



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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South Haven, Michigan

Riverwoods Property Now Officially Owned by SHARA

Major Milestone Paves the Way for New Community Recreation Space in South Haven Township

The South Haven Area Recreation Authority (SHARA) is proud to announce the official acquisition of the Riverwoods property, a 50-acre site located in South Haven Township along the Black River and Kal-Haven Trail. With the sale now finalized, SHARA will move forward with plans to develop the land into a new public recreation space for the South Haven community.

“This is a huge moment for the South Haven area,” said Ross Stein, SHARA board chair. “We’ve taken a site with a complex past and secured its future as a recreational space for the community — permanently.”

A Long-Term Vision, Years in the Making

Originally acquired by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 2012, the Riverwoods site has a varied history, including use as a peach orchard and an unfinished residential development. SHARA began working with the DNR in 2023 to acquire the land under the state’s Land Exchange and Sale program — a process requiring extensive coordination and a formal commitment to long-term public use. SHARA acquired the property at just 25% of its fair market value, reflecting both the public purpose of the project and strong collaboration between local and state partners.

As part of the agreement, the property will continue to be permanently deed-restricted for outdoor recreation, ensuring it will never be used for commercial development or other non-recreational purposes.

What Comes Next

Initial site planning and preparation are already underway. Future phases will focus on expanding public access and amenities while preserving the site’s natural features. One anticipated highlight includes the relocation of a portion of the historic Nichols Covered Bridge, which will be installed as a centerpiece of the park’s trail system. A section of the bridge was preserved through the efforts of Visit South Haven,

which has also committed to financing its relocation to Riverwoods and to matching funds for a grant to replace the fishing pier, relocate the pavilion, and add a kayak launch to the site.

"Initial financial support for the Riverwoods project has come from the Department of Natural Resources, SHARA, and Visit South Haven," said Ross Stein, SHARA board chair. "That funding will help us begin site work, and additional fundraising is underway to support key features in the first phase of development. The Riverwoods project also advances priorities identified in the South Haven Parks and Recreation Master Plan, offering an opportunity to expand recreational access and develop key amenities that community members have consistently voiced support for.

Community Collaboration and Support

"The groundwork is laid, and momentum is building," said Jennifer Sistrunk, Executive Director of Visit South Haven. "We've built strong community support and engaged passionate local advocates who are already fundraising for key features. This is a win for our residents, for outdoor recreation, and for long-term placemaking in the South Haven area."

The DNR, which facilitated the transfer of the site, emphasized the importance of the long-term partnership. "The Riverwoods project is a great example of what happens when local and state partners come together with a shared vision for outdoor access," said Chief Kristen Kosick with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. In addition to facilitating the transfer of the property, the DNR has also committed \$200,000 in grant funding to help kick off development at the site. "We're proud to support SHARA and the South Haven community in creating a space that will benefit generations to come."

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