

Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy

Annual Report–2019

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 ownership of selected parcels in fee 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 2019

In response to MMLC's increasing workload, the MMLC Board approved hiring a Land Protection Specialist who would work half-time. The position was posted and a search commenced early in 2019. The search culminated in the hiring of Kenneth A. Algozin in September of 2019. Ken comes with excellent credentials. He was Executive Director of the DeVries Nature Conservancy in Owosso, Michigan for 12 years, Shiawassee River (Michigan) Project Manager with The Nature Conservancy for 4 years, served two 3-year terms as Conservation Representative on the Shiawassee County Agricultural Preservation Board, a volunteer position, and was a Policy Analyst in the Economic Research Service of the USDA in Washington D. C. for almost 3 years. Recently he served as staff accountant for the Shiawassee Regional Chamber of Commerce in Owosso, Michigan. He received a B. S. in Agricultural Economics from Purdue University, a M. S. in Resource Development from Michigan State University and a PhD in Agricultural and Resource Economics from the University of Illinois. Ken's primary efforts will be on projects that protect natural land and farmland through conservation easements and acquisition of fee land. Since joining MMLC Ken has familiarized himself with MMLC's land protection procedures, developed a master's student project proposal for the University of Michigan's School for Environment and Sustainability, and worked on preparing MMLC for accreditation through Land Trust Alliance. In the short time he has been with MMLC, Ken has already made significant progress in these and other areas.

MMLC contracted with a Development Associate, Heather Majano, to work approximately quarter-time on fundraising in 2019. The work involved applying for grants. A Fundraising Committee was appointed and worked with the Development Associate.

Late in 2018 MMLC received a \$5,000, 1:1 matching grant from an anonymous donor. The Anonymous grant came with the opportunity of an additional \$5,000 if the first \$5,000 was fully matched 1:1 by March 31, 2019. The initial \$5,000 was more than matched by the end of March 2019. All of the match funds came from individual private donors. Almost all 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 Anonymous grant. Your generosity is admirable.

The \$15,000 total funds resulting from the Anonymous grant, plus funds received from members for their memberships in MMLC, and funds from MMLC investments, resulted in MMLC fully meeting our total fund raising goal for 2019. This means we also fully met our fundraising goal for Year 3 of our 5-year MMLC Strategic Plan 2017-21.

MMLC is applying for accreditation status from Land Trust Alliance. The accreditation process is designed to lead to national accreditation of MMLC as a land trust by Land Trust Alliance. We have completed more than half of the materials needed for the application. MMLC received a \$1,500 grant from the Land Trust Alliance to assist in the process. A board member is leading the effort.

The *Handbook of Operations for Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy*, approved June 21, 2017, was further improved. Our policies continue to be refined with each change making us a more effective organization.

MMLC's Newsletter #7 was published and mailed to approximately 280 people in September 2019. Copies of the newsletter are still available and will continue to be distributed throughout 2020.

Annual Report–2019 (this report) and *Annual Plan–2020* were prepared. Our *Annual Plan–2020* and our *MMLC Strategic Plan, 2017-21* will guide our activities in 2020.

Our website, www.midmilandcons.org was kept current in 2019.

MMLC continued to have a presence on social media in 2019, namely on Facebook.

Land Activities

As of the end of 2019, MMLC had 2,117 acres under protection through 17 conservation easements (1,701 acres) and 7 fee properties (425 acres). The approximate location and descriptions of these properties are on our website, www.midmilandcons.org. All properties that MMLC owns outright (fee simple) are kept as natural areas and all have Property Stewards. The public is invited to use those natural areas that have trails.

MMLC acquired a new natural area in 2019, *Swains Lake Natural Area*. It's an unusual natural area, a fen. Fens are relatively rare in Michigan. A fen is a wetland that is alkaline, the pH generally ranging between 7.3 and 8.0. In contrast bogs are acid, less than pH 7.0, while swamps and marshes are neutral. Fens develop when waters rich in magnesium and calcium flow into a wet area producing the fen. Sedges, reeds, and specific grasses are predominant in a fen. The fen that was donated is 8.8 acres and is located in Jackson County. It occurs between two lakes and covers an area that is about twice the size of the 8.8 acres that was donated to MMLC. Besides the usual benefits of protecting a wetland, protecting a fen also protects an unusual array of plant species.

MMLC owns six other natural areas. 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 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. We encourage the public to visit this natural area. A parking lot off Bunker Road is available for visitors to use. The trails are a pleasure to walk.

A second natural area we own in Ingham County, *Iosco Natural Area*, is a 75-acre parcel near Dansville. We plan to complete a trail through the property and construct an off-road parking area in 2020. This natural area is open to the public, except not in 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.

In Ionia County we own the *Ionia Natural Area*, which is largely located 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 and a third native prairie. 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 of the natural area. Nice views of the property are visible from both trails. There are attractive views of the Grand River from the latter trail. Walking and bicycling on these trails are excellent ways to see this property. We encourage you to visit.

The *Atherton Natural Area* was acquired in 2018 when the landowner transferred the property to MMLC on his passing. The owner had the property under a conservation easement. This property is an 82-acre parcel in Shiawassee County and is a nice mixture of shrubland and woodland. Atherton Creek passes through the property and a portion of the property is in the Looking Glass River flood plain.

Fourth Lake Natural Area was acquired in 2017. It is approximately 7.7 acres and is located just south of the City of Hillsdale. 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.

Our seventh natural area is *Eureka Natural Area*, a 2.4-acre parcel, mostly wetland, in Clinton County.

All properties that we own outright, as well as those under conservation easements, are monitored at least yearly 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.

Currently we are working with four landowners who want to protect their land with conservation easements or donate property outright. The properties are in Ionia, Shiawassee, Ingham, and Hillsdale counties.

Annual Plan–2020

The board has developed our *Annual Plan–2020*. It will guide our activities in 2020. In 2020 we plan to: (i) respond to all inquiries for placing conservation easements on land and all offers of donations of land, (ii) prepare conservation easements and baseline documents for landowners who want to protect their land with a conservation easement, (iii) offer presentations to landowners in selected watersheds on how they can protect their land, (iv) monitor all properties we protect, (v) prepare and install MMLC signs on our fee properties, (vi) extend trails and remove invasive plants from specific natural areas, (vii) publish our next newsletter, (viii) correspond with all our members, (ix) carry out Year 4 of our 5-year Strategic Plan 2017-21, (x) register for the pre-accreditation and accreditation processes with Land Trust Alliance, (xi) increase our membership, (xii) prepare our *Annual Report–2020* and *Annual Plan–2021*, and (xiii) maintain our website and our presence on Facebook.

Financial Statement

MMLC had a positive financial balance at the end of 2019 and did not have any liabilities. Revenues from members, grants, and investments were sufficient to accomplish the work MMLC undertook in 2019. Required federal and state documents, including tax documents were completed and submitted to the appropriate units of government. If you would like more information regarding these documents, contact Paul Kindel. Our federal tax documents can be viewed online.

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

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 or by contacting Paul Kindel. 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 adviser.

In 2009, the 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 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 on transfer, if at all. The exemption does not apply to buildings or other structures on the property.

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. MMLC is a partner organization in the Mid-Michigan Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (MM-CISMA). Under this program a survey for the invasive 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 eight 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 Douglas Pearsall join the MMLC Board in 2019. The members of the Board in 2019 were: Stephen Buzby, Elizabeth Connors, Eckhart Dersch, Paul Kindel, Douglas Pearsall, Michael Rhodes, Kenneth Rosenman, Lindsay Ross, Edward Schools, Meghan Stevens and Hailey TenHarmsel. Elizabeth Connors, Edward Schools and Meghan Stevens stepped down from the board in 2019. Officers in 2019 were: Paul Kindel (President), Edward Schools now Kenneth Rosenman (Vice-president), Ken Rosenman now Lindsay Ross (Secretary), and Elizabeth Connors now Stephen Buzby (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 Kenneth A. Algozin by e-mail (midmi@midmilandcons.org), telephone (517-213-8164) or postal mail (Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy, P.O. Box 154, Okemos, MI 48805-0154) or Paul 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 9, 2020