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Saginaw Bay
Watershed Initiative
Network

2008 ANNUAL REPORT





window of opportunity ... the title of our 2008 Annual Report, came to us early in the year. As we reviewed projects that came before our task groups for consideration, we saw that often our initial investments could be a springboard – provided during a limited window of opportunity – to leverage additional dollars and technical support. Most of this year's projects fell into that category.

In its eleventh year of making investments in sustainable projects across our region – efforts that contemplate environmental, economic and community considerations – WIN continued to stay true to its goals and objectives. By providing seed funding and a network to help projects succeed, our partners have worked to set this effort apart from programs that focus solely on projects of a single category.

Recognizing that a focus on the "three legged stool" of sustainability is critical in advancing our region's priorities, WIN continued to meet challenges head-on with an ambitious, creative, and vibrant program to address the needs of our communities.

In 2008, again our focus was on five main areas: water resources, land use, agriculture, wildlife stewardship and communications. By making investments totaling more than \$230,000, 2008 brought our historical grantmaking to more than \$4 million, matched by more than \$8 million in non-WIN support. Further, much of the past project support, including many of the priorities that WIN laid out for the region, played key roles at the state and federal levels in setting funding allocations and project priorities for our area.

I hope you enjoy this report. It provides a sketch, but by no means a complete review, of the work that WIN did in 2008. Nevertheless, we are extremely proud to highlight these success stories. At The Conservation Fund, we are glad to be a partner in this effort, along with our region's most forward-thinking foundations, corporations, and organizations. We look forward to continuing to look through our windows for promising opportunities to help projects succeed in the Saginaw Bay Watershed.

Michael Kelly

The Conservation Fund

Tih Kells



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. Approximately 15 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

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

Seeing the Opportunities

If one word could classify the focus of WIN projects for 2008, it would be "opportunity." In awarding grants to five projects this year, we were challenged to look through many different kinds of windows – environmental, social and economic – to help discover the best opportunities for achieving project goals.

These opportunities came in many forms – from supporting rail trail development to restoring a section of river. They reminded us that sometimes the need requires us to act quickly to provide funds, and other times our expertise alone is most helpful.

Through it all, our focus has been on efforts that promote and encourage the wise use of resources, and that showcase the exceptional outcome of collaboration.

Projects that received WIN funding in 2008 are as follows:

- Bay Regional Tourism Marketing Program
- Observation Tower



Uncommon Collaboration

Communities Join Forces to Showcase Bay Area

ix counties. Hundreds of miles of Saginaw Bay shoreline. Thousands of attractions. One goal: promote the region.

That was the starting point for MI Great Bay, a committee made up of six Saginaw Bay counties – Arenac, Bay, Huron, Iosco, Saginaw and Tuscola. Their mission was simple: bringing people to the region by showcasing the many attractions it has to offer.

The group first formed in 2007 at the urging of Lt. Governor John Cherry, who called on Bay area communities to come together to discuss opportunities and challenges they shared. As a result, representatives of the six counties realized they had several similarities, and they began to work together to promote the entire region.

A 'Massive' List

Members of the MI Great Bay regional collaborative began by taking a look at existing tourism and touring products. They conducted an informal inventory and came up with literally thousands of opportunities,

"a massive list," says Shirley

Roberts, director of the Bay
City Convention and Visitors'
Bureau (CVB) and chair of
the project. The region's
strengths predictably
gravitated toward its
vast natural resources,
where there was an
incredible list of
offerings.

"Swimming, beaches, birding, watchable wildlife, parks, trails, nature areas ... I could go on and on," Roberts says. "One thing that became abundantly clear to us as we developed this inventory is that we have a very strong touring product. Visitors can come to this area of Michigan and spend several days exploring the things that are of interest to them."

Strengths of Many

After identifying the many opportunities, the group focused its initial thinking on how to package and promote the region. Their work was based on the premise that an economic boon for an individual county is an economic boon for the region. For them, it is a classic example of the whole being much stronger than the individual parts. They settled on creating a web site, marketing and promotional materials, and a regional mapping system to enable a visitor to plot out an extended touring experience. The only thing left was to secure funding.

"We were unable to find funding support until we thought of Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN)," Roberts said. "WIN's mission is very similar to ours. WIN's scope in terms of geography encourages support of projects that cover more than one municipality or county. It was a natural progression

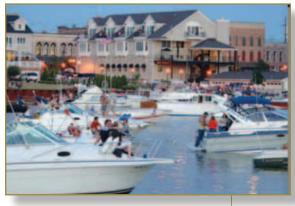
LANDMARK PROJECT

Whitney Drain: A Model of Sustainability

It was a problem more than 50 years in the making. The Whitney Drain, which collects water from Arenac, Iosco and Ogemaw counties and drains it into Lake Huron, had not been upgraded in half a century.

Because of its poor condition, the drain – a diverted branch of the Au Gres River – has been eroding banks, transporting sediment, smothering fish habitat and washing out roads for decades.





to approach WIN to request funding for a fairly aggressive marketing and promotional program."

Funding Provides a Boost

With their plan intact and initial funding of \$10,000 from WIN, the MI Great Bay group was on its way toward achieving its mission. The group later incorporated and became one of five regional tourism authorities – a distinction that qualifies it for state funding. Committee member Helen Paskarnis of the City of East Tawas credits the early WIN support for giving the project a much needed jump start.

"WIN is a great organization that gets involved and backs up their commitment with action," says Paskarnis. "Any time you have the support of an organization that has that kind of reputation, wow – it's fantastic!

"I think this project is really critical because I don't think Saginaw Bay and the communities surrounding it get the recognition this gorgeous area deserves," Paskarnis says. "The counties that participate in this coalition have so much beauty to share."

With this kind of success so far, the group hopes the energy catches on farther north.

Says Paskarnis: "I think we could serve as a sparkplug for other communities all the way up to the Mackinaw Bridge. I don't think we've come close to maximizing the potential here. Any time you have regions working together, it's the quotient of one-plus-one equals four. We know we're going to get a tenfold positive result from it."

Local Champion: Bay City Convention and Visitors Bureau

Partners: Bay City CVB, Lt. Governor's Office, State of Michigan Tourism Department

WIN Grant Award: \$10,000 with required additional match of \$10,000

"Without the support of the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network, we would still be attempting to find funding for this effort. While we still are seeking matching grant dollars, having a WIN challenge grant demonstrates support for our efforts to those we are contacting."

Shirley Roberts, chair,
 MI Great Bay initiative





"You could fly over it and see the problem," says Don Prueter, a former Arenac County Drain Commissioner who was one of three county drain commissioners involved in the project. "The erosion was so great you could actually see the sediment and silt moving into Saginaw Bay and polluting it."

Today that same waterway is a model of sustainability. Workers installed 4,500 square yards of rocks along the banks of the drain. They (continued next page)

Inspired by Nature

Observation Tower Pays Tribute to a Champion

r. Eugene Kenaga was a legend in local environmental circles. He was one of a handful of people who helped bring alive the dream to build the non-profit Chippewa Nature Center in Midland, Michigan. He was a founding member of multiple nature-based groups, sat on the board of many others and in general demonstrated his love of the outdoors by putting his hands to work to preserve the natural beauty of the area.

As a result of the late Dr. Kenaga's passion, the message of environmental stewardship and education reached thousands of lives in positive and lasting ways.

So when the time came in 2008 for a major, \$9 million expansion at

Chippewa Nature Center (CNC), staff and board members wanted to make sure Dr. Kenaga's legacy was not forgotten.

"We all agreed that the focal point of the renovation – an observation tower – should be named for Dr. Kenaga," says CNC Executive Director Dick Touvell. "He was a real catalyst for anything to do with nature or the environment. Even to this day, he's still inspiring us all to venture out into our natural world."

Form and Function Merge

CNC's new observation tower will serve as a rainwater collection, filtering and storing system. The butterfly-shaped wing system will collect water and store it in a cistern, so it can be used later to replenish the Center's rain garden and small ponds.

"The tower itself functions in several ways," says Dennis Pilaske, CNC's Director of Interpretation. "It helps us move water off and filter it, and it also becomes a critical element in the visitors' experience. Now, they can walk to the top and get a view of the natural environment – one they might not normally get standing at ground level."

Another organization touched by Dr. Kenaga was the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN), which was launched with his help. So when the CNC approached WIN about a matching grant, the organization was happy to comply. WIN made a \$50,000 contribution to the tower's construction.



also added V-shaped rock formations in the water to slow down the flow; a series of pools where fish, primarily steelhead, can lay their eggs; and 17,000 native plants.

The Best Solution

For 20 years, Prueter says, officials debated about what to do with the drain. Once approved, it took another six years of discussion among the Whitney Intercounty Drain Board, and more than \$3 million in local property assessments, before the project got underway.





Strength in Strategic Partnering

"We have had a long history with WIN," Touvell says. "Whenever we need a strategic partner – someone to help us gain support – we call WIN. Their goals are similar to ours because we both strive to consider economic, social and environmental needs in everything we do. It's a really good fit."

Pilaske agrees. "We're in a time where people are seeking more environmentally friendly alternatives to the way they do things. They're learning that these new options can also be socially and economically viable as well."

One of the distinctions of the new CNC is it will be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified – one of a handful in the region to create a building that's a model for sustainability. Other aspects of the project include an upgraded visitor's center, new classrooms, an auditorium, a new pre-school

and enhanced programming – all done in a way that protects the surrounding environment.

"We've always used the outdoors as a classroom. When the public sees environmentally-friendly design and simple things they can do to benefit the world, they realize they can have an impact too. With WIN's support, we can get the environmental message out to another segment of the population."

Local Champion: Chippewa Nature Center

Partners: Local and regional foundations and corporations

WIN Grant Award: \$50,000

"Chippewa Nature Center
is a place for people
to come and become
encouraged and inspired
that they can integrate
sustainable living in their
own lives. With WIN's
support, we are getting that
message out to a greater
segment of the population
and we are inspiring people
and institutions to protect
the natural world."

 Dennis Pilaske, Director of Interpretation, Chippewa Nature Center





Tom Bennett, of Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr and Huber, Inc. of Lansing (formerly Wetland and Coastal Resources), was one of the project designers.

"We had other options – less environmentally friendly and more expensive options – that we declined because of the emphasis on a natural design. Also, the drain goes through several parcels of private land and is used for fishing," Bennett says. "We chose a non-intrusive option and in most places, the only evidence of construction is the ripples in the stream that you see about every 100 yards."

(continued next page)

A Greater Vision

Green Pathway Will Connect Communities

ong ago, kids flocked to the railroad tracks when the locomotive rumbled in the distance. Even though the trains have been gone for years, a group came forward several years ago with a greater vision for the land, one that would give people a new reason to flock there.

The plan was to take six miles of abandoned railway (a key connector between Saginaw and Bay counties) and transform it into a non-motorized nature trail.

This particular parcel of land, for now being called the Bay-Zil trail, connects the former rail systems in Bay City and Saginaw, and fits within a bigger effort by the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) to identify and connect significant wildlife habitats, threatened natural resources and opportunities for non-motorized trails in the Saginaw Bay Region.

"This is an absolutely gorgeous piece of property," says Cathy Washabaugh, a member of the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, the group that is helping facilitate the land's purchase.

Trails and Connections

The property parallels the Saginaw River and runs along Crow Island State Game Area. It also meets up with the inter-urban trail system in Saginaw County and crosses two other creeks via former railroad trusses.

"It's a beautiful area that's worth preserving and a critical link to connecting rail trail systems in the area," Washabaugh says.

With the property identified, the next hurdle was acquisition. The Tri-County Regional Path Study Group, with representatives of Midland, Bay and Saginaw counties, worked

together on the purchasing plan but because the property went through two counties, they needed a neutral third party to make the acquisition. The Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy accepted the role of applying for grants to help facilitate the process.

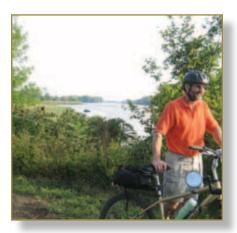
"We made a commitment that we would do whatever we needed to do to facilitate this acquisition," says Valerie Roof, executive director of the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy. "Our best role was to serve as the facilitator to obtain this funding, and we were happy to take that on."



Environmental Expertise

Most of the improvements were paid by local residents, while the rest came from funding sources such as the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN), which contributed \$28,000 to the project.

"Sedimentation from the Whitney Drain is a legacy problem in Saginaw Bay," says WIN's Mike Kelly. "This unique project helps reduce that problem and provides a clear boost to the water quality of the Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron."



Seeing the Possibilities

WIN was one of the first partners brought into the project. "We needed a funder who could see the importance of protecting this property and being able to help out financially," Washabaugh says.

WIN acted quickly, during a small window of opportunity when matching funds were available, to grant \$50,000 toward the purchase. The grant is being used to leverage about \$200,000 more from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). When the deal is completed, MDOT will own the property and there will be

a memo of understanding with the Department of Natural Resources to manage the trail system.

"WIN's involvement has been essential to provide the community support piece," Roof says. "It's an endorsement of the overall project and of the value to the community.

"There is a greater vision, and that is to connect our three counties into a green infrastructure in the Saginaw Bay region. That's really what WIN is all about," she says.

Local Champion: Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy

Partners: Michigan Department of Transportation, BACF Railtrail Committee, City of Bay City

WIN Grant Award: \$50,000

"The thing that makes
WIN unique is that the
funders look at a number
of things related to a
project. They don't just
look at environment. They
also look at economic
and community or social
impact. It's a broader
perspective and I think
that's what really represents
a sustainable project."

 Valerie Roof, executive director, Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy



Bennett says WIN's expertise on the project was invaluable. "WIN came along at the very beginning, back in 2003, and offered financial support and also consultation on flood plain planning, fishery construction and channel stabilization."

Today, a project that looked like it may never be completed is now a beautiful natural resource that draws fishing, hiking and birding from three counties.

"I think this will be quite a nice thing for generations to come," Prueter says.

No More Dam

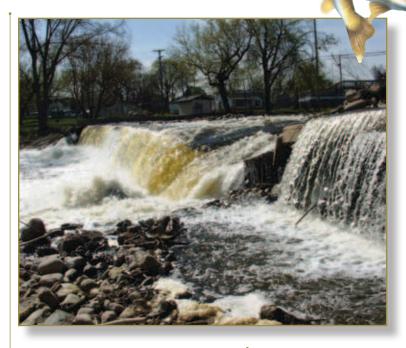
Chesaning Project Will Restore River to its Natural State

few years ago, it was unthinkable that the Shiawassee River dam in Chesaning would be removed. After all, the city's biggest tourist attraction – the Chesaning Showboat – is possible because of the water the dam holds in reserve.

But that was the conclusion when Chesaning officials sought grant money to upgrade the leaky structure. As it turned out, the dam was one of three in Michigan on the critical list for removal, because its original purpose no longer existed. Even worse, it hindered fish passage. Fix it? No way. The state recommended complete removal.

"We knew it was a matter of time before the dam would fail," says Michael Maier, chair of the Shiawassee River Restoration board and a member of the village of Chesaning Parks and Recreation department. "The consequence would be that all of our park systems plus miles and miles of river upstream would become a creek."





A River Restored

The village needed a creative way to maintain the water level of the Shiawassee while facing the prospect that the dam would have to go. Village planners, state and federal regulators, environmental groups, volunteers and interested residents found their answer in the concept of river restoration.

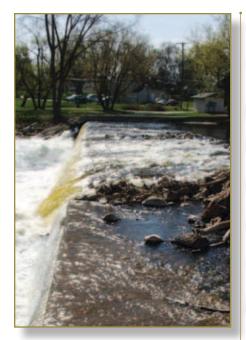
River restoration involves developing ecologically sound solutions to restore a river to its original condition. In the case of the Shiawassee, the team settled on a set of natural rock rapids with resting pools where native species of fish can swim upstream.

When completed, the restoration will include a 300 ft. structure with natural waterfalls that allow for fish passage upstream. It also is

expected to open up another 30 miles of habitat to the Shiawassee in the future. From Fenton to the Saginaw Bay, the Shiawassee will be navigable the entire way.

With the plan in place, the group had crossed the first hurdle but the second was potentially greater: how to pay the \$1.7 million price tag. Planners were coming up dry until they tapped the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) for help. WIN granted the initial \$50,000 to get the project started.

"Saginaw Bay WIN is a great, independent funding source to use for seed money and as match dollars," says Chuck Rolfe, project leader from Wade Trim Engineering. "Because WIN granted the initial dollars, it gave others confidence that this project could be a reality. It was a tipping point for the community to take us seriously and make the project go forward."



Collaboration for Results

Rolfe says WIN's extensive experience at bringing people together was instrumental. "WIN is a group with a lot of experience working with multiple stakeholders. At times there were up to 30 people at our meetings, all with their own interest in the project. WIN made sure appropriate stakeholders were in the room and that there was a team atmosphere at all times."

With the WIN dollars as the springboard, a community river restoration committee took on the challenge of getting additional funds and supplies needed to complete the project. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's Clean Michigan Initiative has committed \$900,000. Concerned residents pledged another \$100,000.

"A highlight for the village is that we formed a river restoration committee

"When Saginaw Bay
WIN gets involved in a
project, there is an added
level of confidence that
it is not only credible but
important. To be able to
say WIN is on-board with
funding changes the nature
of the discussion with
every stakeholder group."

Chuck Rolfe,
 Wade Trim Engineering

of civic minded citizens who donated their time and also helped us acquire materials and funds – all of which can be used as a match against the grant," Maier says. "The outpouring of support for this project, which has a truly regional impact, has been absolutely fabulous."

Local Champion: Village of Chesaning

Partners: Clean Michigan Initiative, U.S. Fish and Wildlfe Service, Great Lakes Fisheries Trust, Corps of Engineers

WIN Grant Award: \$50,000

WIN Partners

A committed group of 10 foundations support WIN with financial contributions and technical support. They are:

Bay Area Community Foundation
Consumers Energy Foundation
Cook Family Foundation
The Dow Chemical Company
Foundation

Harry A. and Margaret D. Towsley Foundation

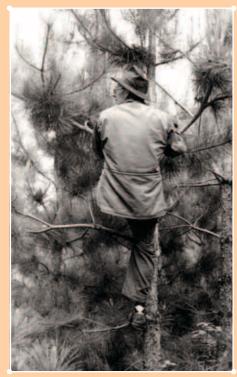
Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation

Midland Area Community Foundation

Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation S.C. Johnson Fund

Saginaw Community Foundation





Dr. Eugene Kenaga, see page 6 for more information.



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The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network is facilitated through a partnership of The Dow Chemical Company Foundation, The Conservation Fund, and local and regional organizations dedicated to promoting the concepts of sustainability in the Saginaw Bay region.