

The New Michigan Landscape: How Oakland County is Ending the "Nature Deficit" by Sharing How Communities Can Protect Birds, Heal Habitats, and Thrive

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Jan 08, 2026, 08:18 ET

Oakland Bird Alliance Secures Top Michigan Audubon Award for Community-Driven Conservation | Bird City Michigan helps recognize communities turning their conservation efforts into reality.

OAKLAND COUNTY, Mich., Jan. 8, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- "How can we save the birds in our own backyard?" "How do we know if our local parks are truly healthy?" These are questions so many Michigan residents are asking, and the partnership between Oakland County and the Oakland Bird Alliance (OBA) has launched a new model to provide the answers.

[Michigan Audubon](#) recently designated Oakland County as the first Bird City Michigan community of 2026, proving a shift in the "Michigan Dream" narrative. For many, the dream of a thriving community is now "being there" for nature—ensuring that urban innovation and natural restoration coexist. "The leaders of OBA and Oakland County are helping to set a new standard for Michigan communities, demonstrating that when leading conservation organizations and municipalities share assets and work together, they can create tangible, lasting habitats that showcase the sustainable life birds and residents deserve," says Kathleen Mennillo, CEO of Michigan Audubon.

Solving the "Nature Deficit" with Action

Oakland County's site-wide restoration efforts showcase exactly how a community can solve the problem of habitat loss. By focusing on habitat, threats, public engagement, and sustainability, the county is restoring much of its 7,000 acres of parkland into a sanctuary for the health and well-being of its 1.3 million residents.

To pursue the Bird City designation, the county formed a "Dream Team" of municipal leaders from Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, and the Board of Commissioners alongside the Oakland Bird Alliance; this ensured that conservation was integrated into the county's Climate Change Adaptation Plan and economic strategy.

The primary challenge Oakland County and OBA overcame is moving from "passive" conservation (just having parks) to active, documented policy. The county is committed to continuous restoration through invasive species control, native plantings, and a pioneering

Climate Change Adaptation Plan developed through the National Institute of Applied Climate Science (NIACS).

"Oakland County's parks and natural areas are part of what makes this region such an attractive place to live and visit. The Bird City designation underscores that protecting habitat isn't just good for wildlife—it also [strengthens our local economy](#)," says Oakland County Parks Director Chris Ward. "Birding and nature tourism bring visitors to our trails, lakes, and communities, supporting small businesses and outdoor recreation across the county. We recognize that healthy natural spaces are essential to healthy people. Every time residents plant a native tree, visit a park, or simply pause to listen for birdsong, they're investing in their own wellbeing and the vitality of their community."

A Blueprint for Community Ownership

Oakland County and OBA collaborate on annual projects that residents can get involved in. From hosting World Migratory Bird Day at Red Oaks Nature Center to managing the Christmas Bird Count at Orion Oaks County Park, the OBA provides the "how-to" for residents to move from enthusiasts to advocates. Because of the significant impact OBA volunteers have on bird conservation and community connections, Michigan Audubon awarded OBA the inaugural Chapter of the Year award in September 2025.

More than 100 species of birds have been observed in Oakland County. To see the incredible diversity of bird species Oakland County and OBA are working to protect, you can [click to explore this gallery checklist of birds](#) found throughout Oakland County.

"The power of the Bird City Michigan designation lies in the fact that it's not just about government action; it's about residents taking ownership of their local environment," says George Harris, President of the Oakland Bird Alliance. "We urge everyone to connect with their local Audubon chapter or other conservation organization. Together, we can turn a passion for birds into county-wide policy."

The OBA provides expert-led interpretive walks and field trips through Oakland County Parks and Trails. These aren't just sightseeing tours; they are mobile classrooms where residents learn to identify species, understand complex migratory patterns, and recognize the specific habitat requirements birds need to survive.

Oakland County's Bird City application serves as a free resource for other Michigan communities, and can be viewed at birdcity.org/michigan/oakland-county.

About [Michigan Audubon](#)

Michigan Audubon connects birds and people for the benefit of both through conservation, education, and research in Michigan. Organized in 1904 and formally incorporated in 1905, it is Michigan's oldest conservation organization. Michigan Audubon launched Bird City Michigan in January 2025.

About [Bird City Michigan](#)

Bird City Michigan is a science-based program that recognizes communities for their bird-friendly actions. The program encourages like-minded organizations, such as municipalities and conservation groups, to work together to create healthier, more welcoming environments for birds and people.

About [Oakland Bird Alliance](#) (OBA)

OBA was founded in 1958 and serves more than 275 members. Its mission is to promote an interest in native wildlife, including birds, other animals, and plants, and advocate for the preservation of wildlife habitats in Michigan. OBA is a chapter of Michigan Audubon and the National Audubon Society.

About [Oakland County](#)

Oakland County is home to nearly 1.3 million people across 62 cities, villages, and townships, spanning 907 square miles. The county is committed to environmental sustainability, stewardship, and restoration of natural habitats.

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