

Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy Annual Report–2020

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 simple 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 2020

In response to MMLC's increasing workload, the MMLC Board approved hiring a Land Protection Specialist in 2019. The position was posted and the search resulted in the hiring of Kenneth A. Algozin in September of 2019. Ken came with excellent credentials for the position. Long term, Ken's primary efforts are on projects that protect natural land and farmland through conservation easements and acquisition of land. Since joining MMLC Ken has familiarized himself with MMLC's land protection procedures, started working, together with the board President, on new conservation easements. He is also working with a master's student in the University of Michigan's School for Environment and Sustainability on developing strategic approaches to identifying important natural lands and farmlands in our area of coverage, developing procedures for contacting landowners of these lands, and explaining to the landowners the importance of protecting their land with conservation easements.

This past year MMLC's developed organizational structures that were not needed when MMLC was a smaller, all-volunteer organization. These structures were also needed because MMLC was selected by Land Trust Alliance (LTA) to apply for national accreditation through LTA in early 2021. In order to receive accreditation, LTA requires that all MMLC's significant policies and procedures be in writing and approved by the MMLC Board. Much of this work was accomplished in 2020 and Ken had a major role in completing it. The remainder will be completed in 2021. The accreditation process is designed to lead to national accreditation of MMLC as a land trust by Land Trust Alliance. Accreditation will give increased credibility to MMLC as a land trust.

In 2020 MMLC was asked by Professor Louis (Lou) Schiavone's if MMLC would serve as a practice client for the students in his advertising class at Michigan State University. The students would develop a marketing strategy for MMLC. This worked out so well that a committee of Lou, as Chair, Ken Algozin, Lindsay Ross, Hailey TenHarmsel and at least one student was appointed to implement the proposals developed by the students in the class. As an added plus, Lou joined the MMLC Board of Directors.

The *Handbook of Operations for Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy*, approved June 21, 2017, was further refined as we developed our organizational structure. The *Handbook* brings all our written policies and procedural documents together in one place. Having the *Handbook* current is essential for accreditation.

MMLC's Newsletter #8 was published and mailed to approximately 290 people in September 2020. Copies of the newsletter are available on our website at <http://www.midmilandcons.org/request> and hard copies are available by e-mailing to kindel@msu.edu.

Annual Report–2020 (this report) and *Annual Plan–2021* were prepared. Our *Annual Plan–2021* and our *MMLC Strategic Plan, 2017-21* will guide our activities in 2021.

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

MMLC continued to have a presence on social media in 2020, on Facebook.

Land Activities

In November 2020, MMLC completed the protection of a productive 86-acre farm in Hillsdale County with a conservation easement. The farm is a nice mixture of natural land and farmland and has 450 feet of frontage on a large lake. The frontage land is all natural. It is an excellent property to protect because of the natural lake frontage and the quality of the farmland.

As of the end of 2020, MMLC has 2,208 acres under protection through 18 conservation easements (1,783 acres) and 7 fee simple properties (425 acres). The location and descriptions of these properties are on our website. The properties that MMLC owns outright (in fee simple) are kept as natural areas and all have Property Stewards. The public is invited to use those natural areas that have trails. These properties were all described in our *Annual Report–2019*. The *Annual Report–2019* is on our website.

All properties that we own fee simple (outright), as well as those under conservation easements, are monitored at least once a year by MMLC Board members and in one case by a non-Board Member. Our monitoring indicates all properties are in good condition and all landowners are following the provisions of their conservation easements.

Currently we are working with five landowners who want to protect their land with conservation easements or donate property outright to MMLC.

Annual Plan–2021

The board has developed our *Annual Plan–2021*. It will guide our activities in 2021. In 2021 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) extend trails and remove invasive plants from natural areas, (vi) implement the marketing proposals of our new marketing committee, (vii) publish our next newsletter, (viii) correspond with all our members, (ix) carry out Year 5 of our 5-year Strategic Plan 2017-21, (x) submit our application for pre-accreditation and accreditation with Land Trust Alliance, (xi) prepare our *Annual Report–2021* and *Annual Plan–2022*, and (xii) maintain our website and our presence on Facebook

Financial Statement

MMLC had a positive financial balance at the end of 2020 and did not have any liabilities. Revenues for the year were essential equal to expenses. 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.

MMLC received two matching grants in 2018 and 2019 for capacity building of MMLC. These funds (total \$55,000.00) are slowly being used for that purpose and help us maintain a balance budget. They should serve this purpose for several years into the future.

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 involving donations, 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. One colony was found, and it was removed.

Meetings and Website

The MMLC Board met monthly in 2020. 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, www.midmilandcons.org.

Board of Directors

We were pleased to have Louis (Lou) Schiavone III join the MMLC Board in July 2020. Biographies of Lou and Ken A. are in our Newsletter #8. Short biographies of all board members are on our website. The members of the Board in 2020 were: Stephen Buzby, Eckhart Dersch, Paul Kindel, Douglas Pearsall, Michael Rhodes, Kenneth Rosenman, Lindsay Ross, Louis Schiavone and Hailey TenHarmsel. Officers in 2020 were: Paul Kindel (President), Kenneth Rosenman (Vice-president), Lindsay Ross (Secretary), and 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. If you have any questions or wish to arrange a meeting, 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 13, 2021