

MID-MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

Annual Report of Activities – 2010

Mission

The mission of the Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy (MMLC) is to protect farmland and natural 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, monetary donations, and other donations. The donors can use these donations as income tax deductions.

Protection of Land

Two conservation easements were largely finished in 2010 and should be completed in 2011. Several others are in the beginning stages.

We have a total of 1,492 acres under protection through 12 conservation easements. A description of these properties can be found at www.midmilandcons.org. All of our properties were monitored in 2010 by MMLC board members except one, and it will be done this spring. All landowners are following the provisions of their conservation easements.

One property with a conservation easement held by MMLC was sold this year. This is the first sale of a property protected by a conservation easement held by MMLC. The sale is of interest because it shows there is a market in mid-Michigan for properties protected with a conservation easement.

MMLC and the Advancing Conservancy Excellence (ACE) Program

In the fall of 2008, MMLC was accepted into the ACE Program. This is a three year program offered by Heart of the Lakes and the Land Trust Alliance and is designed to expand and improve the operating capabilities of Michigan land conservancies. The ACE program provided funds to do a Guided Organizational Assessment of and develop an Implementation Plan for MMLC. The Implementation Plan developed emphasized the need for MMLC to prepare annual and 5-year plans.

In 2009, MMLC was awarded a grant from the ACE Program to develop such plans. In 2009 and the early part of 2010, the board, with the assistance of a facilitator, developed our Annual Plan–2011 and our 5-year Strategic Plan–2010-2014. The MMLC Board approved the two plans in April and June of 2010. These plans are already making MMLC a more effective organization in fulfilling its mission.

In July 2010 we applied for and received a second grant from the ACE program. This grant was to work on the provisions in our two plans. Several things in the annual plan were accomplished in 2010. First, we sent a large mailing to select residents in our seven-county area. The purpose of the mailing was to make residents aware of MMLC by describing its mission and area of coverage and to ask them to consider joining and providing support for MMLC. Second, we improved our website. Third, we developed a 5-year membership and fund-raising plan. Fourth, we started the development of a PowerPoint presentation that will explain to landowners how they can protect their land through conservation easements held by the Conservancy and the benefits of doing so. We plan to start giving such presentations to groups in our seven-county area in 2011. Finally, we started the development of a Land Preservation Plan for our seven-county area. The plan will describe a system for establishing the priority for protection of the different types of lands in our area.

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

On August 17, 2006, President Bush signed into law the Pension Protection Act of 2006. The Act contained important new federal tax incentives for landowners to protect their lands through the donation of a conservation easement. The provisions of the Act expired December 31, 2009. On December 17, 2010, President Obama signed into law an extension of these benefits through December 31, 2011, and they were made retroactive to January 1, 2010.

The law does the following: (i) it 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) it allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100 percent of their income, and (iii) it extends the carry-forward period for a donor to take a tax deduction for a conservation easement donated voluntarily from 5 to 15 years. These are powerful tools that allow donors of more modest income to receive greater credit for donating a conservation easement on property they own to a qualified land conservancy. The current law will expire December 31, 2011. Efforts are being made to extend the law beyond 2011, or preferably make it permanent, but in the present climate for reducing the federal debt it is possible that these provisions will not be extended beyond 2011. If you know of people who are considering protecting their land with a conservation easement, 2011 may be a good year to do it. Additional information on these federal tax benefits can be obtained at www.lta.org, the website of the Land Trust Alliance, or at our website, given below.

Another important tax benefit for protecting land was enacted by the Michigan legislature in December of 2006. Michigan 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, 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 considerably more attractive to new owners. The exemption does not apply to buildings or other structures on the land.

Affiliations

MMLC is a member of Land Trust Alliance, a national land protection advocacy organization, and 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 the public. Our website is www.midmilandcons.org.

Board of Directors

The members of the MMLC Board in 2010 were: Christie Bleck, Stephen Buzby, Eckhart Dersch, Chris Freiburger, Carl Harmon, Paul Kindel, Seth Martin, Ken Rosenman, Edward Schools, Jody Simoes and Robert Zbiciak. Chris Freiburger retired from board in April, 2010. We thank him for his many years of service. Two new people joined the board in 2010, Seth Martin and Robert Zbiciak. Seth works for Michigan State University and Robert for the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. We are pleased to have them as members. 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 their farmland and natural land, encourage them to contact MMLC. We would be pleased to talk with them and provide them with information on and assistance with protecting their land.

If you, or if someone or some group that you know, would like us to give a workshop on land protection and its tax benefits for landowners in your 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 inquires.

Paul K. Kindel, President,
Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy
On behalf of the Board of Directors
East Lansing, Michigan
March 5, 2011