

Keeping Camp O' the Hills green

Officials are closing in on their goal of raising \$252,000 for a conservation easement, but could use a little more help



If officials have their way, Girl Scouts will be gazing in wonder at the beauty of Wamplers Lake far into the future.



This map details the Camp O' the Hills site, which is accessed off of Pink Street.

Legacy Land Conservancy of Ann Arbor officials have been working with the Girl Scouts Heart of Michigan Council to permanently protect the 105-acre Camp O' the Hills facility at Wamplers Lake with a conservation easement. The legal agreement allows the council to continue to own the property, while permanently restricting development of the camp's natural areas.

According to its website, Legacy Land Conservancy protects a variety of types of land, including rural and urban preserves and recreational lands.

Legacy preserves "are open for family-friendly outdoor recreational activities, such as hiking, bird watching, skiing, nature study, and photography" and, if all goes well, scouting, which couldn't make Girl Scout officials happier.

"The Girls Scout Heart of Michigan Board of Trustees, along with our senior leadership team, has made a firm decision

to hold this property in perpetuity for future generations of girls," said council CEO, Jan Barker. "Our partnership with Legacy Land Conservancy provides a wonderful opportunity to create a conservation easement that will allow the property to be preserved for our girls."

Officials say the project will benefit not only the camp's visitors and local wildlife, but also the water quality for all the residents of Wamplers Lake. Protecting the camp's 70-acres of wetlands and remaining forest along the shoreline is the best way to positively impact the lake's long-term water quality.

The easement will be attached to the deed of the property, so any future landowners are bound by the development restrictions. Legacy will monitor the property to ensure the terms of the easement are met.

To purchase the conservation easement, Legacy is expected to raise more than \$252,000 by spring 2018. "We will be using the funds for programs, property

maintenance and improvements at Camp O' the Hills," Barker noted.

They are getting close to meeting their goal. So far, officials have secured a water-quality grant from the Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and gifts, grants, and pledges from individuals, community groups, and private foundations. A gap of \$40,000 remains, they say.

One local group that wanted to help was Oh These Irish Hills!, which pitched in \$1,540 for the cause.

"Contributions from community organizations like Oh These Irish Hills! are giving us the momentum we need to cross the finish line in protecting Camp O' the Hills," said Legacy's Executive Director, Douglas Koop. "It is confirmation of the support and recognition for the Jackson area's land-protection values."

Kay Roumell said the decision to help was easy. "When our committee learned of the

Conservancy project for Camp O' the Hills, we all agreed it would be the perfect cause for our annual Run for the Hills 5K," said Roumell, vice president of Oh These Irish Hills!. "Our mission is to celebrate and support the beauty of the place, the spirit of its people, and the history of the Irish Hills. So, for those of us who have sent our children there throughout the years and have heard the songs and laughter coming from its shores, we

ient."

The funds provided include \$1,500 in proceeds from the race and \$40 donated by participants.

Officials hope to see more help from the community to get over the finish line. Donations in support of protecting Camp O' the Hills can be made online at www.legacylandconservancy.org/donate/ or by calling 734-302-5263.

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