



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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SAUGATUCK HARBOR NATURAL AREA: *FEDERAL PROGRAM OFFERS SUPPORT*

Saugatuck: The Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area has been selected to receive \$3 million through the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Saugatuck project was ranked in 7th in the prioritized list of 57 applicants for coastal lands nationwide.

“It is very satisfying to know this place is important not just for the City of Saugatuck and the State, but nationally as well,” said Peter Homeyer, Executive Director of the Land Conservancy of West Michigan.

On December 22, 2009, the Land Conservancy of West Michigan purchased the property from Oklahoma businessman Aubrey McClendon for \$19 million. Because project funding includes \$10.5 million over three years from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, closing in 2009 was only possible through generous bridge loans provided by James Brooks, The Conservation Fund, The Frey Foundation, Fred & Lena Meijer, The J.A. Woollam Foundation, and an anonymous lender.

As grant funds are released over the next 3 years, a portion of the property will be transferred to the City of Saugatuck’s ownership and become a natural area addition to Oval Beach City Park. By the end of 2012, all of the land will be protected forever. The Nature Conservancy was a key partner with the Land Conservancy of West Michigan in assisting the City of Saugatuck ultimately acquire the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area.

The 171 acre property is already open to the public now through a unique arrangement where the Land Conservancy is leasing the property to the City for \$1 per year while the project is completed.

Total project costs are estimated at \$22.1 million when transactional and management costs are included. The public fundraising campaign will need to close the remaining gap between grants, gifts, and project costs.

On April 24th the City of Saugatuck and the Land Conservancy will host an Earth Day Celebration at the property at 1 pm. The event, which will begin at Oval Beach City Park, will officially “open” this beautiful dune land and kick off the campaign to raise the remaining funds needed to secure the property forever for the public. Naturalist-guided hikes will be offered following a brief ceremony to recognize those who have been instrumental in the project.

“Hosting an Earth Day event seemed like a great way to ‘welcome’ spring to the property,” explained Peter Homeyer. “As part of that celebration we look forward to sharing the goal of what still needs to be raised by the community.”

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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.