



**Saginaw  
Basin Land  
Conservancy**

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# Where the River Meets the Bay

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Consumers Energy's Karn Site  
Hampton Township, Bay County, Michigan

**September 2024**



# Acknowledgments

This report was produced by the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy with the support of funding from the Mott Foundation administered by the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC). The cooperation of ELPC and Consumers Energy staff were instrumental to the public consensus building process that generated discussion and content serving as the foundation of this report.

This report is the result of a public engagement process that was a key part of a collaborative project by the SBLC, ELPC, and Consumers Energy to develop a vision for the future of portions of the 2,400 acre electrical generation site, which has been partially decommissioned and will fully close in 2031. Consumers Energy plans to redevelop the site for commercial use, solar power generation, and a publicly accessible outdoor recreation area that Consumers would fund. Approximately 400 acres of the site may be utilized for an accessible outdoor recreation space. Remaining acreage on site would be used for solar energy production and potential commercial development.



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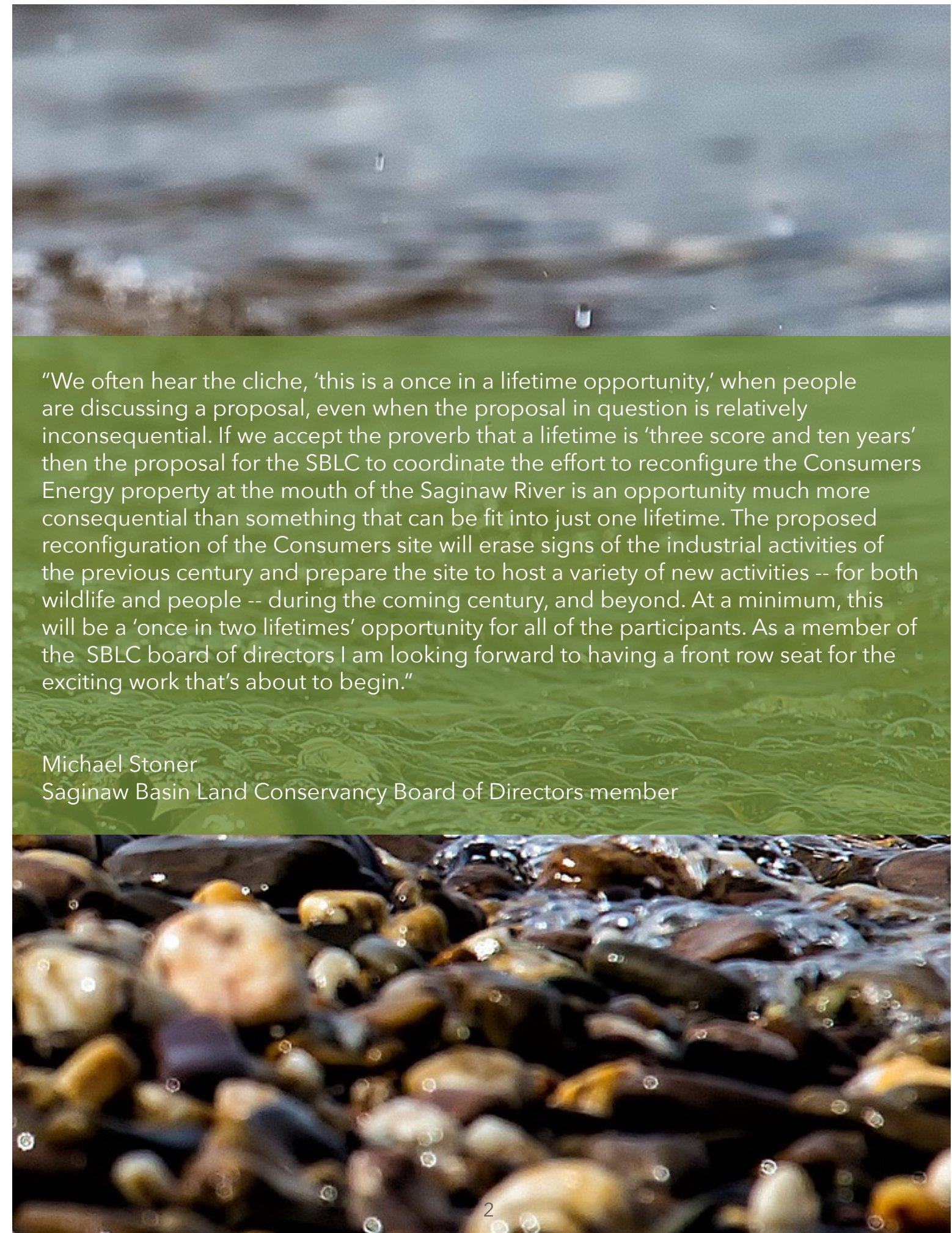


# Introduction

The Saginaw River and Bay absolutely define the settlement geography of Bay County and the entire Saginaw Bay Watershed. Here in Bay City, our community is nestled on the banks of the Saginaw River several miles inland from the Lake Huron shoreline and the expansive Saginaw Bay. On both sides of the Saginaw River, where it meets Saginaw Bay, there are significant developments that prevent public access and enjoyment of this special area. As a result, many residents and visitors to our community have scarcely seen our Great Lakes shoreline! Consumers Energy has made a public declaration that significant changes are coming to their power plants on the east bank of the Saginaw and that they're committed to solar energy production and opening areas of the site that are deemed safe to the public for the first time in generations. The site was a coal plant from 1959 to 2023 and two generating units powered by natural gas will continue operation through 2031. This project was designed to solicit input, interpret that input, and provide a series of professional recommendations from the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy on how to approach the design and development of these new open spaces and public lands in the coming years.

This document provides a series of primary recommendations:

1. Areas of the site that are deemed to be safe for public access should be opened in stages as soon as feasible.
2. The site should be designed around small "parks within a park" linked together with a trail and road network.
3. Each "park within a park," also known as an activity center, will include design elements that vary horizontally, vertically, and texturally.
4. A sitewide infrastructure plan should be developed to determine the overall site infrastructure elements, such as secure access, restrooms, water crossings, natural areas, restoration plantings, and trails.
5. The project must proceed with a rigorous public process at every stage, and the philosophy of community engagement should involve early adopters in the design of subsequent phases to create community advocates for the project.



"We often hear the cliché, 'this is a once in a lifetime opportunity,' when people are discussing a proposal, even when the proposal in question is relatively inconsequential. If we accept the proverb that a lifetime is 'three score and ten years' then the proposal for the SBLC to coordinate the effort to reconfigure the Consumers Energy property at the mouth of the Saginaw River is an opportunity much more consequential than something that can be fit into just one lifetime. The proposed reconfiguration of the Consumers site will erase signs of the industrial activities of the previous century and prepare the site to host a variety of new activities -- for both wildlife and people -- during the coming century, and beyond. At a minimum, this will be a 'once in two lifetimes' opportunity for all of the participants. As a member of the SBLC board of directors I am looking forward to having a front row seat for the exciting work that's about to begin."

Michael Stoner  
Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy Board of Directors member



# Where the River Meets the Bay

This report was developed in response to a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine how our community interacts with the Saginaw River, right where it meets the Saginaw Bay. It is designed to provide a closer look at community needs, as described by workshop participants. It includes recommendations for specific design elements, plant species, and sitewide infrastructure considerations. It proposes a framework for future design as sections of the property become available for public access. It is our intent that this document will provide a roadmap for the development of a beautiful natural recreation area in a critical location within our community. The concepts presented in this report are dependent on a determination that areas of the site that may be opened to the public are deemed safe.

This report was developed after a series of workshops scheduled during January through March 2024 with community leaders in the fields of local government, philanthropy, conservation, education, and business. Workshops were held both in person at the Conservancy's office in Bay City and online via Zoom. The full results of those workshops are included near the end of this document starting on page 31. The extensive recommendations made by workshop participants have been carefully reviewed and cataloged, and, in many cases, they were the inspiration for the professional recommendations contained within this document. The Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy has significant experience over the last 15 years with the restoration of complex, formerly industrial sites. In all cases, it is our objective to try to build consensus with the public around the potential design and uses of public natural areas.

Throughout the development of this document and over the course of several workshops scheduled over two months, we began to develop a series of conceptual drawings and ideas. These concepts have been expressed in the sections to follow. This document includes all the public input that was received during the process, conceptual drawings for activity areas and broader infrastructure, ideas about the specific design elements required to successfully open this site to the public, consideration of the community engagement that should surround the project, and the conclusion summarizing what we believe should be the next steps in the process. We hope this document will provide a basis for action to ensure that this opportunity is not missed and that the next generation of residents and visitors to our community will have access to an incredible new amenity and unprecedented access to the Saginaw River and Bay.



"Greenspace and recreational opportunities offer communities the chance to enhance the quality of life for all its residents. The Consumers Energy Karn Site has the potential to serve people throughout the Saginaw Bay watershed with access to natural amenities and I was excited to hear so many great ideas discussed at the visioning session facilitated by Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy. What an opportunity for the region!"

Dennis Pilaske, Executive Director  
Chippewa Nature Center



# Design Philosophy

Developing a site plan for a project of this scale that will be implemented over a series of different phases is a complex and difficult task. In fact, the basic conditions upon which the initial site plan would be based could evolve over the period when the project is being developed. As a result, we have decided to approach the creation of a public area along the waterfront at the decommissioned Consumers Energy site in a way that is adaptable and will accommodate the site's evolution over time and the feedback from early adopters and site visitors.

Our overall design philosophy relies on two primary factors. First, we will recommend the establishment of a series of "park within a park" activity centers that can be designed and programmed over time as more and more acreage is open to the public. Second, we are recommending an overall site infrastructure plan that would include consideration for a trail network and water crossings to bind the site together while offering connections to the adjacent Soehnel Nature Trail. This site infrastructure plan would also include considerations for access and security, service areas for utility-scale solar installations on much of the site, and could provide for areas to be considered eligible for commercial or mixed-use development.

The site itself is too large to be considered in its entirety as one recreation area. Our recommended approach is more in line with larger regional metro parks or even national parks. Those sites, at ground level, are rarely considered in their entirety. Rather, individual high-activity areas are planned and designed independently of one another but with a family spirit. Users of a national park, for instance, may see that the first open picnic area along their route is crowded with families. Rather than leave for another park or find themselves crowded in with strangers, they can progress to the next picnic area where they might find similar but different amenities. This plan is intended to function in much the same way. It includes the recommendation for a series of activity centers that incorporate amenities from a similar menu, although each individual activity center should vary in its design in order to broaden the overall package of amenities available for guests or respond to specific site conditions unique to that activity center.

Rather than prescribe very specific amenities for every corner of the site, we have instead developed a design philosophy that incorporates three primary design elements: horizontal, vertical, and textural.

The first is horizontal design. In thinking of the site horizontally, we are considering the way in which amenities will relate to one another. We are concerned with their proximity to other amenities and roadways, the availability of certain amenities at each activity center, and more. In this way, each activity center could incorporate different land uses and areas reserved for a variety of activities, and careful consideration would be given to how those amenities work together to create a positive user experience. The remaining areas between activity centers would be primarily reserved native vegetation and wildlife habitat restoration.

The required horizontal elements for each activity center would include, at a minimum, the following:

- Vehicle parking
- Restroom facility (permanent or portable)
- Seating
- Play elements (primarily nature-based)
- Interpretive signage
- Shelter
- Trails (rustic and accessible)

Secondly, we are considering the site vertically. That is to say, how would visitors experience the site at different elevations? This could include experiencing the site exclusively at grade, where existing roads are already in use. It could include the vertical elements of the capped coal ash landfills, which provide an opportunity for rustic trails at higher elevations, offering new views of the Saginaw River delta. It could also include waterfront amenities such as canoe and kayak launches, where the site meets the shoreline.

The required vertical elements for each activity center would include, at a minimum, the following:

- Viewing and resting areas at high elevations (benches or boulders)
- Waterfront access at low elevations (canoe and kayak launches)
- Accessible trails (at grade level)
- Rustic trails (at all levels, connecting elevations)



Finally, we considered textural variety. This means we recommend that each activity center provide a wide variety of tactile experiences for visitors. These include a rustic surface nature trail, grass areas for outdoor recreation, sand at the waterfront, gravel beneath the tires of a mountain bike, or even wood chips in a nature play area.

The required textural elements for each activity center would include, at a minimum, the following:

- Hard-packed crushed fines, permeable pavement, or bituminous surface (accessible trails)
- Rustic dirt and uneven surfaces (rustic, natural surface trails)
- Grass (unprogrammed areas for recreation)
- Gravel (roads and parking areas)
- Wood chips or loose fines (nature play areas)
- Wildflower prairie (in general open areas and restoration areas)

By incorporating a variety of different tactile experiences and considering the design of the site both vertically and horizontally, we believe that creative variety can be incorporated into subsequent activity centers as they are developed while still preserving a family resemblance between those activity centers.



"The possibilities for the former Consumers Energy site are immense. In terms of habitat preservation and outdoor access to natural resources, we collectively have this incredible window of opportunity to encourage conservation efforts while cultivating a site for public use. As a lifetime resident of Hampton Township, enthusiastic outdoorsman, conservationist, and community development advocate, this project has the potential to transform our community creating place-based assets, outdoor educational opportunities, and offering attractions that will increase local quality of life and become a destination for our region."

Rich Van Tol  
Bay-Arenac Intermediate School District



# Timeline

**Karn 1 & 2  
site  
restoration  
through 2026**





**Karn 3 & 4  
operational  
through 2031**

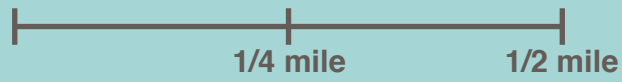
Consumers Energy will work to identify opportunities for public access to the waterways near the site as much as possible, while balancing this access alongside the need as a company to ensure proper distance for the safety of community members, as they seek to develop this area through economic or grid development projects in the future.



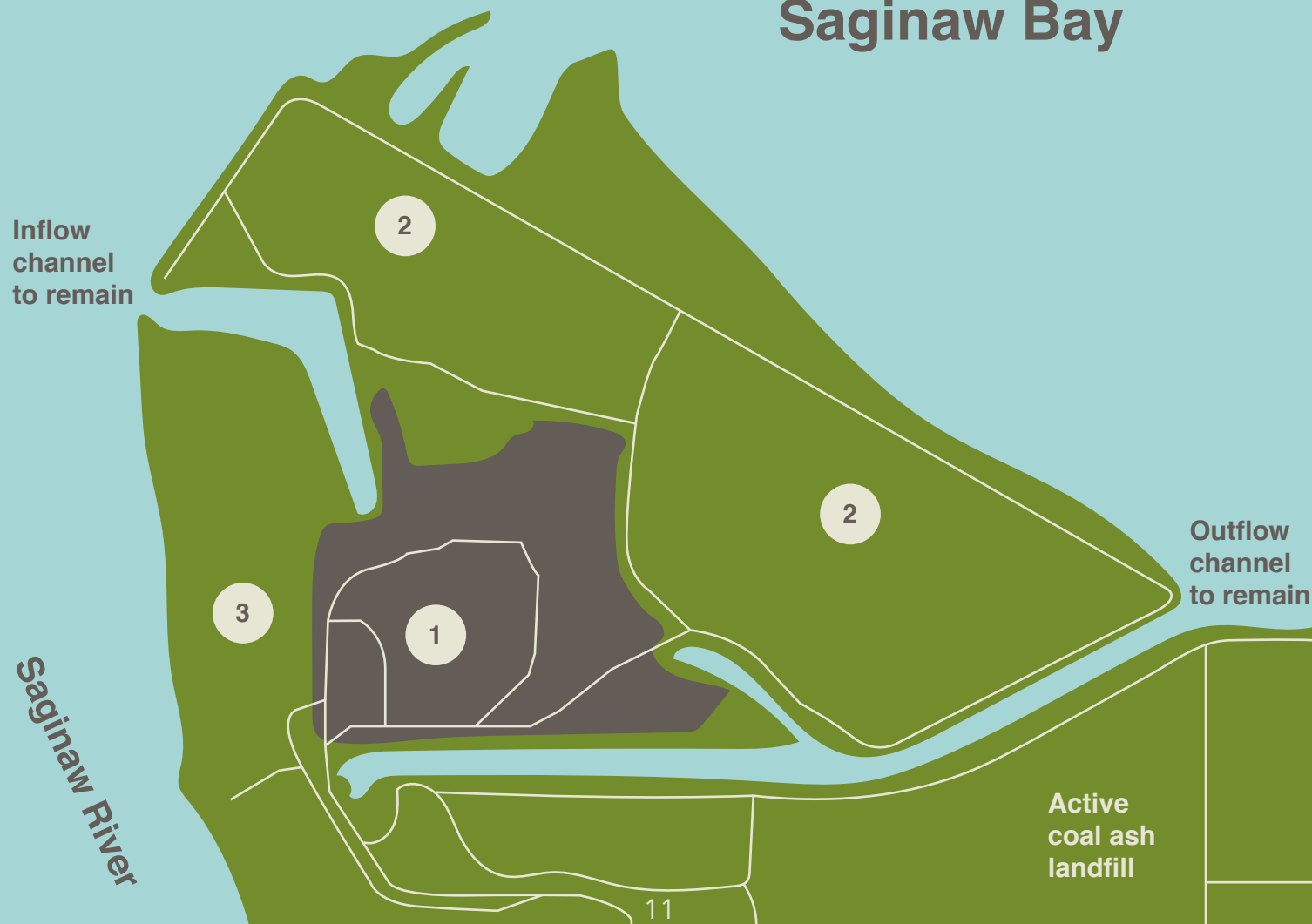


# Existing Conditions

-  Consumers Energy road (paved or gravel)
-  Consumers Energy Karn facilities
-  Capped coal ash landfill
-  Former Consumers Energy Weadock site



## Saginaw Bay



The Karn power plant in Essexville had both coal-fired and natural gas energy production. Recently, the demolition of the coal-fired power plants was completed but the natural gas and fuel-burning generating units will remain active through 2031. The site is also home to a water inlet and outlet that was used to draw water for the cooling necessary as part of the coal-fired energy production process. The site is home to several coal ash landfills and other infrastructure necessary for the production and transmission of commercial power for the community. Much of the remainder of the site is agricultural in its current state.

The site is adjacent to the popular Soehnel Trail provided by Hampton Township. The Hampton Township trailhead is separated from the project site by fencing and a drainage ditch. The plant's existing water outflow will also remain on site. While these waterways present barriers to connecting new trails to the existing community trail network, they can be overcome with the installation of new pedestrian bridges similar to those used by Hampton Township on its trail. These corridors also represent an important greenway between the Quanicassee State Wildlife Area, the habitat buffering the trails in Hampton Township, and the Consumers site.

The site is also adjacent to both the Saginaw River and the Saginaw Bay. This provides an incredible amount of opportunity. At the extreme northwest corner of the site, there is a significant seawall and a deep water channel intended for commercial coal vessels to deliver fuel for the now-retired coal-fired power plant. Along the north side of the site, significant siltation has occurred north of the original seawall to create a series of peninsulas that reach out north into Saginaw Bay. These low-lying areas are populated with vegetation, both beneficial and invasive. The peninsulas provide an opportunity for site visitors to experience the Saginaw Bay at water level. If deemed safe for public access, the two capped coal ash landfills are significantly higher at their peaks than at the perimeter grade. While two of the coal ash landfills are capped and vegetated, one remains in use in an area south of the water outflow. The two completed landfills can be incorporated into any future plans on the site. Primarily, they could serve as hills with rustic trails, providing an experience of changes in elevation and significantly better views. The remaining landfill could be incorporated into a future activity center following the completion of its decommissioning and capping process.

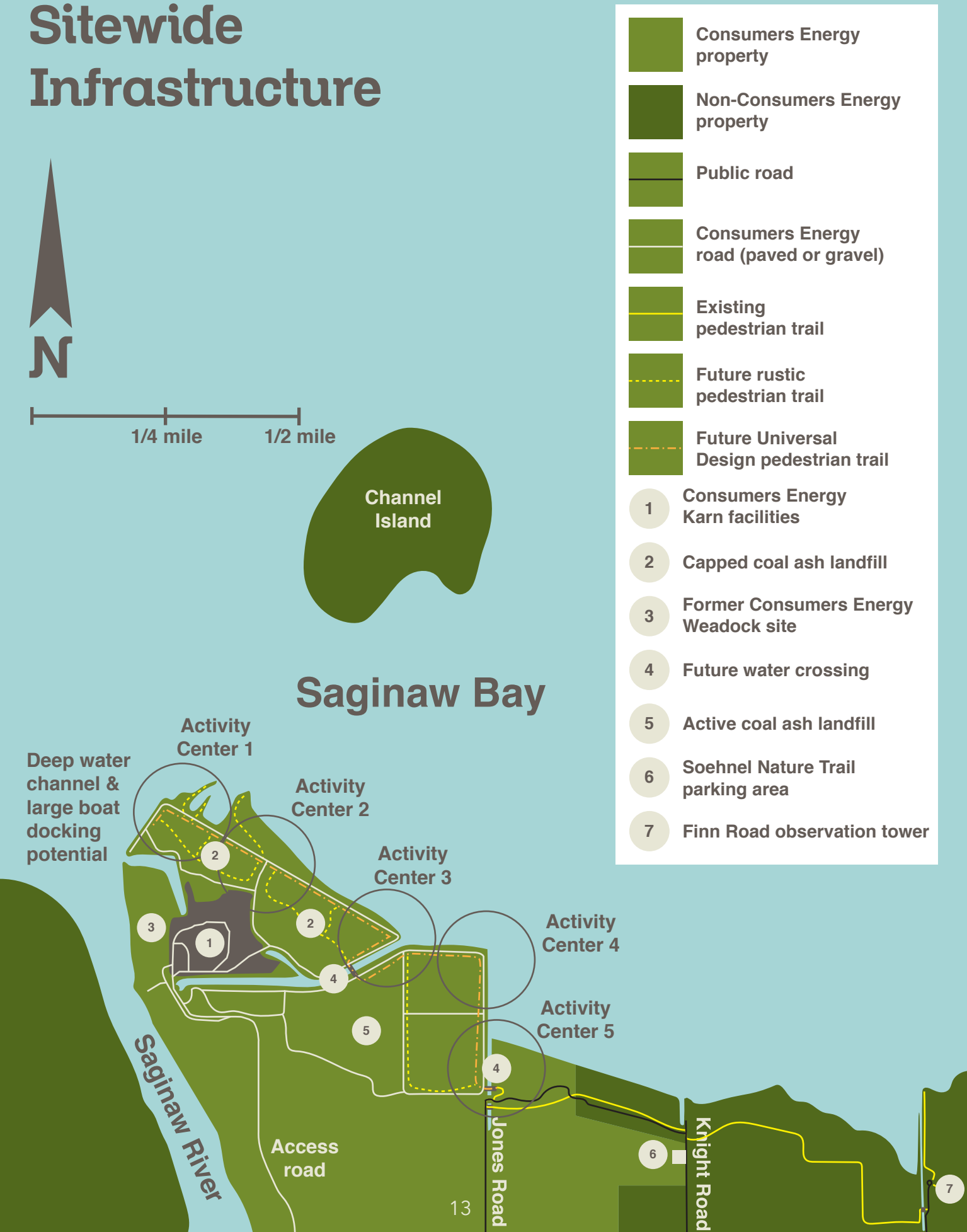
## Existing Conditions



# Sitewide Infrastructure



1/4 mile 1/2 mile



- Consumers Energy property
  - Non-Consumers Energy property
  - Public road
  - Consumers Energy road (paved or gravel)
  - Existing pedestrian trail
  - Future rustic pedestrian trail
  - Future Universal Design pedestrian trail
- 1 Consumers Energy Karn facilities
  - 2 Capped coal ash landfill
  - 3 Former Consumers Energy Weadock site
  - 4 Future water crossing
  - 5 Active coal ash landfill
  - 6 Soehnel Nature Trail parking area
  - 7 Finn Road observation tower

The primary elements of sitewide infrastructure are focused on the idea of connectivity with the rest of the region, access to and around the site, and a planned series of activity centers.

The impediments to connecting the nearby Hampton Township trails to the trails that may be developed on-site include necessary water crossings at the former plant outflow and the ditch located along the site's eastern boundary. Should these two areas be spanned with pedestrian bridges, the site's existing at-grade roadways surrounding the site perimeter could be expanded to include a durable or hard surface trail that would provide smooth accessible pathways for all users throughout the site. By connecting this trail network with the existing trail network, users could experience a nearly 10-mile out-and-back route if they were to begin at one end or the other.

The sitewide infrastructure plan must also consider the location and frequency of the proposed activity centers. We are currently recommending the incorporation of five activity centers, although additional centers could be included at a later date. The plan must also consider the potential for commercial or mixed-use development in some areas of the site and the future of the seawall areas, especially those along the Saginaw River.

Given the complexity and engineering required to address these challenges, this section is not intended to serve as a sitewide infrastructure plan but rather to call for the development of such a plan. Until Consumers Energy makes a final determination concerning the scale and location of the utility-scale solar facility, the extent of public land they choose to make available, and the decision over whether or not to include acreage for commercial or mixed-use development, a full sitewide infrastructure plan may be premature. Such a plan must also include a final solution of safe and efficient public access and separation of the generation assets from the public spaces.



# Connecting Activity Centers



## Saginaw Bay

-  Consumers Energy road (paved or gravel)
-  Future rustic pedestrian trail
-  Future Universal Design pedestrian trail
-  1 Parking area & trailhead
-  2 Wayfinding sign
-  3 Interpretive sign
-  4 Bench or picnic table
-  5 Shelter, picnic table, & restroom
-  6 Canoe/kayak launch area



Each activity center is intended to serve as a “park within a park,” both a place apart and a component of a larger public place. They are intended to be separated by enough distance to give each its own opportunity to shine and reflect the characteristics of its location while being close enough to link together over rustic and ADA-accessible trails.

Activity centers are conceptually located in five areas (shown on the sitewide infrastructure map), extending from the juncture of the Saginaw River and Bay on the west end of the site to the extreme east end of the site, where the existing trailhead for the Hampton Township trail would be expanded to link with a new pedestrian span and trailhead on the project site. In between, activity centers are placed at significant intersections where they can be accessed from several directions or where they can take advantage of unique views or site conditions, such as the peninsulas extending north into Saginaw Bay.

Each activity center will be unique among a collection of places serving together in a linked chain. Together, they will give traveling users a variety of experiences as they cross the overall project site or provide a unique set of local amenities for those who prefer to find a spot and enjoy the day.

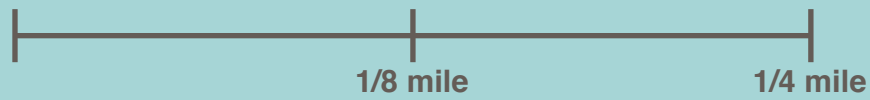





An aerial view of trails at Kensington Metropark near Milford, Michigan is a great example of the site’s connectivity that could be replicated at the Consumers Energy property.








## Connecting Activity Centers



# Activity Center Concept - Site Plan



-  Consumers Energy road (paved or gravel)
-  Future rustic pedestrian trail
-  Future Universal Design pedestrian trail

-  1 Parking area & trailhead
-  2 Wayfinding sign
-  3 Interpretive sign
-  4 Bench or picnic table
-  5 Shelter, picnic table, & restroom
-  6 Canoe/kayak launch area
-  7 Nature play features

## Saginaw Bay



Each activity center should be distinct, a reflection of the site characteristics, public input, and lessons learned from previous aspects of the project. The intention of this suggested approach is that an initial activity center will be engineered and developed, incorporating the vertical, horizontal, and textural elements prescribed by the design philosophy. Then, with that activity center complete, the public will be invited to visit and experience the site. Those visitors will be provided an opportunity to participate in subsequent surveys and workshops as future activity centers are designed.

This conceptual activity center plan is intended to be a starting point for a more formal engineered version. It is intended to serve as a showpiece for the project's overall design philosophy and become a "welcome mat" for the entire project. Ultimately, we anticipate creative solutions for additional activity centers that ensure that hiking, biking, fishing, birdwatching, kayaking, boating, and playing outdoors are offered in a wide variety of forms across the entire public area.

The more formal engineered version of the first activity center will provide far more specific selections for materials, scale, design, and construction methods for the development. This step is described later in this document in the "Conclusion and Next Steps" section. The development of more than one activity center could also occur simultaneously to more economically implement the included amenities.

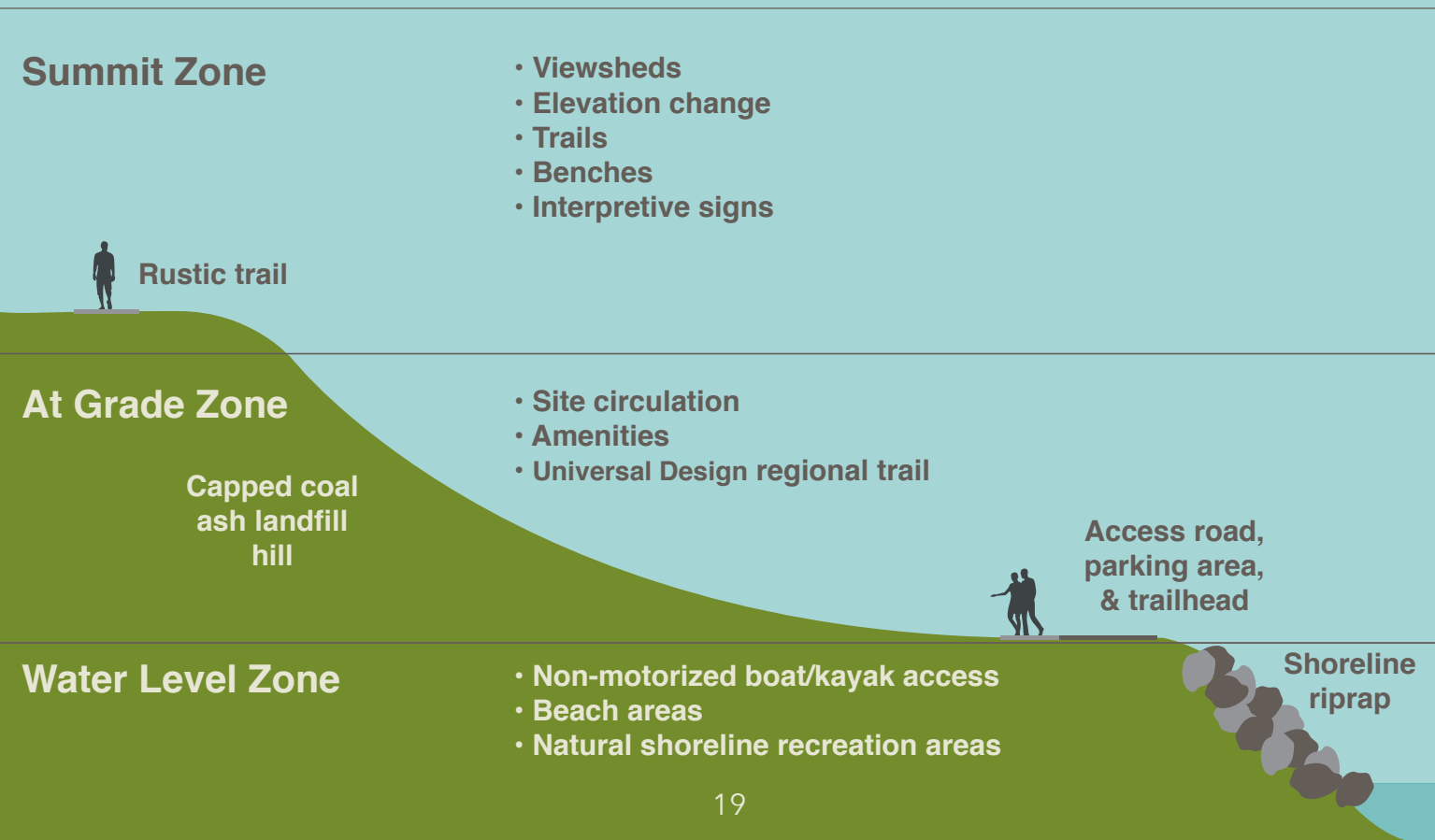


Images from Kensington Metropark near Milford, Michigan provide excellent examples of spaces and amenities that could be suitable for activity centers at the Consumers Energy property.

## Activity Center Concept - Site Plan



# Activity Center Concept Elevation Zones



One of the project site’s most unique opportunities is the variety of elevations that could be opened to the public. Not only is there an established at-grade road network and plenty of open space, but there are areas where site visitors could explore the water’s edge or climb to the top of the mounds created by the coal ash landfills.

This opportunity must be exploited at each activity center and when considering the overall site infrastructure plan. Rustic trails and simple resting areas should be incorporated along the ridgelines of the mounds, offering better views and a rigorous hiking opportunity. Canoe and kayak launching areas and waterfront recreational space must be included wherever waterfront land is present. Even in locations where no land is available along the waterfront, such as where existing seawalls protect the site, consideration for boat docking and other water-level activities must be considered.

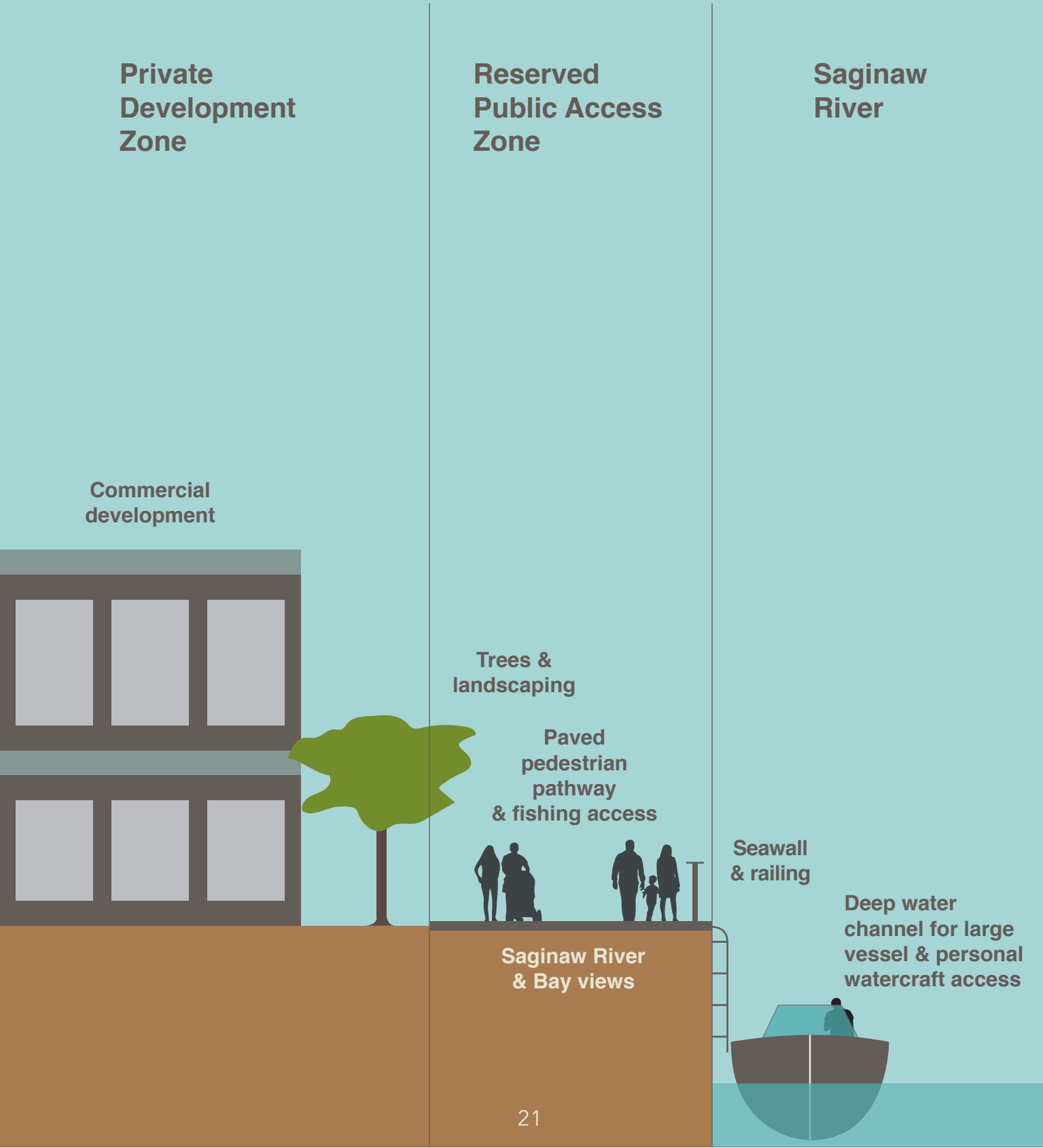


Capped landfill areas can serve as excellent outdoor recreation spaces if utilized correctly. Mount Trashmore, a former landfill near Cedar Rapids, Iowa, features a robust trail network that offers excellent views of the surrounding landscape from its summit.

## Activity Center Concept - Elevation Zones



# Mixed-Use Development Waterfront Public Access



Much of the site will ultimately be dominated by utility-scale solar energy production and storage, as well as a significant public recreation area. However, some areas of the site may still be reserved for commercial or mixed-use development. We support this approach and believe that a dynamic site with a variety of land uses is more likely to succeed than a design that does not rely on this interplay. We do believe that any areas of the site that are developed for commercial or mixed-use projects should be designed to support and interact with the public open spaces while protecting the existing and proposed generation assets.

Similar to Bay City’s Uptown area, we believe that public areas and a waterfront promenade must be included in any commercial or mixed-use development. That way, visitors and users of those projects can have ready, immediate pedestrian access to the outdoor recreation areas provided nearby. This would also maximize public access to the Saginaw River and Saginaw Bay. While we support a dynamic mix of uses, we believe that waterfront access should be exclusively reserved for the public all along the outer site perimeter.



The Uptown Bay City development provides a glimpse into possibilities for mixed-use development on Consumers Energy’s Saginaw River frontage. Setting mixed-used structures back from the river’s edge with a buffer of landscaping and paved pedestrian pathways provides a model for multiple site uses and user groups to co-exist.



# Landscape

## Trees & Prairie Restoration Areas

In addition to areas that will be developed with hardscape elements such as parking and ADA-accessible trails, hundreds of acres of open space will be available for a variety of vegetation restoration approaches. These include the establishment of trees and shrubs, native wildflowers and grasses, and lower-growing and shallow-rooted vegetation suitable for capped landfill areas. This variety of species will provide added benefits for a variety of pollinator species and wildlife as well as a deliberate aesthetic improvement beyond the turf grass that exists throughout a majority of the site.

### Tree and shrub species

- Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)
- Linden (*Tilia americana*)
- Black Willow (*Salix nigra*)
- Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)
- River Birch (*Betula nigra*)
- Box Elder (*Acer negundo*)
- Swamp White Oak (*Quercus bicolor*)
- Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)
- Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)
- Poplar (*Populus alba*)
- Honey Locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*)
- Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*)
- Red-Osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)
- Gray Dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*)
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*)
- Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)

### Native wildflower and grass species

- Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriac*)
- Sand Tickseed (*Coreopsis lanceolata*)
- Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
- False Sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*)
- Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)
- Yellow Coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*)
- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Three-lobed Coneflower (*Rudbeckia triloba*)
- Rosin Weed (*Silphium integrifolium*)
- Stiff Goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*)
- Prairie Heart-leaved Aster (*Symphyotrichum oolentangiensis*)
- Canada Wild-Rye (*Elymus canadensis*)
- Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*).

### Low-grow and shallow root species

- Various fescue grass species
- Dutch White Clover (*Trifolium repens*)
- Crimson Clover (*Trifolium incarnatum*)
- Ladino Clover (*Trifolium repens*)
- Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)
- Common Self-Heal (*Prunella vulgaris*)



Open space provides opportunities for a variety of plantings. Native wildflowers and grasses (upper and lower left) provide benefits for pollinators and aesthetic beauty to the site. Trees provide shade near activity centers and along trail corridors as well as additional vertical components. Lower growing and shallow rooted vegetation like fescue grasses and clovers (lower right) can provide an alternate and pollinator-beneficial vegetative ground cover compared to turf grass on landfill areas.



# Environmental Foundations & Perpetual Stewardship

The perpetual stewardship of public outdoor recreation spaces must be rooted in a sound environmental foundation based on assessments and practices initiated well in advance of any site development. Establishing an environmental baseline that conveys safe conditions for a variety of uses is imperative to the success of any future public spaces created at the Consumers Energy site.

Conducting environmental assessments of the areas that will be open to the public will be an essential part of the process to ultimately develop and open the site. A variety of methods can be utilized to communicate the safety of the site for a variety of public uses once assessments are completed. This could include specific site interpretation, press releases, and use of social media channels. Addressing the public's potential concerns about the site's environmental conditions cannot be understated. Clear and concise information is imperative to ensure that trust is established and maintained.

Once a desired environmental baseline is established, it will be important to adopt a strategy for managing the site in perpetuity to ensure that the baseline is maintained or even improved upon in the future. Any necessary maintenance of potential site remediation measures will need to be accounted for along with best management practices for maintaining the site's ecology. Outlining how the site's amenities and natural features will be cared for and by which parties is integral to the site's success as a public outdoor recreation space. Coordination of management efforts and periodic review of any management plans will help ensure that resources are directed in the most efficient means possible.



## Establishing baseline environmental conditions

- Initiate environmental assessments based on specific site use criteria tailored to the site
- Complete any required remediation activities
- Convey transparent information about these actions to ensure public confidence in site safety

## Perpetual stewardship

- Establish management plan to care for established tree, shrub, wildflower, and grass plantings as well as all built amenities that support the public's enjoyment of the site
- Maintain and update site interpretation to reflect conditions as they change
- Monitor for presence of invasive species and implement best management practices to protect the site's overall ecological condition
- Periodically review management plan to ensure that changing conditions are accounted for



# Community Engagement

Community engagement must be a central component of any long-range plans for the redevelopment of this site. Given that the site is not likely to be used exclusively for outdoor recreation but rather will include a mix of potential future land uses and the presence of a significant utility-scale solar installation, it is important to consider the potential reactions of early adopters of the site. We must also consider the legacy of the coal-fired and natural gas energy production facilities, which means that structures and powerlines that are currently on-site will remain even after the existing plants are no longer part of the site.

It has been our experience that the first visitors to a new natural area hold tremendous sway over public opinion. Should the initial users have a negative experience on the site, they're likely to relay that message to their own networks. This could discourage other people from coming to experience the site for themselves and contribute to poor public opinion of the project.

We suggest that the site be opened up in phases. When the first phase is open and one or two activity centers are ready for visitors, the remainder of the site will still be in development. Therefore, all of the interpretation, signage, and community engagement for this project should be centered on the concept that early adopters must be early ambassadors for the site. The signage and interpretation should lean heavily on the fact that the site is only in its infancy and that these early adopters have an opportunity to participate in the planning and development of future activity centers and the remaining acreage of the site. In fact, this is a central component of this entire approach. Workshops, online forums, events, and other community engagement techniques should be set up and incorporated into the long-term plan for the redevelopment of the site.

By involving early adopters in the design process for subsequent phases of the project, the team will have an opportunity to get ahead of negative opinions that could result from a site user's misunderstanding of the overall project. By inviting the public to enjoy the site, even as it stands with only an initial set of improvements, those visitors are seeing behind the curtain, learning how such a project is developed over time. Hopefully, rather than be discouraged by the presence of some legacy elements of the site, early adopters will instead take part in subsequent design exercises and spread the word of the incredible opportunity the remaining acres provide.



A sample interpretive sign and mock-up that invites visitors to engage with the site and provide feedback that will inform its future. Early adopters of public spaces are critical to the perception of these spaces. Land managers often rely on the feedback of engaged visitors to plan for future development as well as improvements to existing amenities.



# Conclusion & Next Steps

This document is intended to convey several key points. First, the site should be opened up in stages, with each stage coming online as soon as possible. Second, it should be designed around the concept of activity centers, which are small “parks within a park” linked together with a trail and road network. Third, that each activity center will incorporate design elements that vary horizontally, vertically, and texturally. Fourth, the overall site infrastructure elements, such as security, water crossings, natural areas, restoration plantings, and trails, should be considered for the whole site from the very beginning. Fifth, the philosophy of community engagement must be centered on including early adopters in the design process for subsequent phases.

Following the publication of this document, we believe that Consumers Energy should make a public declaration of intent to open public areas that are deemed safe and permissible, with a focus on public waterways. By making a public declaration of intent soon, community interest will rise, and more voices can be added to the community chorus. Also, the complex and challenging finance and fundraising for the project can begin.

The next step is to initiate a formal design process for the first activity center. Inspired by the conceptual maps and illustrations in this report, the project team should secure an engineering or landscape architecture consultant to develop a rich, specific design. When the team and Consumers Energy adopt a final design, that activity center should be scheduled for construction.

Simultaneous with the development of the first activity center, site infrastructure must be reviewed, and an initial approach to public access must be determined. This complex task will require open access to the recreational areas of the site while also protecting the public and the Consumers Energy assets that will remain on-site.

Over the next few years, subsequent activity centers will be constructed, significant site infrastructure issues like water crossings will be resolved, connecting ADA-accessible trails and rustic trails will be developed to link the activity centers with one another and the existing Township trail and new amenities will be conceived and included based on future public feedback.

It is with this high-level approach, involving many tasks that “dial in” specific areas of the site over time, we believe a dynamic, varied, connected, useful, beautiful nature experience will be provided for the community. It will include opportunities for longer day hikes, fresh areas for shoreline fishing, new boater access, high elevations for stunning views, safe areas for outdoor nature play, family gathering sites, and more.





# Appendix A

## Public Consensus Building Process - Workshops

One of the most important aspects of transformative opportunities such as this is community input. Our entire approach is designed on the concept of collaborative consensus building. While organizations such as the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy have experience with restoration projects and providing public access to land, we do not know what the community itself would like to see when such an opportunity is developed. As a result, we designed this public input process to initiate discussion, provide ideas, and validate the landowner's desire to proceed.

To ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach, we scheduled and held a series of community meetings, both in person and online, inviting a broad collection of representatives to participate. These workshops were tailored to the attendees, including parents, municipal leaders, philanthropists, conservationists, elected and appointed government officials, representatives of federal and state agencies, retirees, young people, and more. The ideas generated by each group have been cataloged here in this section.

It was the discussion at each workshop combined with the SBLC's professional insight that informed our final recommendations. The concept of thinking both horizontally and vertically came directly from conversations with boating enthusiasts seeking more and better access to areas to dock their boats and hikers sitting across from them looking for more opportunities to find elevation on rustic trails. Inspiration came from parents looking for areas where their children could get dirt under their fingernails while still having access to picnic areas and restrooms. The concept of textural variety came from conversations about paved trails versus natural surface trails and nature-based playgrounds versus more conventional play areas. It came from a discussion of how to treat surfaces at every elevation and distributed horizontally throughout the site to ensure the broadest possible set of experiences.

The concepts provided by the workshop participants follow. No suggestion was left out, although we have combined similar ideas and organized those thoughts to better help the reader understand and digest them.



"We can't begin to plan for conservation and recreation unless we have an understanding about what both Consumers' and the public want to see at this important site. This public input process will be critical in developing a vision of what that site will look like well into the future."

Michael Kelly  
Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network  
The Conservation Fund



# Workshops

January 17, February 8, February 14, & March 7

## Attendees

### SBLC staff

Branigan, Zachary  
Dandamudi, Sarah  
Edmonds, Trevor  
Gainforth, Sydney  
Meier, Hoss

### SBLC Board of Directors

Banaszek, Mia  
Baumgartner, Micah  
Clements, Todd  
Day, Katelyn  
Fassezke, Mike  
Fitzpatrick, Jane  
Morley, Dave  
Stoner, Mike

### Consumers Energy staff

Busby, Erin  
Isabell, Dena

### Environmental Law & Policy Center staff

Geiger, Jill

### Local Government

Barcia, Jim - Bay County, County Executive  
Close, Terri - Hampton Township Supervisor  
Ogar, Laura - Bay County, Environmental Affairs & Community Development

## Philanthropy

Mahoney, Diane - Bay Area Community Foundation  
Morley, Diane - Bay Area Community Foundation BOD  
Weaver, Lynn - McLaren Bay Medical Foundation

## Conservation

Bauer, Charlie - Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, & Energy  
Gass, Meaghan - Michigan Sea Grant, Michigan State University Extension  
Kelly, Mike - The Conservation Fund, Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network  
Pilaske, Dennis - Chippewa Nature Center  
Vanderhaar, Michelle - US Fish & Wildlife Service  
Wilson, Mike - Bay Conservation District

## Education

Hellus, Dylan - Saginaw Valley State University  
VanTol, Rich - Bay-Arenac ISD

## Local Business

Brines, Bo - Little Forks Outfitters  
Somalski, Jerry - Bay Landscaping

## Community members

Murchison, Craig - Saginaw Bay Yacht Club  
Tighe, Karen - former Bay County probate judge



## Outdoor recreation access

Feedback in this section relates to outdoor recreation activities and amenities

- Access to and viewshed of the Saginaw Bay
  - Bay frontage
- What is the water quality at the confluence of the Saginaw River and Saginaw Bay? What opportunities exist for site interpretation to address concerns or dispel myths regarding this issue?
- Shoreline
  - Beach/sand spits north of rip-rap and perimeter road
  - Habitat & wildlife viewing
- Paddling access
  - Kayaking potential between the Consumers site, Finn Road access, Bay City State Park, and Kawkawlin River
- Nature playgrounds & nature play features
- Wildlife observation
  - Lookout points & viewing scopes
    - Migratory birds
    - White-tailed deer
- Family-accessible pathways
  - Possible connection to existing Soehnel Trail in Hampton Township
    - East side of Consumers Energy site
    - Bridge over waterways/ditches for connections
    - Suitable for walking, biking and strollers
    - Loop trail around landfill
- Fishing access - boardwalk and/or pier
- Boater access
  - Possibly in Area 1 along Saginaw River seawall
    - Finger docks, dock cleats, and/or mooring potential
    - Adequate depth in river from previous freighter accommodations
  - Shallow between bay shoreline and Channel Island
    - Limited boat access
- Rustic experiences
- Educational opportunities
  - Field trips & research opportunities
    - Delta, SVSU, area schools, and youth organizations
  - Interpretive signage
    - Natural features
    - Cultural and historical significance of the site
- Restroom facilities
- Winter recreation
  - Sledding
    - Are landfill areas the appropriate height and grade for this activity?
  - Ice skating
  - Cross-country skiing

- Curate a diversity of experiences, textures, and touchpoints
  - Horizontal, vertical, texture/surface diversity and amount of time spent on site
  - A menu of experiences
- Consider a process where people could have initial access to the site that allows them to provide input for future phases covering 'blank canvas' portions of the property. Using initial site interpretation to garner feedback that will help inform subsequent phases
  - Inviting people in at crucial moments for key experiences
  - Standing on a spot for the first time in generations for a different purpose
- How will site interpretation detail past, current, and future site uses to address perceptions of site contamination and other environmental impacts?
- Comparisons to Midland City Forest
  - Biking
  - Hiking
  - Warming house/structure
  - High impact and multiple uses on approximately 500 acres
  - Family/small group gatherings
- A trail plan or plan for a potential connection to the existing trails in Hampton Township existed before the events of September 11, 2001. Are these plans still viable?
- Birding and addition to the Saginaw Bay Birding Trail
- Similarities to the Saginaw River Headwaters Rec Area in terms of site challenges from past and current industrial-scale power generation and its potential for future uses
- Comparisons between the site's potential and metroparks in southeast Michigan, specifically the Huron-Clinton Metroparks
- Connections to Patterson Road boat launch on the west side of the Saginaw River for access via water
- Substantial bike and foot path opportunities along the Saginaw Bay shoreline
  - Universal access on trail network within Area 2 or throughout the entire site
- Dark sky park opportunities
  - Sunrise, sunset, and other astronomy programs
  - What level of light pollution will exist onsite when current operations cease and industrial-scale solar generation exists?
- Interpreting historical site uses through signage and other installations
- Birding and wildlife viewing opportunities
- Deer population management
  - Will this be necessary?
- Interest from participants in a future site visit



## Habitat restoration

Feedback in this section relates to native plant and habitat restoration

- Reutilizing capped landfill areas
  - Appropriate plantings with shallow roots that won't interfere with overhead and underground infrastructure
  - Wildflowers, grasses, shrubs
  - Equipment weight restrictions on top of these areas
- Addressing invasive species
  - Phragmites
    - Bay shoreline and pockets in upland areas
  - Invasive shrubs and terrestrial plants
    - Scattered in upland areas
- Potential for future research opportunities for fisheries research
- Incorporate beneficial vegetation plantings within solar installations
- How will the management of habitat restoration work be handled in perpetuity?

## Economic development

Feedback in this section relates to potential economic development opportunities

- Continued tax revenue for Hampton Township and Bay County
  - Approximately 26% of land in Bay County is not currently taxed due to a mix of ownership and uses
- Eco-lodging for rustic short-term stays
  - Small cabins
  - Yurts
  - Installed at and above grade
    - No excavation
- What is Hampton Township's ideal vision for the site?
  - More opportunities for outdoor recreation, including potential boating access and water recreation.
- The opportunity to blend economic and recreational uses, especially in the vicinity of the former Weadock building site. This could include a pathway along the river with development east of that corridor, similar to the Uptown development in Bay City on the Saginaw River
- Great Lakes cruise ship port and/or docking capabilities along Saginaw River seawall
- Convention & Visitors Bureau partnership for site promotion
- Biochar furnace/reactor installation?
  - Pyrolysis process - controlled burning of waste organic material in a low oxygen environment that results in a charcoal-like soil additive

## Continued industrial use of portions of the site

Feedback in this section relates to Consumers' future power generation onsite

- Future power generation
- Solar panels & battery storage
- Ash landfilling exists in areas 1, 2, and 5
  - Some future ash removal may take place but capping of these areas is also possible
  - Approximately 30 feet of ash across 150 acres
  - Some surface development and planting may be possible depending on the weight and footprint of structures/development and species that would be planted
- Are there limitations related to the capped coal ash landfill areas?
- Existing Karn structures will be demolished once current natural gas and oil power generation ceases
- Will Consumers maintain ownership of the total acreage? Who would manage acreage opened for public access?

## General

Feedback in this section relates to site aesthetics and its location in relation to other amenities

- How could this site complement the Dow property on the west side of the Saginaw River slated for future public access? How could the Consumer site complement the Dow property?
- If the site is opened for public access, which entity will ultimately be responsible for managing site amenities?
- Site aesthetics
  - View of the site from the Saginaw River and Saginaw Bay
  - How is the site landscaped and/or developed to improve aesthetics after Karn structures are demolished



# Appendix B

## Public Consensus Building Process - Survey

Every workshop revealed something new about the community's needs and wants. In fact, each workshop was significantly different from the others. A concept from a previous meeting would be relevant to the discussion at a subsequent meeting. To ensure that everyone's thoughts were heard and to give participants time to conjure additional thoughts after reflecting on the content of the workshop in which they were a participant, we sent out a simple follow-up survey with a series of questions designed to gather additional information, solicit edits to previous input, or to further discussion.

What follows is a collection of thoughts provided by a survey. These surveys were sent out to workshop participants within the week following their experience in the consensus-building process.

1. What is the best idea **THAT YOU HEARD AT THE MEETING** for renaturalizing and opening a portion of the Consumers Energy site for public recreation after decommissioning?
  - Extension of the trail system to link up with what already exists.
  - Cooperative working arrangement between SBLC, Consumers, Michigan DNR, US Fish & Wildlife Service and others to jointly come up with a solution for repurposing the site.
  - Making plans in advance with all potential partners to make sure all compatible uses of the site are considered and implemented.
  - Automobile access via a driving loop with pull-outs to access natural amenities
  - Local fishing area
  - Extending the nature trail from Jones Road and connecting to the existing rail trail system.
  - Creating walking paths that connect to existing trails. Creating small finger docks that would make the area accessible by boat.
  - Secure parking, trails (mt. biking/hiking/running), bird watching and fishing opportunities (access to the Bay and River)

2. Think **BIG**: What is the **WILDEST** idea that occurred to you **AFTER** the meeting that wasn't previously shared?
  - Not so wild but incorporating a welcome center onto the site that includes history of that site going back before it became the Consumers Energy site...to include Native American usage and even pre Native American where available.
  - Managing new natural/wildlife areas on both sides of the mouth of the river to create one environmentally significant natural resource for the entire region.
  - Leaving the entire site free of development other than facilities that enhance the natural landscape and the strategic geographic/environmental position of the Consumers site.
  - Disabled Access Fishing area
  - Since the property along the river is zoned industrial, redevelop part as an industrial park and have Bay Futures help with economic development of those sites. A great location for industries that require high voltages or high electrical consumption.
  - Creating a nature center similar to Chippewa Nature Center or the buildings at Midland City Forest that would create more of a field trip ready space for our schools to utilize.
  - Restaurant and fishing pier
3. Think **PRACTICALLY**: What is an idea that you have seen executed at another site, or which occurred to you, that was not shared at the meeting but could **EASILY** or **AFFORDABLY** be included at the Consumers Energy site?
  - Linked to Number 3...a pathway that includes interesting facts...something that could be a classroom experience regardless of age.
  - A proposal that would enhance the site but not significantly impact opportunities to market the resource would include adding only pathways and signage to properties on both sides of the river, like what has been done so far with the Saginaw Bay Wildlands project.
  - if possible, dark sky park opportunities
  - Closely managed hunting opportunities. We have the 900 acre wild area created by Dow in Auburn. I believe we have enough walking/hiking trails in Bay County. Most hunting areas are private and an open area like this would offer opportunities to residents that may not be otherwise possible.
  - Monitor Township's industrial park and businesses like SK Siltron or semiconductors or chip industry. There is an opportunity for shipping via the waterway and railroad from this site. This location could provide good paying jobs for many if some sort of manufacturing would locate there.
  - Identification plaques for common wildlife and vegetation that will be seen on the site. Maybe there's some way to make a recording that can be played for those who are visually impaired?
  - Replication of a metro park (with pavilion rentals) or Midland City Forest.



# About the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy

4. Were there any ideas that you heard that you **DO NOT** want to see at the Consumers Energy site?
  - Hunting grounds
  - Talk of creating some sort of industrial park or giant commercial zone seems silly, impractical, and contrary to enhancing the environmental potential of the Consumers site.
  - Erecting large regional commercial distribution centers on the site would be silly [and impractical] for many reasons
  - I'm not certain how hunting would work on this site. access for anglers could be considered
  - I want as many people as possible to use the location. I do not want any idea defeated unless it isn't a real possibility.
  - I don't want to see the site undeveloped and left as a natural habitat. In Hampton Township, so much of the shoreline is property of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources with limited access to the water.
  - Outdoor skating rink.
5. Which of the following is the **MOST** important to you? (1) Maximum trail length (2) Views of the Saginaw Bay and Saginaw River (3) Amenities (restrooms, benches, etc.) (4) Play areas (5) Wildlife habitat restoration:
  - All would be great, but wildlife habitat is number 1.
  - 1, 5, 4, 2, 3. This question was nearly impossible to answer
  - Maximum trail length.
  - 1) Views of the Saginaw Bay and River. 2) Wildlife habitat restoration. 3) Amenities. 4) Play areas. 5) Trails
  - Views of the bay and river
  - Wildlife habitat restoration
  - In priority order for me: 2, 5, 1, 3, 4

The Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy (SBLC) is dedicated to taking action at the intersection of people and nature, elevating landscapes for all, and taking leadership in the area of land use and conservation. The SBLC was established in 1997 as a grassroots non-profit and has grown from an all-volunteer land trust to a multifaceted conservation organization. Since our inception, we have protected nearly 6,000 acres of land, and have created a network of urban and rural nature preserves that are open to the public from dawn until dusk, every day, forever. We have also restored and rehabilitated hundreds of acres on partner landscapes, helped municipalities improve and maintain parks, and offered critical programming centered on conservation and the environment.

We believe that high-quality natural lands are an essential part of a high-quality, competitive community. We believe that everyone should have equal, free access to nature, to Lake Huron, and to our rivers. We are an organization with a history of developing projects that improve the quality of life in the communities we serve.

The SBLC values its partnership with the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC) that provided the opportunity to engage in this process. ELPC is a Chicago-based non-profit environmental advocacy group that advocates, innovates, and litigates to protect the Midwest's environment from the Great Lakes to the Great Plains.



