



Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network

2005 ANNUAL REPORT



The Saginaw Bay Watershed region contains rich resources in agriculture, forestry, industry, and recreation. As the state's largest watershed, it encompasses nearly 8,700 square miles in all or part of 22 counties in central Michigan. Fifteen percent of the state's waterways drain into the Saginaw Bay.

About the Saginaw Bay Watershed

- Home to more than 90 fish species, 138 endangered or threatened species, and 1.4 million people
- Includes more than 175 inland lakes
- Contains about 7,000 miles of rivers and streams
- Path for migrating song birds and waterfowl on the Mississippi Flyway
- Significant agricultural and industrial resources supporting Michigan's economy

On behalf of the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network and its partners, I am pleased to present to you the 2005 Annual Report.

This was another outstanding year for the WIN program. Across our main program areas – land use, water resources, agriculture and pollution prevention, energy efficiency, and wildlife habitat – WIN continued to make strong progress as we focused on our mission to promote the tenets of sustainability and strengthen the connections between our environment, our economy and our community.

In 2005, WIN awarded nearly \$380,000 in funding to twelve projects throughout the Saginaw Bay region. From the new Chippewa Trail in Midland, which will help connect that city to the larger tri-county trail system, to an innovative agricultural land preservation program in Bay County, WIN grants helped communities launch and complete initiatives that will encourage future conservation and investment in our region. Other funded projects will look at restoration of native species, protection of habitat, promoting improved and new energy sources, and new management techniques for our water resources. Many of these programs are highlighted in this report.

The grantees – or I think a better word is, in fact, “partners” – come from throughout the watershed. Our partner community, which at any given time numbers approximately 30 organizations, is one of our most important assets. We learn a great deal from these partners, and they help us to focus on the most pressing issues facing our region. They strengthen the WIN process and keep it viable. They make us a better organization. We, in turn, try to be a catalyst for their efforts and attempt to connect these organizations with additional opportunities for funding, technical support, and organizational expertise.

The Conservation Fund is proud to be a partner in this unique effort to build sustainable communities in the Saginaw Bay Watershed. I want to thank all of our task group members, resource group participants, and our funders. Because of them, we can look back on another extraordinary year for WIN, and look forward to new challenges and opportunities in 2006.

Michael Kelly

Michael Kelly
The Conservation Fund



Support That Reaches Beyond the Funding

In 2005, WIN reached the milestones of \$2.5 million in grants and 150 funded programs since our inception. While this amount is significant, it does not begin to reflect the number of public and private dollars that have been leveraged because of the initial funding made possible by WIN. Because of WIN's support, an additional \$6 million has been committed by other organizations since 1998.

In 2005, these projects received WIN funding:

- Urban and Community Forestry in the Saginaw Bay Watershed
- Planning Tool for Sustaining and Improving the Health of Saginaw Bay's Coastal Habitat
- Chippewa Trail
- Averill Preserve Wetland Construction
- Ogemaw Stormwater Management Project
- Understanding Habitat and Nutrient Requirements of Spring Staging Waterfowl and Shorebirds

- Native Plant Seed Source Development at Saginaw Correctional Facility
- Food Security through Family Gardening Nutrition Education Expansion Project
- Harvesting Clean Energy Conference
- Potential Conservation Area Analysis for Genesee, Lapeer, and Shiawassee counties
- Connecting Michigan: Planning for the Future of Michigan's Trailway System
- Bay County Farmland Preservation Program

WIN Funding Process

WIN follows a unique, interactive process for awarding grant funding for projects and initiatives. Throughout the community-based review process, individuals from many organizations take part by reviewing project applications and offering their expertise on a variety of topics.

WIN awards grant funding twice each year. If you have a project to submit for funding consideration, contact WIN at (989) 892-9171 for an application.



Making Natural Connections

CHIPPEWA TRAIL

Projects that help the public appreciate and connect with nature are essential. With a WIN grant, the Chippewa Nature Center (CNC) made such a connection – literally – in 2005.

Construction of the Chippewa Trail was started in the spring of 2005 and it officially opened on September 1. The 12-foot-wide, ADA/wheelchair-accessible asphalt trail connects the Chippewa Nature Center to the Tridge area in downtown Midland. The pathway covers almost four miles, curving through woodlands, fields, and scenic wetlands.

In downtown Midland, the Chippewa Trail connects with the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail of Midland County, which extends more than 20 miles from Midland to Coleman. At the Chippewa Nature Center end, trail users have another 14 miles of footpaths to explore.

The idea for this connection started in the mid-1980s, shortly after the Tridge – a

three-legged pedestrian bridge – was completed in Midland.

“Midlanders Carl Gerstacker and Ned Brandt started clearing a trail on the south leg of the Tridge along the Chippewa River. Unfortunately, private property intervened and they weren’t able to complete that project,” says Dick Touvell, CNC Executive Director. Several more attempts were made at the trail – until the timing was right for planning that started again in 2000.

“With a generous donation of 18 acres from Dow and donations from five local foundations, we were able to make the Gerstacker/Brandt dream a reality,” says Touvell. “The major WIN grant was a key factor in getting the trail underway in 2005.”

The \$1.2 million Chippewa Trail is located on City of Midland property, land donated by The Dow Chemical Company, and CNC property. To enrich the

user’s experience, trail-side interpretive signage describes significant natural, cultural, and historical features.

Along the trail, there are also benches, picnic areas, resting areas, and other recreational activities, such as softball diamonds, rugby fields, and a disc golf course.

The project was carefully constructed. “First and foremost, we tried to avoid sensitive areas by planning the trail around them,” says Touvell. “We carefully marked trees so contractors would know which must be saved. To preserve two wetlands areas and maintain the path of the trail, we built bridges over the wetlands, allowing trail users to experience the wetlands without harming them. CNC worked closely with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for wetland permitting, and we went above and beyond DEQ requirements for erosion and sedimentation. In fact, we even improved some of the drainage situations. We had an amazing group of

contractors who quickly took to this new way of doing business, which involved much more thought for the environment than most of their customers are interested in.”

Local Champion:
Chippewa Nature Center

Partners:
The Dow Chemical Company

Friends of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail

City of Midland

Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation

Charles J. Strosacker Foundation

Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation

Alden and Vada Dow Family Foundations

Midland Area Community Foundation

Chemical Bank and Trust

WIN Grant Award:
\$50,000

Our Vision

As stewards of the Saginaw Bay Watershed, we value our shared, unique resources, and together we will balance economic, environmental, and social priorities to enhance the quality of life for this and future generations.

WIN's Guiding Principles

- Provide a pleasant and healthy environment
- Conserve historic, cultural, and natural resources
- Integrate economic prosperity, ecology, and aesthetics
- Use land and infrastructure effectively
- Continually evaluate and refine shared vision and goals



“The feedback on the Chippewa Trail has been overwhelmingly positive.

Users enjoy the diversity of habitats. They like the curves on the trail and the boardwalks.

We've seen heavy usage in all types of weather. The Chippewa Nature Center's weekend attendance has increased dramatically. People tell us that they love that the CNC is linked to downtown Midland and to the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail on a nonmotorized route. ”

— Dick Towell, Executive Director, Chippewa Nature Center



Planting the Seeds for Tomorrow

NATIVE PLANT SEED SOURCE DEVELOPMENT AT THE SAGINAW CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

With the Saginaw Correctional Facility and a grant from WIN, the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge is developing a perpetual seed source for native perennial plants, such as prairie cordgrass, swamp milkweed and blue vervain. These seeds will be used in restoration projects at the refuge.

Located south of Saginaw, the refuge covers more than 9,400 acres of marsh, bottomland forests, grassland, and agricultural lands, with four rivers crossing through the refuge to form the Saginaw River, Saginaw Bay's largest tributary.

One example of the future seed use is in restoring agricultural areas to prairies or wetlands. Because a pound of native seed can be several hundred dollars and be difficult to find, this project will create a stock of seed that is both economical and truly native to the area.

Currently, seeds are being harvested by refuge staff and volunteers. Starting in the spring of 2006, inmates will start the pilot program – growing the native seeds in a greenhouse and fields at the Saginaw Correctional Facility in Freeland. Inmates will sort, store, and germinate seeds and cultivate plants.

“The first two to three years will focus on growing the plants. The seeds harvested will then be planted to yield more seed-producing plants. Then we’ll be able to start storing seeds for future needs,” says Steven Kahl, Refuge Manager at the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. “Eventually, we expect to develop a perpetual seed source of 30 species of native plants. This seed will contribute to the restoration and increased diversity of potentially thousands of acres of emergent marsh and prairie at the refuge.”

The refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) calls for the restoration of more than 1,000 acres of cropland to grassland and emergent marsh on existing refuge lands. Further, with the approved expansion of the refuge by 7,500 acres, the CCP calls for nearly 3,000 acres to be restored to grassland and additional emergent marsh habitats. This new seed source will be an important part of this restoration program.

“This is an innovative project that provides not only a clear economic benefit to the refuge, but also provides a new source of truly native plants that will be used to restore some rare and globally significant habitat for a variety of species, including migratory birds,” says Gene Kenaga, co-chair of WIN’s Wildlife Habitat Task Group.

The project helps expand the correctional facility’s current gardening program

so more inmates can participate. The prison currently owns and operates garden areas that will be converted to the production of these native plants.

Funds are also provided by WIN to design and place an interpretive kiosk at the refuge to further describe the project and the importance of native plants.

Local Champions:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

Partner:
Saginaw Correctional Facility

WIN Grant Award:
\$28,675



Photo: Steven Kahl, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Staff and volunteers at the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge are currently collecting native seeds that will be cultivated at the Saginaw Correctional Facility. Here, David Peters is collecting prairie cordgrass seed at the refuge. The native seed project will also incorporate an interpretive kiosk at the refuge, which will describe the importance of native plants as part of the ecosystem and the fundamental construction and remediation of wetland areas.

“This project is a win-win situation because it provides seeds that the refuge will need and an opportunity for structured activity and additional rehabilitation for inmates. In the long-term, when the seed volume exceeds the refuge needs, we’ll have an opportunity to sell native perennial wildflowers and plants to community sites as an alternative to exotic annuals. The profits from these sales could ensure the continuation of the correctional facility’s gardening program.”

— Steven Kahl, Refuge Manager, Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge



Improving the Watershed

AVERILL PRESERVE WETLAND CONSTRUCTION

The Averill Nature Preserve is a 73.5-acre site located between the Tittabawassee River and the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail in Midland County. Approximately five miles northwest of Midland, the preserve is owned and managed by the Little Forks Conservancy. Currently, the preserve has more than one mile of shoreline on the Tittabawassee River and Averill Creek, more than three-quarters of a mile of frontage on the rail-trail, 20 acres of floodplain, and seven different habitats.

The L and B Drain passes through the property, draining the watershed “above” the Averill Nature Preserve. The waterway has inadequately handled the heavy water flows, which have increased over the years as surrounding lands have been developed. In addition, the original drainage tile has broken, allowing most of the water to flow

on the surface, eroding the land around the waterway, washing sediment into the river, and undercutting vegetation.

With a WIN grant, the Little Forks Conservancy is designing an innovative solution.

“The traditional repair would simply involve replacing the damaged tile, burying it, and creating an outfall at the river’s edge. But this could have removed a substantial source of water for the new emerging wetland within the drain boundaries,” says Douglas Koop, Executive Director, Little Forks Conservancy. “Our desire is to slow the velocity of the runoff and let natural processes cleanse the water, to create additional wetland habitat, and to provide a healthy example of a drain system that works with the land to improve water quality.”

With a site survey and preliminary designs being prepared, the final design, permits, and funding should be completed by the summer of 2006 for construction to begin.

“Originally, the drain was just a subsurface pipe that discharged directly into the Tittabawassee River. Working with the project engineers and local partners – including the Midland County Drain Commission and Midland County Parks and Recreation – a suitable design will be created to slow the velocity of the water and create a stable waterway,” says Elan Lipschitz, Land Protection Specialist, Little Forks Conservancy.

“The wetland will act as a natural filter for storm waters and base runoff, allowing sediment to settle and nutrients to be taken up by vegetation before

reaching the Tittabawassee River,” says Koop.

“This wetland will have a multifunctional role in our ecosystem – providing wildlife habitat, improving water quality, and affecting the overall health of the Tittabawassee River and the entire Saginaw Bay,” says Lipschitz.

Local Champions:
Little Forks Conservancy

Partners:
Midland County Drain Commission
Midland County Parks and Recreation
Midland Area Community Foundation

WIN Grant Award:
\$50,000



The WIN Funders' Network

A committed group of 11 foundations support WIN with financial contributions and technical support. They are:

Bay Area Community Foundation
Charles J. Strosacker Foundation
Consumers Energy Foundation
The Cook Family Foundation
The Dow Chemical Company Foundation
Harry A. and Margaret D. Towsley Foundation
Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation
Midland Area Community Foundation
Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation
S.C. Johnson Fund
Saginaw Community Foundation

For a list of participating companies and organizations with their web site links, visit saginawbaywin.org/info/overflow.html.

“When integrated into the history and natural features of the site, we will be able to demonstrate the benefits of repairing eroded banks and using wetland filters within a drain corridor to limit sedimentation into our local waterways.

We hope this will also be a demonstration site for landowners with steep, erodible banks – showing a way to resolve drainage problems on their land.

Additionally, agencies such as conservation districts, drain commissions, and the DEQ may use or prescribe similar techniques throughout the watershed.”

— Douglas Koop, Executive Director, Little Forks Conservancy



Creating Options for Preserving Farmland

BAY COUNTY FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

With a WIN grant, Bay County is working with the Bay County Farm Bureau, MSU Extension, and other partners to coordinate the development of a county-wide Farmland Preservation Program. The program will establish mechanisms for Bay County farmers to preserve their farmland. It will be led by a steering committee – consisting of both rural and urban interests – which will be formed in early 2006.

Currently, many farmers are facing pressure to sell their land to developers. “The primary reason that we’re taking on this Farmland Preservation Program is to develop an alternative for farmers who want to keep their land in farming but may be experiencing pressure to get out of farming,” says Laura Ogar Ryder, Director, Bay County Environmental Affairs and Community Development. “It’s an alternative that isn’t available today for Bay County farmers.”

One goal is to identify the farmlands that are experiencing the highest development pressure. In

addition, this program will help Bay County plan for the future.

“The program is really a land use initiative for us, focusing on smart growth,” says Ryder. “Development in isolated pockets in rural areas can result in a higher cost for delivering public services, such as water, sewer, fire, and emergency services. Public service costs are based on per capita user fees. When you start to spread those services out from the city center, the costs increase for residents and municipalities. We’re all facing reduced revenues and increasing expenses.

“But the goal is definitely not to stop development,” says Ryder. “It’s to encourage smart growth planning for development.”

Participation in the Farmland Preservation Program is voluntary, but parcels must meet requirements established by the steering committee and follow state guidelines.

Typical preservation programs incorporate stewardship from the

local/state/federal government or a land conservancy. Three common tools that can permanently preserve farmland through an agricultural conservation easement include:

- Purchase of development rights – landowners may be compensated for the lost development potential by funding from local/state/federal governments or a land conservancy
- Transfer of development rights – landowners may be compensated by a private entity wanting to increase the development density at another location
- Donation of development rights – no cash is involved (but the landowner’s income taxes may be favorably impacted)

All three of these may be options in the Bay County program. While no local funds are currently available, the state has some funding available. “In order for a landowner to apply for this funding, however, we need to have a state-approved Farmland Preservation Program in place,” says Ryder. “The

WIN grant will help us develop that program.

“We want this program to be as flexible as possible for as many people as possible,” she says. “One of the benefits of this program is that local people get to identify the high-value areas in the county. Farmers will be able to nominate their parcels for preservation.

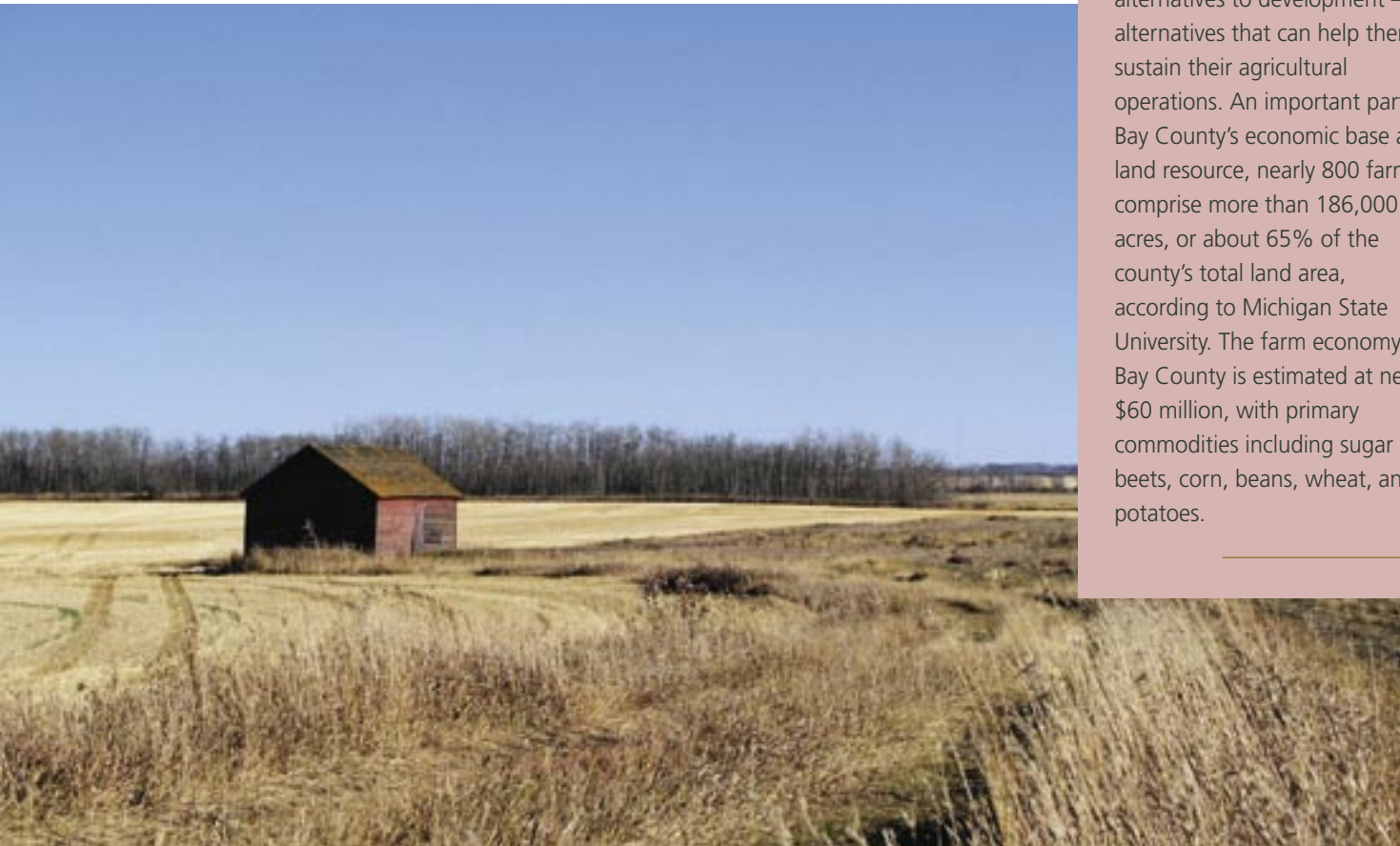
“Overall, this project will provide Bay County farmers with completely new options for the protection of their agricultural land,” she says. “At the same time, the long-range planning for Bay County’s future can help us create a picture that is better for both agriculture and smart growth.”

Local Champion:
Bay County

Partners:
Bay County Farm Bureau
Bay County Home Builders Association

MSU Extension
Bay County cities and townships

WIN Grant Award:
\$27,500



The Bay County Farmland Preservation Program seeks to strategically conserve land for farming by offering landowners alternatives to development – alternatives that can help them sustain their agricultural operations. An important part of Bay County's economic base and land resource, nearly 800 farms comprise more than 186,000 acres, or about 65% of the county's total land area, according to Michigan State University. The farm economy in Bay County is estimated at nearly \$60 million, with primary commodities including sugar beets, corn, beans, wheat, and potatoes.

“Farmland is more than just land to farmers. It is part of their soul.

It's heartbreaking when farmers tell me that their children have gone on and aren't interested in farming. Many elderly farmers don't know who to pass the land on to, but they know with absolute certainty that they want this land to remain in farming.

What the Bay County Farmland Preservation Program will do is provide an option for these folks – with some type of economic mechanism and provision to maintain the farmland in the future.”

— Laura Ogar Ryder, Director, Bay County Environmental Affairs and Community Development

For more information about WIN, visit
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