

New book is another chapter for local lake

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Their home is partially submerged in water, but that's no reason to move.

To these muskrats, a tree stump is all they need.

"There's a muskrat family that's been there for about four years, and they have a litter every year and I watch them," said Western Michigan University graduate student Dok Tael Stevens as she recalled the time she has spent at Asylum Lake on Kalamazoo's southwest side.

"Last year, there was a duck's nest on top of the stump, and the muskrats were going underneath it — I couldn't believe it. I would have thought that the muskrats would have attacked the ducklings."

But scenes of muskrats, ducks and other wildlife may someday be gone from the landscape of Asylum Lake, Stevens fears.

So recently, she used \$2,500 of prize money she won in a discount merchandising company contest and published 2,000 copies of a 92-page book titled, "Haven: A Treatise on Asylum Lake."

The book sings the praises of preserving the 270-acre Asylum Lake area as open space. About 30 acres of the 270-acre parcel would be used under WMU's plans to build a research and business park at the intersection of Drake Road and Parkview Avenue, near U.S. 131. WMU has agreed to turn over the remaining Asylum Lake property owned by the university to the state Department of Natural Resources to manage.

"It's the largest open space area in the county," said Stevens, an environmental hydrogeology major who visits the area up to twice a week to relax, write or study. "With all the abandoned warehouses and offices throughout the county, it seems recycling land should take precedence over developing open space."

WMU's park plans call for building on the 54-acre Colony Farm Orchard and the 265-acre Lee Baker Farm. The two parcels, owned by WMU, are located west and south of the Drake Road/Parkview Avenue intersection.



GAZETTE PHOTO / WAYNE ANDERSON

Dok Tael Stevens sits on a fallen tree over Asylum Lake. It's her favorite spot on the lake, she says.

Normally, Stevens said, she would have confined her opinions, about the research park to the editorial pages of WMU's student newspaper, the Western Herald, where she is a columnist.

But after being ordered in February by her paper's editor-in-chief to take a break from writing about that issue in order, he said, to ensure columns on a wide range of issues, Stevens decided to publish the book.

It is a compilation of sketches,

poems and essays by herself and other area residents.

It only took Stevens, 25, two weeks to put her book together, which was timed to coincide with the Earth Day celebration in Bronson Park on April 25. Stevens sold 50 copies of her book that day and collected more than 300 signatures on a petition that opposes building the research park near Asylum Lake. The petition now has 1,000 names, she said.

The book's last chapter, "What

You Can Do," encourages readers to become involved in the research park issue in some way, such as by writing elected officials or by attending public hearings or meetings.

The book is available for \$4.95 at Bookbinders, 2624 W. Michigan; the Eighth Day Bookstore, 901 S. Westnedge; Petals and Postings, 223 S. Kalamazoo Mall; Michigan News Agency, 308 W. Michigan; and People's Food Co-op, 436 S. Burdick.