

## **Saginaw Bay Coastal Initiative Saginaw Bay Wetland Evaluation Project**

Many high quality wetland areas existing in the Saginaw Bay area are currently under threat of development and/or alteration. These wetlands are extremely important to the health of Saginaw Bay as a whole, as they contribute to water quality, flood control, wildlife and fish habitat and the overall health of the Great Lakes. In an effort to preserve these important habitats, a technical workgroup was formed to identify wetlands that are the top priority for protection efforts in Saginaw Bay, and to inform local authorities of the various methods that may be used to preserve these areas.

The workgroup consisted of members from the Department of Environmental Quality, the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Michigan Natural Features Inventory. The partnership used Geographic Information System (GIS) technology and updated National Wetland Inventory maps to determine the approximate locations of wetlands throughout the five-county Saginaw Bay Coastal Initiative (SBCI) area. Then, a set of criteria was developed to rank each wetland according to its priority for permanent protection efforts. The overall rank of each wetland was derived by assigning a score for each of the criteria, which included evaluations of ecological integrity as well as social and biological desirability. For example, the workgroup evaluated each wetland for presence of threatened and endangered species, existence of a rare and imperiled community, overall size of the complex, regulatory status, and likelihood for migratory bird use, among other factors. The final priority list may be used by local municipalities, townships, and conservation groups to identify locations to focus protection efforts. The rank of each wetland is displayed on a map, which is available in paper form or on a CD in ArcReader format.

The workgroup also produced a manual that describes how to use these maps, issues local protection programs should consider, and the various mechanisms that may be used to protect these wetland resources. Depending on the concerns and objectives of the landowner, options for preservation may include conservation easements, limitation of development options through zoning changes, or sale or donation of parcels to land conservancies, among others.

For more information contact Tracy Collin, DEQ-Land and Water Management Division at [collint@michigan.gov](mailto:collint@michigan.gov) (517-241-4506) or Jim Bredin, Office of the Great Lakes at [bredinj@michigan.gov](mailto:bredinj@michigan.gov) (517-335-3242). For copies of the final maps and manual, please contact the Environmental Assistance Center at 1-800-662-9278 or [deq-ead-env-assist@michigan.gov](mailto:deq-ead-env-assist@michigan.gov).