

POINTS OF VIEW

# Oakland County inventory offers new methods of preservation

For those who are concerned about keeping Michigan a green and pleasant place, the bad news is that development is proceeding at literally an unprecedented rate. The good news is that there just might be a way to accommodate development with preserving entire ecosystems.

In the past, developers often took the position that the land was theirs and anybody who wanted to stop the bulldozers was one of those crazy tree-huggers. For their part, many environmentalists never met a developer they didn't hate.

Caught in the middle, local government officials are often as not stuck their heads in the sand. At heart, they were hobbled by thinking about environmental issues in ways that were confined by the boundaries of their own village or township. They might, for example, try to preserve that part of a wetland within their own jurisdiction, but find themselves unable to prevent development next door that could wreck the entire interconnected ecosystem.

Recently, however, an outfit called the Michigan Natural Features Inventory has finished a ground

breaking study that identified more than 200 sites in Michigan that are both ecologically significant and threatened.

Sponsored in part by the Michigan chapter of the Nature Conservancy, the study for the first time offers a way to identify ecologically sensitive areas and provide local government officials with a way to help out.

Consider Oakland County, one of the largest (1.2 million population) and richest (ranked third nationally) counties in Michigan. Amazingly, the Inventory found that Oakland County is home to some of the most unspoiled ecosystems in the state.

For example, the study identified two of the largest intact prairie fen systems in the state, both in Oakland, the Buckhorn Lake complex in Rose Township and the Long Lake system in Springfield Township. A prairie fen is a system of connected wetlands that sustains plants and animals, some rare and a few threatened.

There are around 100 prairie fen systems in Michigan, but most are small and in bad shape. The systems in Oakland County are mostly intact and largely pristine.



PHIL POWER

Another Oakland County example concerns the Huron Swamp, nearly 2000 acres of wetland in Springfield Township that forms the headwaters of the Huron River and is one of the most sensitive sites in southeastern Michigan.

In response to the information developed in the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, six northern Oakland County communities are collaborating to pass area-wide developmental policies aimed at preserving and protecting entire ecosystems that may cross their boundaries. The six — Springfield, Highland, Milford, Rose and White Lake townships and the village of Milford — propose to work together in a literally unprecedented way.

Although most of southern Oakland County is fully developed, the northern tier of townships is still largely untouched. But the threat of uncontrolled rapid development

spurred local officials into thinking collaboratively about how to protect the natural features of the area. The six communities propose to rethink their development plans and local ordinances to encompass the entire area and the threatened ecosystems that spill across individual local government boundaries.

Although it's still a work in progress, environmentalists are enthused at the prospect. Helen Taylor, state director of the Michigan chapter of the Nature Conservancy, says what's going on in northern Oakland County is "wonderful, an incredibly important and thoughtful step for local communities to protect the quality of life in important places."

She also held out a hand to builders and developers: "I want to believe there are many positive opportunities out there to work together

with developers. The Conservancy has had many positive encounters in finding compatible ways to find and recognize the economic realities while also preserving important places."

Taylor points out that the Natural Features Inventory provides everybody — developers, environmentalists and local government officials — with a detailed database setting out important ecosystems and how they overlap traditional local government jurisdictions.

Leaders in Oakland County deserve a big hand for trying to work out entirely new solutions to old problems. I hope local governments in other areas of the state will follow their lead.

For more information regarding the Natural Features Inventory, contact the Michigan chapter of the Nature Conservancy at (617) 532-1741. Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net

## MORE LETTERS

### Supersedes politics

It is not often that I feel compelled to write to compliment the work of an elected official, however, I must comment on the hard work and clear sense of commitment of Oakland County Commissioner David Moffitt, Farmington Hills.

For the past 30 years, I have been an advocate for people with disabilities, and I have seen many politically expedient decisions that seem to benefit only the elected official. David Moffitt, however, has demonstrated a true commitment to improving the lives of people with disabilities, even when it was not politically expedient to do so.

Oakland County Commissioner David Moffitt has gone the extra mile to stand up for that which he believes. His votes to appoint new members to the Oakland County Community Mental Health Authority Board have been consistently targeted at selecting people who have demonstrated responsiveness to the people served by the county Mental Health Authority.

Oakland County Commissioner David Moffitt's commitment to improving Oakland County's Community Mental Health System has allowed his statesmanship to supersede politics.

Elmer L. Cerano  
White Lake

### Reaching out

To everyone where this wonderful "Observer" paper reaches: My name is Erika Beth Ungersma Fenn. My roots are Dutch and Irish. I am a wife, even though my husband of 36-1/2 years died three years ago. I go on to be the daughter of a very Irish woman, non-deceased. And then I go on to being the mom of three very bright, beautiful children married to wonderful spouses.

To make my story short, I reach out to everyone in recovery in Livonia and every where the Observer reaches. I

am Erika, an alcoholic. I always wanted help. But I had to learn how to ask. I was the proud wife of a pharmacy professor, I was (and still trying to be the proud mom of three wonderful children.)

I ask you in my heart to not dismiss people with substance abuse as failures. We are your judges, lawyers, doctors and just people. I welcome your comments to my home (734) 464-7636. Perhaps we can help the youth of today. I know that I am trying very hard, and I welcome your input.

Erika Fenn  
Livonia

### They like Prill

We would like to express our appreciation of the work Priscilla Brouillette has done while serving on the board of education for Farmington Public Schools. Prill has served four years on the board, with the last year in the role as

president. June 12th is the election for two vacancies, and we highly recommend Priscilla Brouillette for reelection.

Prill is very knowledgeable of the role of the board of education and has a thorough understanding of the curriculum. She has been very active in shaping policy and evaluating the superintendent. She is able to empower individuals and let them do their work successfully.

Although Prill is very good at seeing the "big picture," she is also very aware of the details. Prill goes to many school events and has continued to encourage innovation in students as well as staff.

We have known Priscilla Brouillette for over eight years. She is a thoughtful, caring person. She looks at issues with intelligence and empathy and always takes her job seriously. We have been fortunate to have her leadership for the last four years. On June 12 we have the opportunity

to let her continue her work to keep excellence in Farmington Public Schools.

Mark and Charlene Diehl  
Farmington Hills

### Fee for mass transit?

I would like to make a comment about mass transit.

"Activist argues need for mass transit" was an article written by staff writer Richard Pearl and published April 20 in The Observer.

Does anyone remember during the mid-1970s when license plate fees for the average motorist increased from about \$12 to close to \$40 a year?

The extra money was to pay for a mass transit system. Did we get one? I don't think we did. I wonder why not.

Harold J. McDonald  
Garden City

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