

Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy Annual Report–2018

Mission

The mission of Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy (MMLC) is to conserve natural land and farmland in mid-Michigan and to promote the preservation 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 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.

Organizational Activities in 2018

In June of 2018 MMLC received a \$20,000, 1 to 1 matching grant from The Carls Foundation with the requirement that we achieve the full match by December 31, 2018. MMLC successfully completed the full match on December 29, 2018. All of the match funds came from individual private donors except one. Sixty-three (63) individual donors gave \$19,054.84 and one (1) business, Meijers, gave \$1,000. Two (2) donors gave \$2,000, five (5) gave \$1,000, one (1) gave \$969.84, ten (10) gave \$500, and the rest gave between \$300 and \$10. Most of the donors are members of MMLC and most live in the seven counties for which MMLC provides coverage. A big “Thank You” to all who donated funds to match The Carls Foundation grant. Your generosity is admirable.

The funds from The Carls Foundation grant, plus the match funds for this grant, plus funds received from members for their memberships in MMLC, resulted in MMLC fully meeting our total fund raising goal for 2018. This meant the fundraising goal in Year 2 of our 5-year MMLC Strategic Plan 2017-21 was fully met.

MMLC also received a \$5,000 matching grant from an Anonymous donor in July of 2018. In this grant the match was again 1 to 1, and in addition, if the entire \$5,000 was matched by March 31, 2019 the Anonymous donor would donate another \$5,000. Currently approximately 25% of the match funds have been received.

MMLC contracted with a Development Associate in November 2018 to help with our fundraising goals in 2019 and beyond. The Associate was already able to provide some help in 2018. A Fundraising Committee was appointed that will work with the Development Associate to meet our fundraising goals each year.

MMLC plans to enter the pre-accreditation and accreditation processes run by Land Trust Alliance in 2019. These processes are designed to lead to national accreditation of MMLC as a land trust. The deadline for submission of the applications is June 2019. We have completed about 75% of the materials need for the applications. MMLC received a grant supplement of \$1,500 from the Land Trust Alliance in 2018 for assistance in preparing the two applications. Two board members are taking the lead in preparing these applications.

Our *Handbook of Operations for Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy*, approved on June 21, 2017, was improved in six policy areas. Each improvement defines our policies more clearly and makes us a more effective organization.

MMLC Newsletter #6 was published and mailed to approximately 250 people in September 2018. The newsletter continues to be distributed.

Annual Report–2018 (this report) and *Annual Plan–2019* were prepared.

Our website was kept current.

MMLC developed a presence on social media, namely, on Facebook.

Land Activities

As of the end of 2018, MMLC had 2,117 acres under protection through 17 conservation easements (1,701 acres) and 6 fee properties (416 acres). The approximate location and descriptions of these properties is on our website, www.midmilandcons.org. All properties that MMLC owns outright (fee simple) are kept as natural areas and all have Property Stewards.

In December of 2018 one of the properties on which MMLC held a conservation easement was transferred to MMLC when the landowner passed away. The landowner had designated in his trust that ownership of the property should transfer to MMLC on his passing. This newest property is an 82-acre parcel in Shiawassee County. It will be kept as a natural area. The habitat on the property is largely shrubland and immature woods. Atherton Creek (drain) passes through the property and a portion of the property is in the Looking Glass River flood plain.

MMLC owns five other natural areas in our area of coverage. Our largest is Bunker Nature Preserve (BNP), a 130-acre preserve several miles southwest of Mason. One of the unique features of BNP is the large amount of native prairie habitat it contains, about 65 acres. Since European settlement began, native prairie habitat has become increasingly rare in Michigan. At BNP you can see a relatively large expanse of it. A marked trail system is present on BNP. Three benches have been strategically placed along the trails. Increasingly bird watchers are drawn to BNP because the varied habitats attract a good variety of birds. We encourage the public to visit this natural area. A parking lot off Bunker Road is available for visitors.

MMLC owns another natural area in Ingham County, Iosco Natural Area. It is a 75-acre parcel near Dansville. A trail through the property has largely been constructed. This natural area is open to the public all seasons except fall. From September 14 to January 1 the parcel is open only to certified hunters. The hunting agreement was a condition of the donation of the property.

MMLC's fourth natural area, Ionia Natural Area, is located largely within the city limits of Ionia. The 120-acre property is mostly in the flood plain of the Grand River and has about a half mile of frontage on the river. The property is about two-thirds wooded. The other third was farmland and is now a prairie with native grasses and forbs. The prairie was planted with the excellent help of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is flourishing. 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. Great views of the property are visible from both of trails. There are attractive views of the Grand River from the latter trail. Walking and bicycling on these trails are excellent ways to visit this property. We encourage you to visit.

Our fifth natural area, Fourth Lake Natural Area, was acquired in 2017. It is approximately 7.7 acres and is located immediately south of the City of Hillsdale in Hillsdale County. It is fully wooded and has approximately 1,000 feet of frontage on Fourth (Bass) Lake. It has considerable frontage on Highway 99, which makes it readily visible for people to enjoy. It's a biologically-rich property, particularly with respect to trees and shrubs. Not only are numerous Michigan species on the parcel, but also more southern plant species are present.

Our sixth natural area is a 2.4-acre parcel in Clinton County. It is largely wetland.

All properties that we own outright, as well as those under conservation easements, are monitored by MMLC Board members. Our monitoring indicates all are being kept in good condition and all landowners are following the provisions of their conservation easements. All properties are monitored at least once a year and several are monitored multiple times a year.

Currently we are working with four landowners who want to protect their land with conservation easements. The properties are in Ionia, Clinton, and Hillsdale counties. We are also working with one landowner in Jackson County that wants to donate a relatively rare type of wetland to MMLC.

Annual Plan–2019

The board developed our *Annual Plan–2019*. It will guide our activities in 2019. In 2019 we plan: (i) to respond to all inquiries for placing conservation easements on land and to all offers for donations of land, (ii) to prepare conservation easements and baseline documents for landowners who want to protect their land with a conservation easement, (iii) to publish our next newsletter, (iv) to monitor the properties we protect (v) to carry out Year 3 of our 5-year Strategic Plan 2017-21, particularly with regard to raising funds and

acquiring staff, (vi) to complete our fund raising plan for 2019, (vii) to register for the pre-accreditation and accreditation processes with Land Trust Alliance, (viii) to prepare our *Annual Report–2018* and *Annual Plan–2019*, and (ix) to maintain our website and our presence on Facebook.

Financial Statement

MMLC had a positive financial balance at the end of 2018 and did not have any liabilities. Revenues from contributors and grants have been adequate to accomplish the work MMLC undertook in 2018. Federal and state tax documents were completed. For more detailed information, contact Paul Kindel.

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. 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.

In 2009 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, 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 (trusts) 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. In May of 2018, MMLC became a partner organization in the Mid-Michigan Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (MM-CISMA). Under this program a survey for the invasive plant Black Swallow-Wort, was conducted on Bunker Nature Preserve. Only one colony was found and it was treated for removal.

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 Paul Kindel. Contact information is below and on our website. Additional information about MMLC is also on our website.

Board of Directors

We are pleased to have Meghan Stevens, Lindsay Ross, and Hailey TenHarmsel join the MMLC Board in 2018. The members of the Board in 2018 were: Stephen Buzby, Elizabeth Connors, Eckhart Dersch, Paul Kindel, Michael Rhodes, Ken Rosenman, Lindsay Ross, Edward Schools, Meghan Stevens, and Hailey TenHarmsel. Janelle Hermes and Robert Zbiciak are on leave. Officers in 2018 were: Paul Kindel (President), Edward Schools (Vice-president), Ken Rosenman (Secretary), and Elizabeth Connors (Treasurer). Board members and officers serve 3- and 1-year terms, respectively, and may be reelected.

Protection of Land

We are happy to speak with landowners individually or in groups who would like information on the benefits of protecting their land, including the tax benefits. Feel free to contact Paul 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 19, 2019