



Chippewa Watershed Conservancy Strategic Plan 2016 - 2018

Adopted December 10, 2015

Mission Statement:

The Chippewa Watershed Conservancy (CWC) protects natural habitat and open space in the counties of the Chippewa River Watershed

Vision:

We seek to be a highly-visible, broadly-supported, sustainable, and professionally managed organization capable of meeting the demand for land protection within the Chippewa River Watershed.

Highly-visible: The CWC desires the majority of people in the counties of the Chippewa River Watershed to recognize our name and positively associate us with land and habitat protection.

Broadly-supported: The CWC will continually develop support from our membership and other organizations across the counties of the Chippewa River Watershed.

Sustainable: The CWC will build financial and human resources capable of continuing the work of the CWC into future. This includes an endowment capable of supporting adequate staff time, legal defense and a continuous renewal of the volunteer base.

Professionally Managed: The CWC employ professionally trained staff as a means to leverage our volunteer efforts and maximize our conservation impact.

Balanced Approach: The CWC will pursue a balanced approach in protecting natural habitat by employing Land Acquisitions, Land Conservation Easements and Education. While Acquisition allows complete protection of the conservation resource, it is capital intensive. Conservation Easements protect only those conservation values specifically listed in the agreement, but allow protection of greater acreage at lower cost. While both approaches are needed, each conservation project should involve consideration of the trade-off between the degree of protection and cost. We will pursue a balance between fiscal responsibility and significance of conservation values in determining the appropriate protection methodology. As a small conservancy, the CWC must emphasize low-cost approaches to land protection while working to secure resources for priority acquisition projects. Public education about the need to protect land for future generations and the tools available to accomplish that end is an important aspect of our activities.

Our Service Area:

The CWC will serve the land area that is primarily within the counties of the Chippewa River Watershed.

This includes the counties of: Clare, Isabella, Gratiot, Mecosta and Montcalm. We also are willing to serve Osceola County. The downstream portion of the watershed in Midland County is served by Little Forks Conservancy.

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The CWC will develop effective programs in each of six key functions.

1) Land Protection:

- A) Identify priority parcels and establish contacts for future land protection opportunities
 - i) **Priority Lands:** (2017)

A priority assessment of habitats will be established based on the below criteria. From this assessment a list will be developed to establish regions that the CWC will focus on to protect. The CWC will follow this Priority Land list when making decisions on land acquisition and easements.

 - i) Riparian lands especially along the Chippewa, Coldwater and Pine rivers
 - ii) Parcels adjacent to already protected lands
 - ii) Lands in environmentally sensitive categories; e.g. riparian lands
 - iii) Lands which protect wildlife habitat while providing for public recreation
 - iii) Protection of farmland for future farming
 - iv) Representative samples of other habitats; e.g. hardwood forests, bogs and marshes
- B) Land Acquisition: Develop a *CWC Land Acquisition Funding plan* based on the Priority Land List. Acquire new parcels as additional funds are identified. Preference will be given to parcels that have accompanying donations for stewardship. (2018)
- C) Land Easement Acceptance: Accept easements based on Priority Land List and as funds are available. Preference will be given to parcels that have accompanying donations for stewardship.

2) Stewardship:

- A) Follow the CWC Stewardship Policy for all land parcels.
- B) Monitor each conservation easement and preserve according to its stewardship plan
- C) Train volunteer preserve stewards, easement monitors (2016)
- D) Update GIS parcel maps for all easements and preserves. (2018)
- E) Develop *Forest Management Plans* on all preserves for health of the forest and habitat protection. (2018)
- F) Place standard signage on additional properties where advertisement is warranted.
 - Neyer Preserve (2016)
 - Hiawatha Hills Preserve (2016)
 - Kjohlhede's Kove Preserve (2016)
 - Lake Steven (replace sign) (2017)
 - Peterson Natural Area (replace sign) (2018)
- G) Recognition event to acknowledge all stewards (2016)

3) Membership:

- A) Expand membership (2016:480, 2017:520, 2018:570)
- B) Have at least 10% of dues paying membership from each county of the CWC
- C) Manage mailing lists so that they are current.
- D) Increase membership participation (outings, stewardship)
- E) Have membership activities, events in each county of the CWC

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4) Organizational:

- A) Hire a new Executive Director of the CWC (2016)
- B) Develop additional staff capacity (2017: .5 FTE regular employee)
- C) Develop an internship program. (2016: 2.5 interns)
- D) Develop a 5 year *CWC Technology Plan* (2016)
- E) Upgrade infrastructure (furniture, equipment) based on the CWC Technology Plan (2016: new computer)
- F) Ensure continued compliance with Land Trust Alliance (LTA) Standards & Practices
- G) Review committee structure and combine or eliminate if appropriate (2016)
- H) Define the Board of Advisors roll and expectations (2016)
- I) Continuously review/revise policies as necessary (All policies reviewed every five years.)
- J) Continue and expand staff professional development
- K) Continue and expand Board of Directors training (2016 and each after: 1 BOD member at LTA Rally or LTA Midwest conference)
- L) Engage board of advisors via at least one meeting/training opportunity annually
- M) Incorporate succession planning into annual organizational reviews to consider staff retirements, board and officer replacement/rotations and potential for collaboration or merge with other area conservancies
- N) Apply for Accreditation renewal (2017)

5) Financial Resources:

- A) Follow the *CWC Fundraising Plan* (update the Plan every 5 years)
- B) Expand funding thru grant-writing
- C) Membership donations increase by 10% per year.
- D) Expand endowment, conservation defense and other designated funds
 - i) Increase endowment by 10% annually
 - ii) CWC Acquisition Fund. Based on need and *CWC Land Acquisition Plan*
 - iii) Increase Defense Fund by committee recommended amount. (2016, 2018)
- E) Continue solicitation of members via newsletter and other mailings
- F) Continue fundraising events like the annual Spring Banquet and fall VIP Event
- F) Identify a dedicated source of predictable funds to support staffing costs. (2016)
- G) Develop one new fundraising event. (2018)
- H) Assess the use of land sales for revenue generation. (2017)

6) Building Relationships - Education and Public Outreach:

- A) Develop a *CWC Public Outreach/Marketing Plan*. (2017) (Review plan every 5 years)
- B) Develop a *CWC Communications Plan*. (2017) (Review plan every 5 years)
- C) Continue to increase community awareness thru presence in media (web, e-News, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, *Heron Tracks*, local radio, TV, newspapers)
- D) Assess the development of a CWC Public speaker's series that furthers the CWC mission and vision with the greater public. (2018)
- E) Solicit CWC staff/ volunteer expert speaker invitations under the banner of the CWC.
- F) Conduct at least one landowner options workshop annually (2016,2017, 2018)
- G) Using volunteer guides/experts to develop and deliver educational activities.
- H) Continue to communicate mission and activities to local (city, township, county) officials within our service area

- I) Reconnect with Isabella County Council of Governments to educate on the CWC mission and purpose (2016)
- J) Articulate the relationship between land protection and water quality enhancement. (2017)
- K) Seek ways to encourage local schools to bring students to our preserves for education or bring habitat education to the schools.
- L) Assess the new State of Michigan Science Standards to see if the CWC can provide curricular support or opportunities that align with the CWC expertise and mission. (2018)
- M) Make stronger relationships with the agricultural community to explore ways the CWC can support habitat protection. (2017)
- N) Develop and strengthen the relationship with organizations that have similar missions or have expertise to further the mission of the CWC: (2018)
 - i. Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe
 - ii. Heart of the Lakes
 - iii. Central Michigan University
 - iv. Ferris State University
 - v. Michigan DEQ
 - vi. Adjoining Conservancies