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Wednesday  
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## News

## The News-Herald

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### Made In Detroit bankruptcy judge rules for creditors; land to go to refuge

*By Paula Evans Neuman, The News-Herald*

DETROIT — A federal bankruptcy judge ruled against Made In Detroit Inc. Friday and in favor of its unsecured creditors.

The creditors' plan includes sale of MID's land — 400 acres known as Humbug Marsh and coveted for years by environmentalists — to the Trust for Public Land for inclusion in the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

Members of Downriver-based Friends of the Detroit River were thrilled, although MID is expected to appeal the decision.

"It's great news," said environmental activist Blair McGowan of Grosse Ile Township.

He said Friends of the Detroit River has a recent federal grant to find other sites along the river that need to be conserved.

"There are a whole bunch of things we're trying to do, and that's perhaps MID's legacy," McGowan said.

"Their poorly thought-out strategy has forced us to educate ourselves, to organize ourselves and to look at the wonderful things we have and realize they'll be lost

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if we don't exercise proactive stewardship."

MID's attorney, Thomas Morris, did not return a call for comment.

Detroit Riverkeeper Robert Burns of Grosse Ile said the addition of Humbug Marsh to the refuge "will open up this area to the public for generations to come, and will leave a true legacy that we should all be proud of."

He made note of the many residents, community leaders and environmentalists who worked together for years to prevent the MID development.

"This outcome should send a clear message to all those outside influences who are proposing developments that don't conform with the master plans of the respective communities or the desires of their residents, and that is that they will face stiff and steadfast resistance," Burns said.

The Trust for Public Land reportedly has offered about \$4.5 million, the appraised value of MID's property along the Detroit River in north Gibraltar and south Trenton.

U.S. Rep. John Dingell (D-15th District) played a key role in getting the funds to buy the land for the refuge.

The property is the last undeveloped mile along the Detroit River.

The tract includes 150 woodland acres, 20-acre Humbug Island and a network of valuable coastal marshes vital to fish and migratory birds.

More than 97 percent of the river's coastal wetlands have disappeared to development in the last 50 years.

MID's reorganization plan under Chapter 11 bankruptcy involved the possibility of a loan from New Jersey-based Kennedy Financing.

U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Marci McIvor, after days of testimony, said the chance of MID getting the loan was "unconfirmable."

The developer filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy last October, a day before a scheduled foreclosure auction on the land.

In 1996, the Detroit-based company announced plans to build a \$500 million project on the land, including 350 luxury homes, a golf course, a marina, an amphitheater and equestrian facilities.

In 1997, MID borrowed \$3 million from Standard Federal Bank and Bank One to buy the land.

Over the years, pressure from environmental groups and state and federal regulatory agencies whittled MID's project to 300 homes and a nine-hole golf course.

The developer said all along it would preserve the land's environmental treasures, and asserted its rights as the landowner.

In 1999, the Army Corps of Engineers denied the plan a wetlands permit, citing its "overwhelming adverse impact on the environment in that area."

The denial proved to be a deadly blow to the project.

The loan from the banks went into default in April 2001.

Early this year, developer Peter Beer and others formed the Gibraltar-Trenton Development Co. and bought the note from the banks.

Beer said he was protecting his original investment in the Humbug project. He'll be paid now out of the land sale proceeds, he said.

MID also owes more than \$1 million to unsecured creditors, including former publicist Tina Bassett.

The News-Herald, A Heritage Newspapers Twice Weekly Publication  
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