



SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN  
LAND CONSERVANCY

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## **\$250,000 Grant Awarded to SWMLC for Conservation Along the Black River**

### **New Nature Preserve Will Protect Water Quality and Wildlife Habitat**

**SOUTH HAVEN** — 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. The project, funded by a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Joint Venture grant, will become an SWMLC nature preserve dedicated to the protection of water quality and wildlife habitat.

The GLRI is a task force of 11 federal agencies and was developed to coordinate funding in the Great Lakes Basin to clean up toxins, combat invasive species, improve water quality, and restore wildlife habitat. This year, \$930,000 has been dedicated for the Joint Venture grant program of which six projects in four states were awarded funding.

“SWMLC’s project received the highest overall ranking of all GLRI Joint Venture proposals,” said Barbara Pardo, chief of the Division of Bird Habitat Conservation for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. “Reviewers especially noted the high diversity of flora and fauna that would benefit from the project as well as the strength of the local partnership. The Joint Venture is proud to support this project for the contributions it will make to our bird conservation objectives.”

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.

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NEWS RELEASE

Protecting and restoring the Garvey property was a good fit for the GLRI's Joint Venture grant program, which focuses on birds and is made up of regional partnerships led by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The natural areas along the Black River protect water quality by reducing sedimentation and contain diverse habitats that provide valuable resources to many different kinds of migratory and nesting 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).

The property was first identified as important for conservation through a watershed conservation plan developed in 2008 between SWMLC and the Van Buren Conservation District (VBCD). SWMLC worked with VBCD to prioritize lands for conservation that would best improve water quality and wildlife habitat within the Black River watershed. The results were included in the Black River Watershed Management Plan, developed by the VBCD with grant support from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"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."

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.

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Conservation Research Institute was a natural partner for this grant as they had previously worked with Garvey, and SWMLC has an established track record of success in habitat restoration. CRI principals, Dr. Gerould Wilhelm and Jim Patchett, were able to identify over 300 species of native plants in an initial site visit and were excited at the opportunity to be lead partners in the restoration component of the project.

Local partners, such as the VBCD, BSH/HWTA and TRC, joined in support of the project and many more partners are expected to be welcomed as the project gains momentum.

“It is the Two Rivers Coalition’s mission to protect the health of the Black River and Paw Paw River Watersheds through conservation, education, and advocacy,” said Sam Ewbank, TRC board member. “Protecting and restoring the Garvey property to improve water quality is exactly the kind of active conservation we would like to see all along our invaluable waterways and is the core mission of the project partners.”

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. SWMLC and CRI have high expectations that this project will become one of the premiere ecological restoration sites in the Great Lakes region. Plans to integrate public use with the ecological restoration will begin after the acquisition is completed.

For more information about SWMLC, visit their web site at [www.SWMLC.org](http://www.SWMLC.org) or call 269-324-1600.

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3 jpeg photos available with captions as follows:

**Garvey1:** This trail follows a ridge past an old camp shelter before sloping down toward the Black River.

**Garvey2:** Pictured here is one of three tributary streams that flows 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.

**Garvey3:** The Garvey property features one mile of frontage along the Black River and is maintained by the Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail Association.

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### *Background Information*

*SWMLC is partnering with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources on the Barry State Game Area conservation project and with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality on watershed management planning projects for the Rocky River, Paw Paw River, Black River, Gull Lake watershed and Augusta Creek. SWMLC is working on waterfowl conservation, endangered species habitat acquisition and stewardship projects in collaboration with other land conservancies and nonprofit conservation partners through funding from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. SWMLC is also working on watershed planning and management with the Two Rivers Coalition (Van Buren Conservation District) and Friends of the St. Joseph River. In addition, SWMLC works with county and municipal governments to protect natural areas and open space along Lake Michigan as well as land that provides significant public benefit.*

*To learn more about the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, call (269) 324-1600 or visit their web site at [www.SWMLC.org](http://www.SWMLC.org).*

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