



## **Overview of the Marsin Nature Retreat Center**

### **History**

Mary Sinish formed the Marsin Forest Grove Conservatory in 1999 to establish a nature retreat center with her property along the Portage Waterway near the City of Houghton in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Mary wanted to create a space available for a diversity of community groups to hold events while enjoying a natural setting. After exploring the process required, Mary and the Conservatory's board of directors decided in late 2000 to convert the project to the Keweenaw Land Trust (KLT). As a step towards fulfilling her vision, Mary donated the 40-acre Marsin Preserve to KLT in 2001. Mary continued discussions with her advisors and KLT to keep the nature retreat center project moving along.

With Mary's untimely death in 2005, the process of transferring assets and property dedicated for the Marsin Nature Retreat Center to KLT was begun. As part of this process, KLT staff and Board of Directors prepared a proposal detailing KLT's plans for developing the Marsin Center and programs. An independent consultant was hired to evaluate the proposal, KLT's organizational capacity, and the resources available to develop the Center as proposed. With all parties involved supporting KLT's role and Probate Court approval on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the Marsin Nature Retreat Center was on its way to becoming a reality. Property transfer was finalized in September 2006.

### **Marsin Center Facilities and Support**

The Marsin Center campus has 16 acres and 900 feet of shoreline along the Portage Waterway. With two residences, numerous outbuildings, a utility vehicle, boats and canoes, and tools included in the donation, Mary had the bulk of the resources in place for initial establishment of the Marsin Center. Some space is already available for overnight lodging of visiting professionals or volunteers. As important as the gift of property, Mary planned for the establishment of a dedicated endowment to support the Center's core operations. This financial support enables us to have a resident Property Manager to handle facilities maintenance and improvements.

### **Current Status**

The Center is available for immediate use, ideally for community groups up to about 25 people. However, the complete transformation of the campus and facilities into a nature retreat center will take time and additional resources. Goals include improving esthetics, access for the disabled, energy efficiency and durability. For example, restoring the wood floors will add to the Center's ambience and be easier to maintain than the existing carpeting. We may convert the large bedroom into a functional conference space and alter kitchen and restrooms for group use. A work area for woodworking or craft projects could be setup in the garage or basement. Eventually we could increase the capacity for overnight guests by improving the rustic cabin and the Center's basement area with bunk beds. All improvements will be based on professional recommendations.

### **Shoreline Naturalization**

For ecological and esthetic benefits, we plan to naturalize the shoreline vegetation and create a Portage Waterway demonstration project. Replacing portions of maintained lawns along the waterfront with natural plant communities and native species will help protect water quality, provide wildlife habitat, and allow the Center to blend in with the landscape when viewed from the water. The Portage Waterway is an under-appreciated resource in our community and KLT can take an active role in promoting awareness and appreciation through the Marsin program and our outreach efforts.