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Three Michigan Land Conservancies Accepted into Advancement Program *Organizations Strengthened, Land Conservation Advanced*

GRAND LEDGE, MI Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy and the Land Trust Alliance announced today that **three Michigan land conservancies** have been accepted into the second round of the *Advancing Conservancy Excellence* (ACE) program, a \$1 million, three year initiative to help transform the state's land conservancies into a high-performing, sustainable conservation community. The new additions, Cadillac Area Land Conservancy (Cadillac), Headwaters Land Conservancy (Gaylord), and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (Grand Rapids), bring the total number of Michigan land conservancies participating in the ACE program to **eighteen**.

"These three conservancies are committed to increasing both the pace and quality of their critical conservation work," said Rachel Kuntzsch, Executive Director of Heart of the Lakes. She explained that land conservancies are community based, nonprofit organizations dedicated to the permanent protection and stewardship of natural and working lands for the public good. "They protect natural, scenic, farm and forest lands that are essential to Michigan's economy and quality of life and the ACE program will help them achieve even higher levels of effectiveness."

The ACE program helps to position Michigan's land conservancies to achieve national accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. Accreditation provides the assurance of quality and permanence of land conservation and recognizes a conservancy's ability to protect important natural places and working lands forever. Four Michigan land conservancies have already achieved national accreditation: Chikaming Open Lands, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Leelanau Conservancy, and Legacy Land Conservancy

Acceptance into ACE is a competitive process; conservancies must demonstrate their capacity for participation as well as their likelihood to have a significant conservation impact in their service areas. Once accepted, ACE participants have access to technical training, organizational assessments, mentoring, consultations, and capacity grants tailored individually to their needs. The program is also designed to facilitate the formation of strategic partnerships among

conservancies, foster peer-to-peer mentoring, and encourage collaboration and cooperation among Michigan's active conservancies.

“The ACE program is a national model for providing land conservancies the tools and training they need to achieve accreditation,” noted Erin Heskett, Midwest Director of the Land Trust Alliance. “This program addresses each land conservancy's unique needs. The foundations supporting this program all recognized that advancing individual land conservancies not only strengthens their organization, but Michigan's conservation community as a whole.”

In addition to the Cadillac Area Land Conservancy (www.calc-landtrust.org), HeadWaters Land Conservancy (www.headwatersconservancy.org), and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (www.naturenearby.org), other ACE participants include: Chippewa Watershed Conservancy, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Keweenaw Land Trust, Legacy Land Conservancy, Leelanau Conservancy, Little Forks Conservancy, Little Traverse Conservancy, Livingston Land Conservancy, Michigan Nature Association, Mid Michigan Land Conservancy, North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy, Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, Six Rivers Regional Land Conservancy, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.

The ACE Program is made possible through the generous support of the Carls Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Frey Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and Wege Foundation. For more information on ACE, visit Heart of the Lakes at www.heartofthelakes.org or the Land Trust Alliance at http://www.landtrustalliance.org/community/mid_west/midwest-region .

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Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy was founded by Michigan's leading land conservancies to unite their individual efforts around a common goal – protecting Michigan's land base. Heart of the Lakes supports Michigan land conservancies by researching conservation policy and practice, advocating sound public policies, and providing tools to strengthen conservancy effectiveness. With Heart of the Lakes' support, our member land conservancies are able to conserve Michigan's forests, farmland, coastline and other extraordinary places critical to Michigan's social, economic, and environmental wellbeing.

The Land Trust Alliance is a national conservation organization that works to save the places people love by strengthening land conservation across America. Working in partnership with land trusts, the Alliance is dedicated to increasing the pace and quality of conservation by providing state-of-the-art tools, information, and training that professional practitioners and volunteers need, and by advocating for increased land protection funding and changes to the tax code so that more landowners can afford to choose conservation. By building strong land trusts and investing in legal safeguards, the Alliance is working to ensure the permanence of conservation in the face of continuing threats.