



news release

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Saugatuck Dunes Deal Successfully Closes

SAUGATUCK, Mich. — A decades-long effort to protect a critical stretch of Lake Michigan shoreline has reached a major milestone with the real estate closing of the 171-acre south portion of the McClendon property (formerly known as the Denison property) adjacent to Saugatuck's Oval Beach City Park.

The Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM) closed on the transaction today, purchasing it from Aubrey McClendon for \$19 million. The property will become the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area and open to the public for recreational access.

The City of Saugatuck will lease the property from LCWM while the property is transferred to the City over a three-year period as the remaining funding to support the purchase is raised by a local fundraising campaign led by LCWM. The total cost of the project will reach approximately \$22.1 million when associated transactional and management costs are included, and at least \$4.5 million in public and private funds still needs to be raised.

“This is a wonderful holiday present for West Michigan,” said LCWM Executive Director Peter Homeyer. “Today is a great day for conservation, and for the people of Saugatuck and Michigan. We are thrilled to finally have this property in our hands and look forward to working with the community toward finishing this project successfully. The Land Conservancy of West Michigan is excited about our interim ownership of this critically important land, and pleased we are able to lease the property to the City, giving the public access to this incredible property.”

“So many people said this couldn't be done,” said Helen Taylor, The Nature Conservancy's state director for Michigan. “But then so many people came forward to help. We have a long list of people to thank. Because of the generosity of so many people who care about Michigan and the Great Lakes, this critical and wonderful stretch of dunes can be protected for the health of our majestic Great Lakes freshwater dunes coastal system, and shared by people and nature for generations to come.”

Saugatuck City Councilmember Tony Vettori said he has heard congratulations and kudos from a number of local residents excited about the project.

“This is an exciting and historic time in Saugatuck,” Vettori said. “I will walk that beach with my family and think about this day for a long time.”

Homeyer said today’s closing will now launch LCWM into a major fundraising campaign to raise the private donations that are needed to cover the costs of this project. The Saugatuck property is a flagship example of the importance of conservation and the type of work done by LCWM. The fundraising campaign for the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area will be in addition to the fundraising that LCWM must annually complete to work on this and other projects.

“It’s time now for those who care about protecting the best places in west Michigan to come forward and commit their support,” Homeyer said.

People wanting to support the project should call LCWM at (616) 451-9476 or look online at www.naturenearby.org to learn more about the fundraising campaign.

Significant leadership and support from West Michigan leaders, foundations, and the State of Michigan’s Natural Resources Trust Fund have made this project possible. More than \$6 million in private donations have been made by the Frey Foundation, John A. Woollam, the J.A. Woollam Foundation, Fred and Lena Meijer, James W. Brooks and the Brooks family of Holland, Liz and Todd Warnock, and an anonymous donor. Several of these same donors and the Conservation Fund provided significant loan-bridge financing for this project; and the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund committed \$10.5 million to the project earlier this month.

Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area is part of the world’s largest freshwater dune system, providing habitat for rare and declining species. This stretch of Lake Michigan beach and dunes serve as a prime example of Michigan’s characteristic Great Lakes shoreline. More information about freshwater dune systems can be found [here](#).

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