



People & Place

An Island Gets Public Access to Water



When the Township of Grosse Ile took ownership of an old fishing camp and boat livery on the banks of the Detroit River, the Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy (GINLC) joined a community-wide effort to transform the public eyesore into the first publicly accessible waterfront park on Grosse Ile. Only a half mile from the local high school, the Grosse Ile Waterfront Park is now one of the most frequently visited facilities on the island. The site also pays special tribute to a local conservation hero.



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.

Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy

Formed in 1993, the Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy's (GINLC) mission is to promote for public benefit the preservation, stewardship and understanding of the natural resources in the Township of Grosse Ile. Two primary objectives drive their work. The first is the protection and stewardship of the diverse natural resources found in and around the Township and the resulting high quality of life they provide the community. The second is to provide environmental knowledge to all ages that is so necessary to understand our complex ecosystems and how intimately our human welfare is related to the health of them.

The all-volunteer group of hardworking, selfless, community contributors who love and appreciate the natural world are united by a common philosophy—to work quietly, wisely, scientifically and imaginatively. GINLC is the only private organization in the Township that protects property either by direct ownership of land or by holding conservation easements. For more information, visit www.ginlc.org



A Community Takes Action

For decades, Wayne County owned a small slice of waterfront property on the island of Grosse Ile, located in the Detroit River downstream of Detroit. The property was leased to an individual who ran a boat livery and fishing camp for many years. Over time, the property fell into disrepair and became a real eyesore in the community. Wayne County was ready to dispose of the property and offered it to the Township of Grosse Ile.

For an island community surrounded by water, there is surprisingly very limited public access to the Detroit River within the Township. Persistent visionaries saw the potential for providing access at the Township's newly acquired waterfront property. Despite initial

opposition from some in the community, many hurdles were ultimately cleared to reimagine and restore the site as a local park. Hundreds of volunteers and local businesses pitched in time, labor and contributions to tear down the old fishing shack and clean up debris at the site. As part of an Eagle Scout project, donations were secured to construct a new wooden stairway over the crumbling and dangerous cement steps that led down a steep bank to the beach. The Grosse Ile Waterfront Park was becoming a reality.

Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy Pays Tribute

At about this time, GINLC was looking for an appropriate tribute to Dr. Bruce Jones, a dedicated and well-known conservationist and GINLC member who had recently passed away. The emerging Waterfront Park presented a unique opportunity to support the park and honor Dr. Jones. After the old fishing shack's foundation was filled in and the bank regraded, bank was a major need. GINLC agreed to step in to steward the area and organized volunteers to re-vegetate the bank with native plants.

Other park amenities followed with GINLC's assistance. A bicycle rack and split rail fencing were purchased by the Township and installed by GINLC volunteers. A small brick patio and a bench were also added. Perhaps the capstone of GINLC's work at Waterfront Park is the viewing scope placed on the shore. Marked with a plaque honoring Dr. Jones and purchased with funds from his estate, the scope offers Waterfront Park visitors a chance to watch birds and other wildlife inhabiting the river and to look out over at Stony Island. That island is a powerful testament to Dr. Jones' conservation work and that of GINLC's in its earliest years. Because of their efforts, Stony Island was acquired by the state in 1997 for its ecological benefits and protection of high quality wildlife habitat in the lower Detroit River.



Waterfront Park Today

Thanks to the contributions of so many, Waterfront Park is one of the most often visited recreational facilities in the Township of Grosse Ile and has become an important community asset. Just a half-mile from the local high school, the park's bicycle rack gets ample use as students and residents explore the beach and views of the Detroit River and Stony Island. As Grosse Ile's first public beach, the park provides important access for learners of all ages to discover and learn more about the important natural resources of the lower Detroit River area, a particular passion of Dr. Jones. No doubt visitors will be inspired to act on behalf of conservation thanks to the foresight of the community and GINLC to create this special park with its fitting tribute to a local land conservation hero, Dr. Bruce Jones.

The Grosse Ile Waterfront Park also demonstrates that projects need not be of tremendous size or scale to have significant community impact. Nor do local land conservancies need to own the land in question for them to positively contribute to community building projects. As in this case study, providing such services that help manage parkland or establish amenities that enhance visitors' access and experience of those lands are often the contributing factors that can take a community land conservation project from something simply great to something exceptional.





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