

"The mission of The Highland Conservancy is to encourage and facilitate the conservation of land and natural resources to preserve the rural character of Highland Township."

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Have you noticed that more and more open space is being gobbled up by development?

Are you sad to see more and more lights blotting out the beauty of the nighttime sky full of stars?

Would you rather see newborn foals cavorting around a pasture or acres of pavement and a Home Depot ?

WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

These issues and much more will be discussed at our next meeting. Drop in and join us! The Highland Conservancy meets from 7pm until 8pm on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of every month at the Old Highland Library, 205 W. Livingston Rd. - across from the fire station.

Email us at: info@highlandconservancy.org

Visit our website: www.highlandconservancy.org.

Katheryn Krupa, Editor
Highland Conservancy

Detailed Need Summary

Our most urgent needs are listed below:

News Media Contact (1) * Give interviews * Asked for coverage in local papers * Write letters-to-the-editor

Qualifications:

* Interested in land preservation and stewardship issues. * Good writing skills * Adequate computer and internet skills * Good communications skills

Speakers for local meetings (2)

* Churches * Service groups (must be free to attend occasional luncheons) * Conservancy events * Field questions from these audiences

Qualifications:

* Interested in land preservation and stewardship issues. * Excellent public speaking skills * Adequate computer and internet skills * Good communications skills

Issues Monitors for Conservancy (3)

* Coordinate with the Oakland Conservancy and Nature Conservancy * Maintain contacts with Oakland County * Develop a basic information for speakers

Qualifications:

* Interested in land preservation and stewardship issues. * Well organized * Be able to take good notes * Adequate computer and internet skills * Good communications skills * Well organized * Able to stay current through discussions and reading about these issues

Writer for Newsletter

* Report news and events of the conservancy. * Report on an item of general interest

Qualifications:

* Good writing skills. * Love to write * Interested in land preservation and stewardship issues.

Grant Writer

Grant Writer

* Apply for grants from private foundations, and government * Work with other Conservancies and Oakland County

Qualifications:

* Grant writing experience or the desire to learn

Strategic Planning

* Work in our strategic planning group * Help plan our greenway model * Help with developing easements and acquisitions

Qualifications:

* An interest in biology, engineering, or nature. * Enjoy doing detailed planning * Willing to attend seminars and symposiums * Working outside

Event Planning and hosting

* Help plan community events sponsored by the Conservancy * Help plan Conservancy participation in events sponsored by others * Events include hikes, town-hall meetings and lectures, swap meets, photo contest, picnics, nature trips, etc.

Qualifications:

* Enjoy working on conservancy events described above

Marketing and Internet Technology

* Develop and manage BLOGs for Website and HC membership * Website: ongoing updates, change of graphics, additional material *

Links to/from other websites including other conservancies, Highland Township, other interested organizations (mostly done) *

Conservancy news posted regularly to site including updates on group actions, applicable news, etc. * Email list / E-newsletter for

supporters * Introductory brochures (tri-fold?) * New logo for website and all materials * Enable other groups for their marketing campaigns * Find other places to post flier, including Library and Township bulletin boards

Qualifications (any one of the following):

* Website or blogging setup experience * Computer applications such as MS Office or Adobe * Familiarity with the printing/publishing business * Marketing skills * Artistic skills

Vital Connections for Wildlife

Reprinted with permission from the *Eccentric* Newspaper

When we think about the protection of high-quality natural areas and the wildlife they support, we usually think of large parcels of land. This is good, because the wildlife we love needs plenty of elbow-room to thrive. But there is another way wildlife can be encouraged to stick around. It is the concept of corridors.

As the fragmentation of open land continues apace, wildlife, whose ranges often exceed the boundaries of protected open space, need ways of getting from one protected area to another. Big picture planners look at riparian corridors, pipeline and electrical easements, trailways, greenbelts, and greenways, to find ways of linking up large protected parcels. One of the most touching examples of this large-scale linking up is in New Jersey, where the Interstate highway is occasionally spanned with wide, well-vegetated overpasses, designed specifically for wildlife, to protect them from becoming road kill while they move from one protected area to another.

River corridors, where well-vegetated buffers line the riverbanks, offer corridors for a wide variety of wildlife, including the fish in the river itself. These vegetated buffers filter the water and take up pollutants that might otherwise harm the fish. Ideally, these buffers are vegetated with native plants, which prevent erosion and offer a diverse menu to the wildlife residing there or passing through.

Abandoned railroad beds typically harbor native plant species that haven't been seen for years in other places. They offer already cleared corridors where walking trails for humans can be developed. If they are well planned to preserve and enhance the vegetation needed by wildlife, these, too, can provide safe passage for wildlife, allowing them to browse as they travel from one protected area to another. Efforts are underway in every state to link up such trails into a nationwide trail network. Many townships and municipalities in Oakland County have already been linked in this way, and plans in other communities are on the drawing board.

There are other corridors as well. These, though often overlooked, play a vital role in maintaining valuable wildlife habitat. Often, seemingly insignificant hedgerows or tree lines are rich treasure troves of native plant genotypes, and provide food and cover for wildlife. Enlightened planners are educating homeowners to maintain the tree lines and hedgerows between their properties, an idea that author, Sara Stein, promoted passionately in her ground-healing book, *Noah's Garden*.

Even those who live on small parcels and have many neighbors, can be involved in preserving wildlife habitat, simply by not cutting down the trees and shrubbery between their property and that of their neighbor. Some neighbors are even collaborating to create native gardens between their homes, - intentional corridors, where wildlife can move through the neighborhood safe from harm's way.

This linking up aspect of wildlife protection is a good metaphor for another kind of linking up that is taking place, with amazing partnerships being formed spontaneously between businesses, governments, environmental groups and individual volunteers at all levels. A tremendous amount of creative energy is being released in these synergistic relationships. A reverse NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) is developing, as people who formerly felt isolated in their environmental work are coming together and are starting to say, "I *want* this in my back yard, my township, my county, my state."

Everyone has a role to play in protecting wildlife habitat. Whether a person owns 200 acres, or only a small half-acre lot, there are many ways wildlife can be helped to thrive.

The Economics of Open Space

Reprinted with permission from the *Eccentric Newspaper*

Including protected open space in our plans for residential and commercial development is a trend that is catching on among more and more Michigan township planners and developers. Unfortunately, too often citizens and some government officials may worry that they will lose money from their tax base if open space is left in its natural state. Since the assessed value of a piece of property is higher if it is developed than if it is preserved as open space, the property is assumed to be more *valuable* to the community if developed rather than left in its natural state. Recent studies are beginning to provide us with proof that this may not be true and that including open space preservation in our development plans makes good economic sense.

A study conducted in Michigan's Scio Township concluded that for every dollar raised in property taxes, residential areas demand \$1.17 in services. Other national studies have placed the cost of services at \$1.20 or higher for every dollar that the new taxes bring in. The additional fire, police, schools, road maintenance, and in some cases, sewer costs, end up costing more than the additional taxes that are raised from the new property owners. Because of the time that goes by between when a development is proposed and when its actual infrastructure costs are tallied and new taxes are raised, a thorough "balance sheet" comparison of total project costs and benefits is often not conducted.

When the additional taxes collected from developed properties do not fully cover the additional costs of the services that are required, the additional costs must be passed on to everyone through higher taxes. Land that is *not* developed, such as land subject to a conservation easement, or donated outright to a land trust or local government, will *not* require those additional infrastructure service costs. In fact, since there are minimal costs needed for undeveloped land, those taxes which *are* collected represent additional funds available to help pay for the additional infrastructure services of developed land.

In addition, local governments often find that where open space is protected, property values in the surrounding community rise, and property taxes in aggregate rise accordingly. People who purchase property adjacent to protected open space expect to and do pay more for the amenity of a natural or rural setting. Many developers who have discovered this are utilizing a cluster option, where houses are placed more closely together in order to preserve part of the development as open space. Some townships actively encourage such land use techniques through their ordinances and Master Plans. By finding ways to protect open space, governments are not only

fulfilling their responsibility to preserve the quality of life in their communities, they're actually improving the local economy at the same time.

There are other economic benefits associated with open space that often go unmeasured. These are the benefits of the unseen services provided by many wild open space ecosystems. The services these ecosystems provide include climate regulation, storm and flood protection, water filtration and purification, soil formulation and crop pollination, to name a few. While these are not normally measured in terms of "goods and services," the cost of replacing these natural services can be considerable. A recent study cited in the peer-reviewed *Science* journal compared, among other things, the economic value of the "ecological" contributions made by land kept natural versus being converted to residential or commercial use. In all 300 cases studied, the total economic value of the intact ecosystems ranged from 14 percent to almost 75 percent *higher* than the market benefits that came with land conversion.

No one is suggesting land development be stopped in favor of total land protection. The strength of our economy and the quality of all of our lives is too closely connected to sustainable development. But what these studies suggest is that we take a harder look at the *full costs and benefits* associated with the conversion and use of the remaining open space we have, and use all of the relevant data available as we make our development plans and decisions.

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Sustaining Open Spaces

By Mick Bell,^{itt}
Highland Conservancy

Here in Highland, we the people, through the authority of our Planning Commission, are requesting that all residential development plans include commonly owned open land. I believe this is an enlightened philosophy.

How long can it last? In many parts of the world there are open spaces that have been sustained for over a millennium. Think about it: 40 generations or 1000 years. That's sustainability! Can we expect our open space to be preserved for such a long time? We must. We must preserve our open space not only for our great grandchildren, but also for many generations after them.

Is this possible? Why not? Why not lay out a plan that can be passed to each generation?

Preservation is the result of people's caring. Only if somebody cares, can this open space be maintained. How do we make people care that much? How do we pass that concern to our children's children?

Unfortunately, really long-term plans won't happen simply because we wish them. We have to provide a sustainable management plan. The following essential issues must address in the planning of open-space developments.

Ownership: Who owns the open space? Should it belong to a conservancy, residents, or a township? Who takes over if the stewardship fails?

Governance: Who is responsible? Who is in charge? How are they selected? What is the limit of their power?

Financial support: Who pays for the stewardship activities? Are the owners obligated by their deed restrictions to pay dues?

Stewardship: Is it going to be maintained by the lot owners or by professionals (like it is at many golf course communities)? In either case, what will it cost per lot? What is the ratio of the required dues to the value of each residence? High dues on low-income housing won't work.

Workload: If the work will be done by volunteers, what is the size of the volunteer pool? There is surely a critical mass in play here. What if the sub is below the critical mass? How will be stewardship be maintained?

Security: Dunham Lake has a security committee and is still forced to pay for added police protection for the greenbelt. The security is expensive and somewhat inadequate. How will be security be maintained? Dumping, abandoned vehicles, unsupervised "parties", and other unwanted activities could ruin any natural open space.

Legal matters: Encroachers and vandals must be sued. Insurance might be required. Legal advice is quite often required. Many legal problems can be avoided by the initial covenants.

Property delineation: Open can best be preserved if their boundaries are clearly marked. The best markers appear to be 4x4 posts with metal ID tags.

This overview surely does not include a complete list of issues. There don't seem to be many "handbooks" on sustaining open-spaced development. An obvious conclusion is community planners must develop a set guidelines and checklists to help sustain our green spaces.

YOU ARE WELCOME TO DROP IN!

The Highland Conservancy meets the second and fourth Thursday of every month from 7pm till 8pm at the old Highland Township Library located at 205 W. Livingston Road in Highland, across from the Highland Township Fire Station. You are welcome to just drop in or come with issues or concerns you want addressed. Together we can make a difference!

JOIN THE HIGHLAND CONSERVANCY:

If you want to be kept informed of conservancy news, upcoming events and concerns, email us with your name, address and email address at info@highlandconservancy.org or mail the form below to: Highland Conservancy, 205 W. Livingston Road, Highland, MI 48357.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

NATURE GIVES US SO MUCH. YOUR GIFT WILL HELP PRESERVE OUR LOCAL OPEN SPACES!

Contributions of any amount are welcome! Just send a check or money order made payable to:

Highland Conservancy
205 W. Livingston Road
Highland, MI 48357

Donations are tax deductible.

^[i] Mick Bell, aka Myron Bell is a resident of Highland Township Michigan. He has spent 17 years working on the DLPOA Board and Civic Committee holding positions of management for park maintenance, greenbelt chairman, president of the DLPOA, chairman of the Civic Committee. He is also a founding member of the Highland Conservancy.

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