



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **THREE FAMILIES PERMANENTLY PROTECT NATURAL LAND ALONG THE PERE MARQUETTE RIVER & ITS TRIBUTARIES**

The Land Conservancy of West Michigan, a local non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of natural and scenic lands, recently protected significant land along the Pere Marquette River and its tributaries. In 2008, three families donated conservation easements in the Pere Marquette River watershed in Lake, Mason and Newaygo Counties, permanently protecting nearly 250 acres of river frontage and forest – a perfect example of how local families can make a difference.

The Land Conservancy began working with landowners along the Pere Marquette River Watershed in 1995 and gained momentum in 2003 through a partnership with The Nature Conservancy and key grants from the Fremont Area Community Foundation and the National Forest Foundation.

To date, the Land Conservancy has protected 1,166 acres with 12 conservation easements in the Pere Marquette River Watershed. 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.

“We are very grateful to the generous families who had the foresight to permanently protect their land in the Pere Marquette River Watershed,” says Peter Homeyer, Land Conservancy of West Michigan Interim Executive Director. “These lands protect important habitat for wildlife species, as well as ensure that future generations of river users get to experience the same natural beauty we know and love.”

### **Highlights of The Conservation Easements Created in 2008:**

#### **Nerheim Family Conservation Easement**

**Location:** Branch Township, Mason County

The Nerheim family purchased their property along the Pere Marquette River in 2005 in order to prevent the property from being developed (splits were already drawn out). The conservation easement created by the Nerheims and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan ensures that the land will be protected forever.

The property boasts high-quality natural forests and 2,200 feet along the Pere Marquette River, as well as 1,000 feet along a tributary creek. The banks of both waterways are lined with cedar and hemlock trees. Leaving these tree-lined banks substantially undeveloped will benefit the water quality and quantity in the Pere Marquette Watershed system. The forested property also provides excellent wildlife habitat for species such as bobcats and black bears.

“For five generations, this area has been very important to the Nerheim family who have hunted, fished, hiked, canoed and enjoyed the beauty of the natural habitat and wildlife. We're pleased to be able to protect this land for future generations,” says Lori Nerheim.

**\*\*\*MORE\*\*\***

The property continues the Land Conservancy's focus on the Pere Marquette River watershed. To learn more about the conservancy's projects in the PM, please visit us at Ludington's Earth Day events on Saturday, April 18 or visit our website [www.naturenearby.org](http://www.naturenearby.org).

### **Smith Family Conservation Easement**

**Location:** Sweetwater Township, Lake County

**Size:** 35 acres

Bob Smith of Custer, along with his two siblings, Diane Jensen of Eden, Utah and Rick Smith of Bloomington, Illinois are the third generation to own this property, originally purchased by their grandfather. The cabin that still stands on the property, in fact, was built by their grandfather. The Smith family uses this undisturbed natural land along the Pere Marquette River as a year-round retreat and annual gathering place for out-of-state-family. The conservation easement donated by the Smith family will ensure that the land remains natural, allowing the family to hunt and fish the land as they have done for generations.

Located on a large bend on the Pere Marquette River, the property boasts nearly 2,000 feet of frontage and includes wetlands from a former oxbow on the river. The now protected river frontage and mature hardwood forest provides excellent habitat for local wildlife species.

Though nearly 75% of Sweetwater Township is owned by the US Forest Service, most of the riverfront land is privately owned. The Smith family's commitment to conservation will prevent any further development of their land to protect the habitat, water quality, and scenic views from the river.

### **Bloom Family Conservation Easement**

**Location:** Home Township, Newaygo County

**Size:** 160 acres

This beautiful 160-acre Newaygo County property is the Bloom family's second home and family gathering spot. The land is heavily forested and has extensive wetlands with numerous sedges and some ephemeral ponds. A small trout stream traverses the land and feeds into the Little South Branch of the Pere Marquette River.

The property provides high-quality natural habitats for amphibians (frogs & toads), turtles, deer, turkey, migratory warblers, raptors, mink, bear, and bobcat, among other species. The conservation easement created by the Bloom family with the Land Conservancy insures that the natural features of the land will be protected forever, while allowing the family to continue to use and enjoy the property year-round.

For additional information about the Land Conservancy of West Michigan and how you can save your family land, please call 616-451-9476 or visit [www.naturenearby.org](http://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 over thirty years of experience keeping nature nearby, the Land Conservancy has protected more than 5,000 acres with nature preserves, conservation easements, and project assistance to local governments.*