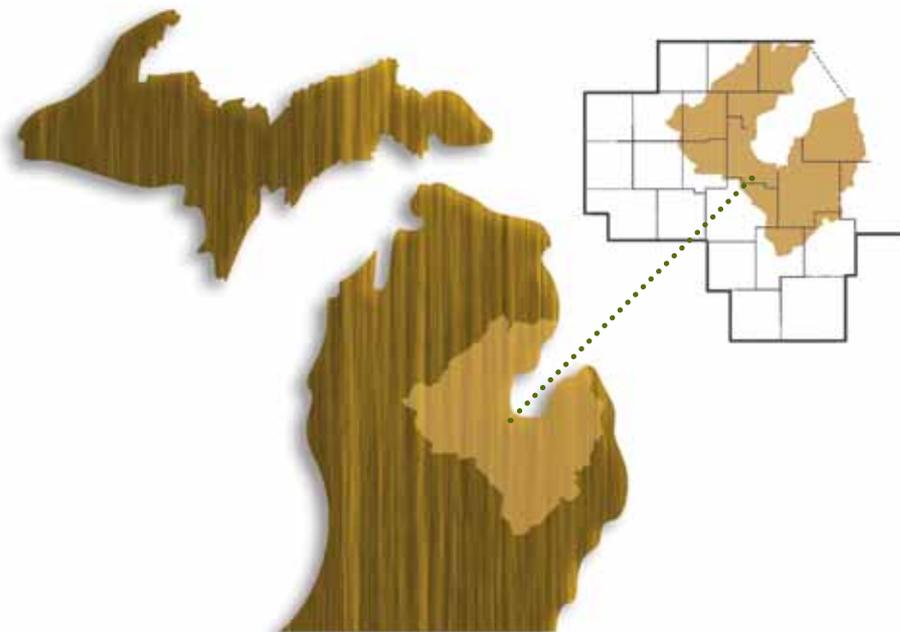


# Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network

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2004 Annual Report



## Where Is the Saginaw Bay Watershed?

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 parts of 22 counties in central Michigan.



**It is with great pleasure that I present to you the 2004 Annual Report of the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN). I join with our many partners in reflecting on a year that saw WIN take tremendous strides in promoting the concepts of sustainable development in our 22-county watershed.**

Based on the belief that we can improve our watershed by balancing economic, environmental, and community priorities, WIN is pioneering a new approach to providing the non-profit equivalent of "venture capital" to projects that not only provide on-the-ground results but also encourage imagination.

In 2004, this same belief that has served as our touchstone for past projects kept us focused on new opportunities and challenges. In downtown Saginaw, we created a unique partnership with Michigan State University that will assist city landowners in developing urban gardens. Along the Saginaw River, we invested in a project to determine if the lake sturgeon – a state threatened species – is returning and spawning. Out in Clare County, we provided a strategic grant that will assist them in developing and expanding recreational and eco-tourism opportunities. Across the region, we are working with the Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited to provide outdoor classrooms and opportunities to learn about the great natural resources that our area contains. You'll learn about these initiatives and more, in this report.

Since 1996, with the generous support of our funding partners, we have been able to provide more than \$1.9 million to over 100 projects that have environmental, community and economic impacts. This year alone, more than \$300,000 was invested in 11 initiatives.

As we close the books on 2004, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the volunteers that serve on our task groups, resource group, or otherwise provide personnel, financial, and technical support to WIN. Without you, we could not have accomplished so much in 2004. Because of you, we look forward to an even better and brighter 2005.

*Michael Kelly*

**Michael Kelly,**  
The Conservation Fund

# FOUNDATION OF SUSTAINABILITY

Projects supported by Saginaw Bay WIN focus on the three important foundations of sustainability: environment, community and economy. In 2004, WIN awarded grants to the 11 projects listed here.

- Saginaw Bay WIN Outdoor Education Partnership (see page 2)
- Food Security through Family Gardening – Nutrition Education (see page 4)
- Sanford Lake Handicap Accessible Fishing/Viewing Platform
- Evaluation of Lake Sturgeon in the Saginaw River watershed (see page 6)
- Promoting Healthy Choices of Fish and Wildlife Consumption from the Saginaw, Shiawassee and Tittabawassee Rivers
- Edward M. Golson Jr. Boat Launch & Nature Park Outdoor Education Curriculum
- Eco-tourism and Environmental Education in Michigan's Gateway to the North (see page 8)
- All Bird Planning for Spring Stopover Sites in the Saginaw Bay Watershed
- Tittabawassee River Watershed Priority Conservation Land Assessment
- Interpretive Trail System – Cass River Unit of Shiawassee National Refuge
- Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge Boat Launch Facility Improvements



# PRESERVING WETLANDS AND GRASSLANDS



## Saginaw Bay WIN Outdoor Education Partnership

Wetlands are becoming outdoor classrooms at several schools in the Saginaw Bay watershed through this partnership between Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and WIN.

The program involves restoring natural wetland and grassland habitats and creating outdoor classrooms on elementary, middle and high school land throughout the watershed area. By identifying small sites at schools that may not otherwise have funding to take on the project themselves, program organizers are converting the areas to usable teaching space.

And the learning is not just limited to the creation of the wetland. With the restoration comes a “study trunk” containing binoculars, butterfly nets, research equipment and other items the teacher needs to facilitate good learning in the outdoor environment. Funding is available to conduct a restoration at 10 watershed-area schools.

“There are a lot of teachers who are interested in environmental education in the Saginaw Bay watershed,” says Michelle VanderHaar, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “With school budgets so tight, we want to help teachers get what they need so they can make environmental education a part of their curriculum.”

For Oaktree Elementary School in southern Genesee County, that’s exactly what happened.

A large wooded area behind the school went through alternate periods of being very wet and very dry. With the help of U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the WIN grant, the school’s Outdoor Education Committee supervised a project to restore the wetland so that wildlife could live there year around.

“The goal was to create an area where waterfowl and other wildlife could hatch or give birth to their young, raise them there, and return on a regular basis,” says Goodrich Area Schools Superintendent Kim Hart. “For our students, it gives them an opportunity to observe the different aspects of nature and wildlife, while showing how human activity can actually benefit wetlands.

“Without the funding of WIN we wouldn’t have been able to improve the wetland area, because the funds just aren’t available within the district. It has also been a great help to our cross country team and those who take nature walks. The damp area of the path that was often impassable is now available to almost anyone,” she says.

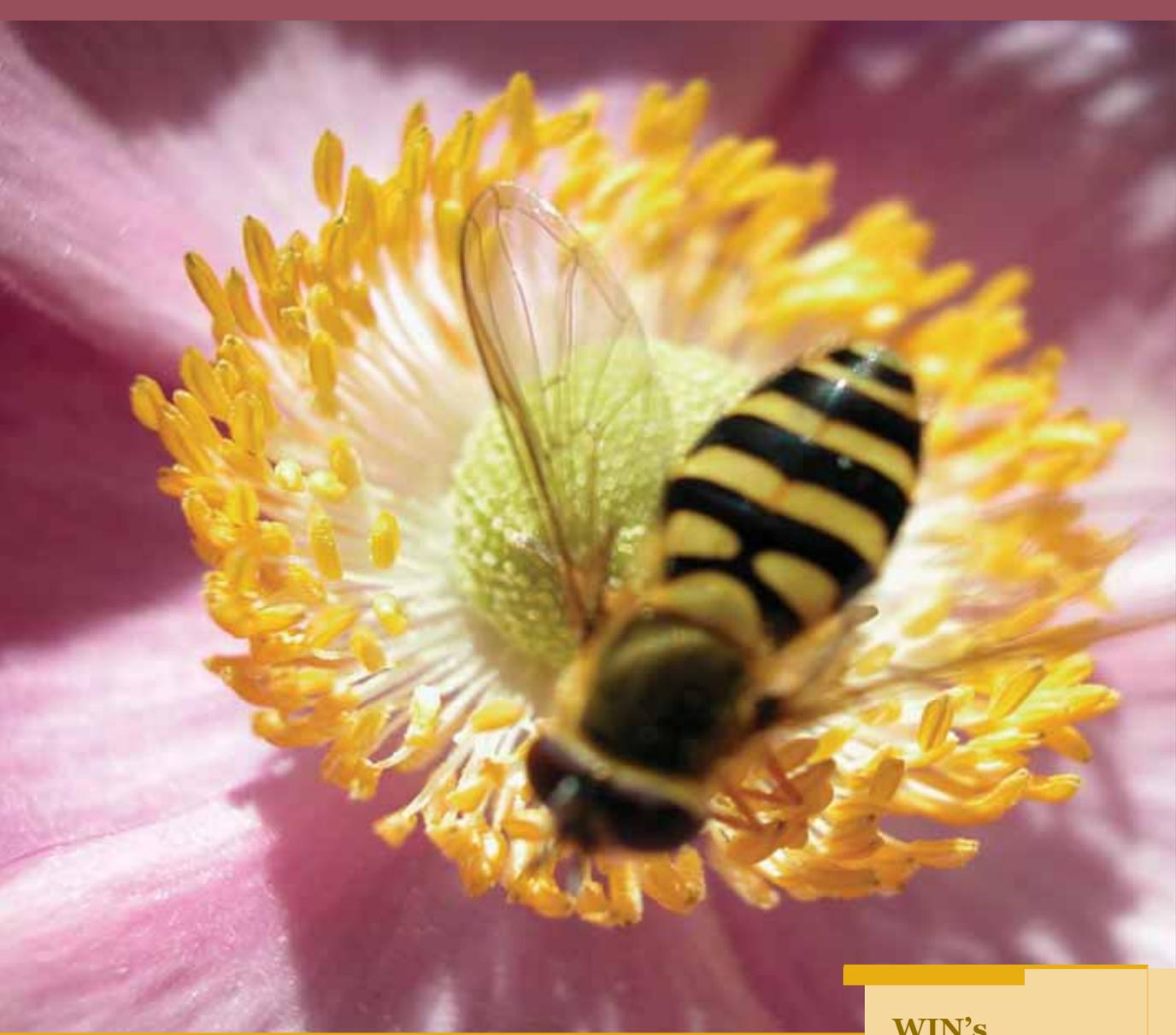
**Local Champions:** Ducks Unlimited – Great Lakes, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

**Partners:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

**WIN Grant Award:** \$20,000

## 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.



*“I can’t say enough good things about WIN. They have done so much for conservation in the Saginaw Bay watershed, and our project could not have gotten off the ground without their help. They play a big role in this region through funding a lot of really important programs.”*

*— Michelle VanderHaar, biologist,  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

## **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

# SPROUTING AN URBAN GARDEN

## The WIN Funders' Network

A committed group of 12 foundations supports WIN with financial contributions and technical assistance.

### They are:

Bay Area Community Foundation

Charles J. Strosacker 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

Kantzler 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](http://saginawbaywin.org/info/overflow.html).

## Food Security through Family Gardening – Nutrition Education

Organizers of an urban gardening program in Saginaw County believe the best way to help families make the connection between healthy diet and healthy living is to put the vegetables right in their own back yards.

This program, organized by the Saginaw County MSU Extension Service and funded in part by WIN, targets low income families who will learn to grow tomatoes, cucumbers and other produce in their own gardens. The 40 newly trained participants ultimately will learn about good nutrition and the benefits of having a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables.

"We've done soil sampling at all of the homes and now we have master gardeners teaching the participants how to plot, plant, water and weed their gardens," says Holly Tiret, program organizer and MSU Extension educator. "We're trying to give them as many tools as we can to help them to succeed."

A nutrition instructor from the Extension Family Nutrition Program is making monthly visits to participants' homes to provide hands-on lessons from the agency's "Eating Right is Basic" curriculum.

In the spirit of true community outreach, Master Gardener volunteers from MSU Extension will mentor the families and 4H youth groups will donate their time to help with weeding, planting, canning and freezing.



"This is ultimately a community-wide improvement effort," Tiret says. "The project also has a sustainability component because it will help teach participants to value land, agriculture and their environment."

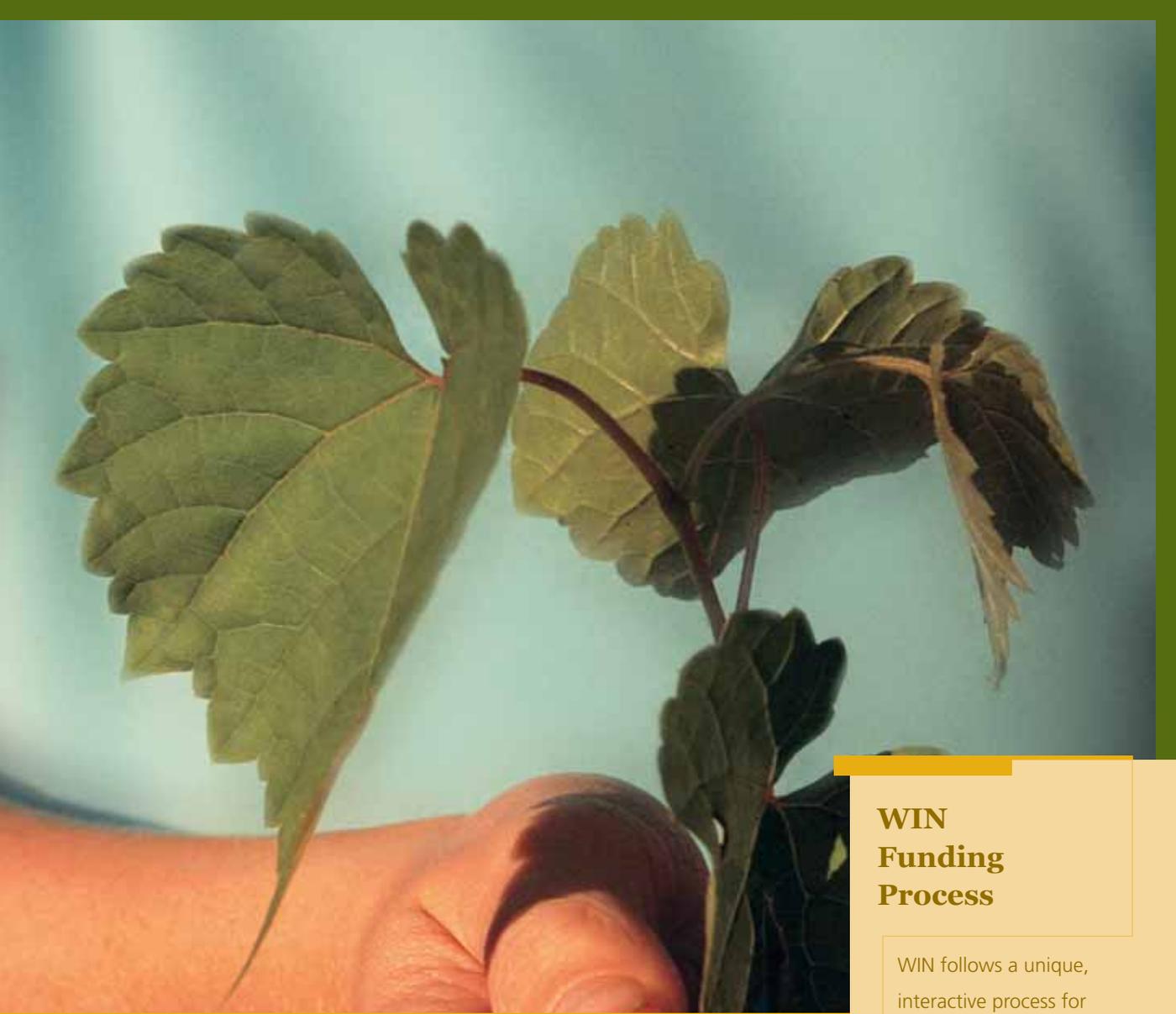
Tiret says successful gardeners may also have the potential to earn income by selling excess produce in local farm markets.

The program is being incorporated into nutrition and health programs of the Saginaw Family Childcare Network Providers and the Healthy Families Program. The long-term hope is that families using day care providers who participate in the Gardening Project, especially those in low income areas, see the benefits as well and try gardening in their own yards.

**Local Champion:** Saginaw County MSU Extension Service

**Partners:** Saginaw County Family Child Care Network, Healthy Families Saginaw, Saginaw Community Action Committee, Saginaw Downtown Farmers Market

**WIN Grant Award:** \$6,000



*“WIN helps to bring community partners together. In our case, the project is to focus on nutrition, sustainable food systems, and educating people about the environment. More importantly our project will also work to connect people in neighborhoods by encouraging family and community activity thereby empowering those same communities and neighborhoods. Without WIN, our efforts would not be possible.”*

*—Holly Tired,  
MSU Extension educator*

## **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.

# TRACKING A THREATENED SPECIES



## Evaluation of Lake Sturgeon in the Saginaw River Watershed

Lake sturgeon that were once thriving in the Great Lakes are now listed as a threatened species in Michigan. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, lake sturgeon were over-harvested because of the value of their eggs (a popular source of caviar) and their flesh (usually smoked for eating.) More recently, damming of tributaries and pollution reduced their numbers even further. Today, the population has dwindled to less than 1 percent of its former abundance.

This three-year project seeks to determine whether lake sturgeon still use, and as importantly spawn, in the Saginaw River watershed. The ultimate goal is to return this native species to the area.

"Fisheries managers from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources have received reports from fishermen who see sturgeon from time to time in the watershed," says Jim Boase, a fisheries research biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "With this project, we want to learn with certainty whether there are sturgeon in the watershed. If we do have sturgeon, we want to know where they are spawning."

The study encompasses the Tittabawassee, Shiawassee, Cass and Saginaw rivers beginning at the Saginaw Bay. Boase says the project will guide future habitat protection and enhancement efforts. He says project planners hope the effort will eventually move lake sturgeon off of Michigan's "threatened" species list and will also aid in de-listing Saginaw Bay from the Environmental Protection Agency's "Areas of Concern" list.

"We have been focusing a tremendous amount of energy on rehabilitating the sturgeon populations in the Detroit and St. Clair rivers, and this project is a perfect complement to our work in those regions," says Jim Baker, fisheries unit manager for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

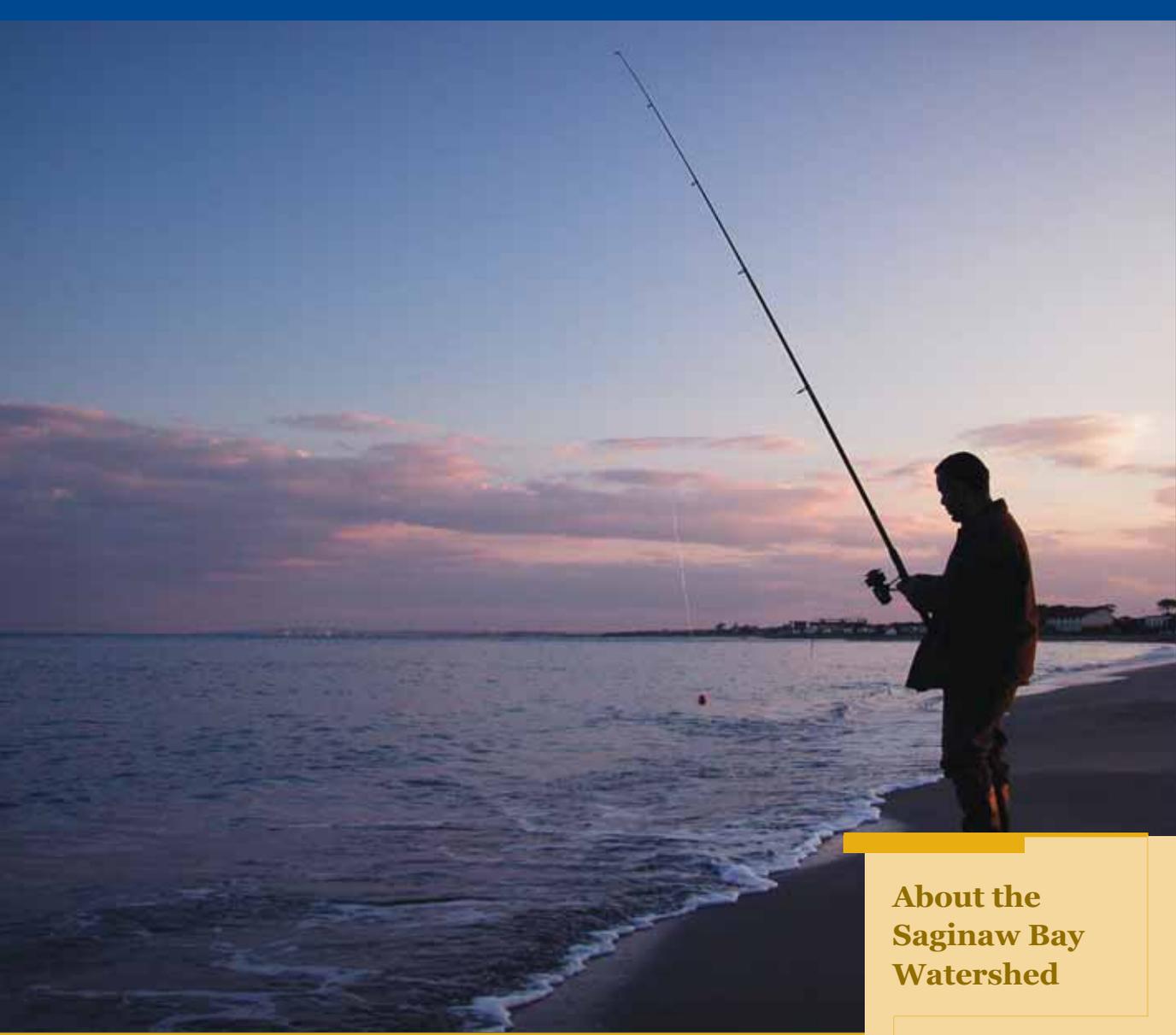
Boase says if the researchers find any lake sturgeon or their eggs, U.S. Fish & Wildlife will conduct genetic testing to determine if the fish are a unique population, or similar with other populations in Lake Huron. From there, they'll determine what future steps are needed to best manage the population.

"Long-term, this project will benefit the area because we'll be able to bring back a fish species that once thrived here," he says.

**Local Champion:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Partners:** Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Lake Huron/Saginaw Bay Commercial Fishers

**WIN Grant Award:** \$90,000



## 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

*“It is impossible to manage a threatened species without good information. Research funding is out of WIN’s scope but for our project they were able see how our goal – to repopulate lake sturgeon in the watershed – fits their sustainability mission. Because of WIN’s grant, we may be able to succeed in getting lake sturgeon off the threatened species list in this region.”*

*— Jim Boase, fisheries research biologist,  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

# RECREATION, EDUCATION AND TOURISM



## Eco-tourism and Environmental Education in Michigan's Gateway to the North

A grant to the Clare County Parks and Recreation Commission is turning dreams into reality for local recreation and tourism planners.

The project centers on helping Clare County – often referred to as the “Gateway to the North” – develop programs to promote environmental and recreational education and eco-tourism in the area.



One part of the grant involves offering something that has never before been available in Clare County – an organized recreation program for kids. With the help of WIN, Clare County is offering children's recreational activities at four sites throughout the area.

Every Saturday for several weeks, children can cross-country ski, make arts and crafts projects and participate in other activities that merge fun and education while promoting the benefits of recreation.



“This project is important on a lot of levels,” says Bill Roche, interim director of Clare County Parks. “Because this county has never had an organized recreation program, people have not been able to understand the social, psychological and health benefits of community-based recreation. Not only will this benefit overall quality of life but organized recreation also can have a direct economic impact because it can attract employers who understand the connection between good quality recreation and workplace productivity.”



The second part of the grant focuses on mapping and marketing the vast recreational resources in Clare County.

“Other groups in the county focus on the business and tourism strengths of the area but we wanted to give people reasons to come here to recreate,” Roche says. “We have about 336 miles of rivers and streams, and 109 inland lakes that offer very high quality fishing in Clare County. Now we're going to have the resources to tell people about them.”



Mapping should begin in spring 2005, when marketing also will get underway. Possible advertising options include development of a web page, newspaper ads and other media that promote the abundant recreational benefits available in the *Gateway to the North*.

**Local Champion:** Clare County Parks and Recreation Commission

**Partners:** MSU Extension Service, Clare County Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Clare County, local Chambers of Commerce

**WIN Grant Award:** \$40,550



*“Without the grant money WIN has generously donated, our program wouldn’t be nearly the quality it is. The children who participate would never really understand the value of recreation and we wouldn’t be able to get the word out about the recreational benefits of our area. It would all be dreams on paper.”*

*— Bill Roche, interim director,  
Clare County Parks*

## Contact Us

For more information  
about WIN, visit

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

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