



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



People & Place

Getting Outdoors in Bay City



By focusing on key urban lands, the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy and its partners want to give residents of Bay City new opportunities to access nature, right where they live, work and play. The Outdoor Urban Recreation (O.U.R.) Bay City project leverages public and private resources to create a network of conservation lands and water access sites within the city fabric. O.U.R. aims to help people enjoy the outdoors and maintain healthy lifestyles while creating positive benefits for local economies.



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 initial 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 are 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 getting us started.

Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy

The Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy (SBLC) was established in 1997 as a grassroots, nonprofit conservation group serving the Saginaw Bay Watershed and dedicated to conserving land and water resources to improve the quality of life in Michigan’s heartland. To date, SBLC has permanently protected over 6,000 acres of land, including ten nature preserves open to the public.

SBLC believes that nature can and should play a role in achieving broad community goals like economic growth, job creation, public health and educational opportunities for children and learners of all ages. SBLC seeks to connect people with nature with the conviction that everyone should have equal, free access to nature, to Lake Huron, and to the rivers that flow to the Saginaw Bay. For more information, visit www.sblc-mi.org.

O.U.R. Bay City—An Urban Nature Network

O.U.R. Bay City is a collaborative between SBLC, other nonprofit organizations, the City of Bay City, a recreational club, and business partners to make outdoor recreation an essential part of urban Bay City’s identity with dedicated access for mountain biking, hiking, birding, paddling and learning for all. By leveraging and re-imagining existing facilities, O.U.R. envisions a citywide network of outdoor recreational assets that will continue to grow and add value to the community, allowing more people to get outside and cherish nature while also helping the city thrive as an attractive place to live and work. Complimenting the recreation facilities are programs and materials developed to get people on the ground and take pride in Bay City.



Discovery Preserve at Euclid Park

The first project in the O.U.R. Bay City nature network started with an underutilized and underappreciated Bay County Park located within the City limits, formerly known as Euclid Linear Park. With a partnership between the County and SBLC, the park recently underwent a renaissance and given a new name—Discovery Preserve. An initial investment of volunteers and funding from Dow Chemical Company made it possible to re-deck half of an aging boardwalk, rehabilitate signage and a toilet facility, eradicate invasive species, plant thousands of native plants, and develop informative displays in 2014.

This revitalized learning landscape is now a 12-acre oasis for nature within the city showcasing native plants and wildlife. Discovery Preserve attracts children and families with a “Kids in Nature” series and other family-friendly programming. It also serves as a hub for the 142-mile Saginaw Bay Birding Trail, another SBLC partnership project, and an opportunity to connect to the largest contiguous coastal freshwater wetland system in the United States and the birds and animals that live there.

Future plans for Discovery Preserve emphasize the site as a place to learn about nature, including a brand new asset: a shelter/pavilion featuring the Chippewa Nature Center. With exhibits and signage, it will provide a programming venue within city limits for the nature center, a place to base trips, nature experiences and other programing.

Michigan Sugar Trails

In another O.U.R. project, privately-owned land owned by the Michigan Sugar Company is being transformed into a multi-use trail network accessible by the entire community—the Michigan Sugar Trails. SBLC and the company will rehabilitate, clean up and develop a new 26-acre natural space with designated singletrack trails for a wide variety of users, including mountain bikes, trail running, hiking and access for birders and anglers. A partnership with Ray’s Bike Shop, a local retailer, provides an organized trail team of volunteers to help develop and maintain the new Michigan Sugar Trails trail network.

Growing the O.U.R. Network

The O.U.R. Bay City vision doesn’t stop with Discovery Preserve or the Michigan Sugar Trails. SBLC and partners, including General Motors, want to tackle a serious invasive species problem at the Edward M. Golson Boat Launch and Nature Area. Plans call for the park to remain in city ownership and upgrade signage, and other facilities.

Also in the planning stages are improvements for a world-class rowing facility, the Bay City Rowing Club Boathouse, owned by the City of Bay City. Plans are to expand its use for kayakers and canoers so that more people can access the Saginaw River.

In addition to great corporate support, O.U.R. has the attention of the philanthropic community, most notably a significant gift from the Bay City Area Community Foundation to turn this powerful outdoor recreation vision into reality. A website and published field guide are planned to link all the O.U.R. Bay City projects together.

Beyond Bay City

The O.U.R. Bay City project is dedicated to providing access, excellent programs, and learning opportunities throughout its nature network. The many partners hold a shared belief that an active outdoor culture of trail runners, cyclists, hikers, birders, kayakers and more will add value to the community and endear people to the cause of conservation, all while playing a role in economic development by attracting and retaining great people and businesses.

To meet its values-based mission of contributing to broad community goals, providing access to nature, and protecting habitat throughout its service area, SBLC is also building partnerships and pursuing Outdoor Urban Recreation initiatives in the city of Saginaw.

