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State grant clears path for future county park and nature preserve in Troy

Commissioners Erickson-Gault and Johnson celebrate funding for the acquisition of 70-acre Turtle Woods wetlands area

TROY, MI – Dec. 11, 2024 – The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) Board has approved a \$2,175,000 grant to Oakland County Parks (OCP) to secure the acquisition of Turtle Woods, a 70-acre area of woods and wetlands in Troy, Michigan. OCP will operate and maintain the property as a county park and nature preserve. The acquisition was made possible through a partnership between OCP, the Troy School District and Six Rivers Land Conservancy – a collaboration fueled by a shared vision to preserve Turtle Woods as a public natural space for future generations to enjoy in perpetuity.

Oakland County Commissioners Ann Erickson-Gault (D-Troy) and Brendan Johnson (D-Rochester Hills) supported the effort and are celebrating the addition of Turtle Woods to the county park system.

“Turtle Woods is an island of untouched natural beauty in an area that has experienced significant development. I am thrilled that this wonderful space will be made available to our residents as a public park,” said Erickson-Gault.

“This is a big win for Oakland County Parks and the residents of Troy, Rochester and Rochester Hills,” said Johnson. “Turtle Woods will provide people with a space to explore nature close to home. This is a great example of reinvesting our tax dollars back into our communities.”

Turtle Woods – located on Square Lake Road between John R. and Dequindre Roads is controlled by a purchase agreement between the Six Rivers Land Conservancy and the Troy School District, which purchased the property in the 1950s. This arrangement permitted Six Rivers to secure the property and hold it while OCP applied to the MNRTF for grant funding. OCP first applied for the MNRTF grant last year, but the project was not selected for funding. Since then, the school district voted to donate half of the value (\$1,875,000) of the property,

helping OCP secure the 2024 MNRTF grant, and the funding needed to purchase the property.

“We are so grateful to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and our partners on this project for understanding the value of 70 undisturbed acres in a very developed area of the county,” said Melissa Prowse, Oakland County Parks Manager of Planning and Development. “We’ve had our eye on this beautiful piece of land for a long time, and we’re thrilled to finally be able to make Turtle Woods an Oakland County Parks nature preserve for all county residents to enjoy.”

OCP hopes to close on Turtle Woods in 2025 and begin construction of the parking lot, restrooms and trails in 2026. OCP will evaluate the existing trails and look at adding new trails or boardwalks where needed but does not have major developments planned for the site outside of the parking lot and restrooms. “Our intent is to keep the nature preserve as natural as possible,” Prowse said.

“The property has nearly 40 acres of wetlands that are critical not only as habitat, but also for their role in stormwater management and water quality in the region,” said Chris Bunch, Executive Director of Six Rivers Land Conservancy. “There aren’t many places like this left in Southeast Michigan.”

Further, several rare species have been found on the property, including the spotted turtle (last seen at Turtle Woods in 1998) and Blanding’s turtle, as well as unique plant species such as wahoo and seedbox. Turtle Woods is also home to some unique natural communities, such as areas of Southern hardwood swamp and wet-mesic prairie remnant. While never formally used as a park, the Turtle Woods property is well-loved and regularly used by the community, as evidenced by trails that traverse the park, stick bridges and stick huts throughout the site. It has also been used for nature education and ecology lessons for Troy Schools students for many years.

“We want everyone to have access to nature, no matter where they live in Oakland County,” said Erickson-Gault. “The goal for our nature preserves is to provide access to these beautiful, green spaces so everyone can reap the restorative, physical and mental health benefits of spending time in the natural environment.”

OCP will be seeking public input on the design of the entrance and trails as part of the park planning process. Interested residents wishing to stay informed about the planning and development process can email info@oaklandcountyparks.com with the words “Turtle Woods” in the subject line.

For more information about Oakland County Parks, visit OaklandCountyParks.com. Join the conversation on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).