



People & Place

New Life for an Old Summer Camp



A bequest to the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy ensured the permanent conservation of a beloved community asset and former summer camp. The Conservancy turned to the community to develop a master plan that ties into area municipal needs and leverages Pilgrim Haven's resources to accomplish multiple community objectives, including a destination point for proposed regional bike and pedestrian trail connections.



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.

Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy

Founded in 1991, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) works to permanently protect natural, historic and scenic landscapes in nine counties of southwest Michigan. The Conservancy owns more than 40 preserves, and holds over 70 conservation easements on private properties. Many of its preserves are open to the public, and all of their efforts are focused on ensuring the conservation of natural lands and open space.

Since its inception, SWMLC has protected more than 10,400 acres of dunes, wetlands, forests, savannas, prairies, farms and vineyards that give southwest Michigan its distinctive character. In 2010, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy received the National Land Trust Excellence Award from the Land Trust Alliance. The award was given for leadership in conservation for their collaborative approach and breadth of work in stewardship and conservation planning. For more information, visit www.swmlc.org

Pilgrim Haven Natural Area

In 2010, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy was named the beneficiary of the Pilgrim Haven property, 26 acres of breathtaking beaches, low bluff sand dunes, a meandering forested creek corridor and open meadows along Lake Michigan south of the City of South Haven. This extraordinary gift from the estate of Suzanne D. Parish ensured the permanent conservation of a beloved community asset, with a 70-year history as a camp and community resource to residents who camped, wed or recreated there. The property is one of the largest remaining undeveloped lakeshore properties in the region.

Pilgrim Haven Natural Area contains several high quality natural areas, but decades of use as a church camp and limited management during the past twenty five years have impacted the ecological quality of other areas on site. The beach, forested dune edge, and stream system are in excellent shape and contain a surprising diversity of plant species. The property's 800 feet of beaches and several gently sloping access points puts it in a class of its own given its geographically unparalleled potential for public use and enjoyment.



A Community Vision

The Conservancy not only invited the community to visit and use Pilgrim Haven, they also invited them to create a vision for it. An early public visioning session provided a baseline of ideas, which was followed by a community design charrette, attended by over 200 neighbors, area residents, former campers, conservationists, and their own members, to help determine the property's future use, design and management. The result is a vision embraced by the community, and the investment made in its creation means there will be life-long champions for this special place.

Upon learning of the gift from the estate of Suzanne D. Parish, SWMLC convened an advisory committee to develop a vision for the property and engage the whole community. An early public visioning session provided a baseline of ideas, which was followed by a community invited design charrette in late 2011. Participants were asked to share ideas, concerns and expectations, resulting in the development of three design options for Pilgrim Haven. Some of the highlights of the community visioning included: create accessible trails, provide interpretive signage of the camp and natural history, develop the site as a spur for area bike trails, create picnic areas, develop a pavilion on the dining hall site, improve the wildlife habitat and keep it as natural as possible. In the summer of 2013, the Conservancy held another community engagement session. Over 250 people walked the property and had the opportunity to ask questions and brainstorm ideas for its use and development.



Placemaking and Partnerships

The Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy has developed strong partnerships with the City of South Haven, South Haven Township, Lake Michigan Community College, South Haven Area Community Foundation, numerous service and conservation groups, and several area businesses and stakeholders to help them steer the design, use and management of the site. These partnerships and the resulting steering committee were founded upon broad community recognition of:

- The importance of Pilgrim Haven to the community
- The potential to create a long-lasting resource for residents and visitors to the area that supports the evolution of South Haven to a tourist based economy
- The role that Pilgrim Haven and the Conservancy play in creating a larger regional open space and conservation identity that supports the placemaking efforts in this lakeshore region.

Developing Pilgrim Haven is a highly visible placemaking project in a location that has had enormous economic development successes in recent years and incredible potential for more. SWMLC has and will continue to spearhead community planning efforts that leverage Pilgrim Haven's resources to enhance multiple regional objectives. The ultimate goal of SWMLC and its partners is to create a long term private-public partnership with the South Haven Area Recreation Authority, a multi-governmental entity, for the management and maintenance of the property. The Recreation Authority is one of several collaborative regional entities that serves this area, and is a key element in the redefining and placemaking of this section of the Lake Michigan shoreline.

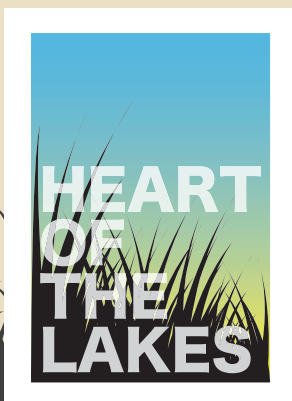




Heart of the Lakes

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.



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Center for Land Conservation Policy

www.heartofthelakes.org