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2010 a strong year for land preservation programs in Washtenaw County, 1,604 acres protected

By RYAN J. STANTON

Land preservation programs in Washtenaw County protected an additional 1,604 acres of farmland, natural areas and open spaces in 2010, local officials said today.

Officials give credit to a number of local preservation millages — including those that fund Ann Arbor's Greenbelt Program, the Washtenaw County Natural Areas Preservation Program, and programs in Ann Arbor, Scio and Webster townships — as well as efforts of the local Legacy Land Conservancy, formerly the Washtenaw Land Trust.

Partnerships

Administrators of Ann Arbor's Greenbelt Program said the key to success has been the willingness of land protection organizations to work collaboratively. For example, collective efforts of the Greenbelt Program, Webster Township and the Legacy Land Conservancy led to more than 1,300 acres of farmland and open space being protected in Webster Township.

Ann Arbor Township and the city of Ann Arbor also collaborated to protect the Charles and Catherine Braun farm, a high priority due to its prime farmland soils and scenic views along Whitmore

Lake and Joy Roads. Five years ago, the property was planned to be developed with hundreds of manufactured houses and an onsite wastewater treatment plant.



The city of Ann Arbor's Greenbelt Program purchased the development rights to this 286 acres of farmland owned by Bill Nixon of Webster Township for \$2.14 million.
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Officials said the treatment plant would have discharged just upstream of the city's water intake site that supplies 85 percent of the city's drinking water.

Farmland Preservation and Leveraging Federal Funding

Local programs with a focus on farmland preservation leveraged almost \$4 million from the Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program to protect more than 1,100 acres. FRPP provides matching funds to keep farmland in agricultural use.

An additional 161 acres of farmland was protected through local millages, landowner donations and local land conservancies. Officials cited four examples:

- Five farms protected by the Greenbelt Program, totaling 610 acres. The projects include \$1.7 million from local partners and \$1.9 million from FRPP grants.
- Three farms protected by Ann Arbor Township, totaling 345 acres. In combination with two Greenbelt projects completed in the township, there are currently more than 1,000 acres of protected farmland in the township, halfway to the goal of 2,000 acres.
- Three farms protected by Webster Township, totaling 160 acres, one of which is adjacent to two previously-protected properties. The other two projects are nearby and are starting a new block of protected land along the scenic Mast Road.
- One project completed by Scio Township, totaling 50 acres. The property also features a wetland treasured by local birders.

Natural Area Preservation

Washtenaw County's NAP Program completed five purchases, adding 277 acres to the nature preserves managed by the county's Parks and Recreation Commission. The purchases include additions to existing preserves and establishing two new preserves.

- The Brauer Preserve, located in Freedom Township, was expanded by 39 acres and now totals more than 225 acres.

- The Goodrich Preserve, located in Ann Arbor Township, was expanded by eight acres and now includes more than 36 acres. The preserve is connected via trails to Horner-McLaughlin Woods, a 96-acre property owned by the University of Michigan,
- In Superior Township, 44 acres were added to the Meyer Preserve. The newly expanded preserve, now totaling more than 180 acres, is a recognized destination for birding. The wooded portion of the recent purchase includes a plant type classified as "threatened" by the state of Michigan. The preserve is located within an area known as the Superior Greenway, a joint project of the of the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, city of Ann Arbor, Superior Township and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission.
- The Clarke & Avis Spike Preserve was established in Sharon Township through the purchase of 103 acres from the Spike property. The property is adjacent to the Grass Lake Sanctuary. It will be available for public access once trails and an access point have been developed.
- The Sharon Short Hills Preserve was established through the purchase of an 84-acre property in Sharon Township. Exhibiting steep topography, which is the source of its name, the preserve will be available for public access once trails and an access point have been developed.

With the completion of these purchases, the NAP Program has established 19 nature preserves in Washtenaw County, totaling more than 2,000 acres.