

New Black River Nature Preserve Will Protect Water Quality and Wildlife Habitat

Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) has been awarded a \$250,000 matching grant to purchase and restore 120 acres of forest and wetland along the banks of the Black River, 3.5 miles east of South Haven. A total of \$930,000 was awarded for six projects in four states and was funded by a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Joint Venture grant. The property, part of a matching grant, will become an SWMLC nature preserve dedicated to the protection of water quality and wildlife habitat.



Pictured here is one of three tributary streams that flow through the site and into the Black River. This "tributary ravine" is punctuated with mature beech and hemlock trees and provides a microclimate and habitat structure favored by a diversity of forest interior bird species.

"During the past three years, SWMLC has been working with landowner, Daniel Garvey, to help him find a solution to permanently protect his property," stated Nate Fuller. "Mr. Garvey was eager to see his land turned into a nature preserve and to share its natural beauty with the surrounding community. He is making this project possible by offering a bargain sale of the property, generously donating a significant amount of the property's value as a match toward the grant."

The 120-acre property is located along the west side of the South Branch of the Black River in Geneva Township and includes over one mile of winding riverbanks as well as small streams meandering through deep tributary ravines. Restoration efforts will focus on improving forest health through such methods as invasive species removal and reintroducing prescribed fire to encourage native plants.

Protecting and restoring the Garvey property was a good fit for the GLRI's Joint Venture grant program, which focuses on birds. "We were able to identify breeding and foraging habitat for at least 70 different target bird species identified in both state and national plans," explained Nate Fuller, conservation and stewardship director for SWMLC. The species include those from four bird plans developed by Joint Venture: waterfowl (ducks and geese), water birds (herons and rails), shorebirds (sandpipers and woodcock), and land birds (songbirds and raptors).



SWMLC proposed the project to the GLRI Joint Venture grant program in partnership with the Conservation Research Institute (CRI), Van Buren Conservation District (VBCD), Two Rivers Coalition (TRC), and the Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail Association (BSH/HWTA). SWMLC and its partners in this grant will provide their expertise in ecological restoration, management and public outreach efforts.

The official acquisition of the property is expected to be completed this fall and restoration work will begin shortly thereafter. Additional funding is being sought to expand restoration efforts and provide long-term funding for management.

To learn more about this project or any SWMLC projects, call (269) 324-1600.

SWMLC Land Protection Team members, Joyce and Bob Leppard, next to a giant tulip tree.