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2009 RECORD YEAR FOR LOCAL LAND TRUST

GRAND RAPIDS: 2009 was a year of many successes for the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, a local non-profit land trust with the mission of *keeping nature nearby*. New records were set, thousands of acres were conserved, miles of shoreline were preserved, and homes for countless wildlife species were protected forever.

This past year 1,861 natural acres were permanently protected right here in West Michigan – the most acreage ever protected in a single year in the non-profit’s 34-year history. Thirteen new land protection projects came to completion by the end of 2009. Total protected acres in West Michigan are now nearly 7,000.

The Land Conservancy’s most publicized project this past year was the protection of the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, 171 acres along Lake Michigan in Saugatuck. The Land Conservancy closed on the property in December 2009. City of Saugatuck records indicate interest in preserving this place stretch back to at least 1952. Over the next three years \$4.5 million needs to be raised to finish the transfer of the land to the City of Saugatuck as an addition to Oval Beach Park.

On the Pere Marquette River, four new conservation easements were established that protect forests, wetlands, and frontage along the river and its tributaries. A conservation easement is a legal agreement that a landowner creates with an organization such as the Land Conservancy in order to protect the natural qualities of their land by permanently limiting its development. The family continues to own and live on the land and the land stays private, but the property can never be split up or sold for development purposes.

The Pere Marquette is a nationally designated wild and scenic river with some of the best trout fishing in the Midwest. Since 2005 the Land Conservancy has completed sixteen conservation easements on almost 1,600 acres within the watershed, some with grant monies and others through outright landowner donations.

The Land Conservancy also created three new conservation easements along the Muskegon River. Snuggled tightly together between the City of Newaygo and Croton Dam they include over 3.5 miles of river frontage in an area is known as critical spawning grounds for fish like lake sturgeon. Scenic views from the water and the shoreline are now preserved as well.

Additionally the Land Conservancy completed projects along Crockery Creek in Ravenna Township, a donated conservation easement in the Blue Lakes area, a new Cascade Township park, and protected a family farm south of Holland that expands the natural buffer to an existing preserve.

“In many ways 2009 was a difficult year for Michigan,” says Peter Homeyer, the Land Conservancy of West Michigan’s Executive Director. “But by protecting the best of our State’s natural character we are accomplishing many goals. We are securing not only a future for native plants and animals, but also protecting important natural areas where residents of Michigan live, work, and play.”

Once land is protected, the Land Conservancy makes a commitment to forever preserve the conservation values of the land. In 2009 more than 775 dedicated volunteers donated 1,244 hours to help maintain the Land Conservancy's 13 nature preserves (open to the public) and monitor the lands protected with conservation easements.

Slideshows

To celebrate this successful year, the Land Conservancy will be hosting several slideshows throughout the area that feature West Michigan's protected natural areas. Stunning photography will take attendees on a virtual tour of local nature preserves, the thirteen projects completed in 2009 and projects that are currently in the works.

The following shows have been scheduled:

Grand Haven: January 27, 2010 (Wednesday) at 7 pm

Loutit District Library
407 Columbus Ave., Grand Haven, MI

Fremont: January 28, 2010 (Thursday) at 7 pm

Fremont Library
104 E. Main St., Fremont, MI

Saugatuck/Douglas: February 2, 2010 (Tuesday) at 7 pm

Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society Old School House
90 Center St., Douglas, MI

Lowell: January 30, 2010 (Saturday) – Slideshow followed by moonlight snowshoe hike!

Slideshow: 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Snowshoe hike: 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. (snow shoe rental \$5 adults/\$3 children)

Wittenbach Science Center & Wege Natural Area
11715 Vergennes Rd., Lowell, MI

For additional information, please contact the Land Conservancy of West Michigan at 616-451-9476, email lcwm@naturenearby.org or visit www.naturenearby.org.

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The Land Conservancy of West Michigan is a local, nonprofit organization that preserves natural land and open space in eight West Michigan counties. It is the only organization devoted solely to preserving natural and scenic lands that are an important part of West Michigan's community character. With thirty-four years of experience keeping nature nearby, the Land Conservancy has protected nearly 7,000 acres with nature preserves, conservation easements, and project assistance to local governments.