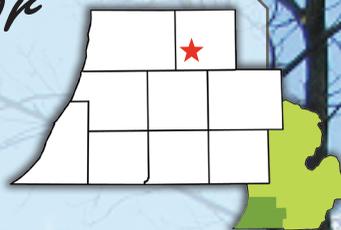




Generations of Appreciation for Fair Lake



At the headwaters of southern Barry County's Augusta Creek lies Fair Lake, an ecologically rich and diverse lake more fittingly called "Spectacular Lake".

Only a few houses dot Fair Lake's pristine five-mile shoreline, which has helped ensure the continued health of this beautiful lake. Though its human inhabitants have more recently noticed its unique ecological qualities, the lake's healthy habitat has been appreciated by generations of wildlife, including the southernmost nesting pair of common loons in the continental United States. Year after year, the loons have chosen to make their nest on a human-made platform at the north end of Fair Lake.

"My parents bought land on Fair Lake in 1938. Even back then, an older neighbor of theirs said the loons had been here for years, so they've been here for at least 90 years and probably much longer," stated donor Noel Hayward. "The loons are so special to us and we would like to do whatever we can to help them continue to make their home here on the lake."

So when a large natural tract of land on Fair Lake recently went up for sale, Noel and her husband, Larry, decided to purchase the property and donate it to SWMLC so that it would be conserved forever. The 66-acre Fair Lake Preserve has over 1,500 feet of frontage on the north end of the lake and contains species that are indicative of the highest quality wetlands in southwest Michigan. Uncommon species such as pitcher plants and grass-pink orchids line the banks of this beautiful lake.

"Fair Lake Preserve is SWMLC's sixth Barry County nature preserve and is critical for wetland and water conservation in the headwaters of the Augusta Creek Watershed, which ultimately flows into the Kalamazoo River," said Conservation Projects Manager Emily Wilke. "Over 600 of the 4,700 acres that SWMLC has conserved in Barry County are in this watershed, an area of focus for land protection for the next several years".

Conserving Barry County is an ongoing labor of love for Larry and Noel. In 1997, the Haywards protected their beloved Blue Ridge Farm in Orangeville Township with a donated conservation easement, later adding adjacent parcels to create a 330-acre contiguous property that is forever conserved with SWMLC.

The Haywards' dedication to conservation is demonstrated in their creation of Barry County Bluebirds, a citizen science project that is part of Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch program. It began a few years ago when Larry placed 50 bluebird nest boxes at Blue Ridge Farm. The project expanded when Larry noted that cemeteries, with their open spaces and few trees, mimic the preferred savanna habitat of Eastern bluebirds. He obtained permission to place boxes in 40 of the 47 Barry County cemeteries — a total of 331 nest boxes! The Haywards' daughter, Tiffany Greenfield, felt that the information generated by all these nest boxes could make an important contribution to Cornell Lab's database, so she set up a detailed data collection system that includes GPS locators. Ten volunteers monitor and maintain the boxes, and the project has been met with enthusiastic community support. You can find out more about this inspiring, grassroots project by visiting Barry County Bluebirds' Facebook page and Cornell Lab's NestWatch page (www.nestwatch.org).

"The Haywards are long-time SWMLC supporters with a deep commitment to Barry County's wildlife and rural character," said Wilke. "We are thrilled to help them protect this special natural area, and to be part of another great Hayward and Barry County conservation success story."

— SWMLC staff

