

MID-MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

Annual Report of Activities – 2008

Mission

The mission of the Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy (MMLC) is to protect open space land in mid-Michigan. 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 federal tax code. It is qualified to receive donations of conservation easements on land, gifts of land, as well as other donations.

Protection of Land

MMLC completed three (3) new conservation easements this year resulting in the protection of 251 additional acres. We now have a total 1,410 acres under protection through 11 conservation easements. Currently we are working with two additional landowners who plan to complete conservation easements early in 2009.

One of the conservation easements completed this year is on an 80 acre parcel that not only is in a completely natural condition but the owners have made a substantial and largely successful effort to extirpate all non-native plant species from the land. A large portion of the property consists of rolling prairie with numerous, different, native prairie plant species. It's quite a sight to see in July when many of the prairie flowers are in full bloom. A rare sight in Michigan, but it gives you an idea how Michigan prairies looked before settlement by Europeans. The other part of the property is an attractive woodland with mature, native trees. The property is near two other properties that MMLC protects through conservation easements. One of our goals is to protect enough parcels in an area so entire rural landscapes are protected. The protection of these three properties is a step toward this goal.

The other two conservation easements cover land that is contiguous but is in two different counties, Ingham and Jackson. It has one owner. Approximately 80% of the property is in agriculture with most of that being prime farmland, as designated by the United States Department of Agriculture. The remainder of the property is a large, beautiful, natural woodland with numerous mature trees and several wooded wetland areas. This property is part of a larger, attractive rural landscape that also would be desirable to protect.

In addition to the 1,410 acres of land that MMLC protects with conservation easements, we also have a Memorandum of Understanding with a landowner in Hillsdale County. He has designated MMLC as the recipient (donee) of his 140-acre property of natural land. Ownership will transfer to MMLC when he and two other people living on the property are deceased.

The monitoring system for parcels whose conservation easements we hold continues to be implemented. Typically parcels are monitored once a year. The biggest responsibility that MMLC accepts when it accepts conservation easements is to monitor and protect the "Conservation Values" of the properties in perpetuity. The Board has created a Stewardship Fund for this purpose. The earnings of the Fund, over and above inflation, will be used to cover the costs of monitoring and protecting the properties. Our initial goal of \$10,000 for the Stewardship Fund was reached this year. As we protect more properties we will increase the amount in the Fund.

Acceptance of MMLC into the Advancing Conservancy Excellence (ACE) Program

This fall MMLC applied, was accepted, and began a three year program – the ACE Program – that is offered by Heart of the Lakes and Land Trust Alliance and is designed to strengthen and improve the operating capacity of local conservancies. Fifteen Michigan conservancies were accepted into the program in 2008. Initially outside advisors from the above two organizations will meet with our full Board to assess the current way we operate and discuss ways for strengthening and improving our mode of operation. Technical training seminars, meetings with other local conservancies, and development of strategic partnerships will all be part of the program. An implementation plan for MMLC will be developed. At the conclusion of the program MMLC will be eligible to apply for grant funds that have been awarded to the above two organizations and are designated for assisting local conservancies implement their plans.

Important Information for Landowners on Tax Benefits When They Protect Land

On August 17, 2006, President Bush signed into law the Pension Protection Act of 2006. The Act contains important new incentives for landowners to protect their lands through donation of conservation easements and these parts have been extended through December 31, 2009. The law: (i) raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from 30 percent of his or her income in any year to 50 percent, (ii) allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100 percent of their income, and (iii) extends the carry-forward period for a donor to take a tax deduction for a conservation agreement donated voluntarily from 5 to 15 years. These are powerful new tools that allow donors of modest income to receive greater credit for donating a conservation easement on property they own to a qualified land conservancy.

Another important benefit for protecting land was enacted by the Michigan legislature in December of 2006. Michigan Act 446 of 2006 eliminates the “pop-up” tax on land covered by a conservation easement when ownership of the land is transferred, for example, when it is sold. The taxable value that the land had before the transfer occurred is retained by the new owner after the transfer has occurred. This will make land covered by a conservation easement more attractive to new owners. The exemption does not apply to buildings or other structures on the land.

Affiliations

MMLC continued to participate in the three-year Upper Grand River Implementation Grant that was awarded to the Jackson and Ingham Conservation Districts in 2006. The goal of the grant is to reduce non-point pollution in the Upper Grand River watershed (about 75,000 acres in Jackson and Ingham counties). MMLC’s responsibility is to explain to landowners how they can protect their open space land through conservation easements. On February 9, 2008 MMLC and Washtenaw Land Trust co-sponsored a land protection workshop for landowners in the watershed. It was held in Jackson. On March 3, 2008 we co-sponsored a second land protection workshop, this time at the Ingham Conservation District offices in Mason Michigan. Both were well-attended.

MMLC is a member of Land Trust Alliance (LTA), a national land protection advocacy organization. MMLC has adopted LTA’s *Land Trust Standards and Practices* as the guiding principles for our operations. MMLC is also a member of Heart of the Lakes, a state land protection advocacy organization.

Meetings and Website

The Board of Directors of MMLC meets approximately 6 times a year. The meetings are open to all, so feel free to attend. Our website is www.midmilandcons.org.

Board of Directors

The members of the Board are: Stephen Buzby, Christie Bleck, Eckhart Dersch, Chris Freiburger, Carl Harmon, Paul Kindel, Ken Rosenman, Edward Schools, and Jody Simoes. Elections were held in the spring and Eckhart Dersch and Edward Schools were re-elected to the Board. Officers elected were: Paul Kindel (President), Edward Schools (Vice-president), Jody Simoes (Secretary), and Stephen Buzby (Treasurer). The board members and officers serve 3- and 1-year terms, respectively.

Protection of Land and MMLC

If you know of landowners who would like to protect farmland and other open space land, let them know about MMLC. We would be pleased to talk with them and provide them with information on and assistance with protecting their land.

If you or someone you know would like us to give a land protection workshop for landowners in a particular part of our coverage area, we would be happy to do so.

Feel free to contact me by e-mail (kindel@msu.edu), postal mail (2915 Margate Lane, East Lansing, MI 48823), or telephone (517-332-3091). We welcome inquiries.

Paul K. Kindel, President,
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