



## news release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Oct. 5, 2009

**Contacts:** Melissa Soule, (517) 230-0818 or [msoule@tnc.org](mailto:msoule@tnc.org); Danielle Fogel, (616) 451-9476 or [danielle@naturenearby.org](mailto:danielle@naturenearby.org)

### New Agreement Negotiated for Saugatuck Dunes Property

**SAUGATUCK, Mich.** — Leaders from City of Saugatuck, Land Conservancy of West Michigan and The Nature Conservancy announced today that an agreement has been negotiated to acquire the 171-acre south portion of the McClendon property (formerly the Denison property) adjacent to Saugatuck's Oval Beach City Park.

“This is a huge step forward in the marathon effort to protect this property in perpetuity for the people of Michigan,” said Helen Taylor, The Nature Conservancy's State Director for Michigan.

“Those of us who live in this area know how special this land is to the local community, and how treasured it will be by everyone who lives in and visits Michigan,” State Senator Patty Birkholz said. “I'm so proud of the work everyone has done to get us here – we've never given up, and now I'm very optimistic that we'll have a happy ending to this story.”

A contract was signed last December to buy the property, owned by Aubrey McClendon, for \$25 million. Subsequent negotiations resulted in the new agreement to buy the property for \$20 million. The total cost of the project will likely be up to \$23.1 million when associated costs are considered.

Tony Vettori, City of Saugatuck Council member, said: “Our records show that the City has pursued the protection of this property since 1952. The road ahead looks clearer than ever before – the finish line is in sight.”

Vettori said the next step in the project will be securing a grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. In February, the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board passed a resolution supporting the project for funding in December in the amount “...of not less than \$11.6 million, but in any event not to exceed \$15 million.”

“This agreement has been made possible by so many, and The Nature Conservancy is honored to have facilitated the process and coordination of the many parties involved,” Taylor said. “Business leaders like David Frey, Dick Haworth, and Jim Brooks offered their wise

counsel in our negotiations—in great part because this parcel was named by the West Michigan Strategic Alliance as one of the most critical natural assets in our region that needs permanent protection,” Taylor said. “Extraordinary leadership gifts have been pledged by those who recognize the importance of protecting this shoreline for future generations. We need to express special appreciation to David Frey and the Frey Foundation, the Brooks Family of Holland, Fred and Lena Meijer, and the J.A. Woollam Foundation, among many others.”

The Land Conservancy of West Michigan signed the agreement to purchase the McClendon property. Assuming the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund supports the project by providing a grant to the City of Saugatuck, the Land Conservancy will complete the transaction in December, launch a public campaign to raise the remaining funds needed, and hold the property until it can be transferred to the City, while leasing it to the City in the interim.”

Land Conservancy of West Michigan Executive Director Peter Homeyer sees today’s announcement as a major step forward for finding compatible solutions for people and nature.

“The Land Conservancy first began working with the City of Saugatuck to acquire the property in 1994. For more than a decade we have been dedicated to the preservation of this property not only for its ecological values, but also its historical and cultural importance,” Homeyer said. Homeyer pointed out that the Saugatuck area attracts about 2 million visitors each year to the small town with a year-round population of 1,065.

He noted that while additional gifts will be needed to complete the project, they are not encouraged at this time. “As soon as the Trust Fund Board officially approves the grant in December, we will launch a community campaign to raise the remaining \$4.5 million needed for the project,” he said. “We hope a significant portion of this remaining funding comes from additional private and public sources, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program.”

To learn more about the project or how you can help now, visit [www.naturenearby.org](http://www.naturenearby.org).

The property is part of the world’s largest freshwater dune system, provides habitat for rare and declining species, and is one of the finest examples of Michigan’s characteristic Great Lakes shoreline. More information about freshwater dunes can be found [here](#).

###