionia. The property is largely in the flood plain of the Grand River and has about a half mile of frontage on the river. It is wooded except for approximately 40 acres that was farmed. The farming stopped at the end of 2016. The farmed area will be planted in native grasses and forbs in 2017. 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. There are very attractive views of the Grand River from the trail on the property. The property is accessible by both of the above trails. Consider visiting using these trails.

In 2016, we worked with four (4) landowners who want to protect their land with conservation easements and one (1) who wants to donate some biological-rich land outright to MMLC. The properties are in Ionia, Clinton, Eaton, and Hillsdale counties. The conservation easement for the property in Clinton County was completed in 2016. The work on the others continues in 2017.

All properties we protect, including those we own outright, were monitored by MMLC members in 2016. All landowners are following the provisions of their conservation easements. Typically, these properties are monitored approximately once a year.

### **Additional Activities**

Work on the MMLC Strategic Plan 2017-21 was started in 2016 and should be completed in early 2017. A presentation by MMLC on how to protect your land with a conservation easement or by fee simple donation was given to participants in a program hosted by the Ingham Conservation District. We continued work with Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and Land Conservancy of West Michigan on protecting land in the

Battle Creek and Flat River watersheds. Our website was kept current in 2016, and our *Annual Plan–2017* and this report were prepared. Our membership at the end of 2016 was 79.

### ***Annual Plan–2017***

The board developed *Annual Plan–2017*. It will guide our activities in 2017. In 2017 we plan to: (i) complete and start implementing our Strategic Plan 2017-21, (ii) further prepare the Bunker Nature Preserve and Iosco Nature Area for public use, (iii) respond to all inquiries for placing conservation easements on land and offers for donations of land, (iv) prepare conservation easements and baseline documents for landowners who want to protect their land with a conservation easement, (v) 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, (vi) publish our next newsletter, (vii) monitor all properties we protect, and (viii) prepare our *Annual Report–2017* and *Annual Plan–2018*.

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

In 2015 the enhanced federal tax benefit for the donation of a conservation easement to a qualified land conservancy was made permanent. This benefit particularly helps landowners of more modest incomes. Additional information on this tax benefit can be obtained at [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org). Also made permanent is legislation that allows individuals to make charitable gifts from their traditional IRA accounts without incurring federal income tax on the withdrawals. For advice on these and other tax issues, consult your tax advisor.

Michigan legislation eliminated 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 the land had before the transfer (sale) occurs 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, if at all, on transfer. The exemption does not apply to buildings or other structures.

### **Affiliations**

MMLC is a member of the Land Trust Alliance, a national land protection advocacy organization for land conservancies in the United States. MMLC is also a member of Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy, a state 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, which is given above. Additional information about MMLC is also on our website.

### **Board of Directors**

We are pleased to have Janelle Hermes join the MMLC Board in 2016. The members of the Board in 2016 were: Stephen Buzby, Eckhart Dersch, Janelle Hermes, Paul Kindel, Andrea Polverento, Michael Rhodes, Ken Rosenman, Edward Schools, and Robert Zbiciak. Officers in 2016 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. Andrea Polverento stepped down from the Board in 2016.

### **Protection of Land**

We are glad to speak with any landowner individually, or give a presentation to any group of landowners or others, who would like information on the benefits of protecting their land, including the tax benefits. Feel free to contact P. K. Kindel by e-mail ([kindel@msu.edu](mailto: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 18, 2017