



The Greening Mid-Michigan Project

www.greenmidmichigan.org

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission is currently partnering with Michigan Natural Features Inventory to complete the Greening Mid-Michigan Project (GMMP). Once complete, the GMMP will provide detailed maps and information about natural resources and green infrastructure throughout the tri-county area that was previously unavailable. The GMMP will serve stakeholders on many levels. For example, local and county governments can utilize natural resource information provided by the GMMP to supplement their Comprehensive Plans or Park and Recreation Plans. Also, private stakeholders can access the information to help shape their habitat and development priorities. In this way, the GMMP will serve as an invaluable tool for agencies and groups in the mid-Michigan area in identifying valuable natural areas and networks.

The GMMP includes three phases of work, including a Potential Conservation Area plan, comprehensive natural resource identification, and a green infrastructure mapping and public engagement component for Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton Counties. The first phase, the Potential Conservation Area plan, maps and defines those places on the landscape dominated by native vegetation that have potential for harboring high quality natural areas. These areas will be ranked as low, medium or high priorities for conservation.

Once the first phase is complete in late 2008, the second phase can begin. The second phase involves the creation of additional parcel and specie-specific data will be collected for each county. The Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) will house this data, and will create general GIS layers of high priority areas for public use. Due to the fragile circumstance of some flora and fauna and water resources in mid-Michigan, the parcel specific data will not be openly available to the public, but can be accessed through the MNFI. This second phase provides a “value-added” aspect to the GMMP. Once complete, the first and second phases will be represented in a report that identifies potential conservation areas.

Through public meetings and input, the third phase will focus on aligning locations for future conservation efforts with existing land uses, comprehensive land use plans and development priorities. These efforts will strengthen regional cooperation and land use planning, while enhancing awareness of preserving regional natural areas to create green infrastructure areas and networks. Attachment #1 Greening Mid-Michigan, provides additional bullet-pointed descriptions of each phase, including its components, outcomes and funding sources.

For the past six months, the Potential Conservation Area Subcommittee of the GMM Steering Committee has made substantial progress, agreeing that this project would aid many public and private stakeholders in prioritizing areas for conservation. In addition, it is clear that stakeholders such as local and county governments, landowners, private land conservancy groups, the United States Department of Agriculture: Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Greater Lansing Regional Committee for Stormwater Management, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited and similar habitat groups would strongly benefit from the outcomes of the GMMP.



Phase One– Potential Conservation Area Plan

Phase One consists of indentifying and mapping natural areas that meet the criteria listed below. Delineation of the potential conservation areas will be conducted through analysis in a geographical information system (GIS) with emphasis placed on 1) intactness, 2) wetlands and wetland complexes, 3) riparian corridors, and 4) forested tracts. Once definitive land areas are identified and scored, they will be presented as Potential Conservation Areas (PCA's). The PCA methodology has been used in several areas in Michigan including: Oakland, Macomb, Cass, Berrien, and Barry Counties.

The ranking criteria for natural areas includes the following elements:

- Size of a site
- Size of core area
- Stream corridor length
- Landscape connectivity
- Proximity to other conservation areas
- Restorability of surrounding lands
- Quality of flora
- Area of unchanged vegetation
- Bio-rarity score based on the quality of natural communities and rare species

Once the land areas are ranked, they will be identified as *High, Medium, or Low Priority*. An example of a *High Priority* area would be a 40 acre woodlot with a stream that adjoins a wetland restoration project. The rankings will exist both in paper copy form and GIS files that can be overlaid with other data layers for efficient use by all stakeholders. Cass County's PCA Report is attached to this report as *Attachment #2* as an example of how the ranking system works.

Phase Two –Comprehensive Natural Resource Identification

In addition to the PCA Report in Phase One, the PCA Subcommittee has identified the need for additional detailed natural resource data. Phase Two will incorporate unique natural features of the region into a report that will include a general location and summary of the following:

- Rare and declining flora and fauna known to occur in area
- Rare and/or high quality natural communities
- Unique river segments
- Unique lakes and ponds
- High quality river segments
- High quality lakes and ponds
- Evaluation of subwatershed integrity(pollution, habitat fragmentation, land use)
- Land cover change by natural community type (% change since mid 1800's)
- Areas within each county with the most significant land cover changes
- Summary of information gaps by each science discipline – helpful in targeting future survey efforts.

This data will be summarized in both a written report and through GIS layers.



Phase Three-Green Infrastructure Mapping and Public Engagement

Once the data of Phases Two and Three have been compiled into GIS layers, maps and reports, the final element of the GMMP involves an intense public engagement component. The importance of engaging the public and the stakeholders is two-fold: The GMMP data can be disseminated to a wide group of people, and comments can be gathered from the public on the PCA aspect of the GMMP. The benefit of Phase Three is widespread, predominantly including a common green infrastructure vision across the region that can be utilized as a development tool to provide communities with a vision for growth, development, tourism and conservation. The third phase of the GMMP will move towards this common vision through the following four components:

- Incorporate current land uses into the natural resource data generated from Phases One and Two to produce a comprehensive green infrastructure database for the three counties. Due to the nature of MNFI criteria, there are several types of land uses that will not be included in the scientific output generated in Phase 1 and 2. Agricultural lands are not included as PCAs. There will also be no acknowledgement of small patches of land, such as parks or other natural areas and existing linear corridors, in the form of potential and existing trails and greenways, which can work to integrate natural area protection with local water quality management plans.
- Conduct stakeholder interviews to inventory and summarize existing conservation and recreation priorities/plans and determine if the PCA analysis is consistent with these priorities. It will be important to compare and contrast the scientific output results with the existing conservation and recreation priorities already underway in the various communities across the tri-county region. It will also be an opportune time to discuss implementation tools which could be used to further implement an integrated green infrastructure vision.
- Increase public awareness and build support for a green infrastructure vision by gathering and incorporating public desires into the scientific data generated in Phases One and Two through charettes. A public charrette will be held to gather this knowledge and allow residents to work across jurisdictional boundaries to envision green infrastructure connections. The charrette will be an opportunity for synthesis of the scientific input data, community conservation and recreation priorities and public desire so that a true regional green infrastructure network can be envisioned.
- Summarize the results from both the scientific and public input data to build momentum towards implementation of a regional green infrastructure vision. Phase Three is incorporated into a larger project initiated by Leap, Inc. (Lansing Economic Area Partnership), a consortium of business and organizational leaders within the Greater Lansing area who are dedicated to assisting the area in its economic growth. Strengthening green infrastructure in the Lansing area has been identified by Leap, Inc. as one of its underlying principles towards a strong economy, and the GMMP will serve as one of two pilot projects that will help to advance it. Not only are they awarding \$35,000 in grant dollars to accomplish the green infrastructure mapping, the stakeholder interviews, and the public engagement, the regional green infrastructure vision, the outcome of each phase will have its own section in the final report that showcases the study results. In this way, green infrastructure takes its place alongside education, housing, and other components that altogether measure the community's quality of life.



This project will result in a report in both print and electronic form. The report will also be available through partner websites.

Overall Funding – The GMMP will cost a total of \$83,545. As presented in *Attachment #1*, the funding for Phase One was secured through the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) in the amount of \$24,000 through the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission. Phase Two funding is incomplete at this time, with partial monies secured through a Battle Creek Watershed 319 grant and from the Greater Lansing Regional Committee for Stormwater Management for a total of \$3,500.00. The Eaton County Parks Department has also given \$4,000.00. An additional \$17,045 is needed for the completion of Phase Two. Multiple public agencies and private groups are currently being approached for financial support of Phase Two. Phase Three is entirely funded at this time by a \$35,000.00 People and Land (PAL) Grant, through Leap, Inc., a group of regional public and private economic development leaders.

Timeline – Phase One will be completed by October 2008. Phase Two should be tentatively completed by spring 2009, but the exact timing for Phase Two depends on acquiring the funding. When the entire GMMP is complete, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission will host a town-hall meeting. Similarly, the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission held a recent Green Infrastructure Workshop that had approx 125 people attending from the region. That meeting was made up of representative officials at the local and county level.

Partnerships – The GMM Steering Committee was created to identify priorities, seek funding, and create networking opportunities for this project. It consists of the following organizations:

Clinton Conservation District – <i>Gary Fritz</i>	Ingham County Parks Department – <i>Willis Bennett</i>
Clinton Co. Community Development Department – <i>Richard Trent</i>	Ingham Conservation District – <i>Brad Johnson</i>
Clinton County Greenspace – <i>Jerry Jaloszynski</i>	Ingham County Ag Preservation Board – <i>Paul Kindel</i>
Eaton Conservation District – <i>Andrea Stay</i>	Michigan Natural Features Inventory – <i>John Paskus</i>
Eaton County Parks Department – <i>Dan Patton</i>	Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance – <i>Nancy Krupiarz</i>
Eaton Community Development – <i>Claudine Hannold</i>	Natural Resources Conservation Service – <i>Eaton and Ingham Counties</i>
GLRC Stormwater Committee – <i>Ralph Reznick</i>	Tri-County Regional Planning Commission – <i>Jon Coleman, Paul Hamilton, Erin Campbell, Harmony Gmazel</i>

Contributing or Interested Partners –

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality	Quality Deer Management
Eaton County Pheasants Forever	Lansing Economic Area Partnership (Leap, Inc.)