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Contact:

April Scholtz, Land Protection Director
Peter Homeyer, Interim Executive Director
616-451-9476, lcwm@naturenearby.org

MNRTF AWARDS \$428,300 FOR THE EXPANSION OF MEINERT COUNTY PARK

Muskegon County - On Tuesday the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) approved a \$428,300 grant which gives a huge boost to the campaign to expand Muskegon County's Meinert Park. The proposed 95-acre addition to Meinert County Park would more than double the size of this beautiful park along the Lake Michigan's shoreline and preserve critical forested dune habitat.

The highly sought after MNRTF grants support efforts to acquire and develop public recreation lands throughout Michigan. Funding for the grants comes from the proceeds of a trust fund created from oil, gas, and other mineral lease and royalty payments. Muskegon County was one of only 37 recipients of acquisition grant funds in 2008.

Tucked away at the north end of Muskegon County, Meinert Park offers a quiet retreat for the outdoor enthusiast. Meinert Park is currently 88 acres with rolling dunes, including a large parabolic dune and scenic overlooks providing spectacular views of Little Flower Creek and the Lake Michigan shoreline. Visitors can climb the unimproved trail to the top of a dune for a panoramic view of Lake Michigan and the surrounding countryside.

Directly south of Meinert Park lies the 95 natural acres which Muskegon County and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan are working to acquire for park expansion. The land is at risk of being sold and developed. By saving this land and adding it to the county park critical shoreline dunes will be preserved, important wildlife habitat will be protected, and recreational opportunities will increase for park visitors.

The property is a continuation of the wooded back-dunes that are found on the south side of Meinert County Park. From the steep dune ridges, hikers are rewarded with views of Lake Michigan and sandy "blowouts". These forested dunes provide critical habitat for migratory warblers and butterflies.

At the bottom of the dune slopes on the east are seasonal wetlands and a small, undeveloped lake fringed with iris, buttonbush, and other wetland plants. This provides excellent habitat for a diversity of birds, amphibians, and other wildlife.

The total project cost expected to add the 95 natural acres to Meinert Park is approximately \$600,000. The \$428,300 MNRTF grant, a \$20,000 grant from the Community Foundation for Muskegon County, and the willingness of the current landowners to donate some of the value of the property gives the campaign a great start. In order to successfully complete the project, however, the Land Conservancy of West Michigan and Muskegon County must raise the remaining funds from the community. For more information on how you can help expand Meinert County Park please visit www.naturenearby.org or call the Land Conservancy at 616-451-9476.

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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 over thirty years of experience keeping nature nearby, the Land Conservancy has protected more than 4,700 acres with nature preserves, conservation easements, and project assistance to local governments.