



Course of Action

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to share the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network's (WIN) 2016 Annual Report with you. While it's only a snapshot of our activities, you can find additional information on our website at www.saginawbaywin.org, and on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

When WIN was created nearly 20 years ago, its founders envisioned an organization that could support not only the groups that were already working in the watershed, but also inspire and incentivize people to think about "sustainability" as more than a novelty. To be effective, sustainability – that relationship between our environment, our communities, and our economy – has to become part of our language, and a part of the projects that we implement in our communities.

In 2016, WIN continued to support programs that gave thought to how their actions would make an impact through that lens of sustainability. We invested in efforts that built connections – literally and figuratively – across the region. For example, "water trails" were simply not on our regional agenda 20 years ago. But today, opportunities to connect our communities by the waterways that run between them abound. And in this report you'll read about one such project along the Shiawassee River that is even seeking a national water trail designation. We also supported "green infrastructure" in Flint as an important alternative to "gray infrastructure," and continued our focus on providing opportunities for people to have meaningful interactions with the environment at various sites across the region. Beyond that, we provided investments in wildlife habitat improvement and unique programs that focus on human habitat, especially in our urban areas like Saginaw, where we are supporting a local land conservancy. You'll read about some of these projects, and more, in this year's report.

In addition to providing a network and technical resource for projects and ideas, we were able to invest nearly \$300,000 across the watershed this year, thanks to our financial supporters. Many of these investments were the first resources dedicated to projects, resulting in the flow of many millions of dollars in additional gifts from other partners.

The Conservation Fund is thrilled to partner with these groups across the watershed that are making a meaningful difference in our communities. I want to thank all of WIN's supporters, friends, members of our committees, and partner organizations who are working to support sustainability in our region. Because of them, we can look back on another successful year for WIN, and look forward to new opportunities in the coming year.



Michael Kelly
The Conservation Fund

ON THE COVER: The Frankenmuth Fish Passage at the former site of the Frankenmuth Dam. The dam's removal reconnected 73 miles of Cass River for fish passage and recreational use. Funding provided, in part, by Saginaw Bay WIN. *Photo courtesy of the U.S Army Corps of Engineers.*

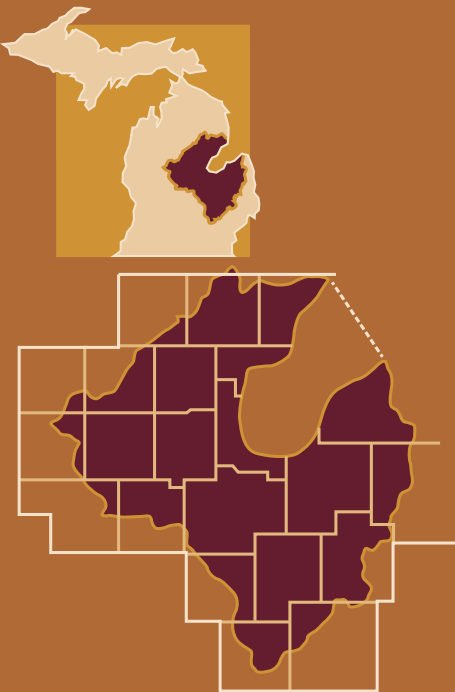
WIN Partners

A committed group of 12 foundations supports 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.



Course of Action

A plan is a great start. But it's just a start until someone – or more likely several someones – turns it into action. The projects WIN funds are ones where the course of action is clear and the benefits are many in terms of the Saginaw Bay Watershed's economic, social, and environmental strength.

The commitment and creativity of people and organizations that look to WIN for funding are both inspiring and effective. Because of their successes, WIN has established a reputation with other funding organizations and technical experts in the area: a WIN project is one to watch. We are honored that WIN is often the first organization, but not the

last, to put confidence and grant money into a diversity of worthy and workable watershed projects.

The WIN 2016 grants, like those in the past, continued to focus on projects that promote the wise use of resources and generate innovative solutions to a variety of challenges in the Saginaw Bay Watershed. WIN also greatly values building collaboration and an overall vision that can be shared throughout the larger watershed community.

We are proud to be the funding and support foundation for many projects that chart a course of action for change.

Projects that received WIN funding in 2016 are:

Access for All: Averill Universal Access Project – *Little Forks Conservancy*

Bridgeport Cass River Access and Trailhead – *Bridgeport Cass River Access & Trailhead*

Flint Southwestern: Habitat Restoration and Green Infrastructure Implementation – *University of Michigan-Flint*

Lake Station Trailhead – *Friends of Garfield Township Park*

Middle Branch Cedar River Dam Removal – *Huron Pines*

Outdoor Urban Recreation Saginaw: A Pathway to Implementation – *Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy*

Pointe Park Development, Renovation, and Water Trail Project – *City of Caseville*

Restoring Spawning Reef Habitat in Inner Saginaw Bay – *Bay County*

Shiawassee River Water Trail – *Friends of the Shiawassee River*

Taking Root in Small Towns – *Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy*

Thomas Township Canoe and Kayak Launch – *Thomas Township*

Saginaw Bay WIN Community Action Mini-Grants

The following are the Action Grants:

Blueway Trails Symposium – *Saginaw Bay Resource, Conservation, and Development (RC&D)*

Butterfly Garden and Habitat Project – *Port Austin Lions Club*

Center Garden – *Beaverton Activity Center*

Charity Islands Education Project – *Huron Pines*

Garber Greenhouse & Garden Project – *Essexville-Hampton Schools*

Outdoor Playground – *Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy*

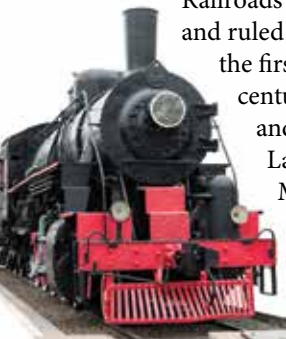
Rain Barrel Education Project – *Bay County MSU Extension*

Shiawassee River Map – *Friends of the Shiawassee River*

Watershed Model Project – *Livingston County Drain Commissioner*



Changing Tracks *Lake Station Trailhead Project*



Railroads crisscrossed the land and ruled the United States during the first part of the 20th century. Towns with depots and refueling spots, like Lake Station in mid-Michigan, were happy to go along for the ride, finding success as a part of the rail industry. Not surprisingly, the railroad quickly became

the heart of Garfield Township's economic health. But as transportation by bus and car increased, rail passenger service to the village ended in the late 1940s. The last train sped past the village in 1988 and then the tracks were removed. The village seemed adrift, even as another opportunity was about to arrive.

"The area became really quiet without the sound of trains rolling past. Many businesses closed, and it felt like our once vital role in Michigan's economy was over," notes Friends of Garfield Township Park's grant coordinator Jeanie Stewart. "The community struggled to find its footing beyond being a rail town."

However, an important advantage soon became apparent in Garfield Township. A non-motorized pathway replaced the thoroughfare created by the old rail system. Starting as the Pere Marquette Rail Trail in Midland then becoming the Pere Marquette (PM) State Trail from Coleman to Ludington, the trail opened up the village to a new vision, new opportunities, and new friends and visitors.

New to the Township

The growing popularity and increased use of the PM State Trail inspired Garfield Township leaders to look at Lake Station in a new light: as something special just

waiting to be refueled. That potential became even more obvious when ROWE Professional Services Company provided a plan and design for a Lake Station Trailhead that would offer several useful and unique amenities.

"This was the first time the township had undertaken a project of this scope. And, frankly, the idea of developing a trailhead here – and all that it would entail – was met with hesitation and concern," says Stewart. "We knew we had amazing natural assets, but we had no idea what our small rural community could actually do with such limited resources."



Approaching WIN and other funders led the township to define a new future as a trail town rather than a rail town. The bold decision to seek grant money required leaders to develop a practical five-year plan for building and maintaining the Lake Station Trailhead. The planning process challenged organizers to think differently and act decisively.

Full Speed Ahead

From uncertainty at the beginning to full speed ahead, the Lake Station Trailhead project is now generating excitement and pride throughout the community. Working to achieve the project's economic and environmental goals has had the added benefit of reviving Garfield Township's collective spirit.

"The Lake Station Trailhead will be a different experience from other places along the PM State Trail. The park will highlight what's wonderful about our rural community by emphasizing its rustic, natural beauty, wildlife viewing, and peaceful environment," says Stewart. "The idea of hospitality and opportunity is encouraging deeper engagement from our residents."

As an ideal starting, stopping, and resting point along the PM State Trail, the proposed Lake Station Trailhead will offer amenities that visitors and residents can appreciate and easily use. A pavilion, picnic tables, benches, restrooms, and paved parking lot will be fully accessible

for people of all ages, abilities, and interests.

The WIN grant will be used to purchase and install some amenities that are not available anywhere else along the PM State Trail. For example, a bike fix-it station and pedestal shower will provide conveniences for cyclists, hikers, and families, as well as help distinguish the Lake Station Trailhead.

Along with providing a setting that promotes nature appreciation and physical activity, the park will feature interpretative signage to highlight Garfield Township's lumber and rail history. In addition, the restored train depot and picturesque coal tower, one of very few left in the U.S., are landmarks that help illustrate Lake Station's past and frame its future.

"The best part of this project for me is seeing renewed community pride and sense of place from our residents. It's the realization that Garfield Township has a continuing role to play in the area's success economically, socially, and environmentally," says Stewart.

LOCAL CHAMPION:

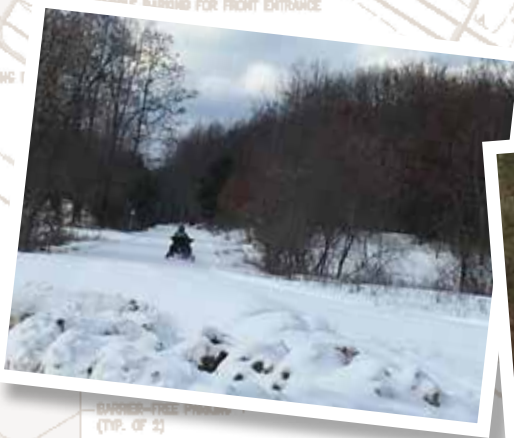
Friends of Garfield
Township Park

WIN GRANT AWARD:

\$10,000

"Lake Station is on the extreme edge of the watershed, so we weren't sure if WIN would consider funding our project. But they were open to and interested in what we planned, even giving us suggestions and much-appreciated guidance. We found their collaborative workshop approach unique in the funding arena. The sense of partnership we felt was so encouraging, and their support helped make our first-ever project a viable investment for other funders."

— Jeanie Stewart,
Friends of Garfield Township Park



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



Improving the Flow of Water and Information

Middle Branch Cedar River Dam Removal



Once upon a time, more than 70 years ago, a dam was built on Clare County's Middle Branch Cedar River. If that sounds like a familiar story, it's no wonder. Similar structures have been built all along the hundreds of miles of rivers and streams in the Saginaw Bay Watershed. Today, no one quite remembers why this particular dam was originally built. And as it ages, the dam becomes more problematic than functional for the individual who owns the property, as well as for the people and wildlife that depend on a healthy and thriving waterway.

The failure of the dam in 2016 caused landowner Robert Gingery to rethink the structure on his property. "I realized that the dam is old, serves no real purpose, and is a barrier to the flow of the river. So when it came time to decide whether to repair the dam or get rid of it, the best answer was clear. I just couldn't properly remove it on my own."

So Gingery contacted the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) for assistance and was connected to Huron Pines. Working closely with several local partners, Huron Pines is using its considerable experience with dam removal to take on the project management. But this case has been unique from the start because of one important asset: the property owner is contributing a significant amount of his own money.

"Mr. Gingery's willingness to invest his own money shows how strongly he cares about and is committed to the project," says Josh Leisen, Huron Pines watershed project manager. "That was an extremely positive factor as we looked for support and funding from WIN and other organizations."

When the Dam Goes

Given that the dam is on private property, the benefits of its removal beyond Gingery's property line may not be obvious. However, this obsolete structure has failed and now poses a liability in terms of safety, increased future expenses, and compromised water quality within the watershed.

Removing the dam will eliminate the risk of a future, more catastrophic, failure. And completing the removal at this point in time offers more options for a cost-effective and controlled restoration.

As for the ecosystem of the Middle Branch Cedar River, getting rid of the dam will immediately remove the most significant barrier on the stream. The free-flowing water will restore many healthy river functions that have been impeded for seven decades, including efficient sediment transport and natural thermal control.

The nine miles of newly connected aquatic habitat will provide increased spawning, feeding, and refuge areas for native brook trout and many other organisms. These are welcome environmental improvements that will benefit the brook trout in the watershed's "Blue Ribbon" designated trout streams.

Where the Information Flows

The grant from WIN also expands support for important outreach and community engagement efforts. Huron Pines will conduct tailored training and informational workshops for two

LOCAL CHAMPION:

Huron Pines

WIN GRANT AWARD:

\$15,000

key groups: local government road commissions and area landowners.

Frequently asked for assistance and technical advice, Huron Pines will now be able to offer training about proper road/stream crossing implementation for road commissions in Clare and Gladwin counties. The training sessions will present economical solutions that help improve safety and natural river health.

Huron Pines also will hold workshops for individual landowners, since many small dams in the watershed are on private property. Using the "Gingery Dam" as a successful case study, the organization will educate individuals about the risks of dam failure and the benefits of removal.

"Small, aging dams on private land are quite prevalent throughout the watershed. They pose significant barriers to natural riparian health and habitat," says Leisen. "We are excited that WIN's support of our outreach efforts will help educate people and promote future successful private dam restoration projects like the Middle Branch Cedar River removal."

"Working with WIN is a great experience. They listened carefully and thoughtfully as we presented our plan, and they gave helpful feedback. We share many goals with WIN. So working together benefits both of our organizations and the communities involved."

— Josh Leisen,
Huron Pines



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.

Access for All *Averill Preserve Universal Access Project*



The ideas of “accessible” and “inclusive” often go hand-in-hand. Maybe that’s because when something is made accessible to everyone, it becomes inclusive in ways that far exceed expectations. Or at least that is Little Forks Conservancy’s hope as it begins to improve and expand its Averill Preserve. For both the project and the organization, “Access for All” is an open invitation to the community – both residents and visitors – to experience the natural beauty of this part of the Tittabawassee River through a universally accessible trail.

The Averill Preserve sits on the banks of the Tittabawassee River along the Pere Marquette (PM) Rail Trail just five miles west of Midland. The 72-acre preserve offers one of the best views of the river in the county. And incredibly, the preserve’s distinctive sights and sounds are just minutes from an urban environment. In terms of time and distance, the preserve is easily accessible to thousands of people.

“The people who know about the Averill Preserve love it and use it a lot. That tells us that the beauty and serenity of the preserve is both appreciated and greatly needed,” says Greg Yankee, executive

director, Little Forks Conservancy. “And we want to extend that freedom to be in nature to people who have mobility concerns, including everything from wheelchairs to strollers, so they can get out and enjoy the area too.”

One for All

The Averill Preserve may be easy to get to by car or via the PM Rail Trail. But right now, it’s not very easy for everyone to use. Access to the trails and the river overlook is limited because of grassy terrain and rough surface conditions. In truth, these factors constrain more than movement. They also limit experiences and exploration.



“Because of the conditions, many visitors with mobility issues may not be able to fully experience the preserve’s inherent beauty and peacefulness,” says Yankee. “Universal accessibility is a real need. The improvements will ensure that more people can engage with the area’s distinctive plants, wildlife, history, and community.”

The Averill Preserve will be the first universal access trail built by the Little Forks Conservancy. With the objective of making it easier for more people to explore and experience the preserve, the organization is adhering to Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines ... and not stopping there.

To create a broader experience for everyone, Little Forks Conservancy is using funds from WIN and other organizations to pave the existing trail, add a 1,000-foot hard surface trail loop, build a universally accessible viewing deck, install low-barrier fencing, and create a natural playscape. Along with updated interpretive panels, hands-on elements, bird boxes, and native plantings, the preserve will present environmental awareness, education, and activity opportunities that include all ages and abilities.

LOCAL CHAMPION:

Little Forks Conservancy

WIN GRANT AWARD:

\$15,000

All Part of a Plan

WIN has a history with the Averill Preserve. In 2006 – 10 years ago! – WIN supported the L&B Drain Restoration, or Averill Wetland, at the site. Erosion caused by failure of a subsurface clay tile had increased the amount of sediment entering the river. The project implemented an award-winning solution for erosion repair and wetland enhancement to filter runoff and pollutants before they reached the river. The WIN funding also helped create a safe pedestrian crossing of the drain and restored native plants to the area.

“We hope our ‘All for One’ project with WIN is just as successful as the L&B Drain Restoration. This new collaboration will help increase the number and diversity of people who can enjoy the preserve’s beauty,” says Yankee. “In addition, we will continue to strengthen our partnerships with the communities we serve, expanding the support that Little Forks Conservancy offers.”



“The remarkable thing about WIN is that it’s a diverse set of professionals. Working with WIN connects us to additional perspectives – like economic development – that we don’t have in our organization but that we need for our projects.”

— Greg Yankee,
Little Forks 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

Project Focus



On the Trail of National Recognition *The Shiawassee River Water Trail*

Rivers wind romantically through American culture. There are a plethora of songs, stories, and art that capture the many seasons and moods of rivers. Even though it's usually aesthetic qualities that are extolled, the more workaday benefits that flow along with rivers to their communities are just as important. The Friends of the Shiawassee River (FOSR) is taking a lead role in elevating this community "riverside backdoor" by pursuing a National Water Trails System designation for the Shiawassee River Water Trail through the National Recreation Trails program managed by the National Park Service (NPS).

According to the National Water Trails System (NWTS), "water trails are routes that connect access sites along a river." Although unofficial, the Shiawassee River's current water trail from Holly to Chesaning offers 110 miles of activity and nature with opportunities to connect all along the way.

"The Shiawassee River is ready-made for NWTS designation. Several improvements over recent years, including MDNR-condemned dam removals and enhanced access points, have opened the river up to more recreation and ecological restoration," says Phil Hathaway, project

coordinator, FOSR. "So we are focusing on developing community collaboration, which is an essential element for a successful water trail."

Getting With the Program

A large portion of WIN's grant supports the effort to build a coalition from a variety of geographies and groups, many that WIN has worked with on past investments in public access sites, habitat restoration, and dam removals along the Shiawassee. Fortunately, the process of applying for NWTS designation is an incredible motivation. Community leaders from area nonprofits, businesses, and municipalities

A Strong Start

Many Shiawassee River communities and organizations have independently completed significant river restoration projects in the past. These efforts – quite a few funded by WIN – are making it possible to meet NWTS requirements.

DAM REMOVALS – replaced obsolete and dangerous dams with naturalized rock ramps

RIVER LAUNCHES/RAMPS – installed and repaired launches to add access points for paddlers and fishers, increasing economic and recreational activity

RIVER TRAIL AND RIVER QUALITY MAINTENANCE – devoted funds, time, and volunteers to manage silt, woody debris, and other water quality issues



recognize the mutual benefits of working together to promote and protect the Shiawassee River.

“The NWTS designation recognizes excellent water trails that are managed by a partnership of local organizations. Typically, the water trail partners work together to improve public access, provide signage and paddling information, and promote conservation practices, even though they are from different communities and may be miles apart,” says Barbara Nelson-Jameson, NPS - River, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. “The Shiawassee River Water Trail has a big advantage because several groups are already on board, developing a common vision and management plan.”

A common outlook is necessary for NWTS designation and for the effective, long-term management of the Shiawassee River Water Trail (SRWT). Yet this collective attitude will also celebrate each community’s distinct character, assets, values, and interests.

Designation Creates Growth

To become a designated NWTS, the SRWT Coalition must incorporate Best Management Practices (BMP) defined by the NPS. Integrating these practices has encouraged the Coalition to set high goals as it strives to meet new expectations for excellence that come with being a nationally recognized water trail.

LOCAL CHAMPION:
Friends of the Shiawassee River

WIN GRANT AWARD:
\$21,400

“We’ve conducted an inventory of the river’s assets against the BMP. We are easily meeting elements of all seven categories,” says Hathaway. “And many communities are amending their civic master plans to include the Shiawassee River Water Trail as a vital component in their strategic thinking. The collaboration to achieve NWTS designation is inspiring.”

The NWTS designation will be a prestigious and strategic advantage to Shiawassee River communities as it helps:

- **Champion economic goals** by drawing more tourists who desire premier outdoor recreation in an ever-changing river setting
- **Build community goals** as efforts to protect and promote a shared natural resource enhance quality of life for everyone
- **Strengthen environmental goals** through increased awareness of river stewardship and sustainability

“WIN’s generous support of the coalition-building effort is helping bring together organizations and municipalities along the river. This confidence in the project will ultimately create an amazing trail-wide experience for residents and tourists,” says Nelson-Jameson. “I’m excited that the new Shiawassee River Water Trail will offer a unique pathway to nature, history, and heritage in the Saginaw Bay Watershed.”

“I think WIN’s interest in supporting a diversity of projects, from small to large, shows just how multifaceted their approach to watershed preservation is. They have a great reputation in the area for bringing insight and understanding to a project.”

— Phil Hathaway,
Friends of the Shiawassee River



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.

SIGNAGE AND MAPPING – developed a consensus plan with the leadership of a SRWT Coalition partner, Headwaters Trails, including adoption of a trail logo and on-site information. Many sign components – such as mileage, safety, interpretive, and maps – are already in place between Holly and Fenton

PUBLIC INFORMATION – dedicated a trail website and Facebook page that assist users, and an existing smartphone app will be updated to include the entire SRWT



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 Watershed.



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THE
CONSERVATION FUND