

Riffles & Runs

Rogue River Watershed Project Newsletter

Grand Valley State University Annis Water Resources Institute

Vol. 4 No. 4 Oct.- Dec. 2002

Making a Personal Commitment to Conservation

April Scholtz - Land Conservancy of West Michigan

Walking along the creek that winds through the woods behind the house it's easy to see why the landowner loves this property – the spring wildflowers, the cool and quiet of the creek in summer, and the “gang” of chickadees and nuthatches that forage in the winter. This property, with a house and yard closer to the road, will never be open to the public as a park, but it is an important part of the effort to preserve the beauty and diversity of the Rogue River.

The landowner is one of a growing number of residents in the Rogue River Watershed working with the Land Conservancy of West Michigan to create a conservation easement for their property. A conservation easement will allow them to continue using the property as a residence (or to sell it to another family), but it will forever limit the full development of the property.

There will never be “McMansions” lining this stretch of creek, and lawns won't replace the wildflowers and wetlands. Even though this property doesn't have public access, the conservation easement will preserve natural habitat that contributes clean and cold water to the Rogue River, a benefit for all river users.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified organization, usually a non-profit land conservancy, that permanently restricts the development of a property. When the Land Conservancy of West Michigan works with a family to



Rogue River near Childsdales.

create a conservation easement it is crafted to reflect the family's interests and the unique nature of their land. Limiting the division of the property and the number of buildings are usually the most important restrictions placed on the property.

The family that owns this property is forgoing considerable development value for their land, but they consider the advantages of a conservation easement to be even greater. Their financial benefits may include:

- An income tax deduction from the IRS for their charitable donation of an easement.
- The possibility of a reduction in property taxes. Please note: at this time there is no guaranteed property tax reduction or credit for a conservation easement donation in Michigan. Local assessors may or may not support a property tax reduction.

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Come Visit the Howard Christensen Nature Center

Nichol Stout

The Howard Christensen Nature Center (HCNC) is nestled in the Rogue River State Game Area northeast of Kent City on Red Pine Drive. The nature center spans across 135 acres and has seven miles of nature trails that intertwine through several different habitats. The "Spring Creek" trail follows the bank along Spring Creek, a tributary of the Rogue River, where beaver activity has resulted in a series of dams. You can also tromp through a bog that leads to Chrishaven Lake on the "Chrishaven Lake Boardwalk" trail. These trails are explored not only by public visitors but are used to educate school children within the Kent Intermediate School District (ISD).

The Kent ISD uses HCNC for environmental education programs. The nature center weaves science, social studies, math, language arts, and fine arts together to create a meaningful fabric of environmental education. This education encourages students, classroom teachers, parents, and community members to develop as environmentally responsible citizens who work to preserve the integrity of the natural world.

This type of education was made possible because of Frank Christensen's dream. Frank and Rita Christensen moved to this area in 1958 with their son Howard. Frank and Howard developed trails, planted trees, and fed wildlife. Howard enjoyed the outdoors until his untimely death

Chrishaven Lake at the Howard Christensen Nature Center

of a brain tumor at age 17 in 1961. Soon after Howard's death, Frank had a dream that the land should be preserved as a nature center in memory of his son. The Kent ISD was selected as the recipient.

A family's love of nature has enabled many individuals an opportunity to experience the wonderful outdoors. The HCNC offers many programs that will enable children to gain a respect and devotedness for the environment, and honor the memory of Howard Christensen in the process.



Information from Steve Mueller, Director of HCNC

If you would like more information on the HCNC visit the web site at www.kentisd.k12.mi.us/hcnc. The HCNC trails are open dawn till dusk seven days a week.

Making a Personal Commitment to Conservation

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- Potentially significant estate tax deductions.

For some families the greatest benefit from a conservation easement is the knowledge that their interest in conservation will be carried out into the future and that their children and heirs will not be fighting over what to do with the property.

The Land Conservancy of West Michigan has helped landowners in the Rogue River Watershed achieve their conservation goals for almost a decade. Now, efforts to preserve the Rogue River have expanded since we became partners with The Nature Conservancy's West Michigan program office, thanks to generous support from the Frey Foundation, the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, the

Steelcase Foundation, the Wege Foundation, and Consumers Energy. Together, the two conservancies are identifying undeveloped lands that help maintain the cold water ecosystem of the Rogue River and are talking with landowners who want to conserve their property through conservation easements, cost-share management programs, or the creation of parks or nature preserves.



To learn more about this program and to receive a brochure that explains how conservation easements work, please contact April Scholtz at the Grand Rapids office of the Land Conservancy of West Michigan: (616) 451-9476 or lcwm@naturenearby.org.

This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under the assistance agreement to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

What is in Your Rogue River Watershed ?

Nichol Stout

As we all know, the Rogue River Watershed is a region of natural beauty. The watershed supports a very diverse environment, and sometimes it is hard to notice the little things. As this watershed is studied and explored, any neat little things we stumble across we will take note of, conduct research on, and let you know about it through this newsletter.

Would you like to see the sun glistening off of the snow on the ground? Enjoy the earthy smell of damp soil? Be calmed by the gurgling sound of water running over cobbles in a creek? I have the place for you, and no cost is involved!

In September 2002, the City of Rockford officially opened the Rum Creek Nature and Fitness Trail. The Trail was part of the City's five-year Parks and Recreation master plan. The State of Michigan awarded the City of Rockford \$95,200 toward the trail's construction.

The Trail begins behind the Rockford Community Cabin on Monroe Street and continues to Northland Drive. I vis-

Rum Creek Nature Trail

ited the trail on the first big snowfall. The trail was sheltered by large pines and maple trees and wound its way along Rum Creek. I saw many interesting sites on my walk. Visit the trail for yourself and see what you can find!



Rockford Squire - September 2002

"Rum Creek Officially Opens With Ribbon Cutting Ceremony"



ing Through Your Watershed



Come back to another exciting adventure! In the last newsletter the mystery location was the Stegman Creek Trestle. The trestle is three miles north of Rockford in Porter Hollow. The Stegman Rapids and Indiana Railroad was constructed through Porter Hollow and Edergton from 1866 to 1872 to supply towns and lumbering camps. A wooden trestle was built over Stegman Creek for the railroad. In 1883, a flood washed out the railroad and the trestle. James House, a local farmer, collected the stones and hauled them to the creek. The railroad used these stones to build the current trestle. The State of Michigan has designated the area a historical site. Can you guess where this new location is?



Tressel Park

Source: Friends of the White Pine Trail www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Trails/9394/

If you have questions about this newsletter or the Rogue River Watershed program, please call Nichol Stout at (616) 331-3092 or e-mail her at stoutn@gvsu.edu.

Farming for the Future



We all want the land that we have today to be passed on in the best condition to our children. This is especially true for farmers and ranchers that depend on the land for their livelihood. The Annis Water Resources Institute at Grand Valley State University will be holding a free workshop geared toward farmers and ranchers in the Rogue River Watershed. At this workshop we will discuss incentive programs that the government is offering to farmers and ranchers in the State of Michigan. These programs include:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

Tuesday

January 28, 2003

Sparta Township Hall

6:30pm - 8:00pm

156 E. Division St., Sparta

RSVP to Nichol Stout at 616-331-3092 or stoutn@gvsu.edu by January 14, 2003.

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