



## news release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area Project to be Completed One Year Ahead of Schedule

**Saugatuck, Mich.** — The City of Saugatuck and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan announced that the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area project will be completed this year. The final two-thirds of the property will transfer from the Land Conservancy of West Michigan to the City of Saugatuck in 2011, ahead of the originally scheduled date of December 2012. \$150,000 remains to be raised from the public by Labor Day for the project to finish successfully.

A fundraising thermometer for the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area project was unveiled today near the information booth in downtown Saugatuck. Originally estimated as a \$22.1 million project, the remaining \$150,000 assures adequate funds for the purchase the property, permanent public access, and an endowment for long-term upkeep.

“Finishing the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area project a year early is great news,” said Jane Verplank, Mayor of Saugatuck. “The City has an interest in this property dating back at least 1954. It is a great place for the public to enjoy Lake Michigan and the Kalamazoo River channel.”

The 171 acres of the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area is located adjacent to Oval Beach Park, just south of the mouth of the Kalamazoo River. Currently the Land Conservancy of West Michigan leases the property to the City of Saugatuck for a \$1 a year.

“This is the last piece,” said Peter Homeyer, the Land Conservancy’s Executive Director. “Raising the final \$150,000 by Labor Day not only gets a great property in public hands right now but, through funding the endowment, assures it will remain an exceptional place in the future as well.”

This magnificent dune ecosystem includes an amazing diversity of habitats and resources: 3,650 feet of Lake Michigan shoreline, populations of at least 6 rare plant and animal species including the prairie warbler (state endangered status) and Blanchard’s cricket frog (state threatened), open dunes, interdunal wetlands, natural jack pine forest, hardwood-pine dune

forest, Great Lakes marsh, 4,452 feet on an oxbow lake, the south pier of the Kalamazoo River mouth, 1,650 feet of Kalamazoo River shoreline, and a historic site known as “Fishtown.”

The Land Conservancy of West Michigan will host guided hikes at the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area on Saturday, June 11 at 10:00 a.m., Sunday, July 10 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, August 7 at 7:30 p.m. Hikes will meet at the north end of Oval Beach parking lot. Parking at Oval Beach is \$6 for a day pass. For more information 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 thirty-plus years of experience keeping nature nearby, the Land Conservancy has protected over 7,300 acres with nature preserves, conservation easements, and project assistance to local governments.*

### **Photos from Fundraising Thermometer unveiling on Tuesday, June 7**

Saugatuck Mayor Jane VerPlank, left, removes the covering from the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area fundraising thermometer as Land Conservancy of West Michigan Executive Director Peter Homeyer, center, and Saugatuck City Manager Kirk Harrier, right, look on. With help from local supporters the 171 acre property known as the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area will be completed in 2011, which is a year earlier than originally scheduled. (Both photos should be credited: Michelle Harris, Land Conservancy of West Michigan)



