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FOR CHANGE

Dear Friends:

On behalf of The Conservation Fund and the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN), I am pleased to present to you our 2014 Annual Report.

Thanks to our partners, 2014 was another fantastic year for WIN. Across our program areas, we were able to invest nearly \$300,000 in grant funding in projects that are helping to grow our region's identity as a sustainable community. Through both our main grant program and our new "Action Grant" project, we were inspired by the ideas that we were presented with. It is the seemingly limitless creativity of the organizations in our region that is helping to engage communities, individuals, and organizations in the work that is critical to our region.

While our focus is on projects throughout our 22-county watershed, we are especially excited about investments this year in some of our most urban areas. The first is a grant in Flint, where we are supporting an aggressive and inspiring plan to not only remove an aging dam, but also to reimagine the riverfront as the focal point of their community. A second urban-focused project is in Saginaw, where we are working with key partners to help them identify corridors for both wildlife habitat restoration as well as public recreation and parks. Our urban areas have many challenges, but at WIN we also see limitless opportunities for engagement and partnerships.

This year we also built on a previous, and key, investment in Frankenmuth along the Cass River. Nearly a decade ago, we began working with city leaders to remove a dam in the center of the City. Its removal, that was identified as one of the top key river restoration projects in the Lake Huron basin and that will connect more than 73 miles of tributary, finally got underway in 2014. And like many other WIN projects, we built on that investment by providing additional funding this year for complimentary fish habitat restoration and erosion control.

Finally, a new and exciting project got underway in the Rifle River Watershed. The Rifle, the only state designated "natural river" in the Saginaw Bay Watershed, will be the focus of substantial effort by a partnership designed to build the region's economy by focusing on this unique and important natural resource. This "gateway community" project will launch in 2015, and is the first project of its kind in our region. It builds on multiple past WIN investments designed to protect and restore this remarkable river.

You'll read about these projects and more in this report.

At WIN, it is about more than making grants, it's about making smart investments in people and projects that make our region better, make our environment more resilient, and provide for economic growth. Thanks to our volunteers, partners, and funders, we look back on another great year for WIN, and look forward to more exciting projects in 2015.



Michael Kelly
The Conservation Fund

Where Is the Saginaw Bay Watershed?

The Saginaw Bay Watershed region contains rich resources in agriculture, forestry, industry, and recreation. As the state's largest watershed, it encompasses nearly 8,700 square miles in all or part of 22 counties in central Michigan. Approximately, 15 percent of the state's waterways drain into the Saginaw Bay.



Sources for Watershed Ideas

Every year the project details change but their essential nature stays the same. The people who turn to WIN are committed and creative. They come from a variety of sources, yet share the vision, passion, and energy needed to make a difference. WIN seeks to fund efforts that strengthen community connections to and stewardship of the amazing natural assets of our Saginaw Bay Watershed. And collaboration is the foundation of every project.

We consider WIN projects to be a “source for change” because our contributions are

often the first funding a project receives. As such, we provide more than money. WIN support offers belief and guidance to projects that then fuel confidence in other funders, experts, and volunteers. (And for most projects, the adage “the more, the merrier” is always true.)

We are thrilled to be the basis for a change of perception, mind, and even heart that can turn the tide and help build sustainability for innovative and deserving initiatives. Projects that received funding in 2014 are as follows:

Cass River Water Trail Development at Davis Park – *Bridgeport Township*

Coldwater Lake Boat Launch and Accessibility Improvements – *Isabella County Parks*

Hamilton Dam Project – *Flint River Watershed Coalition*

Mid-Michigan Community Pathway Project – *Village of Shepherd*

Taking Root In Saginaw Urban Conservation – *Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy*

Cass River Streambank Stabilization and Fish Habitat Improvement –
Saginaw Bay Resource Conservation and Development Inc.

Rifle River Prosperity Network and Gateway Community Project – *Huron Pines*

Gladwin County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail – *Gladwin County Trails
Recreational Authority*

On-The-Ground Habitat Improvement for Saginaw Bay Region –
Michigan United Conservation Clubs

Saginaw Bay WIN Community Action Mini-Grants

The following are the Action Grants:

AuGres River Watershed Boundary Signs – *Huron Pines*

Certified Locally Grown – *Downtown Saginaw Farmer's Market*

Community Garden – *City of Gladwin*

Deer Enclosure Demonstration – *Chippewa Watershed Conservancy*

Garden of HOPE – *St Mary's Foundation*

Halls Lake Natural Area Signage – *Chippewa Watershed Conservancy*

LED Lighting Upgrade at Otto Roeser Park – *City of Saginaw*

Lighting on the River – *Village of Sebawaing*

McLean Nature Preserve Signage – *Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy*

Mobile Farm Market – *Devries Nature Conservancy*

Peaceful Playground – *Zion Evangelical Church*

Science Nature Garden – *Bullock Creek Floyd Elementary*

WIN Partners

A committed group of 12 foundations and corporate partners support WIN with financial contributions and technical resources. They are:

Bay Area Community Foundation
Consumers Energy Foundation
Cook Family Foundation
C.S. Mott Foundation

The Dow Chemical Company Foundation
Harry A. and Margaret D. Towsley Foundation
Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation
Midland Area Community Foundation
Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation
S.C. Johnson Fund
Saginaw Bay Foundation
Saginaw Community Foundation

“WIN’s open-minded, collaborative approach to providing funding is fantastic. With its entrepreneurial spirit, WIN is often the first organization to step in and provide grant money. This is especially valuable to a project like “Taking Root in Saginaw” that provides information, recommendations, and relationships.”

— Zachary Branigan,
Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy



Our Vision

As stewards of the Saginaw Bay Watershed, we value our shared, unique resources, and together we will balance economic, environmental, and social priorities to enhance the quality of life for this and future generations.

The Nature of Urban Land Conservation

“Taking Root in Saginaw”

Picture the perfect terrain for land conservation. Does that image include acres of land filled with wildlife? Maybe there’s a river or old barn far off in the distance. How about lots of people, busy streets, and small city lots in an urban environment? The latter image may not evoke a “perfect” conservation project, but maybe it should. The majority of the Saginaw Bay Watershed’s population lives in urban areas like Saginaw. And that gives the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy (SBLC) new – yet equally perfect – opportunities for conservation.

The SBLC is expanding the nature of land conservation with its “Taking Root in Saginaw” initiative. Designed to connect people with nature in the City of Saginaw, the project will identify the best potential conservation projects by employing land use analysis tools and community engagement techniques.

“We are researching and creating a ‘portfolio of opportunity’ for land conservation in Saginaw,” says Zachary Branigan, executive director, SBLC. “To do that, we are studying and identifying the unique areas in the city where people and nature intersect. But just as importantly, we are talking to the community directly to discover what natural assets are most meaningful to them.”

Since Saginaw and other urban areas are often underserved and, frankly, not always clearly understood by land conservation organizations, “Taking Root in Saginaw” starts a deeply needed dialogue. Combining land studies with public discourse helps define realistic opportunities for nature to improve and enhance the community.



Photo: Stan Lilley

Finding Facts for Opportunity

The changing demographics in Saginaw have altered the city’s land use, often resulting in vacant lots scattered throughout neighborhoods. With little or no attention, unused land becomes more than an eyesore. It also becomes a health and safety hazard for the people who live nearby.

Based on a geographic information system (GIS) analysis of existing land data – as well as zoning, demographic, and statistics related to city features – the SBLC’s natural lands study identified and highlighted the most likely wildlife corridors in Saginaw.

“Taking Root in Saginaw” employs SBLC’s land conservation model to define efforts that will improve the city’s natural resources while also contributing to community development and protecting vulnerable populations, both human and wildlife, in these identified areas.

“Despite the smaller acreage available, conserving habitat in Saginaw can be extremely impactful because of the large number of people involved,” says Branigan. “By being proactive with this project, we can bring awareness of SBLC’s charitable function and environmental service to more people.”

Success through Listening

The project’s extensive focus on community as well as nature made “Taking Root in Saginaw” an excellent fit for WIN. Targeting consensus-building, the SBLC will meet with a variety of community groups and organizations in Saginaw throughout 2015. The many meetings and public workshops provide opportunities for people to voice their needs and wants when it comes how they gain access to nature in the city.



Change

“We don’t make any assumptions as we meet with people. Anything that fits the criteria of what the SBLC can provide is open for discussion,” Branigan notes. “The more we listen – and the more engaged the community is with our project – the more likely our recommendations for active outdoor recreation and conservation will be successful.”

Developing Land Conservation

Broad goals like economic development, job creation, public health, quality of life, and community sustainability are strengthened by access to high-quality natural land. Residents, visitors, potential employers, event planners, and many others appreciate and value this unique asset.

“We believe that the land trust model can play an important role in building a better community. It can be an agent for positive change by creating natural experiences for the community,” says Branigan. “Through ‘Taking Root in Saginaw’ we hope to build strong relationships as we learn how to support Saginaw’s people and natural resources.”



LOCAL CHAMPION:

Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy

PARTNERS:

Children’s Zoo at Celebration Square, Ducks Unlimited, Saginaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc., Carlisle Wortman Associates, Inc.

WIN GRANT AWARD:

\$28,500

Unified and Strengthened by One River

The Rifle River Prosperity Network



“The Prosperity Network will bring together local leaders in environmental conservation, economic development, entrepreneurial efforts, community building and other important areas.

These groups have worked together before, of course, but not exactly in this way,” says Abigail Ertel, project manager, Huron Pines.

“Using the Prosperity Network’s structure, they will set goals and develop

tools that help define a Rifle River ‘Gateway Community’ brand.”

More often than not, communities are defined by land. Blocks, neighborhoods, downtowns, districts and even the miles between ... all of these help shape the unique character of an area. Huron Pines and its partners are working to add water to that land-bound definition. Through the Rifle River Prosperity Network, they envision communities unified by the flow of the Rifle River and sharing in the economic success and stewardship of this high-quality water resource.

Huron Pines is leveraging the region’s strong awareness of a distinctive “Rifle River quality of life” highlighted by the recent Rifle River Watershed Management Plan – and taking it even further. Its Rifle River Prosperity Network will build a framework of local partners and stakeholders who understand the vast benefits that can be realized if their communities share a unified vision and relationship with the Rifle River, the only state-designated “natural river” in the Saginaw Bay Watershed.

Rifle River Unification 101

Strong community engagement like that defined by the Prosperity Network is key to success for the projects that WIN supports. Engagement by members of the community early in the process will help give the Prosperity Network a focused start. And that includes taking time to learn how to maintain and promote this “new” community character for the future success of the region.

To help, Huron Pines and its partners will facilitate programs designed to guide Prosperity Network members’ efforts, including:

- **Cohesive Partner Network** – created as public and private sector stakeholders show commitment to the Prosperity Network by writing and adopting a partnership agreement document

unified



“I think WIN’s enthusiasm to be part of a project like the Rifle River Prosperity Network shows its faith in and commitment to a variety of conservation efforts in the Saginaw Bay Watershed. WIN shares the project’s vision to engage the community and build ownership for the many economic and quality of life benefits that come from living on the Rifle River.”

— Abigail Ertel,
Huron Pines

WIN’s Guiding Principles

- Provide a pleasant and healthy environment
- Conserve historic, cultural, and natural resources
- Integrate economic prosperity, ecology, and aesthetics
- Use land and infrastructure effectively
- Continually evaluate and refine shared vision and goals



strengthened

- **Workshops** – discussions and training about the “Gateway Community” concept, the value of a unified voice and how to market the region’s natural assets
- **Mini-grants** – funding available for local applicants whose ideas align with the goals of the Prosperity Network and demonstrate importance to and investment in the community

“A strong sense of ownership on the part of Prosperity Network members over the first 18 months will be a key to long-term success. In addition to welcoming each member’s unique perspective, the group requires member involvement in the development and implementation of all aspects of the project,” notes Ertel. “Member enthusiasm will prove contagious and invite others in their communities to follow.”

Opening the “Gateway Community”

The success of the Rifle River Prosperity Network will take shape as the communities of the Rifle River Watershed fully realize and promote the economic potential of the area’s quality of life, while balancing economic growth with sound environmental stewardship.

“The Prosperity Network is about listening, learning and growing together as a ‘Gateway Community.’ Since each area in the region is different, we want to help answer its specific needs but also encourage a cohesive approach,” said Ertel. “And in the end, we hope the ‘Gateway’ opens many opportunities that will strengthen and sustain the region’s growth.”



LOCAL CHAMPION:

Huron Pines

PARTNERS:

The Conservation Fund; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation/Sustain Our Great Lakes Program; West Branch; Rose City; East Michigan Council of Governments; Saginaw Bay Resource, Conservation and Development; Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation; The Guide

WIN GRANT AWARD:

\$50,000



“We’ve found that working with WIN means more than receiving funding. WIN also provides knowledge, experience, and networking that have been immensely helpful. A lot of dedicated people have worked on this project for almost a decade. With WIN, we now have the support and momentum needed to move forward.”

— Janet Van De Winkle,
Flint River Corridor Alliance

Ready to Rock on the Flint River

Hamilton Dam Project



There’s no denying that Flint, a vibrant Michigan city, has an image problem ... one that also reaches to the banks and waters of the Flint River. As a principal natural asset, the river offers more to the community than many people realize. Now with the Hamilton Dam Project, the Flint River Corridor Alliance (FRCA) and the Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC), along with their partners, are changing both the reality and perceptions of this significant water resource.

The FRCA and the FRWC recognize that the Flint River is a lovely natural space in the midst of the city’s hustle and bustle. However, much of the river’s potential benefits for both people and wildlife are limited by the aging and deteriorated Hamilton Dam. Over the next few years, the project will complete a long-needed improvement by replacing the dam with rock rapids.

“Many wonderful educational, business, and entertainment opportunities are on the banks of the river in downtown Flint. In fact, the University of Michigan-Flint campus is right next to the Hamilton Dam,” says Janet Van De Winkle, director, FRCA. “Yet the river has been isolated by the dam and its concrete channel structure for many years. It isn’t viewed as the amazing natural asset that it is. This project will reconnect people and wildlife to the Flint River.”

Flow toward the Future

The Hamilton Dam was constructed almost 100 years ago to help regulate the flow of the Flint River. A century of use is now evident in the severe structural deterioration that is creating operational issues with the dam and gates.

The simple fact is that the dam’s function is seriously compromised, making it vulnerable to failure. The potential for loss of life and property in Flint is immense; significant enough that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources classified it a “high hazard critical dam.” Concerns about the Hamilton Dam have also made it a high-priority in the area’s complete river restoration strategy.

To answer this real worry, the Hamilton Dam Project focuses on installing a series of rock rapids. Aesthetically appealing, the expert-designed rock rapids will hydraulically and structurally fulfill two critical functions: controlling the river’s flow and maintaining a head of water for the city’s drinking water system.

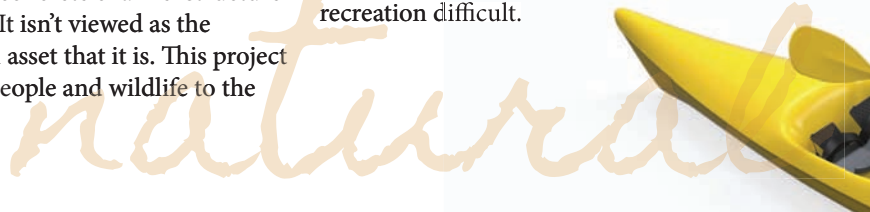
In addition, the design for the rock rapids includes several benefits for fish and aquatic habitat. When the dam is removed, a large portion of the river will reopen for fish migration and to other aquatic species that populate the Flint River. In addition, the naturalized banks will allow for better aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat.

Mitigating Danger Opens Opportunity

Many people still enjoy fishing on the Flint River. Yet because of the Hamilton Dam and its concrete channel, access to the river in the downtown area is quite limited, making fishing and other water sports and recreation difficult.

About the Saginaw Bay Watershed

- Home to more than 90 fish species, 138 endangered or threatened species, and 1.4 million people
- Includes more than 175 inland lakes
- Contains about 7,000 miles of rivers and streams
- Path for migrating song birds and waterfowl on the Mississippi Flyway
- Significant agricultural and industrial resources supporting Michigan’s economy





reconnect

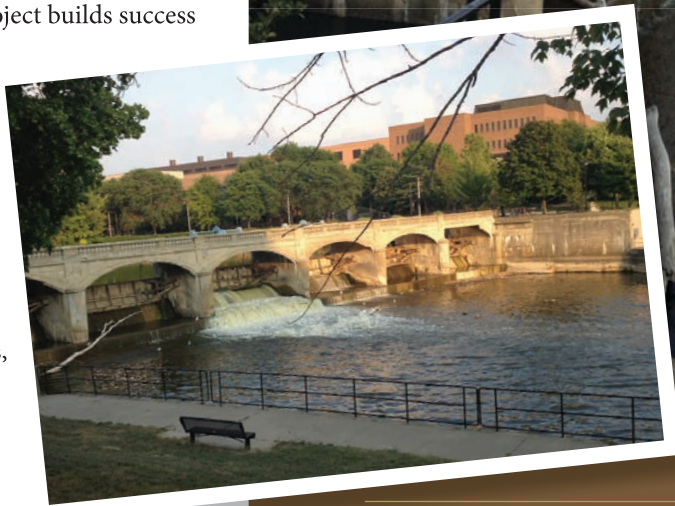
Another drawback for fishers and others who enjoy nature is that there are very few indigenous plants, fish, and other aquatic life living in this segment of the river. The rock rapids and fish passages will greatly improve the quality and quantity of the aquatic life. Fish will find new spawning grounds and plenty to eat as this unique riparian zone returns and grows.

“Installing rock rapids opens the river for people in many ways, such as fishing, boating, kayaking, or relaxing at Riverbank Park,” says Van De Winkle. “The rock rapids will have a significant, positive impact on both native species in the river and recreational opportunities for people.”

Flint River Community Makeover

Like all of the projects that WIN supports, the Hamilton Dam Project builds success by bringing together important goals for area sustainability, environment, community, and economy.

“This project highlights how important the Flint River is on many levels, benefiting wildlife and people by reviving and strengthening this vital riparian habitat. Yet our bigger picture goals for the project include getting people to see the river as an amenity, implementing of the rest of the Flint Riverfront Restoration Plan and encouraging further investment along the river,” says Van De Winkle.



LOCAL CHAMPION:

Flint River Corridor Alliance and Flint River Watershed Coalition

PARTNERS:

Michigan Department of Natural Resources, University of Michigan-Flint, City of Flint

WIN GRANT AWARD:

\$50,000



“WIN supports all aspects of a project, from planning to outreach. Its funding often helps organizations achieve early success, which then builds enthusiasm and even more success. With WIN’s support, our project has a strong start. And we appreciate the momentum from WIN and our partners that will carry us to future success.”

— Jim Hergott,
Saginaw Bay Resource
Conservation and Development



WIN Funding Process

WIN follows a unique, interactive process for awarding grant funding for projects and initiatives. Throughout the community-based review process, individuals from many organizations take part by reviewing project applications and offering their expertise on a variety of topics.

WIN awards grant funding twice each year; there are no grant deadlines. If you have a project to submit for funding consideration, contact WIN at (989) 892-9171 for an application.

Taking Success to the Banks

Cass River Stream Bank Stabilization and Fish Habitat Development

When a tree falls in a river, does it have an impact? The answer is clearly “yes!” ... if the tree is part of a revetment system. Saginaw Bay Resource, Conservation and Development (RC&D) is using tree revetment – an inexpensive yet highly effective erosion control method – to make a positive impact on the Cass River through its Stream Bank Stabilization and Fish Habitat Development Project.

The project’s objective is to stabilize a number of sites along banks of the Cass River and Cole Creek. In conjunction with the fish passage project (also a recipient of WIN support) at the Frankenmuth Dam, the Saginaw Bay RC&D’s project focuses on 73 miles of newly open water in the Cass River. More than two dozen sites – adding up to more than 1,000 ft. of steambank – have been identified as active and severe erosion sites.

“Soil erosion is a natural occurrence. We can’t stop it completely. But we can manage the impact it has on water quality, fish habitat, and the river’s carrying capacity,” says Jim Hergott, executive director, Saginaw Bay RC&D. “With this project, we will introduce tree revetment, a best practice that is not currently being used by landowners in this part of the Cass River Watershed.”

The Sentiment on Sediment

Sedimentation caused by stream bank erosion changes a waterway in many ways that harm its natural ecology. For example, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), sedimentation in rivers can:

- disrupt the food web by damaging habitat where stream organisms live
- transport nutrients that feed the “wrong” types of plants and microorganisms in the water
- alter the flow of water and reduce water depth, making recreational use more difficult

“Reducing sediment in the Cass River and Cole Creek will improve habitat for fish and other organisms, reduce the amount of nutrients negatively affecting the water, and create more recreational opportunities such as fishing, swimming, and boating,” says Hergott. “People enjoy the river and want to be part of this natural resource. Now they will have even more to enjoy.”

People and Tree Revetment to the Rescue

The project will rely on a unique and valuable asset of the Cass River: people who own property along the waterway. As eroded sites are identified and ranked for severity, landowners will be contacted and involved in the Stream Bank Stabilization and Fish Habitat Development Project. Their engagement is essential to project success. After all, landowners are one of the most direct connections between the community and the Cass River Watershed.

With landowner approval, project volunteers and contractors will install the tree revetment system. This bank stabilization method uses 15-foot to 20-foot conifer trees like Norway spruce and red pine to create a secured natural structure that will prevent loss of land into the river. In addition, the trees and their branches attract insects and create aquatic habitat.



stabilize





success

“Within days of a tree revetment installation, we see insects being attracted to the area. The insects provide food for the fish while the branches provide shelter,” says Hergott. “It’s amazing how quickly the water system recovers when sediment is reduced using tree revetment.”

Celebrate Success

Similar to WIN’s mission, the Saginaw Bay RC&D’s overall goal for the Stream Bank Stabilization and Fish Habitat Development Project is to enhance quality of life through conservation for the community today and for generations to come.

“We’ve already achieved success on this project because of the amazing involvement of many dedicated individuals. Even though the project has just started, we can celebrate that achievement,” says Hergott. “And as we heighten awareness of the Cass River as a wonderful resource, we can help renew interest in and enthusiasm for the area with the people who live here, who visit, and who may want to move their homes and businesses here.”



LOCAL CHAMPION:

Saginaw Bay Resource, Conservation and Development

PARTNERS:

Cass River Greenways, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Star of the West Milling Company, Bay Area Community Foundation, Frankenmuth Conservation Club

WIN GRANT AWARD:

\$20,000



WIN
SAGINAW BAY
WATERSHED
INITIATIVE
NETWORK

Contact Us

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The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network is facilitated through a partnership of The Dow Chemical Company Foundation, The Conservation Fund, and local and regional organizations dedicated to promoting the concepts of sustainability in the Saginaw Bay region.



THE
CONSERVATION FUND

