

New tool helps county protect its natural features

BY KURT KUBAN
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County officials are using a new tool in their crusade to preserve what is left of the county's natural landscape.

Earlier this year the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI), a non-profit organization that tracks rare and threatened plant and animal communities, provided the county with a report mapping out remaining natural areas that could be the focus of preservation efforts.

MNFI ranked the natural area sites countywide, based on a number of criteria. The group was looking for unique natural features, including, among other things, a site's size, the amount of native vegetation it possessed, the amount of wildlife it supported, and its ability to absorb stormwater. To conduct its survey, MNFI used aerial photographs, the county's GIS mapping system, and some field work by its botanists, ecologists, and conservationists.

While the majority of the highest priority, or priority one, sites are in the less-developed northern and western sections of the county, many priority two and three sites remain in the more urban areas, including Southfield, Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield, Rochester, and Rochester Hills.

According to MNFI's John Puskas, who helped compile much of the report, the county's more rural areas, such as in Addison, Independence, Orion, and Springfield townships, still contain large tracts of outstanding natural areas that should be protected. But natural corridors along the urban Rouge and Clinton rivers are just as important to preserve.

"What the report shows is most of the high-priority areas are in the top two tiers of the county. That's not surprising because that is where the least development has taken place," he said.

"But it's all relative. Some of these lower priority sites in places like Southfield still might be very important to those communities, because they are the last remnants of the natural world there."

The county's planning and economic development services department is using the MNFI report to work with various communities as they develop master plans for future development.

According to Jim Keglavitz, a senior planner with the county, the report is an important tool for preserving its natural resources.

"If a community is interested in preserving what is left of its natural landscape, the MNFI report is a good place to start," he said.

Land conservancies are also using the MNFI report to target areas that are privately owned, and under the most pressure to be developed. Lorna McEwen, president of the Oakland Land Conservancy, said the report makes the job of finding the most sensitive areas much easier, which is the first step in trying to purchase them, or gain conservation easements.

"We're working to protect the sites that are most crucial. This report is very helpful, because it gives us a way to prioritize on what areas we want to focus on," she said. "I think it was a great move on the county's part."

Larry Falardeau, the county's principal planner and landscape architect, said saving and protecting the remaining natural areas only makes sense, because they are a large reason people want to live here in the first place. He said the county's 1,400 lakes and five major river systems are its greatest assets.

"It's in Oakland County's best interest to maintain its natural resource," he said. "If you erode those natural resources, you erode the economic base. It's all tied to property values."

kuban@oecomm.com | (248) 901-2526



Falcon supporters including school staff, alumni and alumni parents, enjoyed dinner and contributed to the society's drive during the evening's festivities.

Falcon Society raises \$31,000

Almost 300 Farmington High boosters attended this year's Falcon Society dinner dance, held Nov. 22 at Vladimir's in Farmington Hills.

In addition to local dignitaries and school officials, FHS parents, parents of FHS alumni and parents from the Farmington Rockets attended, along with community members who read about the event in the paper or visited the Society's booth at the Founder's Festival.

The event raised an estimated \$31,000 to support improvements to the school.

Along with donations from parents, sports backers groups, student clubs, and various FHS departments, more than 160 local businesses donated their products or made a cash contribution to support the silent auc-

tion. Donor highlights included Red Wings and Pistons tickets from Peter Karmannos at Computware, a \$1,000 cash donation from Motorola to sponsor the cost of entertainment and decorations, use of a GMC Envoy for a week from Bob Sellers Pontiac/GMC, use of a Thunderbird convertible for a week-end from Tom Holzer Ford, a tool package from Bosch, Red Wing Tickets from Nagle Paving, some great MSU tickets from Doug Brzak, a ten foot flowering tree to be planted in the Falcon Plaza from Tom's Landscaping, and plenty more.

Organizers expressed a special thanks to all local businesses that were so generous in these shaky economic times and encouraged the public to support them in return.



Falcon Society Dinner Dance co-chairs (left to right) Karen Matthys, Barbara Kahnoff and Sue Boskey enjoyed the evening they worked hard to plan over the past year.

FARMER JOHN'S Greenhouse

26950 Haggerty Road • Farmington Hills, MI • 248-553-7141

Voted #1

POINSETTIA SALE!

One of Michigan's Largest Poinsettia Growers

OPEN 7 DAYS

FREE Local Delivery with \$50 Minimum Order

- Christmas Trees
- Wreaths • Roping
- Tropical Plants

Go Where They Grow and Save!

Map showing location: 12 Mile, 12 Oaks, Haggerty, Farmer John's, I-696.

SEVEN FOOTBALL FIELDS OF DEALERS

Gibraltar

OPEN EVERYDAY

Happy Holidays

HUNDREDS OF SHOPS SELLING EVERYTHING IMAGINABLE!

AN ENDLESS CHOICE OF FINE JEWELRY

GOLD • SILVER • DIAMONDS • GEMSTONES • BRACELETS • EARRINGS • SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES • CHAINS • WATCHES • TURQUOISE

OVER 30 JEWELERS

COMPUTER SHOW

NEW AND USED

DECEMBER 13-14-15

FRI 10-9 • SAT 10-9 • SUN 10-6

BUY TRADE SELL

SOFTWARE HARDWARE ACCESSORIES

INCLUDING

1,000'S OF C.D.'S
SHAREWARE
GAMES • BOOKS
SCANNERS
MONITORS
MODEMS
KEYBOARDS
& MORE!

OVER 180 TABLES

SAVE UP TO 70% ON NEW AND USED PRODUCTS

Save 50% - Build Your Own Computer

Benefit by Check Order

"THE COMPUTER GURU" OF NO

EXHIBIT (1PM - 6PM) Sign Up, Demo what system to buy, purchase hardware.

SATURDAY (Class from 1PM - 6PM)

SUNDAY (Class from 1PM - 6PM)

OTHER CLASSES AVAILABLE: MEGADOWN, REPAIR, WEB SITE DESIGN & MORE

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL 248-486-9369

Gibraltar TAYLOR

175 E. EUREKA RD. (EXIT 36) • 231-287-2000

TRADE CENTER, INC. GIBRALTARTRADER.COM

FREE FRIDAY ADMISSION

WITH THIS COUPON FRIDAY, DEC. 13TH ONLY