

Appendix B

Final Reports

**Final Grant Report for
The Nature Conservancy – Michigan Natural Features Inventory**
Submitted April 10, 2001

Contractor: Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, Inc. (SWMLC)
Budget Center Name: EPA Partnership LOC
Budget Center: 122-085-6885
Source of Funds: EPA Grant #GL985156-01-0

The following report is a complete list of all activities accomplished under the grant. The information is bulleted under each task to be accomplished per the workplan outlined in the grant contract. The latter portion of the report is the questions provided under Paragraph 1, item 7, of the grant contract.

Task 1:

The Conservancy provided 1200 person hours over the course of this contract. The hours were primarily for development of target areas with the MNFI staff and time spent developing new partnerships in these target areas. Time was also spent developing educational materials and working with landowners.

Task 2:

During the grant period, SWMLC worked with MNFI to develop priority sites in southwest Michigan. Both parties designated the Dowagiac River Watershed (Cass County) and Cedar Creek/High Banks Creek (Barry County) as target areas for the purposes of this grant. (SWMLC has further designated, for our use, a list of 6 other targeted areas in our 9 county service area based on the data provided to us by MNFI and the knowledge we have of potential protection projects.)

In the Cedar Creek/High Banks Creek area, SWMLC continues to work with landowners and partners (OUR-Land Committee and the Barry Conservation District) in priority sites. Properties including larger tracts of beech-maple and oak-hickory forests with various wetland complexes including tamarack swamp and white cedar swamp. Eastern massasauga has been documented at some of these sites. We also have been working with the 4-Townships Water Resources Council, another local group in Barry County working on a watershed management plan for their area. 4-Townships has already approached us about examining an opportunity to sub-contract from them for landowner outreach later in 2001.

In the Dowagiac River Watershed, SWMLC has worked with MNFI to identify properties with high-quality natural areas, particularly sites with intact southern floodplain forests and prairie fens. SWMLC participated in the Mitchell satyr butterfly surveys in July 2000 on properties in the watershed. SWMLC will continue to take on more responsibility of the planning and management of these surveys, as well as surveys for other state and federally threatened and endangered species in the watershed. We continue to participate in the planning of the watershed management plan under our subcontract with the Dowagiac River Stewardship Project housed in the Cass County Conservation District. Nicole Hill, SWMLC Land Protection Specialist, has recently become a member of the Board of Directors for the MEANDRS group working to restore meanders on the Dowagiac River.

The development of four educational brochures on the natural features in southwest Michigan was made possible under this grant. The subject of the brochures are: Southern Forested Floodplains; Fens, Marshes, and Bogs; Wetlands; and Hydrology. A fifth brochure was also done in conjunction with the subcontract monies from the Dowagiac River Stewardship Project on the uniqueness of the Dowagiac River Watershed. All of these brochures are attached to this report.

Outreach to landowners is underway in the Dowagiac River watershed. Over 500 residents in the watershed were identified as landowners or owners likely to have natural communities with moderate to high conservation value on their property. Monthly distributions of educational materials to these landowners, including the brochures referred to

in the previous paragraph, were initiated in September 2000, and will continue into July 2001. As of the date of this report, SWMLC has contacted (by phone and in person) over 15 watershed landowners interested in conserving their land. Five landowners continue to work with the Conservancy to evaluate the best method for conserving their land. One conservation easement, approximately 80 acres along Dowagiac Creek, was completed during the grant period. SWMLC looks forward to increasing the number of protected lands in the watershed by building on the partnerships and contacts made possible by this grant.

Task 3:

In the Cedar Creek/High Banks Creek area, SWMLC continues to work with the OUR-Land Committee and the Resource Professional, Jim Bruce, at the Barry Conservation District to provide assistance on land protection options. Staff have completed 2 workshops in the area as described under Task 4.

SWMLC currently has a subcontract with the Dowagiac River Stewardship Project and the Cass County Conservation District for landowner outreach and education regarding the features in the watershed. We completed a public presentation in the watershed, described below in Task 4 of this report. SWMLC continues to lend support and assistance to the MEANDRS group in the watershed and holds a position on the Board of Directors.

Task 4:

Staff completed 3 one-hour workshops for the OUR-Land (Our Ultimate Resource-Land) Committee meeting on April 15, 2000 on land protection options for landowners with the unique features we had targeted in the area. There were approximately 60 Barry County residents in attendance.

SWMLC was invited for another presentation to OUR-Land on March 22, 2001 to familiarize local officials, particularly newly elected officials, with the Conservancy's mission and land protection options that contribute to the conservation of the special features of Barry County. The evening meeting had approximately 40 attendants. There were many request for specific information regarding the tax benefits of conservation easements and associated charitable contributions.

Staff also participated in a workshop on riparian land management and protection options at the Dowagiac Conservation Club on February 13, 2001. Bill Westrate, local farmer, talented naturalist, and past board member of SWMLC, provided a slide presentation on the natural features of the watershed and shared information on the rare and unique communities and species of the watershed, including the Mitchell satyr, massasauga, copper belly, Blanchard's cricket frog, and spotted turtle. Corey VanWyhe, the Cass County Resource Professional, also provided management advice. The Conservancy spoke on land protection options for landowners. There were approximately 80 people in attendance. It was an opportunity to meet a number of riparian landowners interested in conserving and appropriately managing their land.

The development of educational materials were discussed in Task 1.

Task 5:

Copies of the educational brochures for this project have been attached to this report.

Grant Report Summary Questions

a. Discuss how conservation planning has been incorporated into your organization's operation.

In 1999, SWMLC started to think strategically about developing targeted areas of conservation to proactively identify sites for outreach and land protection when we hired our first Land Protection Coordinator. SWMLC not only

targeted 2 sites for the purpose of this grant, but out of the process of identifying these sites, we have target an additional 6 sites. Two of those are now receiving grant monies from MDEQ to continue working on site plans: Four Townships Project and the Dowagiac River Watershed project.

b. Discuss the Conservation Planning tools provided by MNFI:

How useful where they?

How have you used them?

MNFI's greatest contribution to the grant were the maps and data that enabled SWMLC to identify the more critical areas for conservation. MNFI provided data on element occurrences that were indicators or obligates of target natural communities for conservation, particularly prairie fens (G3/S3) and southern floodplain forests. Another significant contribution by the MNFI staff was the training for our committee members and volunteers on these rarer and most unique habitats and species. As a result, SWMLC has a greater understanding of the ecology of the Mitchell satyr butterfly and Eastern massasauga rattlesnake, prairie fen, coastal plain marsh, and southern floodplain forest.

The maps will continue to be useful in assessing the features of properties and prioritization of sites. The training we received will be valuable as we take on more survey responsibilities in future grants (e.g. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Endangered Species Section 6 grant) and as we walk more properties with these species and ecosystems in mind.

c. Summary of outreach efforts, i.e. workshops, presentations, and/or demonstration projects.

SWMLC organized 3 workshops specifically targeting the local officials, large landowners, and active citizens of Barry County and the Dowagiac River Watershed during this grant period.

The first was in Barry County in conjunction with an OUR-Land's day-long workshop in April, 2000. Attendance was about 60 landowners and politicians. SWMLC did 3 one-hour long presentations. The presentations gave an overview of the natural features of Barry County and a description of the tools landowners can use to protect their land, such as conservation easements, purchase of development rights, and gifts or sale of land to conservation organizations.

The second was in Cass County in conjunction with a February 2001 Conservation District workshop for riparian landowners interested in managing habitat on the Dowagiac River and along tributaries. Attendance was about 80 landowners. The presentation consisted of a slide presentation describing the natural history of the area, some of the unique features in the watershed, and landowner options for protection of their property.

The third presentation was an invitation from OUR-Land to specifically speak to local officials in Barry County, particularly newly elected officials, to familiarize them with the Conservancy's mission and land protection tools available to them via state, federal, and local conservation groups. The March 22, 2001 meeting had approximately 40 attendants.

d. Evaluate the success of the landowner contact program.

The first mailings to 525 Dowagiac River Watershed landowners went out on September 29, 2000. SWMLC has completed 6 consecutive mailings as of the date of this report. SWMLC has been working on 5 potential land protection projects (Hassel, Thomas, Beik, Scherers/Bakeman, and Harrison) that could protect more than 400 acres. We have added new SWMLC members even though that was not a primary objective of the education. We have completed one very restrictive conservation easement on the McKaye's 64 acres along the Dowagiac Creek that is a rich mosaic of wetlands with some upland beech-maple forest and old field. Currently we are negotiating a 12 acre purchase project with documented occurrences of Mitchell satyr, box turtle, and potential occurrences of e. massasauga rattlesnake and Kirtland's water snake.

SWMLC has also been asked to provide technical assistance on the Edward Lowe Foundation property. This property was identified during analysis of the Dowagiac River watershed. The Lowe Foundation is a local community founda-

tion that owns 3000 acres. The foundation has been exploring development of a 10-year management plan with an emphasis on stewarding the unique features and habitats of the land. The property is a rich mosaic of forest, wetland, and grassland. SWMLC staff and volunteers and MNFI will be working on this property to inventory and identify features for conservation.

The completed mailings have primarily been the brochures explaining the features that make up the watershed. SWMLC is preparing to accept another grant that will provide us the tools and resources necessary to continue landowner contact and education with those landowners and visit more properties. It will take some time to nurture those landowner relationships. SWMLC will continue to work on developing these relationships as we continue our grant obligations with the Dowagiac River Stewardship Project and the Cass County Conservation District over the next 18 months.

e. Discuss future plans for landowner outreach and education.

As a component of our strategic plan, SWMLC has targeted outreach planned in the Cedar Creek/ High Banks Creek areas of Barry County during the summer and fall of 2001. Outreach will include reprinting and distributing brochures, 2-3 mailings, and neighborhood meetings. We also have verbally committed to a subcontract for landowner outreach with 4-Townships Water Resource Council, a partnership of Barry and Kalamazoo County and 4-Townships to facilitate a watershed management plan. Both of these are partnerships were initiated under this grant and will continue to nurture and grow.

OUR-Land and other Barry County supporters will continue to assist us in meeting new landowners and encourage more projects in the county. SWMLC currently has 1,040 acres of land under conservation easement in the county and we have been contacted regarding a number of good projects in recent months.

SWMLC will also continue with the work started with the Dowagiac River Stewardship Project and the Cass County Conservation District for landowner outreach and education under the subcontract we have for their watershed planning grant. We anticipate completing the 15 land protection projects (conservation easements, gifts, acquisitions) we started in the watershed, and hope that they will give SWMLC a higher profile in the watershed.

SWMLC is also scheduled to receive a 3 year subcontract from MNFI in the spring of 2001 to complete Mitchell's satyr butterfly and massasauga surveys across the service area, design site conservation plans, and form stewardship teams. The Dowagiac River watershed has a concentration of these sites, and the surveys give SWMLC an opportunity to meet and develop relationships with even more landowners.

April 4, 2001

John Paskus, MNFI
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Nature Preserves

Lake Breeze
Oceana County
Lamberton Lk Fen
Kent County
Palomita Reserve
Ottawa County
Saul Lake Bog
Kent County
Wege Foundation
Natural Area
Kent County

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Re: Final Report – Community Conservation/Landowner Contact Project

Dear John:

With this letter I would like to give you a final report on the contract we took with MNFI as part of your EPA grant. This contract allowed us to work on ecologically important sites in Newaygo and Muskegon counties, primarily through landowner contact.

Our task was to “develop and implement a proactive public outreach program in one or more high ecosystems in central Lower Michigan.” We focused on the northeastern Muskegon area and Brooks Township in Newaygo. The attached report details project activities.

In this report you also asked us to cover the following points (as part of Task 7):

- 1. Incorporating conservation planning.** This project did not drastically change the way in which we incorporate conservation planning into our organization. We have always been interested in sites identified by MNFI and other credible scientists as having ecological significance. Having land protection staff trained in The Nature Conservancy methodology has meant that we frequently operate in a manner consistent with their landowner contact programs.

What this project did was give us the opportunity, through financial support, to concentrate on some of these more significant sites that are difficult to protect because of fragmentation, low support for conservation, low-income levels, and sites that have a low profile for the community.
- 2. Usefulness of MNFI planning tools.** The conservation planning tools provided by MNFI were definitely useful but required significant amounts of time to adapt to our small land trust with no staff scientists and no mapping/aerial photo capacity in our office. It took us a long time to select viable sites from the raw data given to us and we had to purchase digitized aerial photos before we could make much progress. Background information and slides on elements were very useful.
- 3. Summary of outreach efforts.** See attached report.

4. **Evaluation of the success of the landowner contact program.** If you were to judge the landowner contact program by the number or acreage of conservation successes achieved in the grant period, the results would be abysmal. Only one landowner wanted to participate in the Conservation Partners program and there were no donations of easements or land.

In rural and northeastern Muskegon County and Brooks Township many of the landowners are of modest means, the land is highly fragmented and usually includes their residence, and people often live in these areas because they want to be in a place with little government interference.

All of these factors contribute to this lack of conservation success and have caused us to think long and hard about how we work toward conservation of some of these important areas.

As part of this project I had the opportunity to attend an environmental seminar held by the Community Foundation for Muskegon County in which one of the speakers was describing characteristics of the population. One way that he described a typical resident was a “non-joiner” that is overscheduled and has a hectic life.

If a typical landowner in this area can be characterized as less affluent, a “non-joiner”, with a hectic life and a skepticism for “programs”, targeting landowners for the “Conservation Partnership” program or trying to get them to consider selling or restricting their home site is not going to be very fruitful.

What we have decided to do from this point on is to de-emphasize joining a program, look for opportunities for conservation easements or acquisition (the latter potentially facilitated by TNC), develop model projects if possible, and focus on long-term, occasional contact by using the database to continue sending information or invitations to events.

5. **Future landowner outreach.** We intend to continue working in Muskegon County and Brooks Township on important ecological sites. In particular, in light of the above, we will continue to send information or meet with landowners contacted as part of this program. We are hoping that a long-term approach will pay off eventually.

Working with the MIFO of TNC and the USFS, we worked to identify landowners who would be willing to participate in a model program to cut blocks of planted pines off former prairie land. We were successful in finding 2 cooperating landowners (a third, our Conservation Partner, wants to wait and see the results) and have found an appropriate contracting organization. We hope to use federal match-grant programs to fund these projects.

We hope to use these sites as models for other landowners who have sites that are degraded by planted pine.

We also recognize that the only way to protect some of these sites may be through purchase, since many of these lands are the landowner's primary asset.

Finally, we are working with The Nature Conservancy as they prepare to open a field office in Grand Rapids. Our partnership with them will include continued efforts to preserve the coastal plain marsh and prairie/savanna systems in our area.

For the most part, these are difficult sites to preserve. The Nature Conservancy has known about many of them for years, but because of land fragmentation, residential use of the properties, low-income levels, and a tendency toward anti-preservation and/or anti-government attitudes, these sites remain unprotected.

In conclusion, this contract allowed us to focus our efforts on ecologically significant sites in a way that was previously not possible. While we don't have much in the way of protected acreage to show for it, we are hoping that continued contacts will result in permanent conservation.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact me at 616/451-9476 or lcwm@naturenearby.org. Thank you.

Sincerely,

April Scholtz

Enc.

Final Grant Report: EPA Partnership LOC

Task 1: Provide a minimum of 1200 person-hours on Tasks 2-6.

Action:

Well over 1200 hours were consumed by this project, and Land Conservancy staff are continuing with follow-up visits, calls and mailings! Here are how the minimum hours were allocated:

- 2 terms of Calvin College interns (Jennifer Long, Brett Bowersox) – 300 hours.
- Summer 2000 paid intern (Laura Ediger) – 360 hours.
- Land Protection Director (April Scholtz) – 540 hours between Aug '99 and April '01.

Task 2: Develop and implement a proactive public outreach program in one or more high ecosystems in central Lower Michigan. Outreach efforts were to include presentations and/or demonstration projects, developing and implementing and landowner contact and education program, providing landowners with information and the opportunity to become a volunteer steward (we called it “Conservation Partner”), develop a database of landowners.

Action: The focus of the project was on the dry sand prairies and oak/pine savannas of Brooks Township and similar sites in Muskegon County, as well as Muskegon County’s other high priority sites such as coastal plain marshes. The following activities took place:

- Worked with MNFI to identify priority sites in Muskegon County. This necessitated updating information on the site viability and land ownership.
- Worked with MIFO of TNC to identify priority sites in Brooks Township.
- Developed information sheets for landowners on the Karner Blue butterfly, savannas, dry sand prairies, and coastal plain marshes.
- Obtained a related grant from the Community Foundation for Muskegon County to produce a brochure designed to encourage private land conservation in the county.
- Created the “Conservation Partner” program with informational materials and designed an award.
- Contacted 33 landowners in Brooks Township and 34 landowners in Muskegon County. Followed up with 21 personal discussions in Brooks Townships and 20 in Muskegon. Learned status of properties, interests of landowners, and will continue to follow up with prospects. Referred 3 landowners in Brooks Township to MIFO/TNC because of mutual interest in acquisition for conservation. Have 7 prospects for conservation easements in future.
- Awarded only one Conservation Partner award.
- Presented slide show on special natural features and conservation options at following events: Brooks Township Open House (roughly 40 people in attendance), Newaygo County’s Land Use Task Force’s Land Use Seminar (100 attendees), Land Conservancy Open House sponsored by the Community Foundation for Muskegon County (100 attendees), and the Dalton Township Master Planning group (10 attendees.)

Task 3: Initiate and build partnerships with other organizations and agencies in central West Michigan to further the protection of high priority ecosystems.

Action: The most significant partnership that happened was the formalized partnership created between the Land Conservancy and the Michigan Chapter of TNC. The focus of the agreement was the partnership to raise funds for working on the sites of concern in this project, and other TNC-selected sites of ecological concern.

Other agencies that we are continuing to work with include the Muskegon River Watershed group, Brooks Township, the Newaygo County Land Use Task Force, the Lake Michigan Federation, the Conservation Districts, MSU Extension, the West Michigan Regional Environmental Network, and Timberland RC&D.

Task 4: Convene a working session to identify specific educational materials needed for outreach.

Action: Working with John Paskus, we were able to focus on selected natural communities and obtain scientific information and slides for these features. We used these materials to create our own handouts and slide presentations.