



People & Place

Connecting the Dots



The Explore the Shores network of barrier-free sites that provide access to water in Manistee County is the result of a dynamic partnership led by the Alliance for Economic Success, a regional economic development organization, with a wide variety of public and private partners, including the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy. Two of the conservancy's protected nature preserves—Arcadia Marsh Nature Preserve and Arcadia Dunes: The C.S. Mott Nature Preserve—are part of a collaborative network of publically accessible and jointly marketed sites designed to provide barrier-free accessibility, educational opportunities and a connection to recreation and fishing in Manistee County.



People & Place

Land Conservancies as Community Builders

Place matters as Michigan rethinks its path to restoring prosperity in the 21st century. The way we value place depends very much on the diversity and beauty of the natural resources unique to Michigan. Every community has a story. The time has come for Michigan to recreate our state narrative to reflect the trust, optimism, and inspiration that is evident in land conservancies' work as innovators and advocates.

With generous support from the Consumers Energy Foundation, Heart of the Lakes launched an initiative to document how land conservancies and their partners are important to local economic development and thriving communities. Land protection projects from around the state, including this one, were selected as case studies to showcase land conservancies in their role as community builders.

Community building projects demonstrate the relevance of conservation to successful Michigan communities – helping to create attractive places to live, work, and play. Land conservancies that engage in this work find themselves more fully integrated in their community and able to deepen their connections and relationships. Through community building projects, conservation is strengthened as a shared value.

This approach becomes even more important in a rapidly changing world where protection of land simply for the sake of conservation may no longer resonate as strongly as it has in the past. Our everyday links to the land continually diminish. Community building projects are a way of tackling that problem at both ends. Meeting people where they are, instead of trying to convince them of some intrinsic values they may not share or understand, will create new opportunities to promote the importance of nature alongside economic development.

As nonprofit organizations dedicated to the permanent protection of land for the public good, Michigan's conservancies help create vibrant places through both land protection, as well as community engagement activities in support of local goals and objectives.

Heart of the Lakes is pleased to highlight a few exceptional projects with this case study and others, while recognizing the great work of the conservancies behind them. These projects exemplify a commitment to building communities and the value of people and place. Thank you to the Consumers Energy Foundation for making it possible to do so.

Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy

For two decades the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) has protected and cared for the northwest Michigan's natural, scenic, farm and forest lands. The GTRLC thinks about the landscape in terms of watersheds, rivers, scenic transportation corridors and the vital clusters of the region's working farms and forests. By thinking about the community in this way, GTRLC is able to evaluate how certain land uses and protection and stewardship efforts in specific areas will impact the things our community members value the most – access to our region's majestic shorelines; opportunities for hiking, biking, hunting, canoeing, birding, fishing and other outdoor activities; safe, clean water; a sense of rural character; respect for private property rights; and a healthy economy.

GTRLC's mission is to protect significant natural, scenic, and farm lands, and advance stewardship, now and for future generations. Their service area includes Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Manistee Counties. With the support of individual donors and foundations, volunteers, and the partnership and leadership of local, state, and federal agencies, GTRLC has protected over 34,000 acres of land and more than 100 miles of shoreline along the region's exceptional rivers, lakes and streams. For more information, visit www.gtrlc.org

Arcadia and More

Arcadia Township, located in Manistee County, is bordered on the west by Lake Michigan, nestled in a spectacular natural valley surrounded by soaring sand bluffs. The Township contains two interconnected lakes, one of which is a harbor of refuge, and a significant fresh water Great Lakes coastal marsh. Arcadia Marsh, one of the Conservancy's nature preserves, is one of only 15 or so remaining coastal marshes along Lake Michigan's Lower Peninsula shoreline, and hosts over 150 species of birds including 17 State Endangered, Threatened, or Species of Special Concern. Since the 1900's the climate, tempered by the cool waters of Lake Michigan, has made Arcadia a refuge for visitors from southern Michigan and neighboring states. People are drawn to the natural beauty and relative remoteness of the area – many of the visitors are connected with the nationally renowned Arcadia Bluffs Golf Course, built in 1999 in the south of the township at Camp Arcadia, a Lutheran family retreat center founded in 1922, which draws thousands of visitors each year.

The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy's long-term vision for their Arcadia Marsh property includes maintaining ecosystem integrity; creating and maintaining access for restoration of the 155-acre Marsh; honoring donor and grant commitments, which include accessibility; and maintaining and building relationships with users and stewards of the property. This current phase of the Arcadia Marsh

project includes additional land acquisition, restoration work, and the development of Universally Accessible infrastructure including parking, signage, picnic areas, trails and boardwalks, and fishing piers.

There are 12 miles of hiking and mountain biking trails at Arcadia Dunes, but none of them are accessible to those with physical limitations. Wooded Universally Accessible trails are rare in northern Michigan outside of Hartwick Pines (Grayling area). The goal of this project is to create a ½ mile paved Universally Accessible trail overlooking the Lake Michigan coast. The project supports the goals of Michigan DNR-approved management plan for the property and public access and users' needs. The development of the trail may also alleviate use pressure and erosion on the existing trail to the Old Baldy dune.

Arcadia Township has also planned three investment phases for improvements at Arcadia Beach along Lake Michigan. The improvements include new parking and Universally Accessible restroom facilities, a viewing platform, and beach access, as well as a playground area. GTRLC is collaborating with the Township to manage a joint fundraising campaign for the Arcadia Dunes, Arcadia Marsh, and Arcadia Beach projects.

This collaborative project reinforces the power of community-based partnerships that aim to protect natural resources and stimulate the economy, provide an example of rural placemaking, demonstrate a role that conservancies can play in community building and economic development, and illustrate a landscape level approach to conservation planning and implementation.



Explore the Shores

Arcadia Township participated in The Lakes to Land Regional Initiative—a unique planning effort among fifteen townships, one City and two Villages in northwestern Lower Michigan to articulate a vision for the region's future. The resulting program is called Explore the Shores, and is a network of sites designed to provide barrier-free accessibility, educational opportunities and a connection to recreation and fishing in Manistee County. This collaborative effort of public and private organizations was facilitated by the Manistee County Community Foundation and the Alliance for Economic Success. With the understanding that economic development justifies environmental protection, Explore the Shores is committed to enhancing economic health by drawing 1 million new visitors to its sites by the year 2020. The sites include the GTRLC preserves – Arcadia Dunes and Arcadia Marsh.

GTRLC and its partners agreed to a unique set of shared principles and are working together to invest in and improve several place-based projects in Arcadia. Those principles include planning and development of a system of parks, land/water restoration and public access that transcends ownership and mutual collaboration toward improvement and infrastructure development—all fundamental to quality of life and economic well-being of the Township.





Heart of the Lakes

Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy was founded by Michigan's land conservancies to unite their individual efforts around a common goal – protecting Michigan's land. Heart of the Lakes supports land conservation by supporting conservation policy and practice, advocating sound public policies, and providing tools to strengthen conservancy effectiveness.

With Heart of the Lakes' support, our members are able to conserve Michigan's forests, farmland, coastline and other extraordinary places critical to Michigan's social, economic, and environmental well-being.



Heart of the Lakes

Center for Land Conservation Policy

www.heartofthelakes.org