

The Bateman Estate Purchase.....comments by Mary Jo Adams, Landowner/Executive Committee of The Mackinaw River Project

On December 7, 1996, The Nature Conservancy purchased 663 acres of the William Bateman Estate. 976 total acres were auctioned, with seven separate parcels going to other individuals. The six tracts purchased by TNC contain about 1 3/4 miles of direct Mackinaw River frontage, some large areas of river bottomland prone to flooding, some timber area, and some rolling farmland. The funds used to purchase this property came from The Nature Conservancy's national office, and not from the grant money from IEPA. TNC has very strict guidelines regarding purchase of property from the national office, and was held to only bidding up to the appraised value of each tract.

This purchase of property was also done only after research into the flora, fauna, and aquatic species in the area, an independent appraisal of the land value, and considerable, sometimes heated debates by the members of the Executive Committee of the Mackinaw River Project. The controversy stemmed from statements made very early on by TNC staff that acquisition of property was not a goal of The Mackinaw River Project. There were fears expressed early on that all the "Project" was going to be was simply TNC going around and snapping up land along the river. It was in order to allay those fears that TNC made their comments regarding land acquisition. I think it is now apparent, after three years of efforts to craft "The Mackinaw River Watershed Management Plan", that the purchase of land is not, and was not, a primary strategy of the Mackinaw River Project. In fact, it was only after it was suggested by some members of the Executive Committee that TNC seriously investigated the possibility of purchasing this land. In many of our minds, the purchase of the property by TNC was a far better alternative than the potential of a subdivision development, a large hunting club, or even the U.S. government, rumored to be interested in the area as a shooting range.

There were many concerns expressed by members of the Executive Committee regarding the purchase, and because of these concerns, TNC agreed to several conditions. One, TNC will continue to pay taxes on the property. Two, TNC cannot sell or transfer the property to a public agency. And third, TNC will not promote public access to the property. In addition, a committee was formed with members of the Executive committee and other interested individuals, to provide input regarding the use of the property. Plans are now under way to restore vegetation along some badly eroding river banks, to restore some wetland areas, and to continue farming in some of the upland areas.

The purchase of the Bateman property gives TNC a significant opportunity to make some positive impacts on water quality in the Mackinaw....just like many of us other landowners are going to attempt to do. Preservation of the forest and prairie areas, stabilization of river banks, restoration of flood plain, reduction in run-off and erosion, research and demonstration....all of these are going to have a positive impact on the Mackinaw River.