



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Friends:

The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) works at the three-way intersection of our communities, the environment, and the economy. That intersection is called sustainability, and our work has never been more representative of that than it was this year.

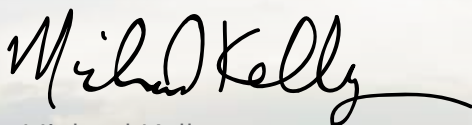
With a strong base in community, we worked closely with partners in Clare to assist them in not only developing a great recreation site, but also ensuring that the development was consistent with conservation and education. We collaborated with Monitor Township in Bay County to bring focus to a park along the Kawkawlin River. At this Saginaw Bay tributary we are developing new access and fishing opportunities, all while supporting the economy of the nearby Village of Kawkawlin. In downtown Saginaw, we are investing in something new for WIN — public art — that will tell the story of conservation and community to brand new audiences. You'll read about those projects, as well as others, including our Action Grant Program, in this report.

Additionally this year, along with a broad group of partners, we completed one of the most significant environmental restoration projects in the history of Saginaw Bay. The Coreyon Reef restoration project concluded with the placement of more than 23,000 tons of limestone in Saginaw Bay, in an effort to restore prime historical spawning habitat for fish species such as bass, walleye, and whitefish. We also completed an incredible documentary film about the project that you can view at [www.conservationfund.org/videos](http://www.conservationfund.org/videos).

But, it's a project that is just as important to the communities around the Saginaw Bay as it is to fish. Reef reconstruction further supports a theme at WIN to build resilient and healthy fish populations through habitat restoration, dam removal, and river access — so that communities all along the rivers and coastline of Saginaw Bay can prosper from one of America's greatest recreational fisheries.

WIN and our partners continue to provide funding, technical support, training, and opportunities to convene various community interests in the effort to promote sustainability across the region, with a watershed approach that is not typical.

When we have the best people on our committees, and with the generous funding support of our Funders Network, we can turn great ideas into fantastic projects. We deeply appreciate the time, talent, and treasure that is provided by our committee members, work groups, project sponsors, and all of the terrific partners that make WIN work.



Michael Kelly  
The Conservation Fund



ON THE COVER: Barges containing more than 23,000 tons of rock traveled from the Saginaw River into Saginaw Bay to complete the Coreyon Reef Restoration project in 2019. The rocks will provide a new spawning habitat for walleye, whitefish, and other species. *Photo courtesy of Chris Zuker (Big Foot Media).*

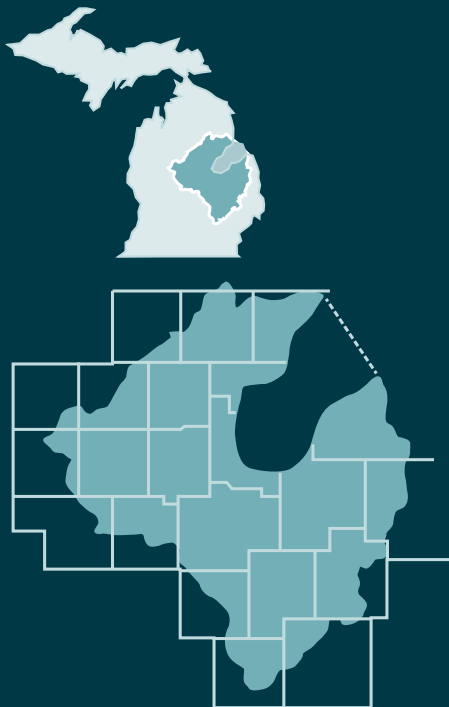
## WIN Partners

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  
Charles Stewart 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.



# Conservation with Mindful Collaboration

“Mindful collaboration” may sound like a trendy term but it’s what WIN has done for a little over two decades. This mindful approach to conservation and sustainability in the Saginaw Bay Watershed brings together dedicated people, valuable ideas, and needed support in a thoughtful way.

**People.** Mindful collaborations start with people who are enthusiastic and creative. WIN encourages and connects these individuals, experts, and private and governmental organizations through comprehensive collaborations that achieve results.

**Ideas.** WIN-funded projects are diverse, yet they share the goal of protecting and conserving the Saginaw Bay Watershed. These projects feature innovative and realistic ideas that inspire change.

**Support.** Often the first to support projects, WIN offers early funding that shows belief and trust in these endeavors. Other funders, experts, and volunteers feel confident adding their support to projects that receive WIN grants.

### Projects that Received WIN Funding in 2019:

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Beaverton Trailhead - *City of Beaverton*

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Emerald Isle Recreation Complex - *City of Clare and Clare Parks and Recreation Department*

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Flint River Ecology Study - *University of Michigan - Flint*

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Great Mural Project - *Downtown Saginaw Association*

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Linwood Scenic Access Site Improvements - *Bay County*

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Lower Cedar River Corridor Assessment and Restoration - *Gladwin Conservation District*

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Outdoor Education Partnership - *Chippewa Nature Center*

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Herbert Steih Park Renovation and Access Improvements - *Monitor Township*

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### Saginaw Bay WIN Community Action Mini-Grants:

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Educational Garden Gazebo - *Gladwin Conservation District*

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Neighborhood Gateways Gardens - *Genesee County Parks*

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North End Mobile Market - *Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village*

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Outreach and Member Development Project - *Great Lakes Bay Zero Waste Consortium*

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Refuge Kayak Loan Program - *Friends of the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge*

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Riverside Park Bioswale - *Au Gres-Sims School District*

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Victory Garden Project - *Auburn Farmers Market*

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# A Community Jewel

## Emerald Isle Recreation Complex

Sometimes it takes a jolt to rev up a community. For the City of Clare, that eye-opener came in 2019 when Clare County was ranked by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute as the 79th (out of 83 counties) for health outcomes in Michigan. Despite the recreation opportunities available to them, Clare County residents need easier access to resources that help build healthy lifestyles. So the city government and community members doubled down on their commitment to improve the county's overall health ranking. A significant part of the solution is taking shape as a new park, the Emerald Isle Recreation Complex.

The City of Clare purchased the 26-acre property in 2012 with use as a park in mind. Since then, it has been used for youth soccer programs, walking and running on the perimeter trail, and as an area for resident placemaking. The idea that the park could provide more opportunities to a greater number of people was recently ignited.

“The existing soccer fields and trail are great for the people who use them. But not everyone plays soccer or is sports oriented. We saw that the park could be much more,” said Joy Simmer, City of Clare Parks and Recreation director. “The Emerald Isle Recreation Complex will be the first of its kind in the area. It will be a gathering place that people with differing interests and abilities can use, whether for sports or to enjoy being outside in nature. It will truly be a park that the whole community can enjoy.”

WIN funding is helping the City of Clare Parks and Recreation Department advance the area from a soccer park to a recreation complex. The grant covers costs for interpretative signage, a footbridge through the butterfly garden, plantings for the area, and playground equipment.

### An Emerald Isle of Activity

With improved overall health for Clare County residents a driving force in the development of the Emerald Isle Recreation Complex, Simmer and other community members put a lot of thought into the types of activities that will appeal to a diverse group.



*"We needed funding sources for the Complex but our eligibility is very limited in the region. I reached out to WIN to see if they'd consider being part of this important community project. Not only did we receive a grant, WIN shared other resources and connections to assist us. What a great resource in the Saginaw Bay Watershed."*

— Joy Simmer, Clare Parks and Recreation Department

**LOCAL CHAMPION:**  
City of Clare and Clare  
Parks and Recreation Department

**WIN GRANT AWARD:**  
**\$20,000**



As it continues to grow in phases, the completed Emerald Isle Recreation Complex will offer visitors:

- Paved walking and exercise trails with exercise stations
- Soccer fields for youth and adult programs
- Skate and bike park
- Playground with universal design
- Butterfly and pollen garden
- Interpretative signage, picnic pavilions, bathrooms, and safety lighting

While these amenities will encourage outdoor activity, the butterfly and pollen garden will focus on conservation. The garden will host native plants chosen with guidance from local conservation districts.

The WIN grant will also be used for interpretative signage throughout the Complex. Visitors will learn about the plants and animals that live in the park and are members of the Saginaw Bay Watershed.

## Inclusive Play

WIN's support will play a part in building the new playground at the Complex as well. The playground will feature recycled and environmentally friendly materials and reflect Clare County's natural beauty with equipment that looks like trees and logs.



Not as visible but even more important, the playground's universal design will meet ADA requirements. Thanks to the use of ramps and guardrails, visitors with limited mobility can use and enjoy the equipment. In addition, free entry to the complex will remove many economic barriers, offering everyone access to the array of outdoor activities and fitness opportunities.



## Healthy Community Support

The community is providing a healthy amount of support for the Emerald Isle Recreation Complex through money and time commitments. In fact, residents clearly voiced their approval at the ballot box. A parks millage passed with 77 percent approval, which is believed to be the highest success rate in the City of Clare's history.

"We have many community members who are very driven to help the recreation complex become a reality. They are eager to support the project because they see its many health benefits through activity and a connection to nature," said Simmer.

## 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.



# Art Communicating Life

## Great Mural Project

A picture that paints a thousand words about the importance of environmental conservation in the Saginaw Bay Watershed can be an invaluable communication tool. But an eye-catching mural with that same message? Well, that practically shouts it to everyone who sees the wall of art. With WIN funding, the Great Mural Project (GMP), a Saginaw-based initiative, will visually “shout” and share a celebration of the Great Lakes Bay Region’s natural resources in its third public art installment.

The GMP is composed of a group of engaged and connected young professionals who love Saginaw and the Great Lakes Bay Region. Fueled by their belief that every great city needs art, music, and cultural events to enrich the community, they are transforming rundown and forgotten spaces in Saginaw through beautiful and fun murals.

“Public art, like murals, is accessible. Everyone is an equal consumer of public art regardless of who they are or where they come from. The stories in our

mural, like this year’s conservation focus, are able to reach people who might not get them in other forms,” said Jamie Forbes, GMP steering committee member.

Mark Piotrowski, who will be creating the WIN-funded mural this year, is both an incredibly talented artist and a dedicated educator. He will use these gifts and his enthusiasm for the subject matter to design a mural that communicates important environmental themes to the community.

### An Art-Full WIN

Art is not the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the types of projects that WIN often funds. By branching out into this new area – with the help of the GMP – WIN will reach a wide and diverse audience. From residents to visitors and tourists, the new mural will capture attention and spur curiosity about the Watershed with each and every viewing.

*“WIN is an incredible organization. The environmental conservation knowledge and expertise that they share is so important to the region. They bring a big picture point of view that welcomes a diversity of projects. I’m so glad they trusted in us and our project’s potential to reach the community through public art.”*

— **Jamie Forbes**, Great Mural Project

**LOCAL CHAMPION:**  
Downtown Saginaw Association

**WIN GRANT AWARD:**  
**\$15,000**



Photo courtesy of Hanna Ferguson



Piotrowski’s artwork will focus on sustainability and protecting the Saginaw Bay Watershed. His design may even include references to successful WIN-supported projects in the region, like non-motorized trails, river accessibility, and outdoor classrooms.

As with many other grant projects, WIN’s support will go beyond funding. Several Saginaw Bay WIN members will be part of the GMP’s advisory committee to help guide the mural’s theme and choose a suitable location. WIN’s expertise and experience will help inform ideas and concepts so that the artist has a firm foundation on which to build his unique style.

“Collaboration is a big part of GMP’s success. We’ve had support from a variety of organizations in Saginaw, such as the Saginaw Downtown Development Authority and Spence Brothers Construction. We’ve also worked hard to bring together people who understand the need for

public art and believe it makes a difference. They are excited to help bring important community themes to life as murals,” said Forbes.

## The Work of Art

WIN funding will allow GMP to purchase materials and supplies, such as paint and anti-graffiti coating; rent equipment for the mural installation; and print the Great Mural Map pamphlet that has a self-guided tour of the many murals in Saginaw.

“Art and environmental sustainability really do partner well,” said Forbes. “And investing in both helps create a community in which people want to live and care for.”



## 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



# A Lot for Learning

## Outdoor Education Partnership



No matter their age, children have a lot to learn about nature and their role as environmental stewards. From how nature works to ways people protect the environment, the choice of lessons is wide open. And the wonderful thing is that most children love to learn about nature, especially when they can get outside and experience it. To encourage that enjoyment, Chippewa Nature Center (CNC) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) have teamed up to create outdoor classrooms at several schools in the Saginaw Bay Watershed, giving students a place of their own in which to learn.

“Outdoor education is a one-of-a-kind experience for students, one that they really enjoy. Unfortunately, we’ve seen a decline in the amount of time that kids spend outside,” said Dennis Pilaske, CNC executive director. “Kids are losing out on seeing how their world changes daily, weekly, monthly with the seasons. And while they are a very connected generation in some ways, they are disconnected from the nature in their own backyards.”

Outdoor classrooms enhance students’ connections to nature. They also help build teamwork, strengthen critical thinking, provide hands-on exploration, develop a variety of academic skills, and are good for children’s mental, physical, and social health.

In 2004, WIN funded a similar project that successfully created 10 outdoor classrooms through habitat restoration at local schools and parks. Now this new program, Schoolyard Habitat Grants, continues that positive momentum of place-based learning through USFWS-directed habitat restoration and adds a new component: tailored curriculum developed by CNC’s education and environment experts.

Elementary, middle, and high schools within the 22 counties that make up the Saginaw Bay Watershed are eligible to apply for up to 10 Schoolyard Habitat Grants that support the creation of both a place to learn and customized lessons.



*“WIN’s support is a stamp of approval that shows they believe a project is valuable, well thought out, and led by knowledgeable people who are dedicated to the watershed. WIN helps organizations like CNC complete projects that will improve life for people and nature in the Saginaw Bay Watershed.”*

— Dennis Pilaske, Chippewa Nature Center

**LOCAL CHAMPION:**  
Chippewa Nature Center

**WIN GRANT AWARD:**  
**\$24,800**



## The Curriculum

A major strength of the Schoolyard Habitat Grants program is that the curriculum will be tailored to each school. CNC will collaborate with teachers to develop outdoor classrooms that supplement and enrich the existing curriculum and are age appropriate. This approach allows CNC to meet specific educational needs while connecting lessons to the restored habitat in each outdoor classroom.

In addition, CNC will provide professional development training for teachers to ensure they have the content knowledge and outdoor teaching skills necessary to make full use of their restored natural space.

“When outdoor education takes place at students’ schools, it goes from something that happens or exists ‘elsewhere’ to something that is part of their daily lives,” said Jenn Kirts, CNC director of programs. “We find that the closer nature is to the student, the closer the student is to nature.”



## Outdoor Classrooms

Like the curriculum, each Schoolyard Habitat Grant school will receive an individualized habitat restoration through USFWS’ Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program which is helping restore and enhance wildlife habitat at schoolyards in the Saginaw Bay Watershed.

Even before the habitat restoration begins, students will have opportunities to learn. The PFW involves students in the creation of their outdoor classrooms as much as possible. Students are invited to work on project design, plant selection, permit writing, planting, etc.

“Working with teachers and students is the most exciting part of this partnership. Seeing teachers’ faces go from stressed to happy when they find out everything we have to offer is amazing,” said Michelle Vander Haar, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife biologist.

Over the next two years, an estimated 6,000 students will experience nature without leaving their schoolyard. The outdoor classrooms eliminate barriers to nature, such as distance, transportation, and costs, while showing students that nature can be enjoyed and observed everywhere.

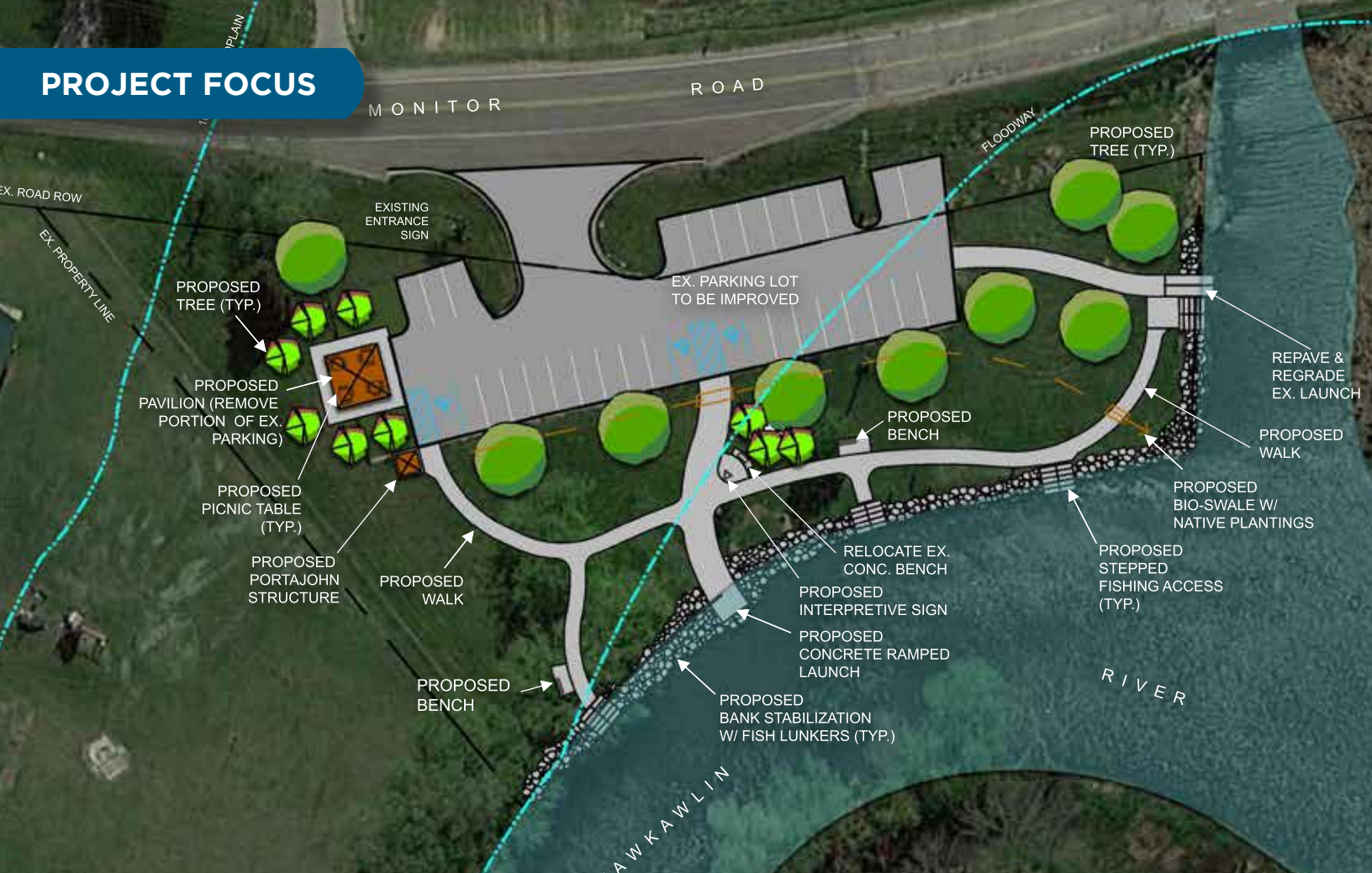


## WIN Funding Process

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.

## PROJECT FOCUS



# Launching Impact

## Steih Park Renovation and Access Improvements

The Kawkawlin River is home to many creatures that thrive in its waters. Wood ducks, great blue herons, minks, beavers, and many other water-loving animals depend on the river for habitat and food.

Yet nature-loving humans haven't had easy access to enjoy the river, until now.

The Herbert Steih Park Renovation and Access Improvements Project will open the Kawkawlin River to experiences and activities that positively connect people to nature. The park renovation plan includes installing an improved kayak and canoe launch and fishing platforms at the site's 1.24 acres of riverfront property.

"We feel this is an important quality-of-life project for people in Monitor Township, Bay County,

and beyond. The Saginaw Bay Blue Water Trail Development Plan even identified Steih Park as a favored access point in need of attention," said Ken Malkin, Monitor Township supervisor. "We would like to see more people take advantage of and appreciate this significant environmental resource unique to the area."

WIN's funding for the project is dedicated to installing a concrete kayak and canoe ramp, fishing platforms, and interpretative signage. These improvements will encourage people to enjoy nature and recreational opportunities on the beautiful Kawkawlin River, while also presenting information about the importance of the Saginaw Bay Watershed that surrounds them.



*“WIN’s people are familiar with the area, the Kawkawlin River, and the park itself. They recognized our project’s potential and the many opportunities that these needed renovations will provide. Their help with applying for a WIN grant, as well as other grants, has been a great boost for the project.”*

— Ken Malkin, Monitor Township

**LOCAL CHAMPION:**  
Monitor Township

**WIN GRANT AWARD:**  
**\$20,000**



## Rocking Riverbank Improvements

The moderate pace of the Kawkawlin River at Steih Park offers excellent paddling and fishing experiences. Unfortunately, it also leads to soil erosion. Controlling this erosion is a priority for Monitor Township and is a major part of the renovation and improvement plan.

Soil erosion causes loss of park property, makes access to the river difficult, and damages the riparian habitat. In addition, the quality and health of the Kawkawlin River is affected by soil aggradation from erosion all along its course, especially as it nears the Saginaw Bay, which is just a few miles downstream from Steih Park.

To control the erosion, rip rap will be installed against the riverbank at Steih Park. Composed of large rocks that absorb the river’s motion and energy, the rip rap will protect this natural resource for many years.

“As part of the larger Saginaw Bay Watershed, Steih Park offers opportunities for environmental conservation and improvement that will impact our habitat here and all the way to the Saginaw Bay,” said Malkin. “Investing time and money in Steih Park helps the community understand our important role as stewards of the river and watershed.”

## WIN for a Grant

Monitor Township is planning to leverage WIN’s support to apply for a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) grant. Projects funded by the MNRTF focus on natural resource protection and outdoor recreation, which makes the Steih Park renovation a great fit.

## 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





## Contact Us

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

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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 Watershed.



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CONSERVATION FUND