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## **OLESON FOUNDATION GRANTS FUNDS FOR TRAIL AND FISHING PLATFORM ON BEAR CREEK AT SPIRIT OF THE WOODS**

**Dickson Township, Manistee County** - The Oleson Foundation Board of Trustees has awarded a \$25,000 grant to help people of all ages, needs and abilities use and enjoy Bear Creek at Spirit of the Woods Conservation Club, a 43 acre nature preserve located on Bear Creek, a high quality stream managed for trout and salmon that is an important tributary of the Big Manistee River.

Grant funds will be used to improve a trail known as "Mickey's Trail" for universal access and to develop fishing decks and platforms along the trail. Mickey's trail is memorialized for a leader of the Spirit of the Woods nonprofit organization who died of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's Disease) and had a special appreciation for the trail that is often used by people with mobility challenges.

The grant was sought by the Alliance for Economic Success for Spirit of the Woods as part of the Explore the Shores program, an initiative started in 2008 that has brought over \$1 million to Manistee County to develop universal access to waters throughout the County. The vision of the new program is to develop 50 Explore the Shores sites by 2020 that will bring at least 1 million new visitors to the County. By the end of 2010, the Explore the Shores program will have succeeded in securing grants to develop sites in Stronach, the Arthur Street (US 31) Boat Launch, the Bar Lake Outlet on Lake Michigan and on the Big Manistee River at Rainbow Bend and near the confluence of Bear Creek with the Big Manistee River. A grant application is pending review by the Michigan Coastal Management Program that would complete design and preliminary engineering at seven access sites on Manistee County's Portage Lake, consistent with the new Onekama Community Master Plan that was also supported by a grant from the Oleson Foundation.

"This is a great opportunity for the Oleson Foundation to help protect and wisely manage Manistee County's spectacular water resources through a program that helps everyone, including people with special needs, use and enjoy these world class destinations to their fullest," said Kathy Huschke, Executive Director of the Oleson Foundation. "The grant will also support the dynamic Explore the Shores initiative that has become an important part of the economic development strategy for the County."

Supporters for the grant request to the Oleson Foundation included: the Spirit of the Woods Conservation Club, the office of U. S. Senator Carl Levin, Village of Kaleva, Manistee County Planning Department, Manistee County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Manistee County Community Foundation and the Alliance for Economic Success.

There is a gravel access road to Spirit of the Woods off of Coates Highway in Dickson Township. The area is open to the public at no charge. There is a meeting center and clubhouse, a building that once served as a dining hall for the Depression-era Civilian

Conservation Corps. There are four trail systems. The property is extensively used by anglers, particularly during the late summer, fall and spring in pursuit of migrating salmon and trout species, primarily Chinook Salmon and Steelhead (Rainbow) Trout. Because of the moderate river flow and flat access to the river banks, it is an ideal place for people with mobility issues to enjoy recreational fishing. The property is also used for hiking and nature observation, youth training and education, scouting activities, school wildflower walks, photography, kayaking and canoeing.

“Manistee County is uniquely positioned at the center of one of the world’s most productive salmon and trout fisheries,” said Ray Schmidt, owner of Schmidt Outfitters in Wellston, Michigan. “Bear Creek is a one of the most important cold water streams in Michigan because it supports naturally reproducing strains of migratory Chinook Salmon and Steelhead Trout, as well as a resident populations of Brook Trout, Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout. This project will make these treasured resources available to everyone, including anglers worldwide who visit Manistee County.”

“The Oleson Foundation has been a true partner in supporting our efforts to make Manistee County a community of choice for families, businesses and visitors, said Cyndy Fuller, Executive Director of the Alliance for Economic Success. “This grant will enable generations of residents and visitors to enjoy a special place on the water in Manistee County.”

Fuller said that the Explore the Shores program was an offshoot of Manistee County’s first county-wide visioning effort, Envision Manistee County. The Michigan and National Easter Seals organizations led a follow-up project called Envision Accessible Manistee and provided an initial grant to develop the Explore the Shores program. Fuller said that the Oleson Foundation has been instrumental in providing financial support to implement the visioning project.