

January 2007 Highland Conservancy E-Newsletter:

Greetings! In this newsletter you will find a synopsis of key accomplishments for 2006, an invitation to the Conservation Stewards Program, and important information about NEW TAX BENEFITS available this year for making a land donation or conservation easement on your land.

**Renew your Membership:**

We invite you to renew your support of the Highland Conservancy again this year. Your past generosity has helped the Conservancy in our mission to facilitate the conservation of land and natural resources to preserve the rural character of Highland Township. We value your generous support! To continue your membership, mail your check for \$25.00 made payable to: Highland Conservancy, 205 W. Livingston Road, Highland, MI 48357 or visit our website at [www.HighlandConservancy.org](http://www.HighlandConservancy.org).

**Accomplishments for 2006:**

Highland Conservancy continues to work hard to protect the incredibly rich and diverse land, water and natural beauty that attracted each of us to live here. With a small but dedicated group of volunteers we have accomplished a great deal this past year. Some highlights for 2006:

- Highland Oaks Park is much closer to completion and will be a beautiful park once finalized. It has been a slow process but it will be well worth the wait.
- We led a major stewardship effort in the township park north of the library when the Highland Conservancy teamed with local cub scouts to clean up trash and other debris dumped in this sensitive nature area.
- At the annual Hi-White Parade we gave away 300 tree seedlings and brochures with information about our efforts and goals such as protecting natural beauty areas, establishing parks, trails, greenways and preserving open space in Highland.
- The Highland Conservancy is working closely with the Oakland Land Conservancy to protect an important fen area at the headwaters of the Shiawassee watershed and is currently reviewing other key parcels in Highland for various levels of protection.
- Our current president continues to attend Planning Commission meetings to provide input and feedback with regard to conservation issues and future development.
- We finalized a Tree Preservation Ordinance currently under review by the township. Our efforts helped initiate new strategies for a “greener” site plan review process.

- Working with the Oakland County Environmental Planning Department we created a Green Infrastructure Plan to use as an ecologically friendly blueprint for Highland. This greenway plan is a model for a broader effort to protect land throughout Oakland County.
- We obtained extensive training and completed 300 hours of voluntary service through the Michigan Conservation Stewards Program, a pilot program developed as a cooperative effort of the Michigan DNR Wildlife Division, Michigan State University Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Michigan Nature Features Inventory. **THIS PROGRAM IS BEING OFFERED AGAIN:**

### **Conservation Stewardship Program:**

Michigan State University is again offering this awesome program which will run February 3 through March 26, 2007! However, the deadline to register is JANUARY 17<sup>th</sup> so don't delay! Three of us attending last year and we loved it so much we recommend it to everyone. "The best people in their fields are teaching this. Where do you get an opportunity to learn from people like that? How else will you get the information to the average citizen?" urges a former 2006 participant. You will learn how to identify trees and plants, look at aquatic creatures under microscopes, explore rare short and long grass prairies and habitats, and learn about conservation from the experts. To enroll contact: [msue.Oakland@county.msu.edu](mailto:msue.Oakland@county.msu.edu) or call Carol Lenchek 248-858-0887.

### **New Tax Information for 2007:**

Please consider donating a conservation easement on your land in 2007!

Family farmers, ranchers, and other moderate-income landowners can now obtain a significant tax benefit for making the charitable donation of a conservation easement.

On August 3, 2006 the Congress approved a tremendous expansion of the federal conservation tax incentive for conservation easement donations. On August 17, the President signed it into law. **This is a great victory for conservation!**

The victory is due in large part to the work of individuals from hundreds of land trusts across the country, who made this a local issue for their Senators and Representatives. Thank you! The new law:

- Raises the deduction a landowner can take for donating a conservation easement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Extends the carry-forward period for a donor to take tax deductions for a voluntary conservation agreement from 5 to 15 years.

It is also important to note that this only applies to easements **donated in 2006 and 2007**. The bill also includes sensible reforms that affect the appraisal process for all donated

property and tighten the rules for easements on historic buildings. The bill language is slightly different than what was passed last fall by the Senate.

Katheryn Krupa, Editor [HighlandConservancy.org](http://HighlandConservancy.org)