



Dear Friends:

On behalf of The Conservation Fund and our partners in the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN), I am pleased to present our 2017 Annual Report.

Since WIN's beginning in 1998, we have worked through our committees, investments, and technical support initiatives to help develop a better, more sustainable region with specific focus on three key areas: environmental conservation, community development, and economic prosperity. Keeping these key tenants of our organizational vision in mind, all of our efforts are dedicated to engaging our communities in supporting sustainability across the region.

Again in 2017, we had great success across all of our program areas. With leading support from our long-term, dedicated group of foundation partners, we were able to invest in projects across the Saginaw Bay Watershed. In this report, you will read about a great new project spearheaded by a longtime partner, Huron Pines, to begin the process of identifying new and better ways to keep our Saginaw Bay pristine by working with the community of Au Gres on its stormwater program. Also, you'll learn about how the Mt. Pleasant Discovery Museum is promoting environmental stewardship with a WIN grant that also ties in with a new energy efficiency project at its facility.

As you may be aware, Saginaw Bay's coastline contains one of the United States' largest remaining expanses of contiguous freshwater wetland. With WIN's support, you'll read about how the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy is working to consolidate these properties and bring them under a single umbrella that can be used to promote these unique resources, encourage future protection, and provide new and improved opportunities for the public to access many of these unique areas. Finally, this year WIN invested in a major project in Midland that will turn a former brownfield into an amazing natural gem right in the center of town. The new South Riverfront Restoration Project involves multiple partners, will provide incredible new access, and will be a signature site for environmental conservation in an urban setting. You'll read about these projects, and more, in the following pages.

In a "first" for the region, this year WIN was also able to sponsor and organize, with key financial support from the Cook Family Foundation, the first "State of the Bay" conference in Bay City. More than 200 people attended this daylong event, which focused not only on WIN projects, but also programs, research, conservation, and educational initiatives across the region and country focused on Saginaw Bay. The event concluded with a cruise on the Saginaw River aboard BaySail's Appledore Schooner and Bay City Boatline's Islander. Work is already underway for the next State of the Bay conference in September of 2019. Stay tuned for more information.

A special thank you to the investors, committee members, local governments, and other partners who make WIN work. With your support, we look back on another great year, and we look forward to 2018, our 20th year of making a meaningful difference across the Saginaw Bay Watershed. We could not do it without you!



Michael Kelly  
The Conservation Fund

ON THE COVER: The Little Forks Conservancy's Lane Preserve on the North Branch of the Cedar River in Gladwin County. The preserve, which includes more than one mile of river frontage, is managed through a partnership with the Leon P. Martuch Chapter of Trout Unlimited. The Cedar River has been a focus of multiple groups and projects, including several Saginaw Bay WIN investments. *Photo courtesy of Little Forks Conservancy.*

## WIN Partners

A committed group of 12 foundations support WIN with financial contributions and technical support. 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

## 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.



## Channeling Potential

Seeing the potential for projects to positively and sustainably affect the environment, economy, and social growth of our watershed communities is one of WIN's strengths. WIN grants are designed to be an effective way to channel potential and support into doable, real-world projects.

The projects WIN supports are diverse, yet they all strive to turn potential into achievement. The individuals, experts, and private and governmental organizations involved care deeply about results. They innovate for the future and inspire change in awareness, process, and even strategy for watershed issues.

Such dedication to success is a big part of what WIN recognizes through its investments. And other funding organizations have come to trust WIN's

insight. They often join in to support watershed efforts, awarding additional funds to projects that have WIN backing. Being the first group to put confidence and grant money into environmental projects is an honor and privilege that WIN takes seriously.

Many of WIN's 2017 grants focused on projects that entail multifaceted collaboration. Community support and involvement are critical to answering the diverse challenges these projects tackle.

Potential is actually success just waiting to be recognized. By channeling support to concerned and creative people and organizations in the Saginaw Bay Watershed, WIN fuels the power of potential.

Projects that received WIN funding in 2017 are:

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**Au Gres Stormwater Project: Phase I** – *Huron Pines*

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**Cass River Corridor Pollinator Project** – *City of Vassar*

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**Cedar River Watershed Sediment Reduction** – *Saginaw Bay Resource, Conservation, and Development*

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**Mt. Pleasant Discovery Museum Environmental Stewardship Project** – *Mt. Pleasant Discovery Museum*

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**Regional Marketing of the Cass River Water Trail** – *Cass River Greenway*

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**Regional Promotion of Flint River Water Trail** – *Genesee County Parks*

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**Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands** – *Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy*

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**Saginaw Street Landing, South Branch Flint River** – *Six Rivers Land Conservancy*

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**South Riverfront Restoration Project** – *Michigan Baseball Foundation*

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### Saginaw Bay WIN Community Action Mini-Grants

The following are the 2017 Action Grants:

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**AgriScience Greenhouse Project** – *Standish-Sterling High School*

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**Bay City Fresh Start** – *Bay City Market Farmer's Market*

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**Chippewa River Watershed Festival** – *Citizens' Watershed Committee*

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**Conservation and STEM Video** – *Au Gres-Sims School District*

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**Flint River Water Trail Signage** – *Flint River Watershed Coalition*

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**High School Hydroponics Project** – *Birch Run Schools*

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**Ingalls Forest Kiosk and Signage** – *Iosco Conservation District*

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**Interpretive Signage Project** – *Chippewa Watershed Conservancy*

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**Mobile Farmer's Market Cooler** – *Devries Nature Conservancy*

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**Riverwalk Community Mural** – *City of Owosso*

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# Weather the Stormwater

## *Au Gres Stormwater Project*



The old adage says “out of sight is out of mind.” That’s certainly true for stormwater. As it runs off out of sight – and loses people’s attention – stormwater enters municipal drainage systems and, ultimately, the Saginaw Bay. And it carries pollution and sediment right along with it. Huron Pines, an organization devoted to preserving our natural areas and protecting wildlife, is continuing its efforts to improve water quality by creating awareness of this often overlooked environmental issue. A WIN grant is helping Huron Pines work with the City of Au Gres, the Au Gres-Sims School District, and area businesses to bring effective stormwater management to the surface of community interests.

According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, stormwater runoff is one of the leading causes of water quality problems for local rivers. This project will follow the same model that Huron Pines has used successfully in West Branch and Rose City. These previous projects, which were also supported by WIN, have achieved measurable water quality improvements.

“This is a proactive project for Au Gres, given that Michigan regulations don’t apply to smaller communities. That isn’t stopping its leaders and educators from thinking about how stormwater runoff affects their water quality,” says Brad Jensen, Huron Pines executive director.

“As we review the town’s hard and green infrastructures to make recommendations, we also help define how this community will protect its natural assets for future growth.”

### Stormwater Off

Unmanaged stormwater threatens water quality in the Au Gres River and the Saginaw Bay Watershed by increasing pollution, sediment, and soil erosion. Huron Pines will analyze the situation in Au Gres, estimate runoff and pollutants in specific drainage zones, and recommend appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs). These practices are proven ways to prevent water pollution caused by stormwater.

## 10 THINGS EVERYONE CAN DO TO REDUCE STORMWATER RUNOFF POLLUTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) suggests several easy, yet powerful, ways to reduce pollution from stormwater runoff:

**GROW SMART:**  
use fertilizers sparingly

**DRAIN RIGHT:**  
never dump in storm drains or in streams

**FILL IN:**  
put plants in bare spots in yard

**SAVE NUTRIENTS:**  
compost yard waste

**TREAT WISELY:**  
use least toxic pesticides and follow labels carefully

**PLANT STRATEGICALLY:**  
install rain gardens to capture runoff

“Our stormwater study will determine those areas in town that are fine and those that need improvements. Then we can prioritize problems and match them to BMPs that will make a real difference,” says Jensen. “The plan’s focus will be on retrofitting the existing system with filters, efficient landscaping, and even a WIN-supported rain garden.”

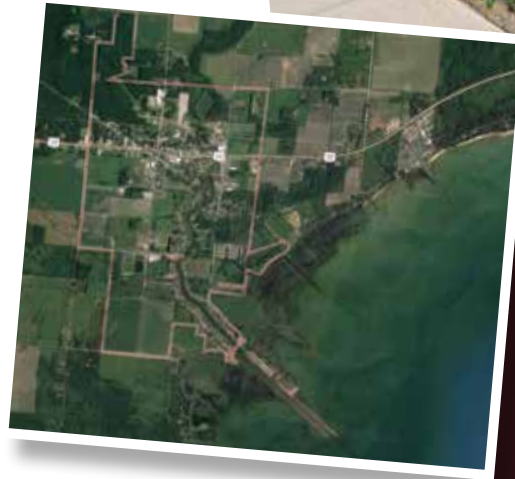
The Huron Pines Stormwater Project will go beyond pointing out problems and offering recommendations. It will also help identify potential funding sources for implementation. The Au Gres community will have a start-to-finish stormwater runoff management plan that puts it on the path to improved water quality.

### Community On Board

Huron Pines has learned from other projects that success depends largely on community engagement. Like many other WIN-funded efforts, the Au Gres Stormwater Project will involve much of the local community, from civic and government organizations to businesses to schools.

Huron Pines will target increased public awareness of stormwater runoff as a source of water pollution through an informational video, podcasts with the local high school, and meetings throughout the community.

An exciting opportunity for deeper community involvement will be place-based learning with Au Gres-Sims High School. Alongside Huron Pines, students will have an active role in analyzing stormwater data, planning recommendations, and presenting results. The project will connect young people



with the fragile natural asset in their backyard and give them a way to effect positive change.

“We have a great relationship with the Au Gres city government and the local school district. As the project continues, we look forward to building positive rapport with other members of the community,” says Jensen. “What we do today to improve and protect water quality will influence how people perceive Au Gres for years to come. Water quality affects Au Gres’ industry, business, and recreation, as well as its environment.”



*“We’ve worked with WIN on several projects, including other stormwater management efforts. In each case, our goals were more achievable because of WIN and the people we work with there. WIN is more than a source of funding. It is a great partner in building critical community support and ensuring project success.”*

— Brad Jensen,  
Huron Pines

### 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

**CLEAN WELL:**  
take cars to the car wash rather than washing on driveway

**MAINTAIN RIDES:**  
check cars for leaks and recycle motor oil

**WASTE NOT:**  
pick up after pets

**PUMP IT OUT:**  
pump septic tanks and inspect systems regularly

# Connecting the Wildlands

## *Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands Project*



Sometimes reconnecting with nature requires disconnecting from carefully cultivated surroundings. When the call for adventure requires something a little more wild, the Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands can answer. The Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy (SBLC) and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe are working together to connect several nature preserves in Bay and Arenac counties to build a distinctive Great Lakes Bay Region outdoor experience.

The WIN-supported project will create a coastal wildlife sanctuary and outdoor recreation destination surrounding the Saginaw River delta. With 700 acres of native habitat, the Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands will offer open and unplanned space where plants, animals, and people can flourish.

“Right now this area is several fragmented sites that are not visited much because of a lack of awareness. Our goal is to create a collection of nature preserves connected by rustic trails. This will give people one destination with several opportunities to thoroughly explore diverse natural habitats,” says Zachary Branigan, SBLC executive director. “With hiking boots and some water, visitors will be able to get out and get to the heart of Saginaw River delta.”

### Consolidate the Land

The different preserve properties in this coastal area are relatively close to each other, and some even share borders. Yet they are currently individual entities that create a patchwork of misleadingly separate environments. But like nature itself, they are actually highly connected by their geography, habitats, and stewards.



The new unified natural area will include the following Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy and Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe properties:

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Pinconning Nature Preserve

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Saginaw Eagles Landing Casino and Hotel and surrounding land

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Saginaw Nature Preserve

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Standish Nature Preserve

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Wah Sash Kah Moqua Nature Preserve

The new initiative, the Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands, will become the unified identity for this collection of nature preserves. Together these properties – and more in the future – will continue to serve as a sanctuary for hundreds of species of flora and fauna.

The SBLC is partnering with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe to coordinate the management, outreach, and branding of the new Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands. Collective management will strengthen both groups’ ability to develop long-range plans and mutual environmental goals, including wildlands improvements.

With its closeness to the Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron, the Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands features a diverse habitat that requires attentive stewardship. The project will enable coordinated enhancement work including invasive species control on 100 acres, native species planting on 10 acres, consideration of wildlife passages, and habitat structure placement throughout.

“Our ties to the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe are deep, making this collaboration feel like a fitting next step in our stewardship efforts,” says Branigan. “The project allows us to offer an interconnected trail system that will bring people into and through this beautiful habitat. The Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands will be a more removed experience, highlighting the importance of conserving this natural asset.”



Saginaw Project

Worth Road

Meyette Road

Bay-Arenac Line Road

Arenac State Road

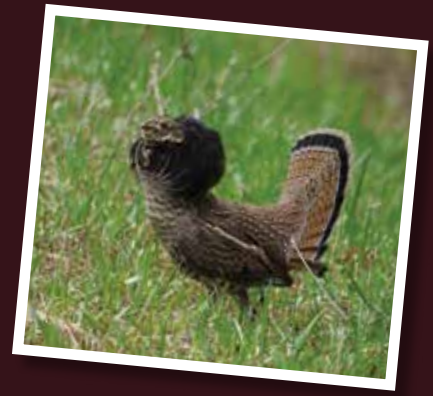
Saginaw River

Saginaw River

M13

Scale

# Saginaw Bay Coastal Wildlands Map



*“Working with WIN is always a positive experience. WIN is willing to take a chance on a variety of projects, provides introductions to larger audiences, and is a gateway for additional funding. The WIN grant process is an extremely beneficial learning experience as well as a fund-raising effort.”*

— Zachary Branigan, Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy

## 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



# Play That's Working for Future Stewardship

## *Mt. Pleasant Discovery Museum Environmental Stewardship Project*

Play is essential to healthy child development. Yet recent studies show that kids may not be getting enough of it. If kids' pretend play doesn't become adult dedication to learning and growth, our economic, environmental, and social progress can suffer. The Mt. Pleasant Discovery Museum takes play seriously as a way to inspire children's natural curiosity and creativity. With the help of a grant from WIN, the museum's newest exhibit puts child's play to work, offering a building block to lifelong environmental stewardship.

### **Welcome to PleasANT Park**

In 2017, after five years and thousands of hours of play time, the museum introduced a new exhibit that combined

macro- and micro-environments. This mixture of large movement and close examination became the perfect opportunity to engage children and adults in the value of environmental stewardship.

"Part of our goal is to make a positive impact on the community," says Liz Conway, Mt. Pleasant Discovery Museum executive director. "Along with inspiring and educating children, we want to reinforce values that are important to our community. Cooperation, communication, and caring for the environment are key values that our new PleasANT Park exhibit strengthens."

Pleasant Park invites children to an outdoor world inside the museum. A pint-sized camper with a pretend campfire welcomes imaginative play (and delicious

make-believe s'mores). The play structure lets children become kid-sized ants that crawl through and explore a forest log. And small, yet still hugely important, citizens of nature can be seen through the WIN-supported microscope table that brings a small world and its small inhabitants into focus.

"Families explore nature together in this visually gorgeous exhibit inside the museum. After experiencing our version of one of the Saginaw Bay Watershed's river settings, they will have a familiarity and interest that can continue outside of the museum," says Conway. "With WIN's help, we are introducing an awareness of the environment to our earliest learners."

The first month Pleasant Park was open for play brought a 50 percent increase





with five-year-old light fixtures beginning to need repairs and fluorescent bulbs needing replacement, the museum decided it was time to brighten up the facility in a new way.

WIN helped purchase a new LED lighting system for the museum. LED lights are much more energy efficient, which will lower utility costs. In addition, LED's bright light improves safety, lowers liability, and helps learning continue every day, even a cloudy one.

"We anticipate the LED lights will reduce our energy costs by 25 percent and will not need to be replaced for several years. We are dedicated to being good stewards of both our donors' contributions and the environment," says Conway.

The Mt. Pleasant Discovery Museum is a unique spark of creativity in the community that encourages children's intrinsic desire to learn. WIN helped bring inquiry-based play and years of vibrant environmental programming to museum visitors of all ages.

*"The STEM component of the PleasANT Park exhibit came from our discussions with WIN. Their insight and input helped us successfully transform the exhibit so that it combines play and inquiry-based learning to build future environmental stewardship."*

— Liz Conway,  
Mt. Pleasant Discovery Museum



in museum attendance. Even more important, the microscope brought a new strength to the museum: the excitement of scientific inquiry and nature study.

### Bright Lights, Learning, and Energy Efficiency

Making sure learning is well lit is also important in the museum. But lights need electricity and electricity costs money. So



### 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.



# A Natural Diamond in the Rough

## *South Riverfront Restoration Project*

As Midland strives to offer a high quality of life and meaningful experiences, part of its industrial past is blocking the way. An abandoned factory site on the river bank still connects the city to a yesterday that doesn't reflect today's reality or incorporate tomorrow's vision. So a major "makeover" – the South Riverfront Restoration Project – is in the works. A collaboration between the Michigan Baseball Foundation (MBF), The Dow Chemical Company, and the City of Midland, the project will restore this vital riverfront site and create new conservation, recreation, and economic opportunities.

The 14-acre site on the Tittabawassee River is across from Midland's downtown. More than water separates this property from the energy and excitement of Main Street's activity. The riverfront location is full of leftover rubble, debris, and old concrete blocks from its industrial heritage. The land sits idle rather than fulfilling its potential as a vital community asset.

To fuel its future usefulness, the City of Midland purchased the land in 2015 with a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Now with the help of funding from WIN and others, MBF is leading the site's restoration effort.

"We want to transform this land from an unused and unattractive concrete brick manufacturing site to a place that highlights the river's natural beauty and allure," says Paul Barbeau, MBF president. "We envision a space that invites all types of outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy the river's open landscape and wildlife. It will be part of a revitalized riverfront that is ideal for birders, walkers, kayakers, anglers, and learners of all ages."

### **From the Rubble**

The \$1 million grant from FEMA that initiated site recovery was possible because the property is in a floodplain. Attached to the grant award was a FEMA mandate

that nothing new could be built there. The grant does allow the land to be used for recreational purposes though.

Along with its neighbor, 23 acres of newly restored wetlands owned by Dow, the site presents an amazing opportunity to create an extensive riverfront landscape that benefits both nature and people. Working with the engineering and design firm AECOM, MBF is moving forward to replace rubble with renewal to transform this diamond in the rough.

"We've got the AECOM design and funding from WIN and other organizations in place and approval from the City of Midland. We're working with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to obtain authorization and permits," reports Barbeau. "We're excited that construction is slated to begin in the spring of 2018."





### Back to Nature

Excavation of the former factory site and removal or reuse of the rubble will be the first step in riverfront conservation and protection. Beyond the aesthetic benefits of removing the unsightly debris, the planned recovery will restore this long-displaced natural ecosystem.

The South Riverfront Restoration plan includes re-establishing important ecological features to support the area's biodiversity and improve water and air quality including:

**NATIVE WETLANDS** for flood management and stormwater filtration

**RIPARIAN BUFFER** to absorb nutrients and stabilize the shoreline

**NATURAL HABITAT** that will provide food and shelter for bird, amphibian, and aquatic life

"This will become a well-planned, healthy natural space that allows people to experience this habitat in a variety of ways and depths of engagement," says Barbeau. "Our hope is that it will bring people and place together in a unique and sustainable way."

### A Riverfront Experience

As the project connects more than 40 miles of trails and 80 acres of recreational lands along the river, it will also connect to Midland's downtown and nearby neighborhoods. The new nature park will become part of a larger vision for Midland's economic and environmental future.

The South Riverfront Restoration Project includes plans for a vast network of walking and biking trails, a canoe/kayak launch, fishing pier, river overlook, and boardwalk. A pedestrian footbridge over the Tittabawassee River is part of the long-term vision.

"The strong collaboration between government, business, foundations, and environmental organizations is making this restoration possible," says Barbeau. "By preserving the river and its diversity of wildlife, the park will offer a more personal and up-close nature experience for residents and visitors."

*"The alignment of our project and WIN's guiding principles was strong. With our overlapping goals and the quality of WIN leadership, we know this will be a success for the Michigan Baseball Foundation, the community, and this riverfront asset."*

— Paul Barbeau,  
Michigan Baseball Foundation

### 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.



## Contact Us

For more information about WIN,  
visit [www.saginawbaywin.org](http://www.saginawbaywin.org) or contact:

Saginaw Bay WIN

P.O. Box 734

Bay City, MI 48707

(989) 892-9171

Fax: (989) 892-9172

E-mail: [info@saginawbaywin.org](mailto:info@saginawbaywin.org)

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 Watershed.



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