

# The Thumb Naturalist

## Thumb Land Conservancy News

2025 January 25

With a new year, the Thumb Land Conservancy News has a new name and slightly new focus. The Thumb Land Conservancy dates back to 2008 officially, but 5 years prior to that, I thought about creating a publication dedicated to nature of the Thumb region and drafted the first edition of *The Thumb Naturalist* 22 years ago in January of 2003. But at that time, there wasn't much of a mailing list to send it to, so it was never published. Gradually, our TLC news approached the publication I envisioned. Now, with its transition to *The Thumb Naturalist*, in addition to our conservancy news, we hope to include more articles or other works about nature in our region. As always, anyone can contribute, whether you would like to write about a species, a natural area, or submit a story, a poem, an opinion, a photograph, artwork, video link, or just about anything. A few things we strive for in our news, and continuing with *The Thumb Naturalist*, are to be informative, educational, generally transparent, real, sometimes funny, and encouraging in an otherwise dismal world. As an introduction to *The Thumb Naturalist*, I want to start with the first 2003 January issue. It is almost unchanged from the original draft except that I have added information about the last two articles that I never got around to writing. Keep in mind that this first issue is from 22 years ago, so some of the contact information for the Michigan Nature Association is dated, and they did purchase the 9-acre Sharon Rose Leonatti Sanctuary in Kimball Township in Saint Clair County, shortly after this was written.

-Bill Collins, Executive Director, TLC

# The Thumb Naturalist

Supporting natural areas and naturalists of Michigan's Thumb and adjacent Ontario

## Forests of Southeast Michigan Vanishing Fragments of Our Natural History

After the last ice age and prior to European settlement, forested a majority of the southeast Michigan landscape, perhaps 80 to 90%. Today, what remains of this forest are basically only small woodlots, usually confined to the interior portions of township sections. These small woodland fragments are sanctuaries for species that once occupied a vast forest wilderness across Michigan and eastern North America. Few people seem to realize that most of the species that occur within mature forests occur nowhere else. Most of the species are not able to survive in a field, let alone a field that was once cultivated, and forest species can take centuries to reestablish in newly developed wooded or shrub areas on fallow fields, assuming that a mature forest ever remains adjacent as when seeds and roots can spread. Our remaining woodlots or forest fragments are literally museums of presettlement Michigan. They are not pristine for the most part, but as close as it gets.

For example, 1978 data indicated that only 12% of Saint Clair County was forested. Recent SEMCOG data was interpreted to indicate that approximately 15% of Saint Clair County is forested for the purposes of the 2000 Master Plan. This number was derived from data indirectly corresponding to actual forest coverage. The definition of forest is open to a lot of interpretation. Some agencies place great significance on old field and shrub areas that have recently, within the past decade or so, developed the beginnings of a forest canopy by seeding establishment in former agricultural areas. While technically, these areas may now be forest, they are far from mature forest that has remained relatively undisturbed for many decades or that has been reestablished on cleared but uncultivated forest land from remnant root and seed stock. Former agricultural lands may not contain or support the full array of species in mature forests for centuries, if ever. Given the extensive development in Saint Clair County over the past 20 years, the actual percentage of forest is probably not higher than 10%, even considering new sapling establishment on fallow fields.

Whether 10% or even 15%, forest now represents a small fraction of the southeast Michigan landscape, where once it was the majority. The low percentage alone should trigger protection. Percentages and forest fragments are literally museums of presettlement Michigan. It is the basis upon which academic and economic leadership is established. The bottom 10% represents failure. Our forests in southeast Michigan are failing.

In addition, it should be considered that on average, roughly 25% of the remaining forest in Michigan is forested for the purposes of the 2000 Master Plan. This number was derived from data indirectly corresponding to actual forest coverage. The definition of forest is open to a lot of interpretation. Some agencies place great significance on old field and shrub areas that have recently, within the past decade or so, developed the beginnings of a forest canopy by seeding establishment in former agricultural areas. While technically, these areas may now be forest, they are far from mature forest that has remained relatively undisturbed for many decades or that has been reestablished on cleared but uncultivated forest land from remnant root and seed stock. Former agricultural lands may not contain or support the full array of species in mature forests for centuries, if ever. Given the extensive development in Saint Clair County over the past 20 years, the actual percentage of forest is probably not higher than 10%, even considering new sapling establishment on fallow fields.

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Whether mature old-growth or highly disturbed second-growth, there should be incentives to preserve, maintain, and expand these areas. Even from just a basic utilitarian perspective, it makes sense to maintain mature woodland forests for a local firewood and lumber supply. It is not difficult to imagine scenarios in which the lack of utilities and transportation could force the community to rely on this resource. There are some that even suggest that American democracy is a product of our original forests. Obviously, the forests did play a self-sufficiency in early America that would not be possible in much of Europe. The forest was noted by the famous author and traveler, Alexis de Tocqueville, who after journeying through the United States in 1831 by the appointment King Louis XVI of France, wrote Democracy in America, a staple textbook of our schools until the mid-1900s.

## Northern Forests of Saint Clair County

### A Unique Piece of "Up North" in the Blue Water Area

A unique disjunct northern forest habitat occurs in Saint Clair County, especially around the Port Huron area. Most people I describe this to immediately recognize the forest type, but it is such a part of the Port Huron area that they don't realize how unique it really is. Much of the land is being held for development along I-94 and I-69 by the sudden appearance of Paper Birch and Eastern White Pine in the forest near Port Huron, giving the Blue Water Area its well-known "up-north" look that adds to the attraction of the area as a recreational destination. It is likely that Pine Grove Park got its name from a remnant grove of Eastern White Pine in this same habitat occurring within the city limits of Port Huron. This northern habitat is more typical of forest north of Michigan's transition zone; a broad transitional band oriented generally east-west across the lower peninsula, south of which forests are dominated by broad-leaved, deciduous trees, and north of which forests are dominated by a mix of conifers and northern hardwoods. There is some disagreement as to exactly where the limits of this transition zone are, but generally Saint Clair County lies well south of the transition zone (refer to the attached transition zone map from *Michigan Trees* by Barnes and Wagner). This northern forest habitat generally does not occur any further south in Michigan than approximately Bay City. In the Thumb, the habitat appears to be largely exclusive to the Port Huron area, and occurs on sandy soils in Tuscola County and Sanilac County. It seems most pronounced in the Port Huron area though, extending as far west as Riley Township, and south into Columbus and Saint Clair Townships. The northern limit is generally Fort Gratiot Township, with variations on the plant community extending up through Burtchville Township and into Sanilac County very near the Lake Huron coast.

This northern forest habitat appears to result from a unique combination of sandy soils deposited through the Thumb in glacial lakeplains, dunes and wetlands, the cooler growing season near Lake Huron, a high water table, and possibly the former influence of fire. According to Chuck Lightfoot of the USDA-NRCS, the area seems to be a "frost pocket" because of its low elevation and high groundwater. This would certainly characterize much of Kimball Township, and especially the habitat of Painted Trillium, which I will get into later. The distribution of this forest seems to be limited primarily to the distribution of sand to loamy sand substrates of the Wainola-Deford and Hoytville-Allendale-Nappanee soil associations, and secondarily to Allendale-Latty soil associations (refer to the attached General Soil Map from the *Soil Survey of Saint Clair County, Michigan*). It does not cover the entirety of these soils, nor is it totally confined within them either. The habitat ranges from dry to mesic (moderate) to wet northern forest, but vast areas are wet, with a landscape consisting of small knolls and pits distributed across the forest floor. The knolls are drier and typically covered with Bracken Fern, Wintergreen, Bunchberry, Bristly Sarsaparilla, Fringed Polygala, Partridgeberry, Goldthread, Canada Mayflower, Indian Cucumber-root, Bristly Starflower, Late Low Polygala, and sometimes Sweetfern. The pits are damp to ponded and contain Cinnamon Fern, Royal Fern, Northern Lady Fern, and Sensitive Fern. Trees and shrubs occurring in these areas include Red Maple, Eastern White Pine, Eastern Hemlock, Paper Birch, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Wild-rain, Nannyberry, Northern Arrowwood, Speckled Alder, and Common Highbush Blueberry.

Our preservation efforts have not been focused specifically on this habitat, as we have tended to concentrate on specific plants or species. This habitat may be tough to protect because of its proximity to Port Huron and the surrounding urban and industrial areas. It is not clear how much of the habitat remains, and speculation, and some of the parcels are held by owners of large amounts of land in the County that have historically resisted land regulation and are being actively adverse to the notion of natural area preservation.

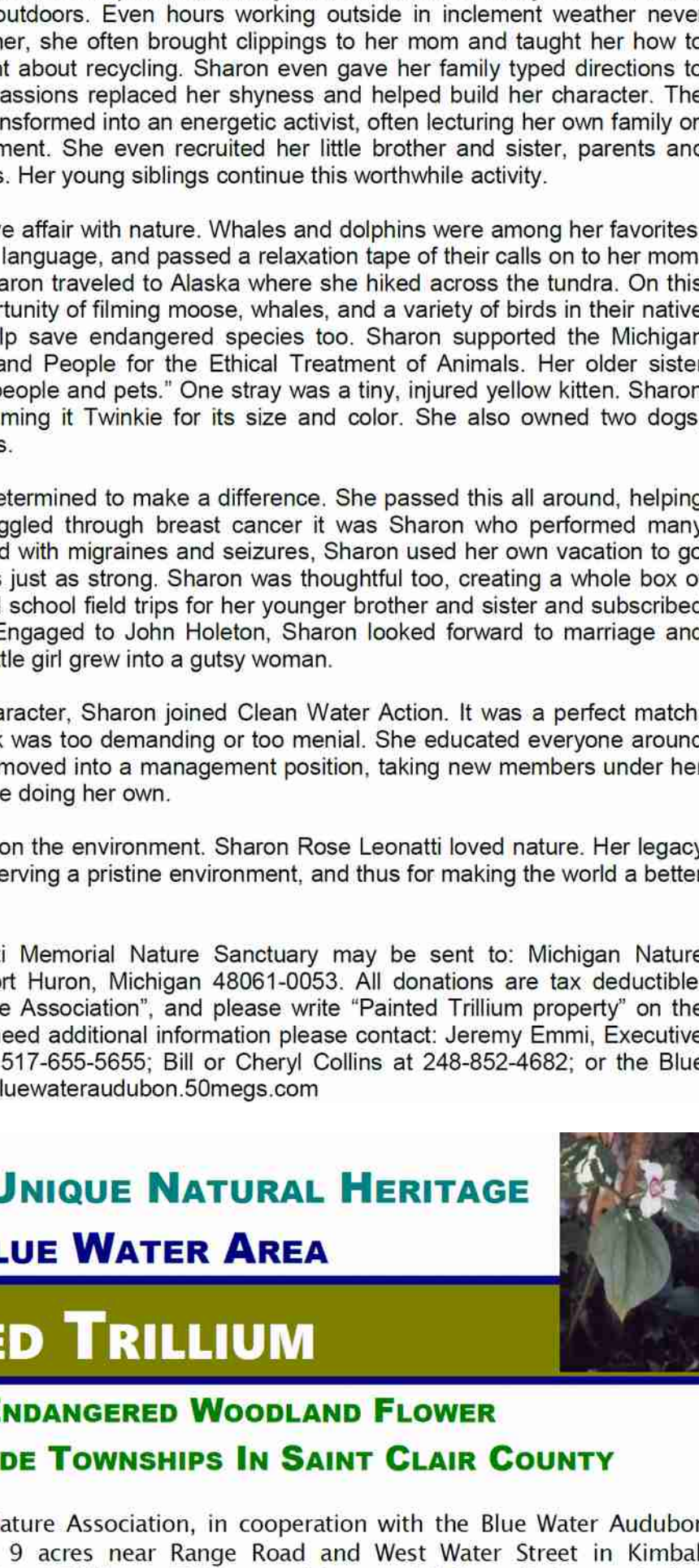
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## Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary

### Kimball Township, Saint Clair County, Michigan

What started simply as an effort by concerned naturalists to protect a rare woodland wildflower near Port Huron, Michigan has become a tribute to a dedicated Clean Water Act activist, Sharon Rose Leonatti. Cheryl and Bill Collins have been working for over a year with the Michigan Nature Association and Blue Water Audubon Society to purchase a small 3-acre tract of forest containing one of only six remaining colonies of Painted Trillium, a Michigan Endangered species, in all of Michigan. All six locations are in Saint Clair County. The distribution of Painted Trillium is extremely limited by unique habitat requirements, and by habitat destruction resulting from development. In Saint Clair County, Painted Trillium grows only in cool, acidic sands, in mature northern forest communities of Red Maple, Paper Birch, Eastern Hemlock, and Eastern White Pine. Not only is this new preserve land important for Painted Trillium, but for other uncommon woodland species that depend on the forest. This past November, the Michigan Nature Association executive board, the eventual landowner, voted unanimously to name the new preserve in Sharon's honor: the *Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary*.

On November 28, 2001, Sharon, 28, was working door-to-door for CWA in Port Huron Township in Saint Clair County, Michigan when she was hit and killed by a car. News of Sharon's tragic death traveled quickly through environmental circles, reaching Bill and Cheryl Collins of Rochester Hills the next day. "Actually, my daughter read about it in the local paper and called us the next morning, thinking that we probably knew Sharon because of our environmental work in the area. Unfortunately, we did not have the privilege of knowing her," said Cheryl Collins. "Despite not knowing Sharon Leonatti, the Collins' were saddened by the loss of a fellow laborer for the natural environment. "I was particularly troubled by Sharon's death because here was someone working on the front lines, going door-to-door, probably with little recognition, and for a cause that Bertha and I do not appreciate" said Bill Collins. "Then it struck me while working a few days later. Cheryl and I were working on this Painted Trillium preserve, less than 1 mile from where Sharon died. Here was a great opportunity to recognize Sharon's life and work by naming the preserve in her honor." Bill and Cheryl added that when purchase negotiations with the landowner were going nowhere for months, the hope of honoring Sharon and her family was often the only thing that kept them going. "We have worked with Brad Wilson [formerly the Macomb County Community Organizer for the past 20 years, the actual percentage of forest is probably not higher than 10%, even considering new sapling establishment on fallow fields. Sharon's name and image told him about the idea over a year ago, but we had to keep it quiet until the purchase was finalized" said Cheryl.



Sharon Rose Leonatti

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### From Sharon's family:

Sharon Rose Leonatti was quite a woman. Who would have ever guessed that the shy little girl who loved to visit the zoo and take nature hikes with her family would develop into a passionate and outspoken proponent of all aspects of environmental protection? She did that and much, much more. Born June 28th 1973, little Sharon often had to work hard to maintain average grades. Yet that never deterred her. To the contrary, her mother believes "it built her character." Struggled a degree in her fieldy character making her determined and purpose oriented. Sharon eventually earned a certificate in General Studies from Macomb College, all the while working hard to support herself. Future dreams included a four-year degree in Environmental Science. Her dad recalls "Sharon never gave up." This often served as an inspiration to her younger sisters. Everyone around her respected her character. Sharon's love of nature permeated all aspects of her life. She and her sisters shared fond memories of camping trips and white water rafting. Rollerblading was also a hobby she enjoyed. She just plain loved the out-of-doors. She preferred blue jeans and boots to fancy attire. It better suited her lifestyle. Sharon loved going outdoors. Even hours working outside in inclement weather never deterred her. Sharon was a avid gardener, she often brought clippings to her mom and taught her how to care for them. Likewise, she was adamant about recycling. Sharon even gave her family and subscribed to follow. According to her mom, Sharon's passions replaced her shyness and helped build her character. The once reticent, soft spoken, little girl had transformed into an energetic activist, often lecturing her own family on how to preserve and protect the environment. She even recruited her little brother and sister, parents and friends to help clean up parks and beaches. Her young siblings continue this worthwhile activity.

Of course animals were included in her love affair with nature. Whales and dolphins were among her favorites. Sharon enjoyed their soothing, mysterious language, and passed a relaxation tape of their calls on to her mom. Six months before her untimely death, Sharon traveled to Alaska where she hiked across the tundra. On this trip of a lifetime, Sharon enjoyed the opportunity of filming moose, whales, and a variety of birds in their native habitat. The young activist wanted to help save endangered species too. Sharon supported the Michigan Humane Society, Defenders of Wildlife, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Her older sister recalls Sharon "always picked up strays, people and pets." One stray was a tiny, injured yellow kitten. Sharon named her Lulu. She also loved to travel and travel with her brother and sister. She also owned two dogs, Scruffy and Bear, her constant companions.

She was a very compassionate person, determined to make a difference. She passed this all around, helping whoever needed it. When her aunt struggled through breast cancer it was Sharon who performed many nursing duties. And when her aunt suffered with migraines and seizures, Sharon used her own vacation to go and lend a hand. Her love of children was just as strong. Sharon was thoughtful too, creating a whole box of care for them. Like many, she was into recycling. Sharon even gave her family and subscribed to National Geographic World for their. Engaged to John Holton, Sharon looked forward to marriage and motherhood. But it wasn't to be. The shy little girl grew into a gutsy woman.

In keeping with her caring, committed character, Sharon joined Clean Water Action. It was a perfect match. Sharon worked tirelessly for CWA; no task was too demanding or too menial. She educated everyone around her about Clean Water. Sharon gradually moved into a management position, taking new members under her wing. She helped them with their work while doing her own.

Throughout her short life, focus remained on the environment. Sharon Rose Leonatti loved nature. Her legacy is that just ... a passion for nature, for preserving a pristine environment, and thus for making the world a better place.

Donations for the Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary may be sent to: Michigan Nature Association, Post Office Box 610053, Port Huron, Michigan 48061-0053. All donations are tax deductible. Make checks payable to "Michigan Nature Association", and please write "Painted Trillium property" on the memo line. If you have any questions or need additional information please contact: Jeremy Emmi, Executive Director, Michigan Nature Association at 517-655-5655; Bill or Cheryl Collins at 248-852-4682; or the Blue Water Audubon Society web site at [www.bluewateraudubon.50megs.com](http://www.bluewateraudubon.50megs.com)

## HELP PROTECT A UNIQUE NATURAL HERITAGE

### OF THE BLUE WATER AREA

## PAINTED TRILLIUM

### A MICHIGAN ENDANGERED WOODLAND FLOWER

#### OF KIMBALL AND CLYDE TOWNSHIPS IN SAINT CLAIR COUNTY

The Michigan Nature Association, in cooperation with the Blue Water Audubon Society, is purchasing 9 acres near Range Road and West Water Street in Kimball Township to protect Painted Trillium - *Trillium undulatum*, a Michigan Endangered plant species. According to State records, Painted Trillium now occurs at just six remaining locations in all of Michigan, and all six locations are in Saint Clair County, which has the distinction of being located on the western edge of the Painted Trillium range in North America. Some references indicate the next closest location as Vermont. The distribution of the species is extremely limited by unique habitat requirements, and by habitat destruction resulting from development. In Saint Clair County, Painted Trillium grows only in cool, acidic, and sandy mature second-growth forests of Red Maple, Paper Birch, Eastern Hemlock, and Eastern White Pine. Typical plant associates are Bracken Fern, Wintergreen, Bunchberry, Bristly Sarsaparilla, Fringed Polygala, Partridgeberry, Goldthread, Canada Mayflower, Indian Cucumber-root, Clintonia, Wild Sarsaparilla, Starflower, and Lycoperdon, giving the forest a distinct northern Ontario, west coast Michigan, and Lycoming, Indiana forest type. Painted Trillium and its northern forest habitat are remnant of a cooler post-glacial period in the Port Huron area. Many have confused other trillium species with Painted Trillium; White Trillium with aging pinkish petals or green stripes from a common mycoplasma infection, or Red Trillium. But Painted Trillium is a distinct and uncommon species (see left).

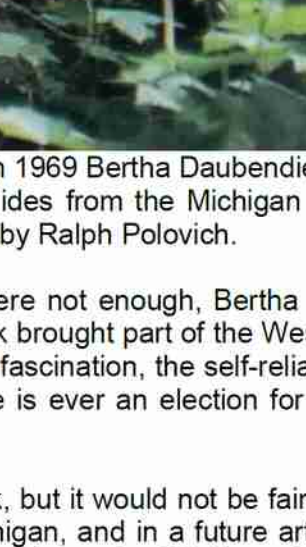
As far as we are aware, this is the last Painted Trillium site that can be purchased in Michigan. Not only is this land important for Painted Trillium, but for the many other woodland species that depend on this forest. If you want to help preserve a unique Michigan heritage of Saint Clair County and Michigan, this is it. Please consider sending a generous donation to:

Michigan Nature Association  
Post Office Box 610053  
Port Huron, Michigan 48061-0053

All donations are tax deductible. Make checks payable to "Michigan Nature Association", and please write "Painted Trillium property" on the memo line. If you have any questions or need additional information please contact: Jeremy Emmi, Executive Director, Michigan Nature Association at 517-655-5655; Bill or Cheryl Collins at 248-852-4682; or the Blue Water Audubon Society web site at [www.bluewateraudubon.50megs.com](http://www.bluewateraudubon.50megs.com)

## The Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary

On November 28, 2001, Sharon Rose Leonatti, 28, was working door-to-door in Port Huron Township for Clean Water Action, a non-profit environmental organization, when she was hit and killed by a car only a short distance from the Painted Trillium property.



Sharon loved nature and gave so much of herself to help others and protect the environment. The Michigan Nature Association has chosen to name the Painted Trillium preserve in Sharon's honor: The *Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary*.

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## Bertha Daubendiek

### A Rare Western Disjunct in Michigan

The Michigan Nature Association is a pioneering state preservation group that grew from the ambition of a local woman and the generosity of many volunteers and donors since its beginnings in Macomb County back in 1951. The MNA has since acquired 160 nature sanctuaries on over 8,000 acres in 53 counties across Michigan to preserve rare species, habitats, and unique landscapes. For 50 years, MNA was based in Macomb and Saint Clair Counties, acquiring its first nature sanctuaries here in the early 1960's. MNA now has 18 sanctuaries in the Thumb.

It is not possible to describe MNA without describing its founder, Bertha Daubendiek. Executive 88, Bertha was the defining force and major benefactor of MNA for half a century. She served as the "New Secretary" until her retirement in 2001 and was a trustee until this year. From 1988 until 2002, Bertha's home in Kenoskee Township, Saint Clair County, was MNA's statewide office. The mailing address was Avoca, of all places.

Bertha and Gordon Daubendiek were born on a homestead in northeastern Montana where the land was usually too dry for a good wheat crop. Her family later moved to a farm in southwestern Iowa. Bertha recalls spending many hours cooking for her 8 brothers who wanted only pancakes until one day when she made carnal bread and then they only wanted that.

Bertha recalls her father pointing out birds near their home and showing her a map of his travels, especially to the upper peninsula of Michigan. Bertha's mother gathered buffalo berries out on the coulees in Montana, valleys carved out by ancient glacial flows. Her mother was a "fisherwoman who loved the wild places." Later, during annual vacations to Michigan, her mother would walk with Bertha everywhere on the MNA lands.

After receiving a B.A. in Business Administration from Grinnell College in Iowa, Bertha came to Michigan. Here, she was secretary to the president of the Economic Club of Detroit, and secretary to State Supreme Court Justice Neil E. Reid. She also worked as a court reporter in Detroit, Mount Clemens, and Saginaw. Many of MNA's documents are in Gregg shorthand, with meticulously recorded details.

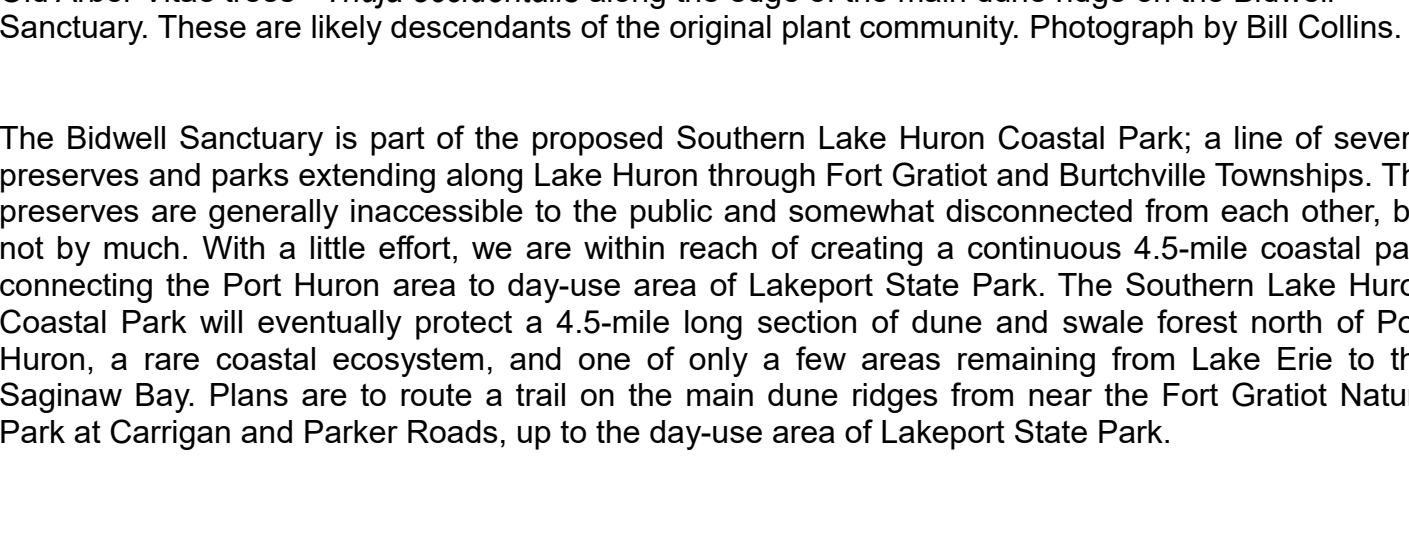
Bertha says she does not recall feeling any particular love for nature until she was in her 40's. She bought a summer cottage on Lake Huron near Lexington. One day she saw the bird feeding group in Macomb County that became MNA.

Over the years, Bertha gained a reputation as an outspoken, demanding, and exacting leader, a quality that certainly benefited all of us in the form of rare natural treasures preserved across Michigan.

Although I grew up in Saint Clair County, it was not until 1984 while attending MSU and working as a program assistant with The Nature Conservancy in East Lansing, that I learned about Bertha and MNA. I worked with Wendy O'Neil, a delightfully enthusiastic young woman dedicated to nature preservation. Sadly, I was told of Wendy's death from cancer a few years ago. Wendy was on the phone one day, and at some point she just smiled and said, "Yes Bertha... Yes Bertha... OK Bertha... Goodbye Bertha." I asked, "Who was that?". With her characteristic mirth, Wendy fondly explained MNA and its leader, having just been lectured by Bertha.

While Bertha is known for her commanding personality, she has always had a softer side. First of all, she has given much of her personal fortune to the people of Michigan as MNA sanctuaries. Secondly, her leadership of MNA always emphasized the individual, and in many ways, she gave free-reign to anyone willing to help.

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Bertha Daubendiek, left, with the Eastern Michigan Nature Association in 1970, making plans to expand statewide at the office of attorney Frank Giambone in Mount Clemens. Seated to the right are Thelma Sonnenberg, Marie Moran Peter, and Julius C. Reiter. Standing right of Bertha are Frank Giambone, Rita Juckett, and Richard W. Holzman. Photograph by Ralph Polovich.

In MNA publications like *"In Retrospect"*, a hardcover reflection on the accomplishments of MNA published in 1988, and the *"Nature Sanctuary Guidebook, 7th Edition"*, published in 1994, the photographs, many of which were taken by Bertha, focus on the individual's experience in nature. There are not just plants, animals, and landscapes, but intimate scenes of people in nature. There is a sense that the common person's interaction with nature is just as important as the academics'. It seems that the person on the other side of the camera really cared about the subject. To some extent, this was a product of several great photographers working for MNA, but also seems to reflect Bertha's love for people.

Bertha also has an introspective flare for the moment, seizing the "here and now" and appreciating anyone that crosses her path. On page 78 of *"In Retrospect"* there is a photograph of two young girls looking at a tree branch. Bertha's caption reads, "It was just a chance friendly encounter, August 6th of 1987. I made a quick stop, your parents' van came along and I asked you to pose. That is the rare mountain alder, or green alder. Always in the group, in 1978. Back then, Bob 'Big Bob' Collins (not related), my well known biology teacher at Saint Clair County Community College, was the President. I attended a few BWAS events through the 1980s, which were always educational. This is how I learned to call in Screech Owls by whistling, or other birds by using the 'emergency call'. A contingent from Lambert County, Ontario regularly participated in the BWAS, including Alf Rider who always gave a thorough presentation of his latest shorebird sightings. One of the most impressive activities I participated in, along with my sister, brother, and friend Chris Walker, was bird netting and banding in the Port Huron State Game Area in the spring of 1983. It was fascinating to see the birds so close. In those days, I noted that the BWAS attracted a wide age range of birders, from kids to 90-somethings, and from beginners to world life-listers and academics. BWAS is still active and you can find their Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/261255820627222>.

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MNA exploring the Keweenaw Peninsula in 1969. Bertha Daubendiek, bottom center. Above Bertha are Thelma Sonnenberg, Marie Moran Peter, and Julius C. Reiter. Standing right of Bertha are Frank Giambone, Rita Juckett, and Richard W. Holzman. Photograph by Ralph Polovich.

As if her accomplishments in Michigan were not enough, Bertha has even been working to preserve prairie land in her native Iowa. Bertha Daubendiek brought part of the West with her to Michigan, a mountain range of strength, great plains of vision, coulees of fragrance, the self-reliance of a pioneer, and for anyone that really knows her, a prairie full of charms. If there is ever an election for Mother Nature of Michigan, my vote is for Bertha.

This article focuses on Bertha Daubendiek, but it would not be fair to leave out other people that have been a part of MNA. There are many across Michigan, and in a future article I will highlight several local individuals, past and present. For more information about the Michigan Nature Association, visit their web site at [MichiganNature.org](http://MichiganNature.org) or contact MNA at 326 East Grand River Avenue, Williamston, Michigan 48899, phone: 517-655-5655, e-mail: [MichiganNature@MichiganNature.org](mailto:MichiganNature@MichiganNature.org).

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## The Nature Year in Macomb and Saint Clair Counties

### Macomb Nature Association, 1963

## The Nature Year

### in Macomb and St. Clair Counties, Michigan



The Nature Year in Macomb and Saint Clair Counties, Macomb Nature Association, 1963

This article wasn't written in 2003. It was to be about a booklet published in 1963 by the Macomb Nature Association, what later became the Michigan Nature Association, entitled, *The Nature Year in Macomb and Saint Clair Counties*. The 63-page booklet provides a history of the Macomb Nature Association, an extensive guide to animals and plants of the region, and detailed descriptions of their sanctuaries, along with very nice woodcut or linocut depictions of each sanctuary by Dr. Robert S. Butsch, former Director of the Michigan Audubon Society in 1960 and 1961, and Editor of the Jack Pine Warbler in 1961 through 1964. One of his images depicting the Pine River Nature Sanctuary, since renamed the Stephen M. Polovich Memorial Plant Preserve, is used on the first page of this issue of *The Thumb Naturalist*.

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## The Blue Water Audubon Society

### An International Club For All Ages

This article wasn't written in 2003 either. The Blue Water Audubon Society formed in 1955. TLC Members Tom and Laurie Dennis have been active with the BWAS for many years. TLC Executive Board Member Chris Walker introduced me to the group in 1978. Back then, Bob "Big Bob" Collins (not related), my well known biology teacher at Saint Clair County Community College, was the President. I attended a few BWAS events through the 1980s, which were always educational. This is how I learned to call in Screech Owls by whistling, or other birds by using the "emergency call". A contingent from Lambert County, Ontario regularly participated in the BWAS, including Alf Rider who always gave a thorough presentation of his latest shorebird sightings. One of the most impressive activities I participated in, along with my sister, brother, and friend Chris Walker, was bird netting and banding in the Port Huron State Game Area in the spring of 1983. It was fascinating to see the birds so close. In those days, I noted that the BWAS attracted a wide age range of birders, from kids to 90-somethings, and from beginners to world life-listers and academics. BWAS is still active and you can find their Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/261255820627222>.



Yellow Warbler - *Setophaga petechia* atop a Michigan Elm tree along Branch 6 of the Bunce Creek, Port Huron Township, Saint Clair County, 2007 May 21. Photograph by Bill Collins.

## Keep Looking Up

### End of January 2003 Issue 1 of The Thumb Naturalist

## Bidwell Sanctuary Coastal Trail Development

### Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County

### Chickadees in hickory shade

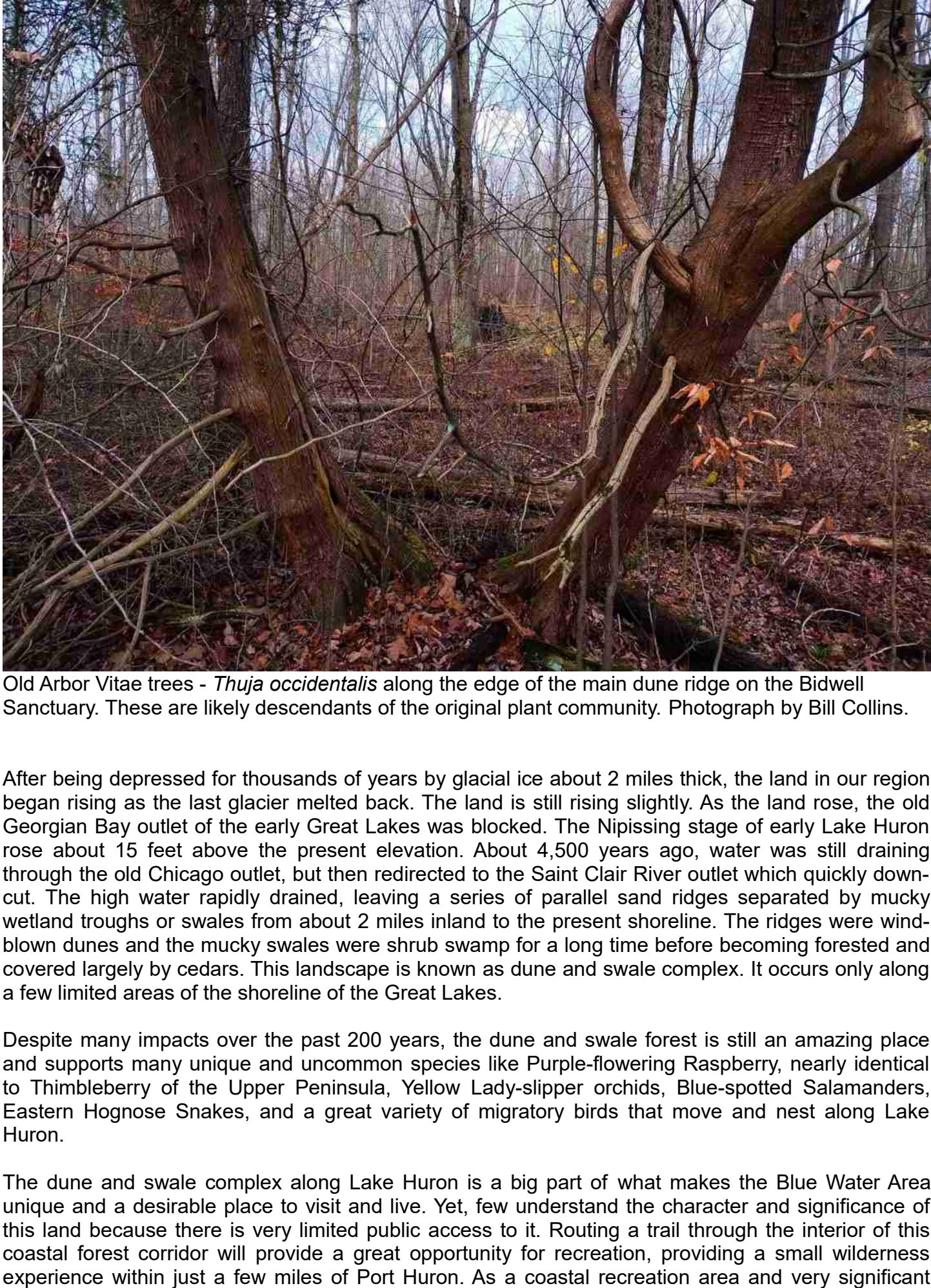
### Place among hemlock trees on sandy ground with sound or waves breaking - Lénapé

Through the work of our new Stewardship Assistants, Jason Sawyer and Teddy Wiley, the TLC resumed clearing an invasive weed removal on the coastal trail on the Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville township in the fall of 2024. The trail extends north nearly the full half-mile length of the property and we are now working to loop route back down the east side of the sanctuary.



Old Arbor Vitae trees - *Tujia occidentalis* along the edge of the main dune ridge on the Bidwell Sanctuary. These are likely descendants of the original plant community. Photograph by Bill Collins.

The Bidwell Sanctuary is part of the proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park; a line of several preserves and parks extending along Lake Huron through Fort Gratiot and Burtchville Townships. The preserves are generally inaccessible to the public and somewhat disconnected from each other, but not by much. With a little effort, we are within reach of creating a continuous 4.5-mile coastal park connecting the Port Huron area to a day-use area of Lake State Park. The Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park will eventually protect a 4.5-mile long section of dune and swale forest north of Port Huron, a rare coastal ecosystem, and one of only a few areas remaining from Lake Erie to the Saginaw Bay. Plans are to route a trail on the main dune ridges from near the Fort Gratiot Nature Park at Carigan and Parker Roads, up to the day-use area of Lake Park State Park.

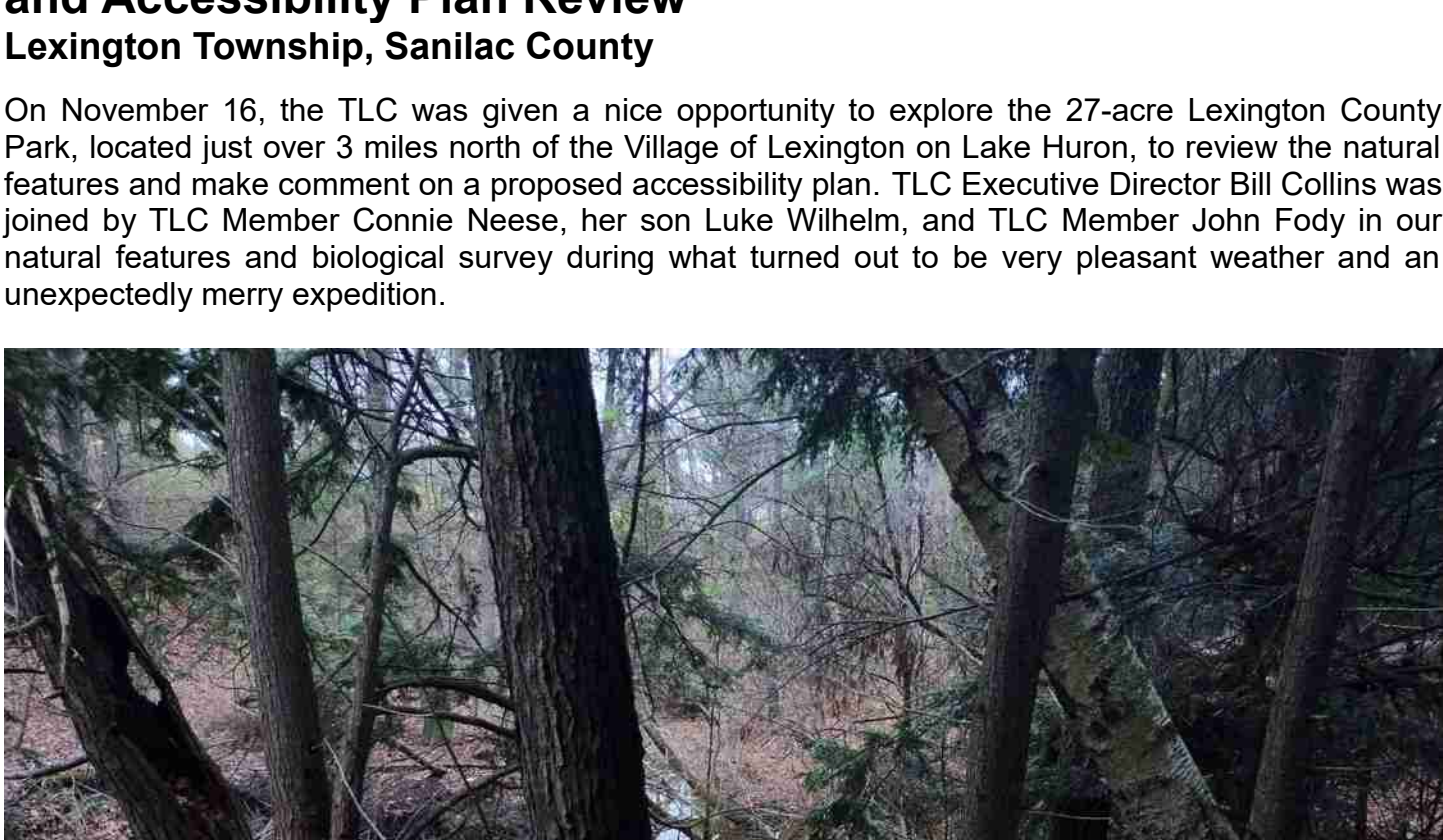


Old Arbor Vitae trees - *Thuja occidentalis* along the edge of the main dune ridge on the Bidwell Sanctuary. These are likely descendants of the original plant community. Photograph by Bill Collins.

After being depressed for thousands of years by glacial ice about 2 miles thick, the land in our region began rising as the last glacier melted back. The land is still rising slightly. As the land rose, the old Georgian Bay outlet of the early Great Lakes was blocked. The Nipissing stage of early Lake Huron rose about 15 feet above the present elevation. About 4,500 years ago, water was still draining through the old Chicago outlet, but then redirected to the Saint Clair River outlet which quickly drowned. The high water rapidly drained, leaving a series of parallel sand ridges separated by mucky wetland troughs and swales from about 2 miles inland to the present shoreline. The ridges were wind-blown dunes and the mucky swales were shrub swamps for a long time before becoming forested and covered largely by cedars. This landscape is known as dune and swale complex. It occurs only along a few limited areas of the shoreline of the Great Lakes.

Despite many impacts over the past 200 years, the dune and swale forest is still an amazing place and supports many unique and uncommon species like Purple-flowering Raspberry, nearly identical to Thimbleberry of the Upper Peninsula, Yellow Lady-slipper orchids, Blue-spotted Salamanders, Eastern Hognose Snakes, and a great variety of migratory birds that move and nest along Lake Huron.

The dune and swale complex along Lake Huron is a big part of what makes the Blue Water Area unique and a desirable place to visit and live. Yet, few understand the character and significance of this land because there is very limited public access to it. Rerouting a trail through the interior of this coastal forest corridor will provide a great opportunity for recreation, providing a small wilderness experience within just a few miles of Port Huron. As a coastal recreation area and very significant migratory bird corridor, the park is expected to draw visitors from across southeast Michigan and southwest Ontario.



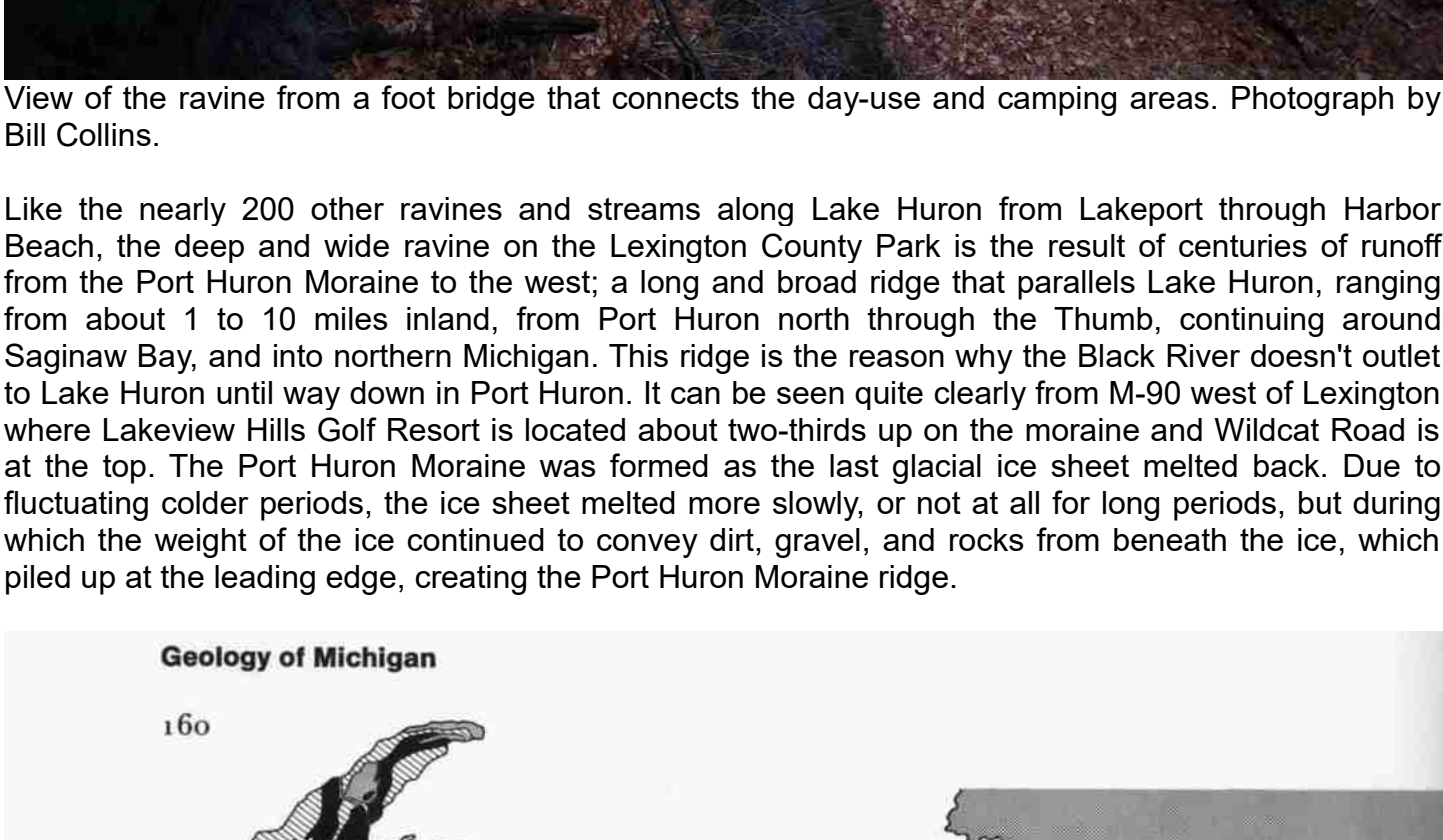
In late November and early December, the TLC submitted drawings and applications to Burtchville Township for a building permit and special land use permit to develop the entrance of the Bidwell Sanctuary at Metcalf Road for visitors. The plans are to be reviewed in early 2025. This is an important step in developing not only the Bidwell Sanctuary for public use, but also the larger Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

The TLC again thanks major funders of the Bidwell Sanctuary acquisition and Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project, including The Carls Foundation, Consumers Energy Foundation, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, Ducks Unlimited, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Community Foundation of Saint Clair County, Moore Family Foundation, Cargill Salt of Saint Clair, Cargill, Incorporated, the Bioregion RepARATION Fund, SEMCO Energy Gas Company, and individual donors.

## Lexington County Park Natural Features and Accessibility Plan Review

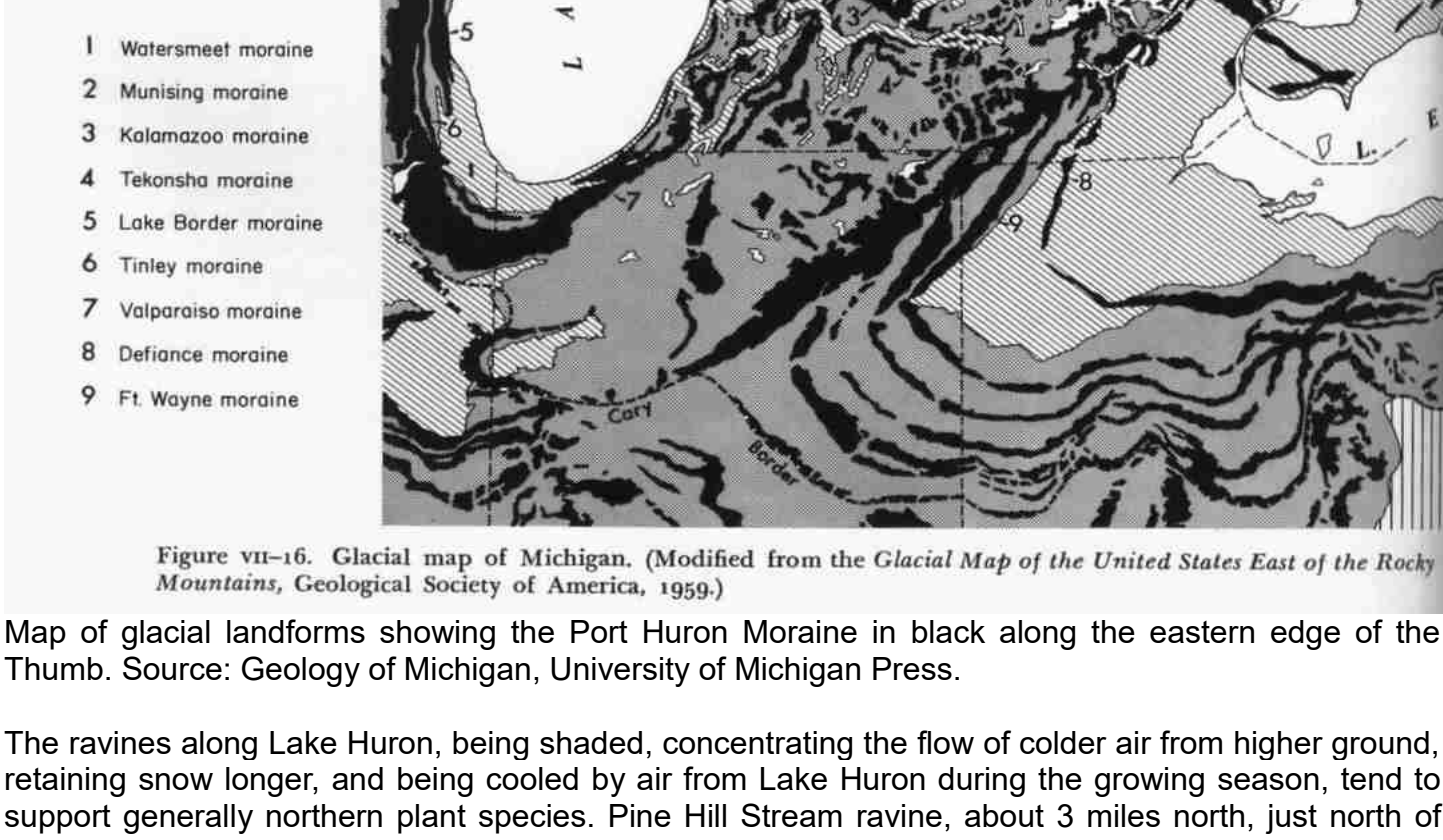
### Lexington Township, Sanilac County

On November 16, the TLC was given a nice opportunity to explore the 27-acre Lexington County Park, located just over 3 miles north of the Village of Lexington on Lake Huron, to review the natural features and make comment on a proposed accessibility plan. TLC Executive Director Bill Collins was joined by TLC Member Connie Neese, her son Luke Wilhelm, and TLC Member John Fody in our natural features and biological survey during what turned out to be very pleasant weather and an unexpectedly merry expedition.



TLC Member Connie Neese and her son Luke Wilhelm exploring the ravine. Photograph by Bill Collins.

If you've never been to the Lexington County Park, you should plan a visit. The day-use portion of the park, accessed by the north drive, is apparently open year-round but the web site says it's open only from May 1 through October 31: <https://www.sanilaccounty.parks.com/lexington-park/>. You might want to contact the park or County before going in November through April. The Lexington County Park is impressive not only because of its location on Lake Huron, with a substantial and generally secluded beach during lower lake levels, but also because of a large ravine and creek that runs through the middle of the park from M-25 to Lake Huron.



View of the ravine from a foot bridge that connects the day-use and camping areas. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Like the nearly 200 other ravines and streams along Lake Huron from Lakeport through Harbor Beach, the deep and wide ravine on the Lexington County Park is the result of centuries of runoff from the Port Huron Moraine to the west; a long and broad ridge that parallels Lake Huron, ranging from about 1 to 10 miles inland, from Port Huron north through the Thumb, continuing around Saginaw Bay, and into northern Michigan. This ridge is the reason why the Black River doesn't outlet to Lake Huron until way down in Port Huron. It can be seen quite clearly from M-90 west of Lexington where Lakeview Hills Golf Resort is located about two-thirds up on the moraine and Wilcox Road is at the top. The Port Huron Moraine was formed as the last glacial ice sheet melted back. Due to fluctuating colder periods, the ice sheet melted more slowly, or not at all for long periods, but during which the weight of the ice continued to convey dirt, gravel, and rocks at beneath the ice, which piled up at the leading edge, creating the Port Huron Moraine ridge.



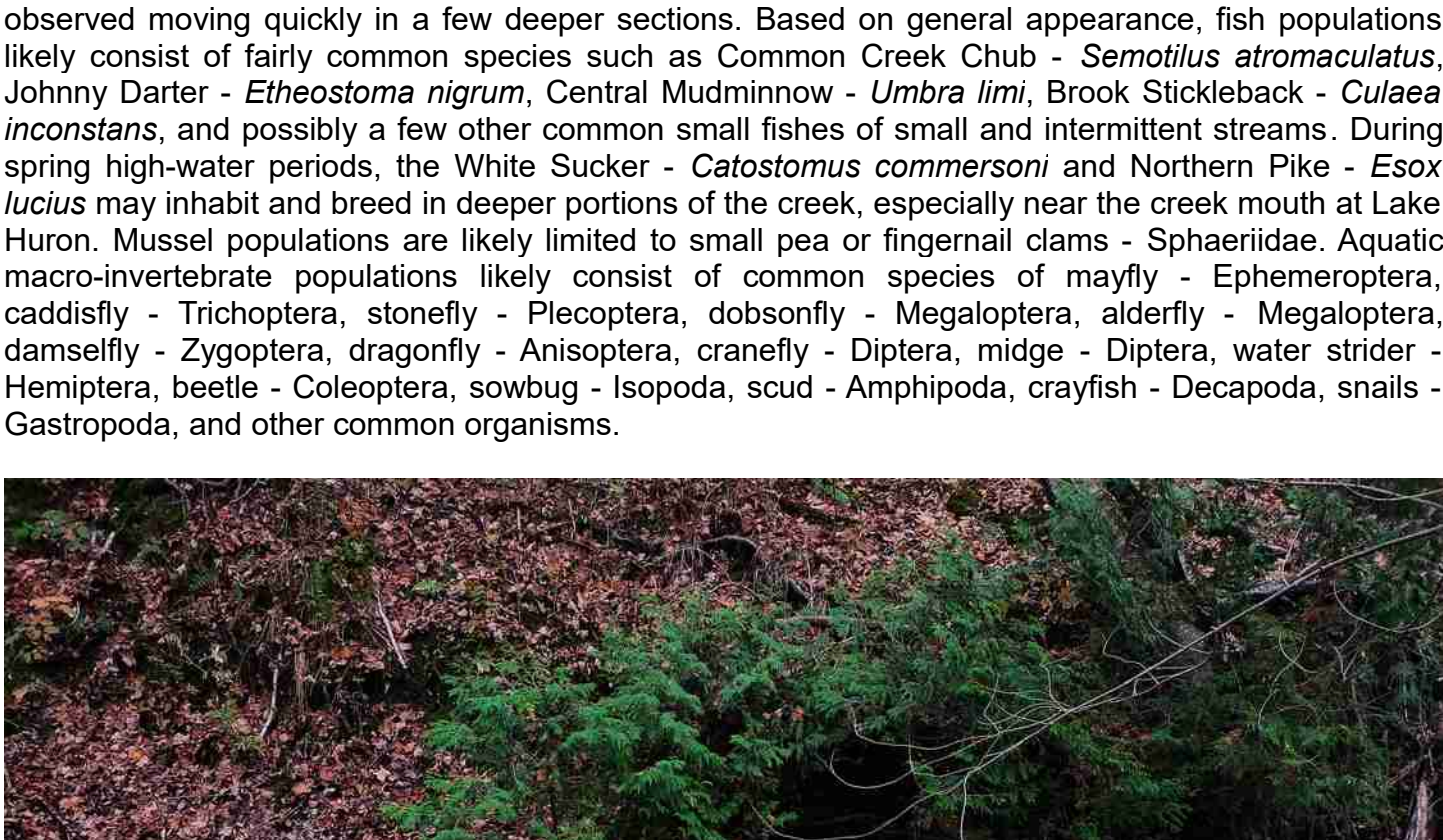
Map of glacial landforms showing the Port Huron Moraine in black along the eastern edge of the Thumb. Source: Geology of Michigan, University of Michigan Press.

The ravines along Lake Huron, being shaded, concentrating the flow of colder air from higher ground, retaining snow longer, and being cooled by air from Lake Huron during the growing season, tend to support generally northern plant species. Pine Hill Stream ravine, about 3 miles north, just north of Applegate Road, supports Striped Maple - *Acer pensylvanicum*, which is well south of its normal range of the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula, and also Michigan Special Concern Large Toothwort - *Cardamine maxima*, which is known from only a few locations in Michigan in rich forest along streams, often in shaded ravines.

The cooler micro-climate of the Lexington County Park ravine supports a generally northern forest community, dominated largely by Eastern Hemlock - *Tsuga canadensis*, Yellow Birch - *Betula alleghaniensis*, Sugar Maple - *Acer saccharum*, and Eastern White Pine - *Pinus strobus*. Other fairly extensive vegetation in the ravine includes Paper Birch - *Betula papyrifera*, American Beech - *Fagus grandifolia*, Big-tooth Aspen - *Populus grandidentata*, Arbor Vitae - *Thuja occidentalis*, and Basswood - *Tilia americana*. Once widespread across the Thumb region, the northern forest within the ravine is now quite limited due to historic logging and agriculture, occurring largely in river valleys and ravines like that on the park. Trees like Eastern Hemlock and Yellow Birch were already essentially relicts of a cooler climate centuries ago, and so are now under even more threat due to climate warming.

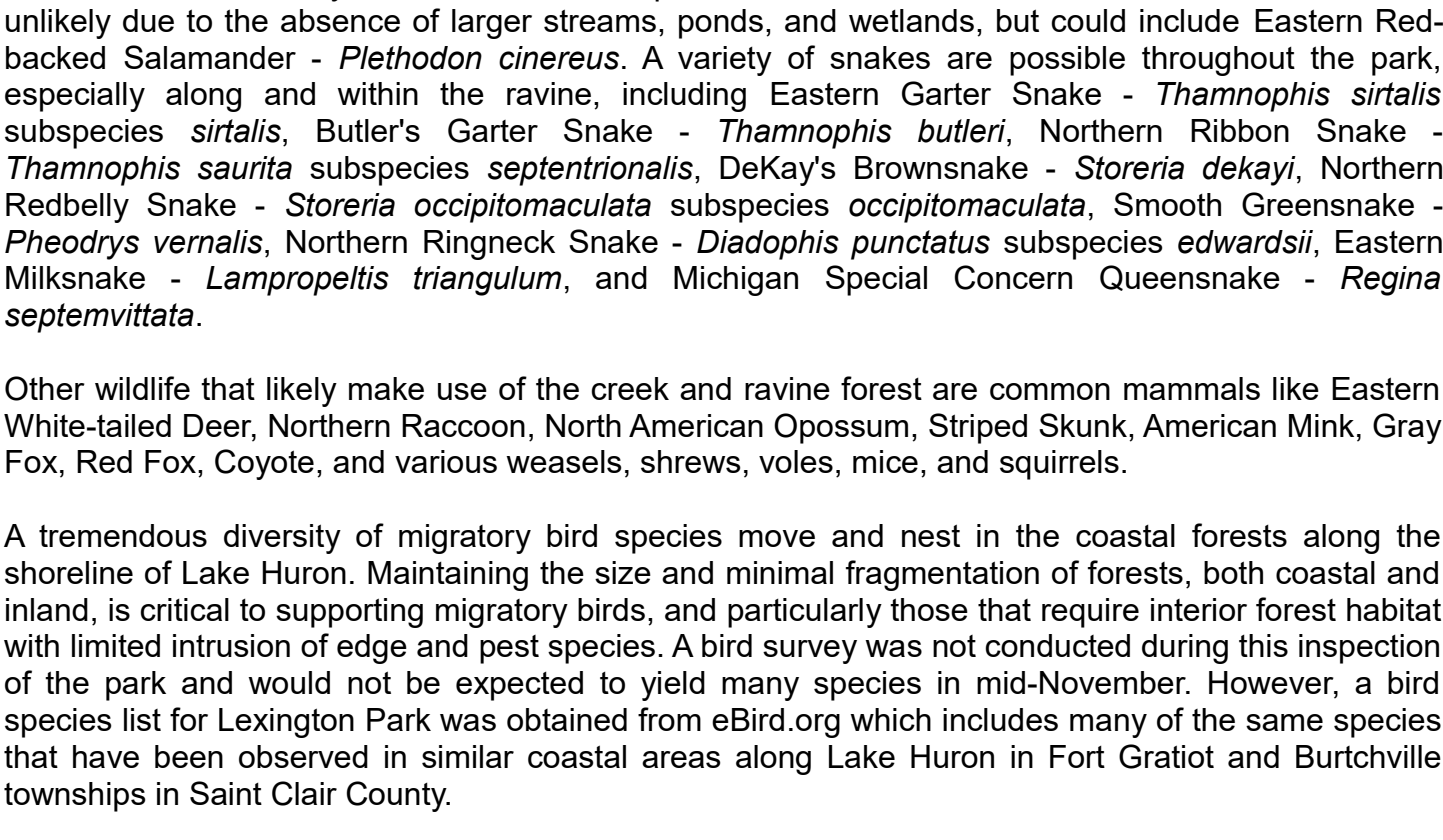


Eastern Hemlock, Eastern White Pine, and Paper Birch along the south side of the ravine. Photograph by Bill Collins.



Eastern Hemlock seedlings in the ravine, showing sustained reproduction in the cool microclimate. Photograph by Bill Collins.

At least 67 plant species were identified during our approximately 3-hour inspection of the park. Several species observed were omitted from the list simply because they appeared to be common weeds. As the park was inspected in mid-November, native spring ephemeral plants like trout-lily and trillium were not observed, but are likely present, along with other plants that persist through the summer. Perhaps the rarest plant species found during this inspection was Purple-flowering Raspberry - *Rubus odoratus*, an eastern species on the western edge of its range in Michigan, originally recorded from only seven shoreline counties; three other county locations likely representing escapes from plantings. Here, it normally occurs on wooded dune ridges, especially in Fort Gratiot and Burtchville townships in Saint Clair County, but we found a small clump growing down in the ravine, only about 10 feet above the creek. Another notable species found was Butternut - *Juglans cinerea*, a generally southern tree near the northern edge of its range in Michigan, that has been extensively eliminated across its former range by the Butternut Canker fungus. We found only one sapling that does not appear to be growing well, located roughly 50 feet west of the southwest corner of the day-use parking lot. Butternut has been found near Lake Huron along streams and ravine valleys in Burtchville and Worth townships, and so may be one of the generally southern species that takes advantage of the extended growing season and slightly warmer winter temperatures near the lake. Other uncommon or rare species may be present but were not observed as our site inspection was conducted outside of the growing season and was not exhaustive.



TLC Member Connie Neese getting a closer look at a clump of Purple Flowering-raspberry. Photograph by Bill Collins.

All watercourses are important for their many water quality aspects, aquatic community, and wildlife values, particularly those that discharge to the Great Lakes. As with the nearly 200 other streams flowing off the Port Huron Moraine east to Lake Huron along the east side of the Thumb, the creek on the Lexington County Park is somewhat isolated from intensive agriculture, which is more characteristic of land west of the Black River. However, the headwaters of the creek flow through largely non-buffered crop fields.

An aquatic survey of the creek was not conducted as part of our review, but some small fish were observed moving quickly in a few deeper sections. Based on general appearance, fish populations likely consist of fairly common species such as Common Creek Chub - *Semotilus atromaculatus*, Johnny Darter - *Etheostoma nigrum*, Central Mudminnow - *Umbra limi*, Brook Stickleback - *Culaea inconstans*, and possibly a few other common small fishes of small and intermittent streams. During spring high-water periods, the White Sucker - *Catostomus commersoni* and Northern Pike - *Esox lucius* may inhabit and breed in deeper portions of the creek, especially near the creek mouth at Lake Huron. Invertebrate populations are likely limited to small pea or fingernail clams - Sphaeriidae. Aquatic macro-invertebrate populations likely consist of common species of mayfly - Ephemeroptera, caddisfly - Trichoptera, stonefly - Plecoptera, dobsonfly - Megaloptera, alderfly - Megaloptera, damselfly - Zygoptera, dragonfly - Anisoptera, cranefly - Diptera, midge - Diptera, water strider - Hemiptera, beetle - Coleoptera, sowbug - Isopoda, scud - Amphipoda, crayfish - Decapoda, snails - Gastropoda, and other common organisms.



Ravine creek showing a gravel and stony substrate necessary to support a higher quality aquatic community. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Generally common amphibians are likely to use the creek and adjoining land, including Wood Frog - *Rana sylvatica*, Green Frog - *Rana clamitans*, Northern Leopard Frog - *Lithobates pipiens*, Northern Spring Peeper frog - *Pseudacris crucifer*, Eastern Gray Treefrog - *Dryophytes versicolor*, and Eastern American Toad - *Anaxyrus americanus* subspecies *americanus*. Most salamanders and turtles are unlikely due to the absence of larger streams, ponds, and wetlands, but could include Eastern Red-backed Salamander - *Plethodon cinereus*. A variety of snakes are possible throughout the park, especially along and within the ravine, including Eastern Garter Snake - *Thamnophis sirtalis* subspecies *sirtalis*, Butler's Garter Snake - *Thamnophis butleri*, Northern Ribbon Snake - *Thamnophis saurita* subspecies *septentrionalis*, DeKay's Brownsnake - *Storeria dekayi*, Northern Redbelly Snake - *Storeria occipitomaculata* subspecies *occipitomaculata*, Smooth Greensnake - *Phrynosoma vernalis*, Northern Ringneck Snake - *Diadophis punctatus* subspecies *edwardsi*, Eastern Milksnake - *Lampropeltis triangulum*, and Michigan Special Concern Queensnake - *Regina septemvittata*.

Other wildlife that likely make use of the creek and adjacent forest are common mammals like Eastern White-tailed Deer, Northern Raccoon, North American Opossum, Striped Skunk, American Mink, Gray Fox, Red Fox, Coyote, and various weasels, shrews, voles, mice, and squirrels.

A tremendous diversity of migratory bird species move and nest in the coastal forests along the shoreline of Lake Huron. Maintaining the size and minimal fragmentation of forests, both coastal and inland, is critical to supporting migratory birds, and particularly those that require interior forest habitat with limited intrusion of edge and pest species. A bird survey was not conducted during this inspection of the park and would not be expected to yield many species in mid-November. However, a bird species list for Lexington Park was obtained from eBird.org which includes many of the same species that have been observed in similar coastal areas along Lake Huron in Fort Gratiot and Burtchville townships in Saint Clair County.

The Lake Huron shoreline, ravine, and creek are all great natural features at the park. The whole area, particularly the ravine, is sensitive in terms of native vegetation, potential erosion, and water quality. Perhaps the biggest factor in protection of the ravine has been its relative inaccessibility due to the steep slopes which serve as a natural barrier that will continue to provide relative protection for the area in the long term.



Fallen trees along the creek due to bank destabilization. Photograph by Bill Collins.

A positive aspect of the large number of downed trees in the creek is that the increased woody debris creates better habitat for fish and other aquatic organisms, and it helps to assimilate increased nitrates discharged from agricultural field tilling. Decreasing nitrates in surface waters is important for controlling algal blooms and maintaining good water quality.



View southeast of the Lake Huron shoreline. Photograph by Bill Collins.

A major threat to the native quality and sustainability of the forest on the park is the occurrence of invasive weeds. These are extensive, especially across the upstream half of the ravine. Invasive shrubs are widespread, including Common Privet - *Ligustrum vulgare*, Tartarian Honeysuckle - *Lonicera tatarica*, Multiflora Rose - *Rosa multiflora*, and Japanese Barberry - *Berberis thunbergii*. Invasive trees noted in the ravine are Norway Maple - *Acer platanoides* and Black Locust - *Robinia pseudoacacia*. Invasive herbs include Canada Thistle - *Cirsium canadense*, Reed Canary Grass - *Phalaris arundinacea*, and Reed - *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*. I have observed extensive areas dominated by invasive Lily-of-the-valley - *Convallaria majalis* across the north ravine slope during my previous visits to the park. Of these, Common Privet, Multiflora Rose, Japanese Barberry, and Lily-of-the-valley are the biggest threats as they will eventually dominate the understory and exclude almost all other vegetation. Other invasive weeds such as Tartarian Honeysuckle, Canada Thistle, Reed Canary Grass, and Reed would largely be shaded out if the forest canopy is restored.

The TLC thanks the Sanilac County Parks and Recreation Commission for this great opportunity to explore the Lexington County Park and make comment on their park accessibility plans. The park is truly one of the gems of the Thumb coastline and with a little help, it will remain so for future generations.

## Loznak Sanctuary Invasive Shrub Removal and Seed Collection

Marysville, Saint Clair County

Yānhdawa' yeh de yenhtha' iyaen' - *The Prairie is Near the River* - Huron-Wendat

In the late fall and early winter, TLC Board Member Dan Rhein and TLC Stewardship Assistant Teddy Wiley cut and treated large areas of Glossy Buckthorn, Autumn-olive, and other invasive shrubs on the Loznak Sanctuary. This is gradually opening up the lakeplain prairie and adjoining woodland on the west side of the sanctuary to resemble more closely the original prairie and oak-dominated woodland, both fire-dependent plant communities. They have focused their work on two areas near the west side where they found a large patches of Fringed Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita*. More Fringed Gentian is always good.

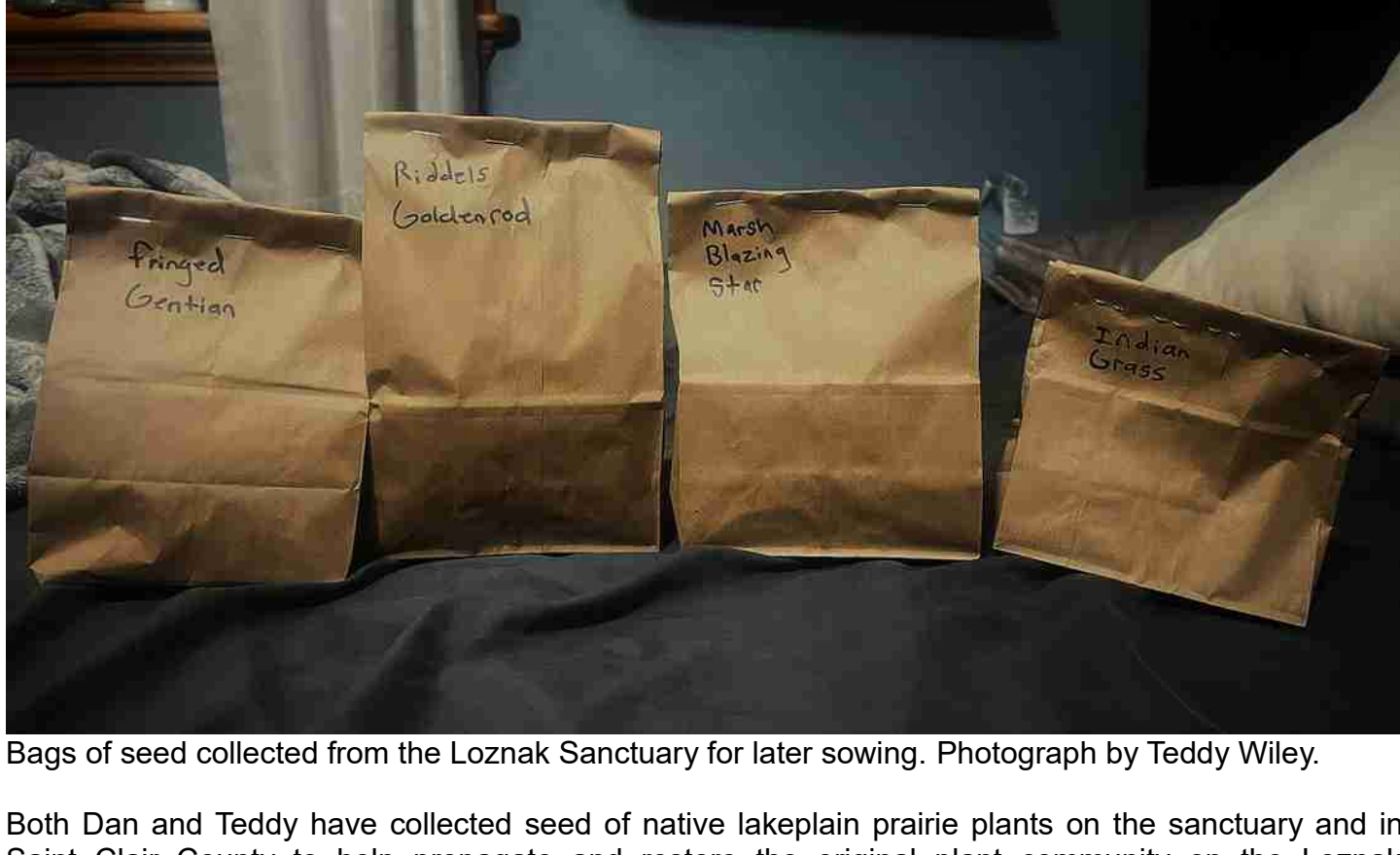


Cleared buckthorn and other invasive brush. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.



Paper Birch left in clearing area. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Dan and Teddy also found a remnant patch of Indian Grass - *Sorghastrum nutans* further east that we apparently overlooked. Indian Grass is a new prairie species addition for the sanctuary. It would normally be an expected species in an intact lakeplain prairie community, but the Loznak Sanctuary has endured a lot of impact that likely eliminated several native species originally present a century ago.



Bags of seed collected from the Loznak Sanctuary for later sowing. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Both Dan and Teddy have collected seed of native lakeplain prairie plants on the sanctuary and in Saint Clair County to help propagate and restore the original plant community on the Loznak Sanctuary. Species include Fringed Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita*, Rough Blazing-star - *Liatris aspera*, and Riddell's Goldenrod - *Solidago riddellii* from the Loznak Sanctuary, Indian Grass - *Sorghastrum nutans* from the Loznak Sanctuary and a nearby patch in Port Huron Township, and Cord Grass - *Spartina pectinata* from Port Huron Township and Harsens Island. Some of these seeds were already planted on the sanctuary, but most will be sown, conditions permitting, throughout the winter and into March to allow us to continue vegetation management but also provide for natural stratification necessary to break the dormancy of the seed.

## Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary Trail Clearing

Fort Gratiot, Saint Clair County

The TLC didn't waste much time on starting a new section of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park trail on our new 80-acre Shorewood Forrest acquisition. In late November and early December, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC Member Connie Neese, and TLC Stewardship Assistant Teddy Wiley started clearing the trail along a major dune ridge from Carrigan Road.

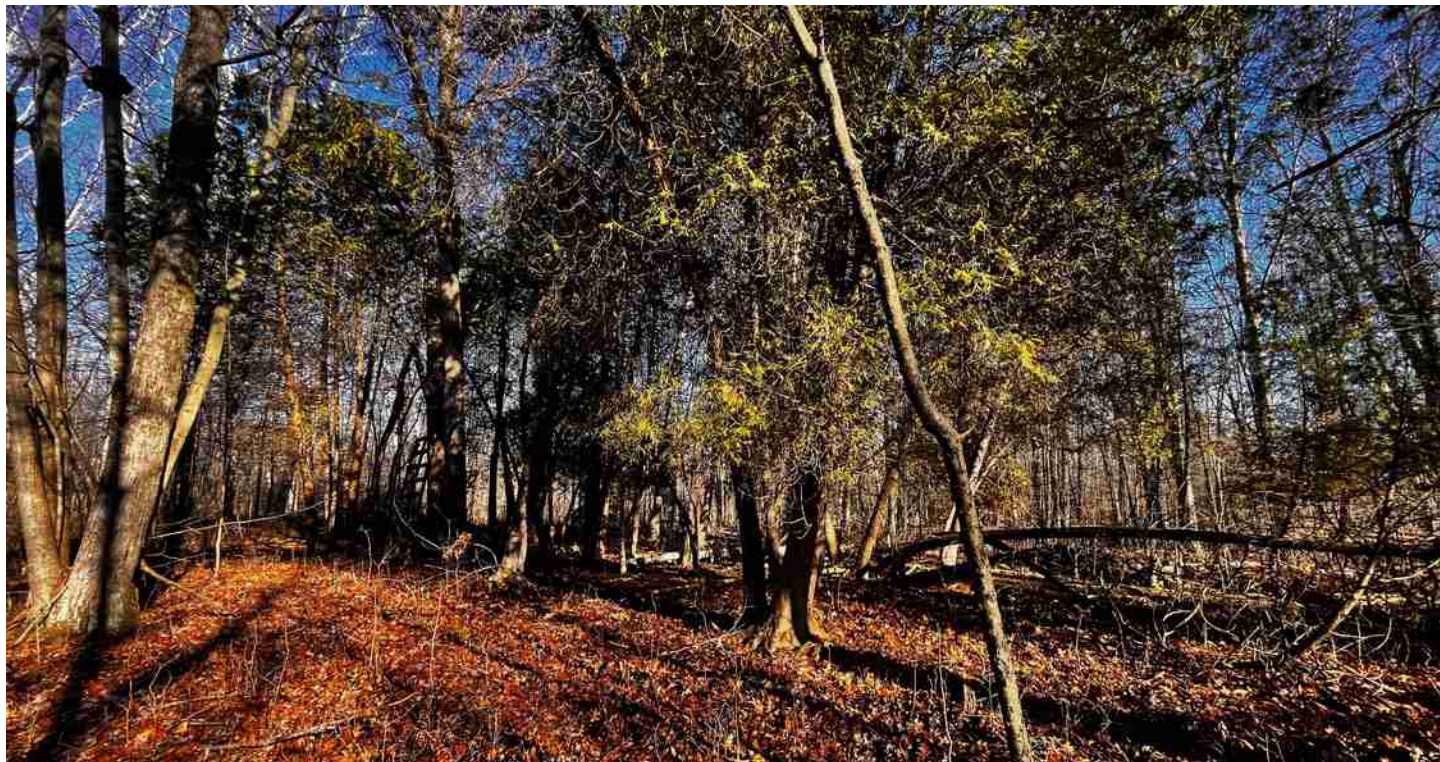


Start of the new trail on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.



The Shorewood Forrest wetland swale sleeps. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

We started the new trail entrance at Carrigan Road, about 1/4 mile north of the 40-acre pond on the Fort Gratiot Nature Park. The trail heads basically due north to the east edge of the dune ridge. From there, it will continue along the east edge of the ridge, similar to the trail on the Bidwell Sanctuary, providing a nice view of the adjoining wetland swale. This ridge continues northwest 1 mile through the middle of the Shorewood Forrest preserves, allowing for a trail of the same length that will eventually connect with Brace Road.



Old Arbor Vitae - *Thuja occidentalis* trees, likely descendants of the original plant community, on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

While working on the trail, Teddy took the opportunity to walk about a half-mile up the ridge to the middle of the Shorewood Forrest preserve area, the middle of Section 9. There, the dune and swale forest extends a half-mile north and south, about 3/4 mile east, and about 1/4 mile west. It is one of the most secluded locations of what will be the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. Mapping by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory shows that originally, much of the dune and swale forest consisted of cedar swamp. Most likely, Northern White-cedar - *Thuja occidentalis*, not really a cedar but generally a cypress, dominated the wetland swales. With historic impacts to the ecosystem, not the least of which is the relentless grazing of the cedar seedlings by Eastern White-tailed Deer, Northern White-cedar, or Arbor Vitae, has all but disappeared. But on his walk to the trail, Teddy found several remnant Arbor Vitae trees along the dune ridge. Every one of these trees is precious because they are needed to restore the original plant community of Shorewood Forrest.

## New Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Connection

Fort Gratiot, Saint Clair County

While working on the new Shorewood Forrest trail, a 5-acre parcel for sale on the south side of Carrigan Road came to our attention. Everything just fell together in terms of funding and owner response, making this the fastest purchased acquisition in TLC history. We closed on the property on 2025 January 10. The significance of this 5 acres, beyond that it contains intact dune and swale forest, is that it provides a direct connection from the 40-acre pond on the Fort Gratiot Nature Park, right up to our new trail entrance to the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary on Carrigan Road. This is a critical connection for the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park as it allows for a continuous trail connection, except the Carrigan Road crossing, extending nearly 2 miles, from the southern end of the Fort Gratiot Nature Park up to Brace Road on the north side of the Shorewood Forrest preserves.



The new 5-acre connecting parcel shown in yellow.

This purchase was made possible by funding provided by a long-awaited grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council which came through just in time. Ultimately, we thank Kali Rush of the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited in Dexter, Michigan for this grant opportunity and her continued work and advocacy on behalf of the TLC.

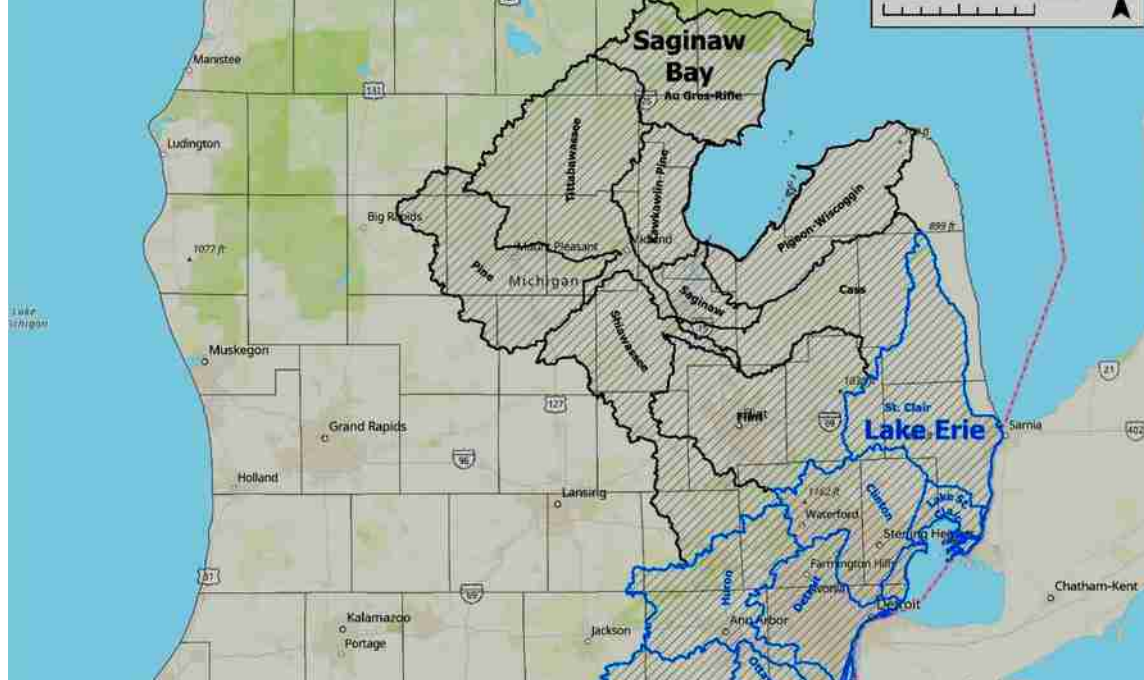
## Wetland Conservation Program Grants

Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division

On July 25, Ducks Unlimited notified the TLC of our first grant award through the Wetland Conservation Program for acquisition of the 113-acre Morley Trust Property along the Kawkawlin River north of Bay City. We applied for the grant in early January of 2024. By far, our largest project ever in terms of cost, the grant award provides up to \$650,000 to purchase the entire Morley Trust Property, which includes about 90 acres of imperiled lakeplain wet-mesic and wet prairie, about 2 acres of relatively undisturbed lakeplain wet prairie and marsh, about 11 acres of wooded dune ridges or oak openings, and a nearly 10-acre public rail trail. The total funding of the grant depends on the appraised value of the property. Based on the completed appraisal, and also a review by a second appraiser, we will be able to use almost all of the grant for this acquisition. Additional funding for the purchase is to be provided by a private loan to the TLC.

As if the first grant was not enough, which honestly, in trying to protect natural areas, a conservancy can never have enough funding, the TLC was awarded a second grant from Ducks Unlimited through the Expanded Wetland Conservation Program on October 10. The TLC applied for this second round of Wetland Conservation Program funding in late August. The additional grant funding is designated for acquisition of an as yet to be revealed property. All we can say is that, if successful, this will be a great addition to the protected public land of the Thumb.

The Wetland Conservation Program is managed by the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited on behalf of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Michigan DNR developed the Wetlands Conservation Program to guide expenditure for a portion these funds, and selected Ducks Unlimited through a competitive process to manage the program. Ducks Unlimited is a non-profit company that has preserved, enhanced, or restored 16 million acres of wetlands in North America since 1937.



Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie watersheds in Michigan. Source: Wetland Conservation Program request for grant applications.

The Wetland Conservation Program grants are designated for protection of wetlands in both the Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie watersheds, as part of a larger initiative to secure and improve the water quality of Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie. Fortunately for the TLC, most of our territory is located within one or the other watershed. The western basin of Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay experience frequent recurring harmful algal blooms which are primarily driven by excess phosphorus entering the lakes through runoff from rainfall and snowmelt. Harmful algal blooms can be toxic and cause severe illness, leading to closure of drinking water facilities, boating areas, fishing events, and beaches. Restoring wetlands on the landscape to catch the runoff and filter out phosphorus is one potential solution to this problem, and part of what is hoped to be accomplished through the Wetland Conservation Program.

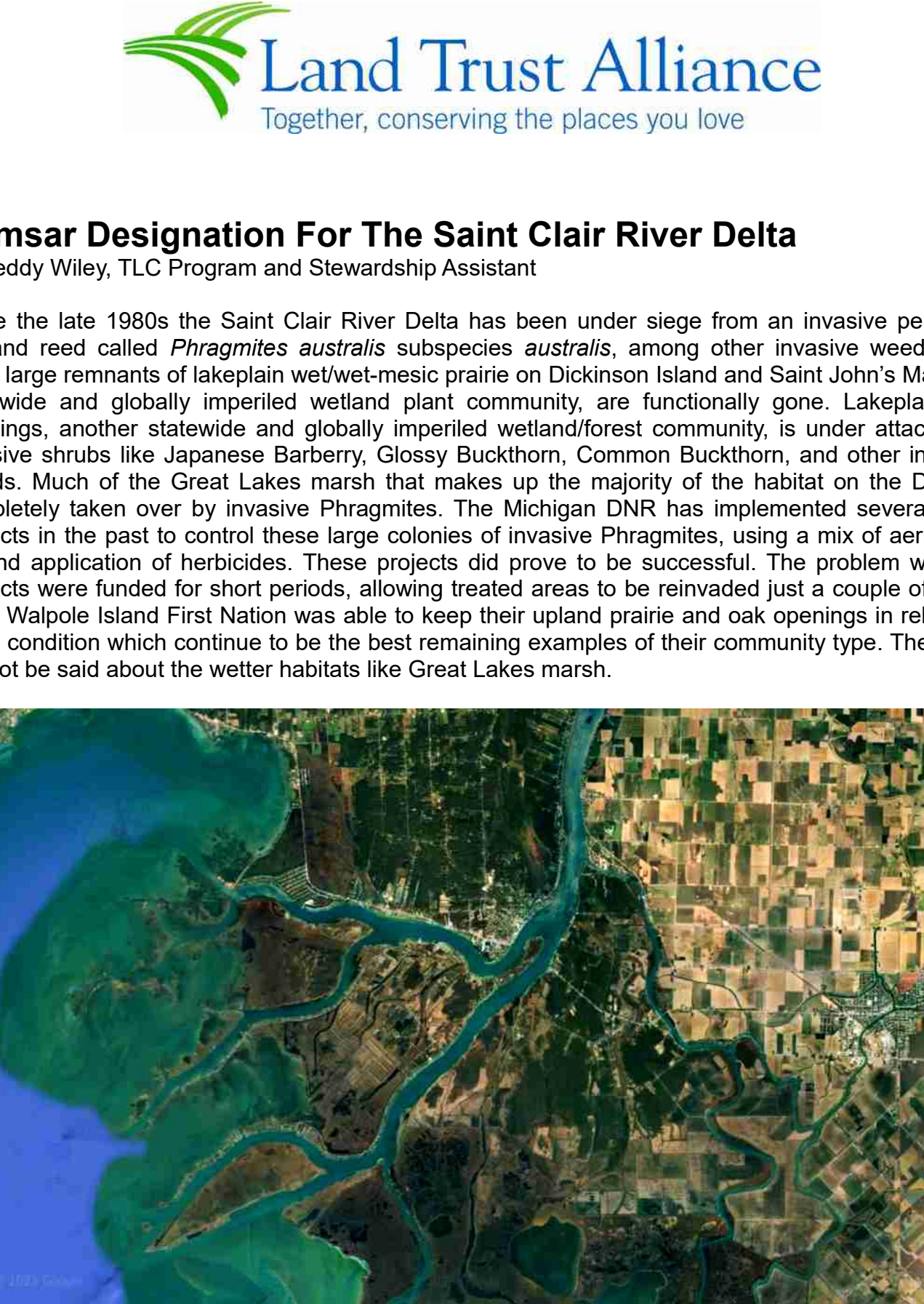


Source: <https://www.ducks.org/>

Our sincere gratitude to Kall Rush and Matt Conrad of the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited in Dexter, Michigan for notifying the TLC of these grant opportunities. Our thanks also to the Wetland Conservation Program Steering Committee for selecting our projects for funding.

## Four County Community Foundation Grant

In mid September the TLC applied for grant funding from the Four County Community Foundation based in Romeo to help fund acquisition of a new preserve in Lapeer County; over 40 acres of conifer swamp and shrub swamp complex at the headwaters of the Belle River. In early November, we received notice of a small grant to be used toward that purchase, but we have a long way to go yet in the fundraising. The Four County Community Foundation funded stewardship of our Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary in Dryden Township, Lapeer County in 2002. We thank them for their continued support.



## Land Trust Alliance Grant

The TLC Executive Board decided to join the Land Trust Alliance. As we advance as an organization and in our land protection efforts, the TLC finds it increasingly necessary to seek the knowledge and advice of the LTA and similar sources. The TLC board also completed an organizational risk assessment this summer with the LTA that emphasized our basic direction. We are not pursuing LTA accreditation at this time, but are attempting to generally follow LTA standards and practices.

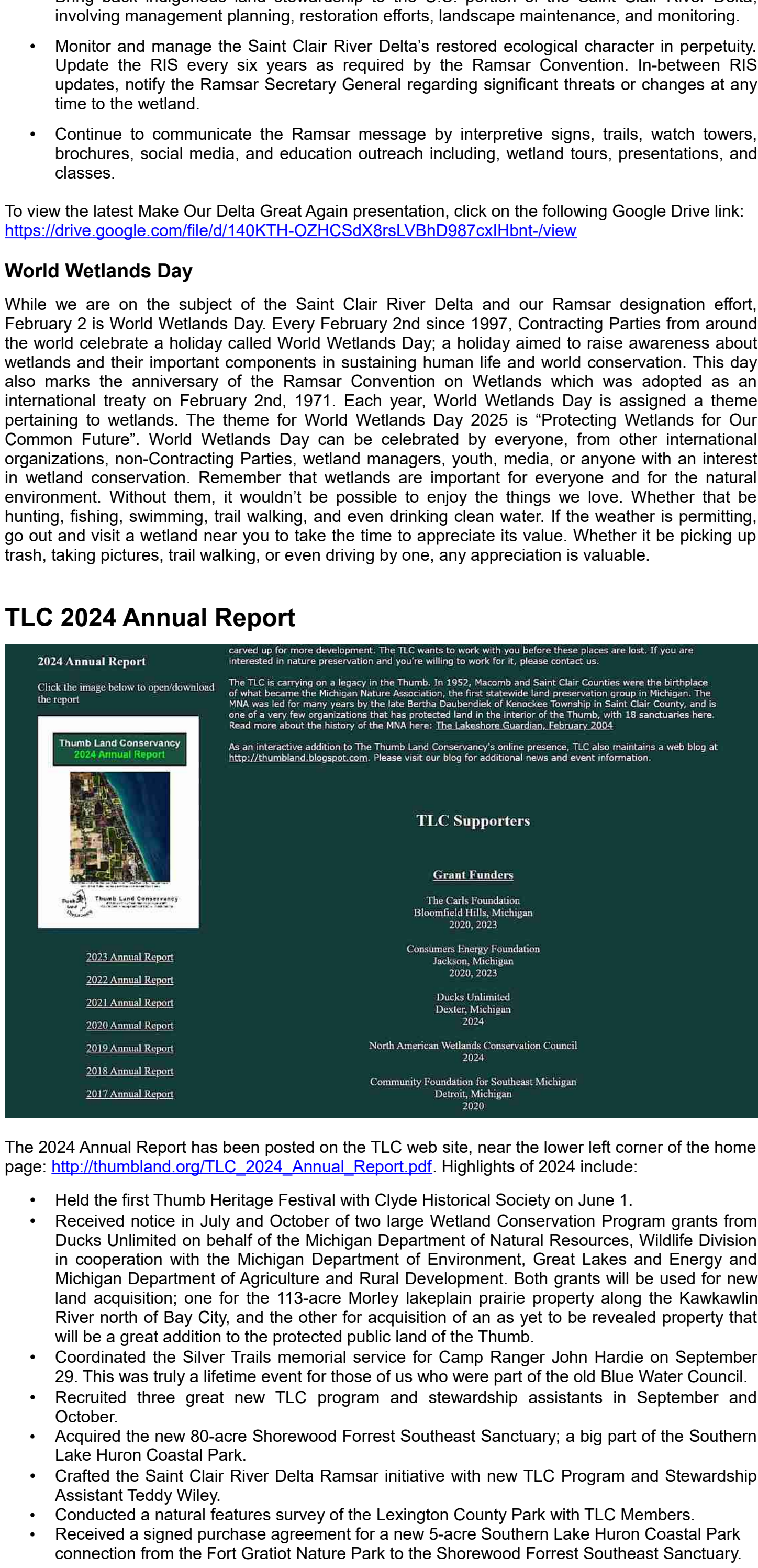
In early September, the TLC was given the opportunity to apply for a 2024 Midwest Ensuring Conservation Permanence Risk Management Grant from the Land Trust Alliance. In late November, we received notice of an award of \$2,000. This grant will be used exclusively for paying our new staff to address important conservancy issues that were discussed during our series of with the Land Trust Alliance in the summer and fall of 2024, including building our capacity to support administration and fund development, and to develop a fundraising and communications plan to increase general operating funds. We thank the Land Trust Alliance for their guidance and support.



## Ramsar Designation For The Saint Clair River Delta

By Teddy Wiley, TLC Program and Stewardship Assistant

Since the late 1980s the Saint Clair River Delta has been under siege from an invasive perennial wetland reed called *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*, among other invasive weeds. The once large remnants of lakeplain wetland-mesic prairie on Dickinson Island and Saint John's Marsh, a statewide and globally imperiled wetland plant community, are functionally gone. Lakeplain oak openings, another statewide and globally imperiled wetland/forest community, is under attack from invasive shrubs like Japanese Barberry, Glossy Buckthorn, Common Buckthorn, and other invasive weeds. Much of the Great Lakes marsh that makes up the majority of the habitat on the Delta is completely taken over by invasive Phragmites. The Michigan DNR has implemented several large projects in the past to control these large colonies of invasive Phragmites, using a mix of aerial and ground application of herbicides. These projects did prove to be successful. The problem was the projects were funded for short periods, allowing treated areas to be reinvaded just a couple of years later. Walpole Island First Nation was able to keep their upland prairie and oak openings in relatively good condition which continue to be the best remaining examples of their community type. The same cannot be said about the wetter habitats like Great Lakes marsh.



The Saint Clair River Delta. Google Earth: Earth.Google.com

The Saint Clair River Delta is located at the northeast corner of Lake Saint Clair at the confluence of the Saint Clair River and consists of Saint John's Marsh, Dickinson Island, Harsens Island, Seaway Island, Bassett Island, Squirrel Island, Walpole Island, and Saint Anne's Island. The delta is fed by the waters of Lake Huron where it eventually empties out into the shallow Lake Saint Clair. The delta's overall size of approximately 32,000 acres and location between two freshwater lakes makes it one of the largest freshwater deltas in North America and the only major river delta in the Great Lakes basin.

The problem is not only Phragmites in the Saint Clair River Delta, but also lack of long-term commitment, engagement, and cooperation. To combat this issue, the Thumb Land Conservancy and I crafted a movement called "Make Our Delta Great Again", which aims to designate the entire Saint Clair River Delta including Saint Johns Marsh as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is one of the oldest multilateral environmental agreements. It was negotiated in the 1960s by countries and non-governmental organizations concerned about the increasing loss and degradation of wetland habitat for migratory waterbirds. The treaty was officially adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar on February 2, 1971, becoming effective in 1975. A key provision of the treaty is to identify and place significant wetlands on a list of Wetlands of International Importance, also known as the Ramsar List. Criteria for listing include representative, rare or unique wetland types, and various aspects emphasizing the importance of biodiversity. The list includes an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits or services.



Map showing Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance in our region, minus Humbug Marsh along the Detroit River and also the proposed Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar wetland. Map by Teddy Wiley. Google Maps: Maps.Google.com

Designation of the Saint Clair River Delta as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance would "confer upon it the prestige of international recognition" and embody our national government's "commitment to maintain its ecological character" and "promote the conservation" of the site (An Introduction to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, Page 41). Designation should also provide additional funding opportunities and help motivate all stakeholders to better protect the Delta's ecological character. More funding is desperately needed to control invasive Reed - *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*, among other invasive weeds, which has eliminated nearly all native vegetation and severely degraded wildlife habitat of vast areas of wetland along the Great Lakes. More complete control of invasive Phragmites would eventually lead to restoration of the entire Saint Clair River Delta ecosystem.

Ramsar designation of the Saint Clair River Delta, although an integral part of "Make Our Delta Great Again", is only the first initiative of MODGA. The work really begins after designation and will include:

- On day one, begin drafting a new management plan with the Saint Clair River Delta's appropriate site managers/owners. Implement the new management plan as soon as possible.
- Work alongside the Administrative Authorities and relevant stakeholders, carry out the largest eradication effort in conservation history, using top of the line aerial and ground-based equipment.
- Bring back indigenous land stewardship to the U.S. portion of the Saint Clair River Delta; involving management planning, restoration efforts, landscape maintenance, and monitoring.
- Monitor and manage the Saint Clair River Delta's restored ecological character in perpetuity. Update the RIS every six years as required by the Ramsar Convention. In-between RIS updates, notify the Ramsar Secretary General regarding significant threats or changes at any time to the wetland.
- Continue to communicate the Ramsar message by interpretive signs, trails, watch towers, brochures, social media, and education outreach including, wetland tours, presentations, and classes.

To view the latest Make Our Delta Great Again presentation, click on the following Google Drive link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/140K1TH-OZHCsdx8rslVBhD987cxlHbnt-View>

## World Wetlands Day

While we are on the subject of the Saint Clair River Delta and our Ramsar designation effort, February 2 is World Wetlands Day. Every February 2nd since 1997, Contracting Parties from around the world celebrate a holiday called World Wetlands Day, a holiday aimed to raise awareness about wetlands and their important components in sustaining human life and world conservation. This day also marks the anniversary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands which was adopted as an international treaty on February 2nd, 1971. Each year, World Wetlands Day is assigned a theme pertaining to wetlands. The theme for World Wetlands Day 2025 is "Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future". World Wetlands Day can be celebrated by everyone, from other international organizations, non-Contracting Parties, wetland managers, youth, media, or anyone with an interest in wetland conservation. Remember that wetlands are important for everyone and for the natural environment. Without them, it wouldn't be possible to enjoy the things we love. Whether that be hunting, fishing, swimming, trail walking, and even drinking clean water. If the weather is picking up, go out and visit a wetland near you to take the time to appreciate its value. Whether it be perking up trash, taking pictures, trail walking, or even driving by one, any appreciation is valuable.

## TLC 2024 Annual Report

2024 Annual Report

2023 Annual Report

2022 Annual Report

2021 Annual Report

2020 Annual Report

2019 Annual Report

2018 Annual Report

2017 Annual Report

carved up for more development. The TLC wants to work with you before these places are lost. If you are interested in nature preservation and you're willing to work for it, please contact us.

The TLC is carrying on a legacy in the Thumb. In 1952, Macomb and Saint Clair Counties were the birthplace of what became the Michigan Nature Association, the first statewide land preservation group in Michigan. The MNA was led for many years by the late Bertha Davidson of Kenosha Township in Saint Clair County, and is still honored for her contributions. But her protection led to the creation of the Thumb, with 18 sanctuaries here. Read more about the history of the MNA here: [The LakeShore Guardian, February 2024](http://www.LakeShoreGuardian.com)

As an interactive addition to The Thumb Land Conservancy's online presence, TLC also maintains a web blog at <http://thumbland.blogspot.com>. Please visit our blog for additional news and event information.

**TLC Supporters**

**Grand Donors**

The Carls Foundation  
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan  
2020, 2023

Consumers Energy Foundation  
Jackson, Michigan  
2020, 2023

Ducks Unlimited  
Dexter, Michigan  
2024

North American Wetlands Conservation Council  
2024

Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan  
Detroit, Michigan  
2020

The 2024 Annual Report has been posted on the TLC web site, near the lower left corner of the home page: [http://thumbland.org/TLC\\_2024\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://thumbland.org/TLC_2024_Annual_Report.pdf). Highlights of 2024 include:

- Help the first Thumb Heritage Festival with Clyde Historical Society on June 1.
- Received notice in July and October of two large Wetland Conservation Program grants from Ducks Unlimited on behalf of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Both grants will be used for new land acquisition; one for the 113-acre Morley lakeplain prairie property along the Kawkawlin River north of Bay City, and the other for acquisition of an as yet to be revealed property that will be a great addition to the protected public land of the Thumb.
- Coordinated the Silver Trails memorial service for Camp Ranger John Hardie on September 29. This was truly a lifetime event for those of us who were part of the old Blue Water Council.
- Recruited three truly great new TLC program and stewardship assistants in September and October.
- Acquired the new 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary; a big part of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.
- Crafted the Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar initiative with new TLC Program and Stewardship Assistant Teddy Wiley.
- Conducted a natural features survey of the Lexington County Park with TLC Members.
- Received a signed purchase agreement for a new 5-acre Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park connection from the Fort Gratiot Nature Park to the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary.

## 2024 TLC Supporters

The TLC has received increasing support in 2024 and the past few years.

### Grant Funders

- The Carls Foundation, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 2020, 2023
- Consumers Energy Foundation, Jackson, Michigan, 2020, 2023
- Ducks Unlimited, Dexter, Michigan, 2024
- North American Wetlands Conservation Council, 2024
- Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Detroit, Michigan, 2020
- Community Foundation of St. Clair County, Port Huron, Michigan, 2020
- Franklin H. & Nancy S. Moore Donor Advised Fund of the Community Foundation of St. Clair County, Port Huron, Michigan, 2020
- Cargill, Salt, Saint Clair, Michigan, 2020
- Cargill, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2020
- Full Circle EcoHouse of Prayer, Bioregional Reparation Fund, Port Huron, Michigan, 2022
- Four County Community Foundation, Romeo, Michigan, 2022, 2024
- SEMCO Energy Gas Company, Port Huron, Michigan, 2020, 2023, 2024
- Land Trust Alliance, Washington, D.C. and Michigan, 2024
- Algonquin Power & Utilities Corporation, Oakville, Ontario, Canada, 2021-2023
- Huron County Community Foundation, Bad Axe, Michigan, 2016-2023

### Land Donors

- Dr. Paul Croissant, Clarkston, Michigan, 2023
- Richard Loznak, Loznak Real Estate Enterprises, LLC Saint Clair, Michigan, 2019
- Michigan Nature Association, Okemos, Michigan, 2019
- Raymond & Nancy Peltier, Port Huron, Michigan, 2010
- Dr. Syed Latifat Husain Hamzavi, Fort Gratiot, Michigan, 2010
- Lois M. Gerrits, Saint Clair, Michigan, 2009
- Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner, 2008

### Conservation Easement Donors

- Michael & Gail Anderson, Fort Gratiot, Michigan, 2023
- Andrew & Natalie Ellis, Cass City, Michigan, 2023
- Darrin & Kim Koester, Fort Gratiot, Michigan, 2020
- Bob Putze, North Street, Michigan, 2017

### Sustaining Patrons

- Dorothy Craig, Fort Gratiot, Michigan
- Pete & Angelene Catlos, Fort Gratiot, Michigan
- Christine Powell & Bern Smith, Washington, D.C.
- Elizabeth "Bess" Touma, Washington, D.C.
- William & Cheryl Collins, Marlette, Michigan
- John Schomaker, Saint Paul, Minnesota
- Randy & Kathleen Schein, South Bloomfield, Michigan

### 2023-24 Contributing Members

- Tom & Laurie Dennis, Fort Gratiot, Michigan
- Connie Bates, President, Clyde Historical Society, Clyde, Michigan
- Connie Neese, Fort Gratiot, Michigan
- Judith & William Rader, Tucson, Arizona
- Peggy Thorp & Jerry Orlovski, Lakeport, Michigan
- Amy Martinez, Marine City, Michigan
- Kirsten Lyons, China, Michigan
- Dr. Brian Palik, Grand Rapids, Minnesota
- Mike Kubacki, Ubly, Michigan
- John Hartranft, Linden, Michigan
- Carl Kasprzak, Troy, Michigan
- Cathy Rovano, De IT Services, Port Huron, Michigan
- Jeff Ronan, LochanDe IT Services, Port Huron, Michigan
- Jeff Ronan, LochanDe IT Services, Port Huron, Michigan
- David Ladensack, Summit Realty, Lakeport, Michigan
- Timothy Lozen, Lozen David and Kovar, P.C., Port Huron, Michigan
- Richard Duthler, R.A. Duthler Land Surveyor, Imlay City, Michigan
- John Fody, Marysville, Michigan
- Kay Cumbow, Lynn, Michigan
- Dr. Scott Ferguson, Clyde, Michigan
- Fred Fuller, Yale, Michigan
- Dan & Wendy Rhein, Port Huron, Michigan
- Blake Short, Port Huron, Michigan
- Chris Walker, Fargo, North Dakota

## Business Supporters

- Lozen Davidson & Kovar, P.C., Port Huron, Michigan
- R.A. Duthler Land Surveyor, Imlay City, Michigan
- Summit Realty, Lakeport, Michigan
- Cathy Rovano, Accountant, Sterling Heights, Michigan
- LochanDe IT Services, Port Huron, Michigan
- Lighthouse Lawncare & Irrigation, Lakeport, Michigan
- RBF Construction, Flint, Michigan
- Presbyterian Villages of Michigan, Southfield, Michigan
- Tri-County Bank, Brown City, Michigan
- Amy's Relation To Creation & Botanicals, Marine City, Michigan
- Knights Insurance, Cass City, Michigan
- Meijer, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- C. Roy & Sons, Yale, Michigan

## You Got The Power

### To Help Nature Thrive In 2025

### Save Nature Any Place! Invasive Animals & Plants!

Did you make any new year resolutions? Here's five resolutions suggested by the National Wildlife Federation that will help wildlife thrive in 2025: <https://blog.nwf.org/2024/12/5-new-years-resolutions-for-your-garden/>

In 2025, we are continuing to highlight restoration of natural habitat on private land, neighborhood efforts, and programs like Homegrown National Park, National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat, and the TLC Naturehood registry.



Restoration doesn't need to be complicated. In one way, it represents the truest expression of private land ownership and democratic ideals. As a landowner, you are vested with a great deal of power and responsibility. While the world is distracted by monetary value and appearance, there can be benevolent and unpretentious aspect to owning land. You have the power to help restore nature, to support native species, to improve our air, water, soil, and climate, and to benefit all of humankind now and for generations to come, all right where you live. Every little piece of land now matters, whether it serves as habitat for native species year-round or is just a stop-over for transients. If you have a lot of land, you can have even more impact. Even if you don't own land but have a few flower pots or a small patch of dirt at your disposal, you will surely benefit a few of our beleaguered pollinators. Regardless, there is a lot to be said for adding a little beauty to our world. For a basic guide on restoring or creating natural habitat on your property, see our 2023 March 19 TLC News: <http://www.thumbland.org/News031923-DrPaulCroissantLandDonation.pdf>

## TLC Winter Stewardship

If you want to work on any of these projects, let us know.

Date	Activity	Location
February - March	trail clearing, invasive shrub removal	Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary
February - March	Black Locust removal	Carrigan Sanctuary
February - March	invasive shrub removal	Crossing Road Sanctuary

## Clyde Historical Society

The Clyde Historical Society meets on the third Thursday of each month. Their next meeting is March 20 at 6:30 pm at the historic Clyde Township Hall and Museum located at 5080 Wildcat Road and M-136, next to Bill Bearrs Memorial Park. The Clyde Historical Society brings together people interested in the history of the area and local genealogy. They promote an appreciation for the local history and its people; and collection, protection, and preservation of significant historical items. Their next events include:

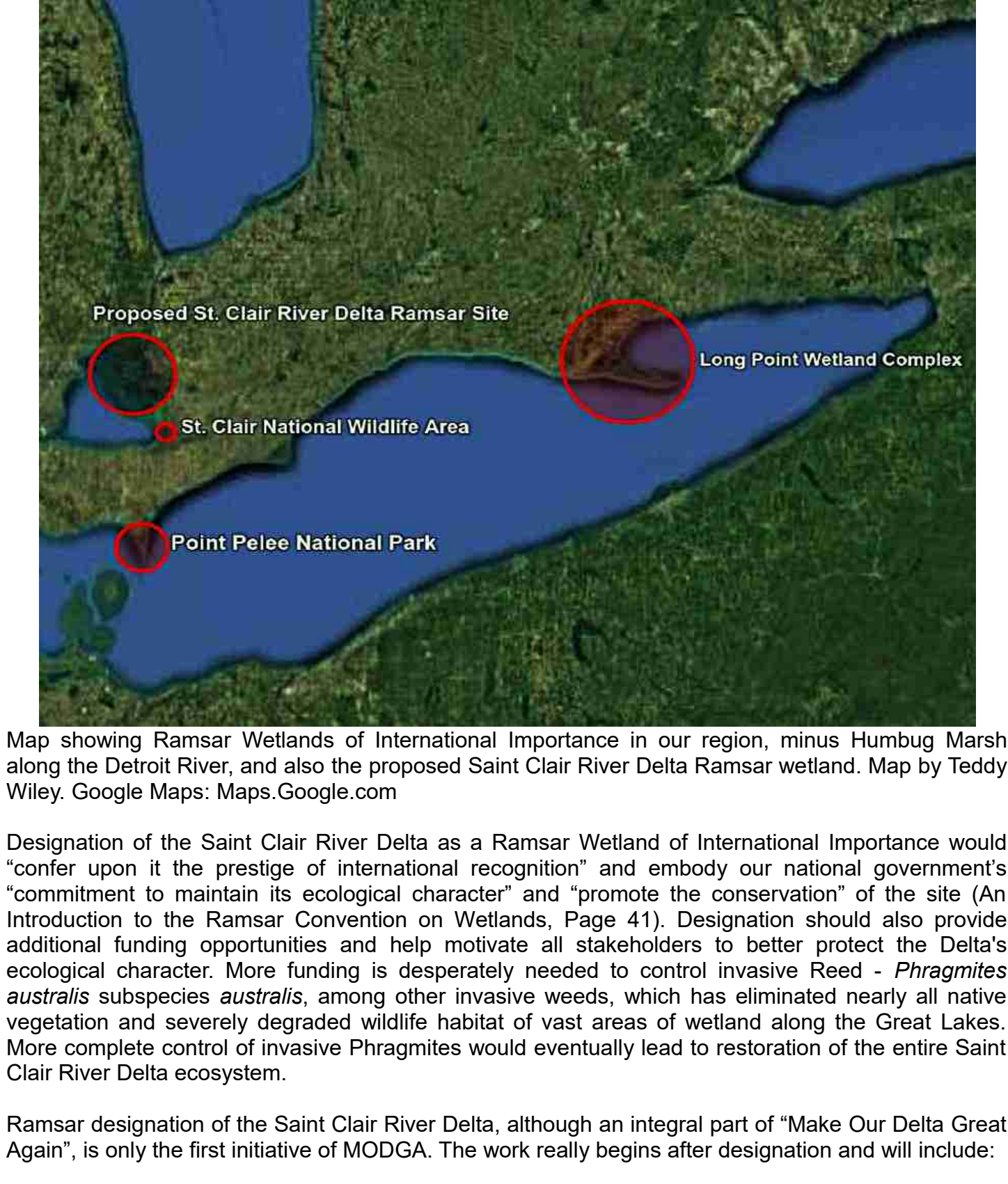
- May 18 - Honoring Our Veterans, Bill Bearrs Park
- June 14 - Second Annual Thumb Heritage Festival

For more information, see the Clyde Historical Society Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481890455361159/>

## One Special Gull

### Lesser Black-backed Gull - *Larus fuscus*

By TLC Member Tom Dennis



Lesser Black-backed Gull - *Larus fuscus*. Photograph by Jacie R. Sanders.

Let's take a look at the Lesser Black-backed Gull, one of several winter gull species found in our area. This is another bird that draws bird enthusiasts to the Blue Water Area since it's relatively uncommon as well as fun to learn about and watch up close. This species is similar to the much larger Great Black-backed Gull so let's learn how to tell them apart and find out why Lesser Black-backed Gulls are special.

These gulls (notice that we don't call them "seagulls" as no "birder" would use this common generic misnomer) are typically found in North America only during the winter while they breed across much of northern Eurasia and most winter along the coastal waters of Eurasia and Northern Africa. Most of these visitors come to our area from Iceland, Britain, and Western Europe to winter on the Atlantic Ocean coast as far south as Florida. They are rarely seen inland however, a few show up on open Great Lakes waters and are often seen along the St. Clair River even during the harshest winters.

They are a medium-sized gull, slightly smaller than Herring Gulls and are slender with long wings. Winter adults have a dark grey back, obvious streaking on the head and neck, yellow legs, yellow bill with a red spot on the lower mandible, and a dark "smudge" around the eye contrasting with the mostly white head. It takes them four years to attain complete adult plumage and immature birds can be hard to distinguish from other gulls, especially Herring. Look for the whitish head with a dark smudge around the eye, dark bill, long evenly dark wings and whitish rump and base of the tail. Weighing in at just under two pounds puts them at half the weight of the hefty Great Black-backed which can also be distinguished by its pink legs.

These birds are opportunistic, omnivorous feeders and feast locally on fish, insect larvae, crayfish, worms, mussels, seeds, fruit, small mammals, small birds, scraps and carrion. They forage or steal food from other birds. The call of the Lesser Black-backed Gull is just what you expect a gull to sound like as it is very much like that of the Herring Gull. They nest on the ground in colonies where immature birds, nonbreeding adults, and failed or off-duty breeders form "clubs" near the colony where they spend time loafing, resting, and preening ... just slightly better than watching soap operas or off-track betting!

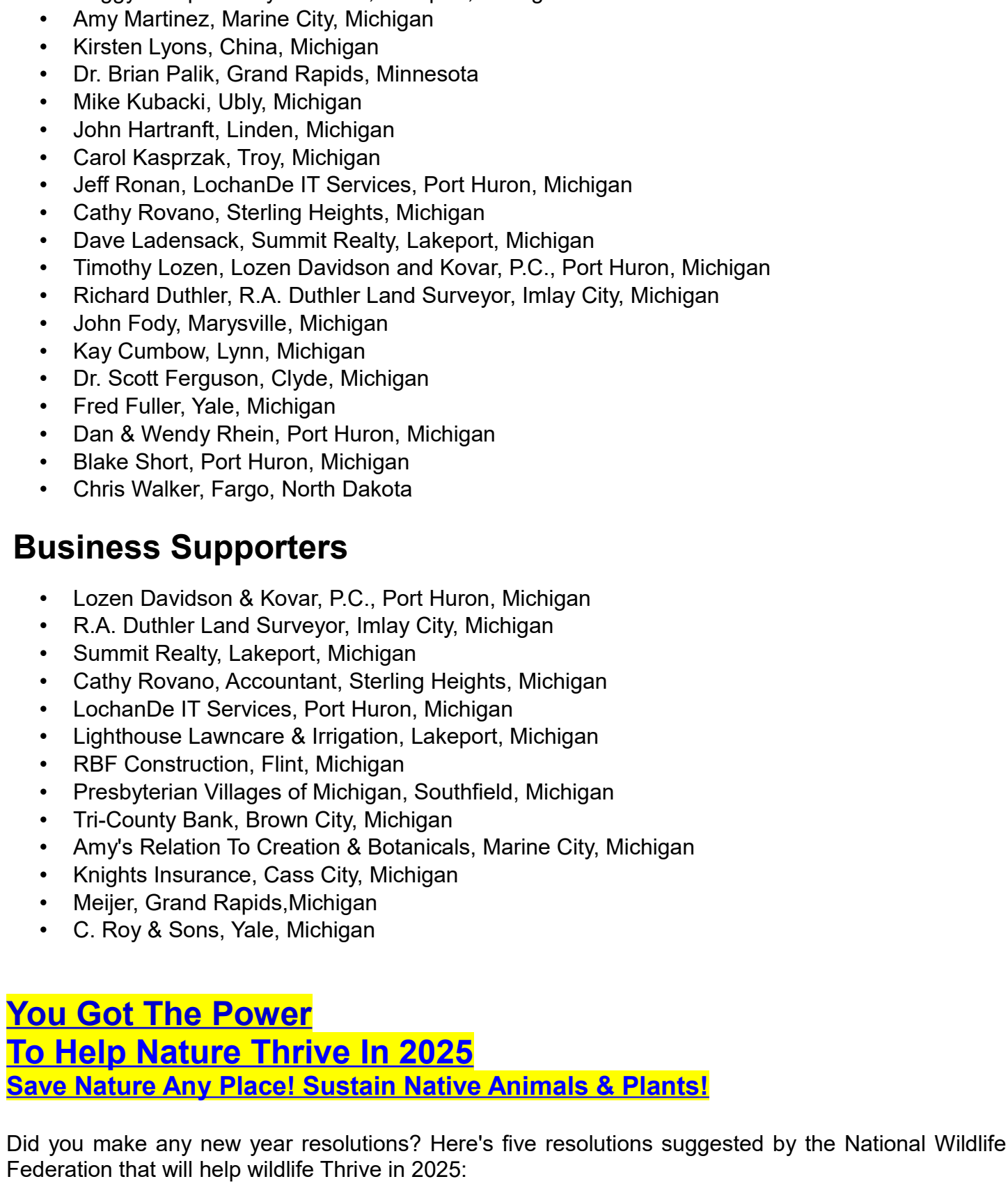
You can learn more about birds and nature by attending Blue Water Audubon meetings. Check the Blue Water Audubon Society Facebook page for the latest meeting details, local bird sightings, discussions, and events. Be sure to "friend" us!

Tom Dennis is a resident of Fort Gratiot where he and his wife Laurie Melms Dennis, tend to their bird and butterfly friendly gardens. He is a speaker and free-lance writer, passionate birder, advanced master gardener, creation scientist, and naturalist with degrees from Michigan State University in Zoology and Biology. Tom is an active member of Blue Water Audubon Society, Master Gardener of St. Clair County, Port Huron Civic Theater, Ross Bible Church, Tapestry Garden Club, Blueways of St. Clair, and is a steward of the Blue Water Riverwalk with Friends of the St. Clair River.

## Thyme - *Thymus vulgaris*

By Amy Martinez, RN, BSN  
Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals, Marine City

Following is a description of the well-known herb thyme, it's use and health benefits.



Thyme - *Thymus vulgaris*. Credit: Steve Turner. RichardLyonsNursery.com

Identification: Thyme is a small perennial evergreen shrub in the Mint Family native to southern Europe. The woody stems are numerous, finely hairy, quadrangular, and 6 to 10 inches tall. Leaves are slightly downy on top and very downy underneath, opposite, sessile, ovate to lanceolate, and with slightly rolled edges. Flowers are small, bluish-purple and are 2-lipped, fashioned in a whorled, dense, head-like clusters that bloom May through September.

Parts Used: Herb, Taste: Strong and spicy.

When/How to Harvest: Harvest leaves in the summer. Frequent trimming keeps the bushes from becoming woody and increases yield. Use fresh whenever possible and freeze or dry to store.

Actions/Properties - Effects on the Body: Warming and drying. Anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antioxidant, antiparasitic, antispasmodic, astringent, carminative, diaphoretic, expectorant, anticatarrhal, anthelmintic, sedative, antiseptic. Helps with emotions of unforgiving, anger, rage, hate, bitter, resentful, emotional bondage, neurasthenia, paralysis, shingles, throat problems, laryngitis, dental plaque-causing bacteria, mucous respiratory conditions, whooping cough, Colds, flu, lower and upper respiratory infections, bronchitis respiratory conditions with productive coughs, diarrhea, chronic gastritis, poor appetite, flatulence, colic, ascariis (roundworms), hookworms, occasional upset stomach and gas, bloating, fever, rheumatic problems, swelling, sprains, warts, encourages blood flow to surface bruises, cuts and wounds.

Constituents: Essential oils (thymol - antiseptic, antimicrobial especially for upper respiratory infections, expectorant, diaphoretic and anticatarrhal).

Safety: Use only culinary amounts during pregnancy. Excessive internal use can lead to poisoning and over stimulation of the thyroid.

Uses: Wound wash, poultice, tea, tincture, mouth wash, bath, essential oil, toothpaste, salve.

Dosing: Infusion 3 to 12 grams dried herb per day divided into 1 to 4 doses. Tincture 2 to 4 mL 3 times daily. Essential oil 2 to 3 drops on a sugar cube 2 to 3 times daily orally. Infuse, apply to locally 1 drop with carrier oil to chest, lower stomach, or bottom of feet, oral 1 to 2 drops sublingual, in a capsule or water.

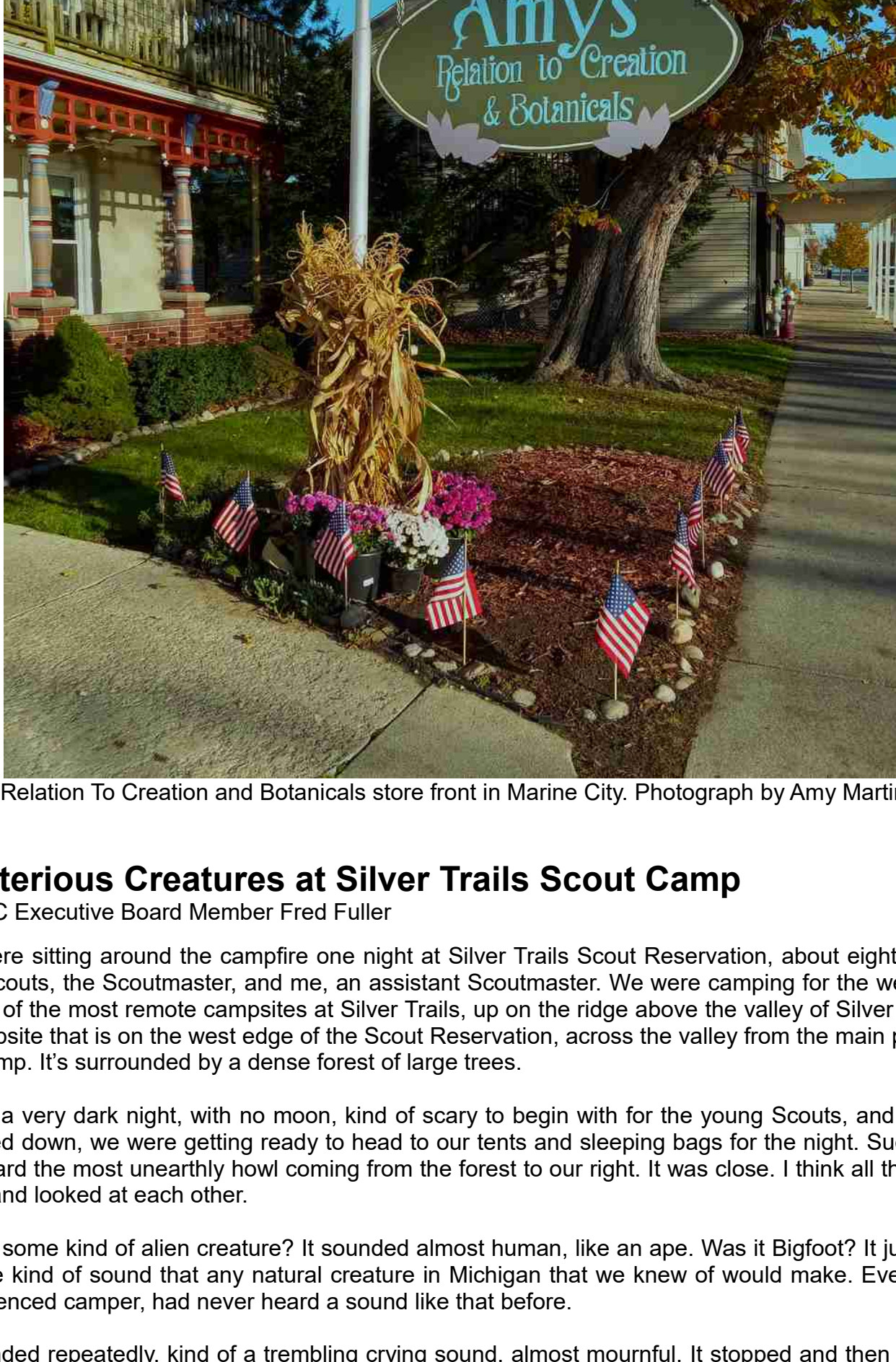
History: May have once been used as sacred incense. Name origin means "to make a burnt offering."

## References:

Herbal Academy, *Introductory Herbal Course: Monographs*, TheHerbalAcademy.com, 2023  
Lust, John B., *The Herb Book*

*Essential Emotions*, EssentialEmotions.com

[Amy's Relation to Creation & Botanicals, LLC](#) is a family-owned and operated botanical store located at 256 South Water Street in Marine City. A variety of natural products are available including teas, coffees, utensils, dried herbs, live plants, herbal tinctures, essential oils, salves, and other medicinal, wellness, personal care, and cleaning products. Owner, Amy Martinez, is focused on offering locally-sourced, natural, unprocessed, and eco-friendly products. The store is open from 9 am to 6 pm Tuesday through Saturday, but open until 8 pm on Thursdays from April 4 through December. In addition to the store, Amy offers a meeting room available for rent for small groups, for health presentations, wellness consultations, tutoring for nursing students, and Bible studies. For more information or to reserve the meeting room, see: [AmysRelationCreation.com](#) or call 810-335-4622. For a schedule of events see: <https://amysrelationcreation.com/upcoming-events/>



Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals store front in Marine City. Photograph by Amy Martinez.

## Mysterious Creatures at Silver Trails Scout Camp

By TLC Executive Board Member Fred Fuller

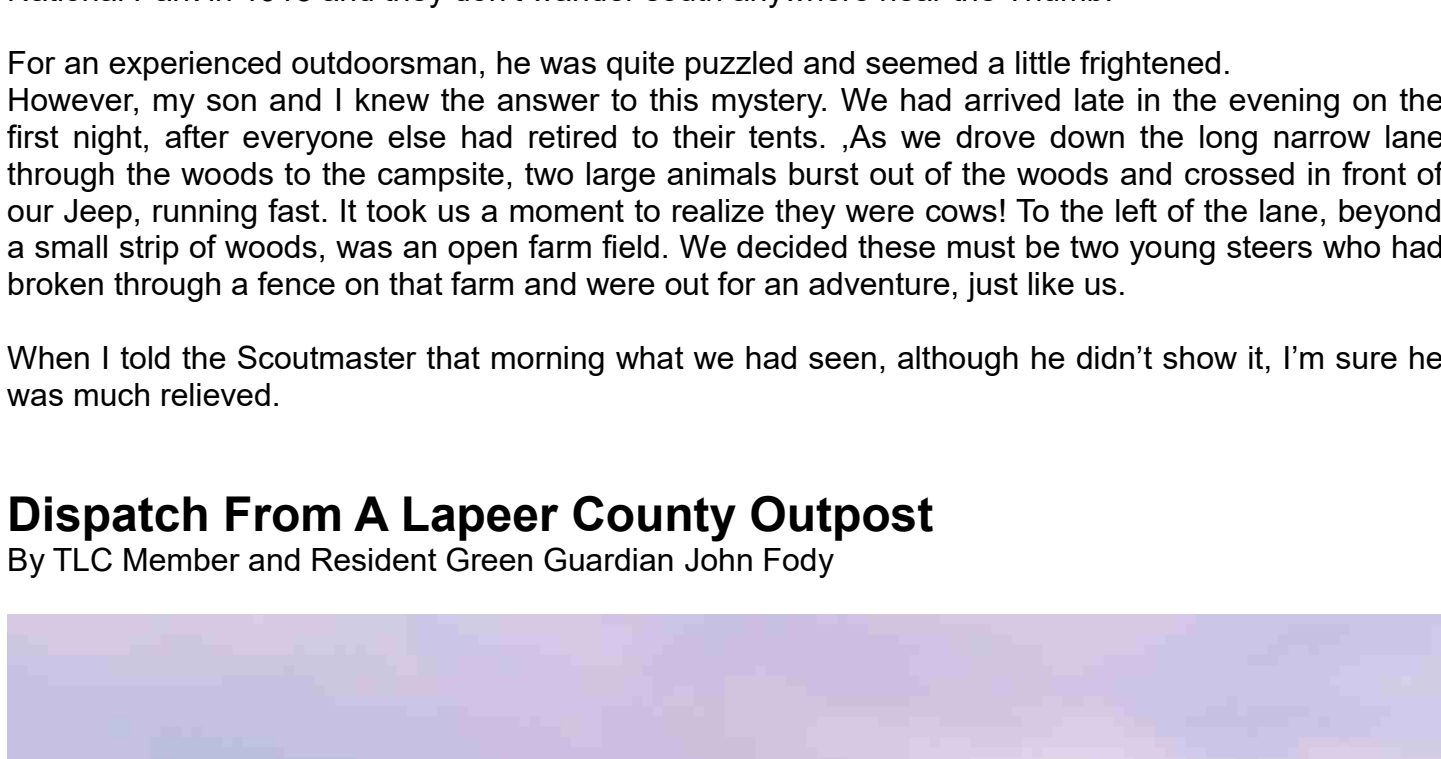
We were sitting around the campfire one night at Silver Trails Scout Reservation, about eight young Boy Scouts, the Scoutmaster, and me, an assistant Scoutmaster. We were camping for the weekend at one of the most remote campsites at Silver Trails, up on the ridge above the valley of Silver Creek, a campsite that is on the west edge of the Scout Reservation, across the valley from the main parts of the camp. It's surrounded by a dense forest of large trees.

It was a very dark night, with no moon, kind of scary to begin with for the young Scouts, and as the fire died down, we were getting ready to head to our tents and sleeping bags for the night. Suddenly, we heard the most unearthly howl coming from the forest to our right. It was close. I think all the boys froze and looked at each other.

Was it some kind of alien creature? It sounded almost human, like an ape. Was it Bigfoot? It just was not the kind of sound that any natural creature in Michigan that we knew of would make. Even I, an experienced camper, had never heard a sound like that before.

It sounded repeatedly, kind of a trembling crying sound, almost mournful. It stopped and then started again. It was several minutes until the Scoutmaster and I, both committed more to logic and science than the boys, decided it was an owl. I had heard a few owls before, but nothing like that. But there are at least seven different species of owls in Michigan, with several others that are rare but occasionally show up here. I guess it was one of the owls I'd never heard before. The seven common species range in size from very large to very small: the Great Horned Owl, the Long-eared Owl, the Short-eared Owl, the Northern Saw-whet Owl, the Barred Owl, the Eastern Screech Owl, and the Snowy Owl, which many people have seen on winter days, migrating through Michigan.

I think what we heard was a Barred Owl. You can listen to different owl calls in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFKv6Z3X32E>. Others can be found on the internet, but the best place to hear them is in the wild on a dark night!



Barred Owl - *Strix varia*, Whitby, Ontario, Canada, January 2005. Credit: Mdf, en.Wikipedia.org.

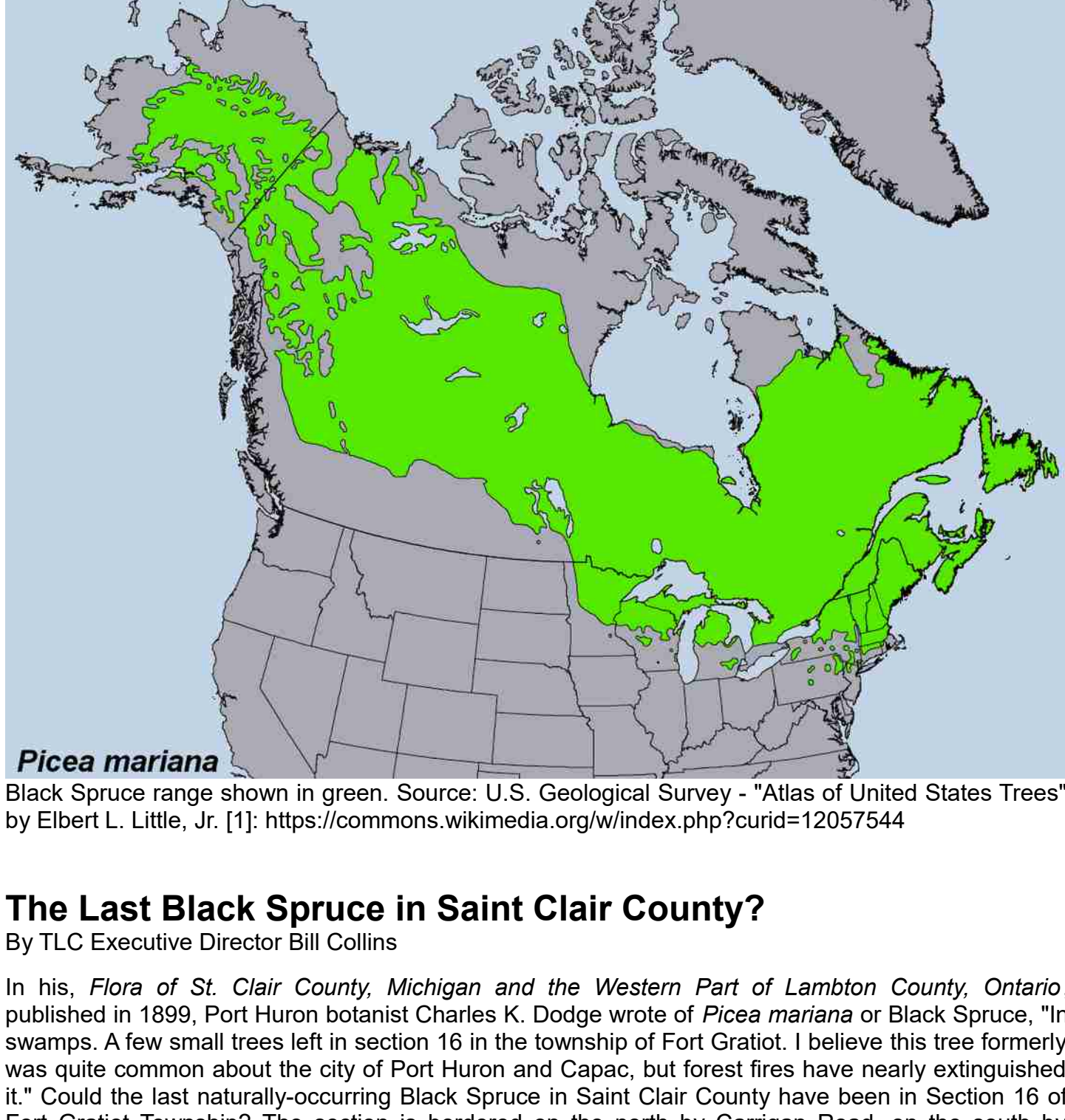
But there's more to the mysteries of this campout! The first morning, as we sat around eating breakfast, our Scoutmaster revealed that he was puzzled by some tracks through our campsite that he saw when he got up early. It was a trail of large cloven hooves, too big for a deer. What other creature could it be, he wondered. There are no elk, or moose, or buffalo in the Thumb of Michigan. The last native Michigan elk was reportedly seen in the Thumb of Michigan, but that was about 150 years ago. There are elk in northern Michigan, but they were introduced to the state from Yellowstone National Park in 1918 and they don't wander south anywhere near the Thumb.

For an experienced outdoorsman, he was quite puzzled and seemed a little frightened. However, my son and I knew the answer to this mystery. We had arrived late in the evening on the first night, after everyone else had retired to their tents. As we drove down the long narrow lane through the woods to the campsite, two large animals burst out of the woods and crossed in front of our Jeep, running fast. It took us a moment to realize they were cows! To the left of the lane, beyond a small strip of woods, was an open farm field. We decided these must be two young steers who had broken through a fence on that farm and were out for an adventure, just like us.

When I told the Scoutmaster that morning what we had seen, although he didn't show it, I'm sure he was much relieved.

## Dispatch From A Lapeer County Outpost

By TLC Member and Resident Green Guardian John Fody



Conifer swamp along a small lake in Lapeer County. Photograph by TLC Member John Fody.

This image is of a wetland in Lapeer County. If you look carefully amidst the dominant eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) and tamarack (*Larix laricina*) towards the center, you will see a few intermixed black spruce (*Picea mariana*). This species is much more abundant in northern Michigan and in the boreal forest of Canada. I have only seen it in four places here in the south, the southernmost being in northeastern Jackson County. Black spruce is a little odd place in this part of the state; how did it get here? These trees are most likely relicts of the boreal forest that was displaced southward by the last glacial advance, and then followed the retreating ice back northward starting about 14,000 years ago. They have managed to hold on for several thousand years. I hope that they will be able to survive our rapidly-changing climate.

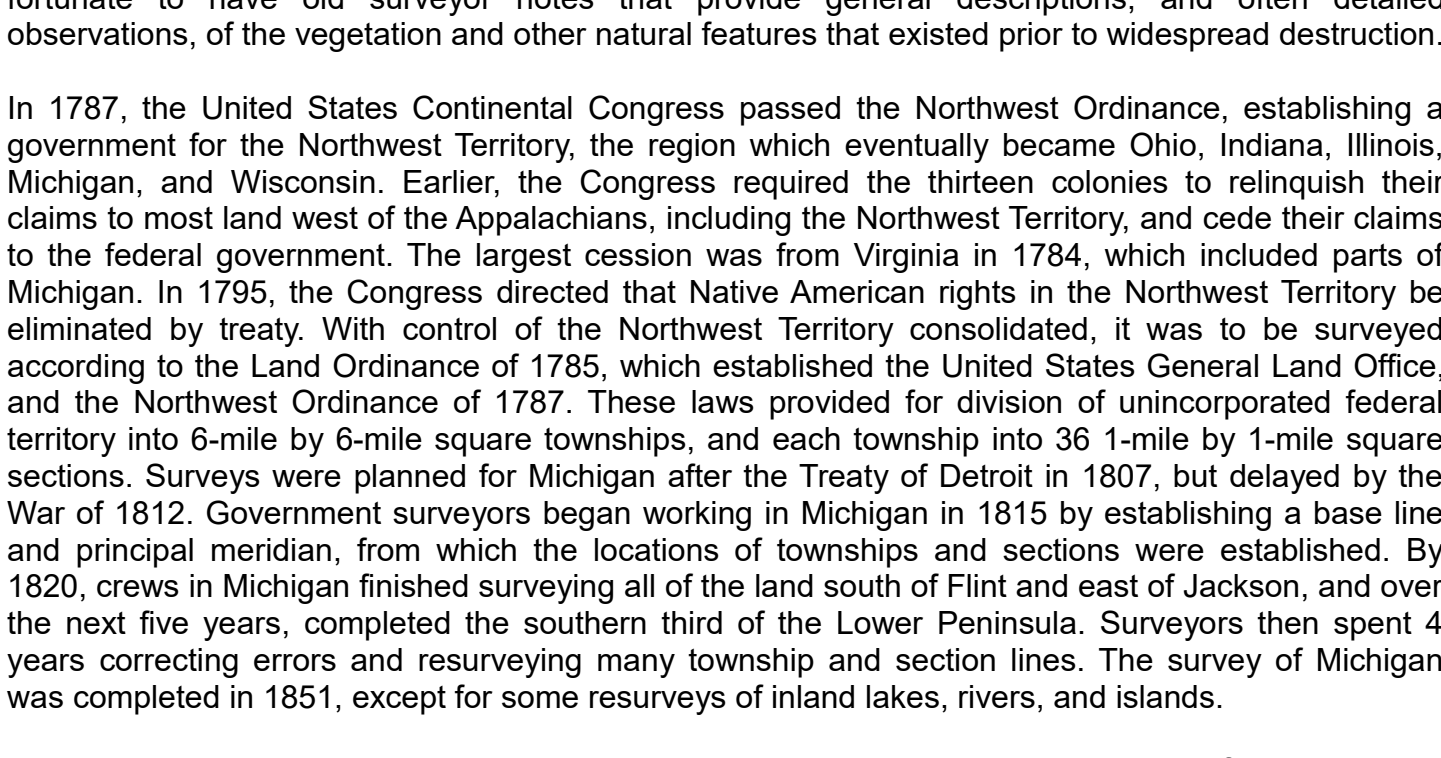


*Picea mariana*  
Black Spruce range shown in green. Source: U.S. Geological Survey - "Atlas of United States Trees" by Elbert L. Little, Jr. [1]: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12057544>

## The Last Black Spruce in Saint Clair County?

By TLC Executive Director Bill Collins

In his, *Flora of St. Clair County, Michigan and the Western Part of Lambert County, Ontario*, published in 1899, St. Clair County botanist Charles K. Dodge wrote of *Picea mariana* or Black Spruce, "In swamps. A few small trees left in section 16 in the township of Fort Gratiot. I believe this tree formerly was quite common about the city of Port Huron and Capac, but forest fires have nearly extinguished it." Could the last naturally-occurring Black Spruce in Saint Clair County have been in Section 16 of Fort Gratiot Township? The section is bordered on the north by Carrigan Road, on the south by Keewahdin Road, on the east by 24th Avenue, and on the west by Park Road. Most of Section 16 was originally covered by dune and swale forest, with a broad area of muck to the west, covering much of what became known as "Gardendale" because the organic soil was so conducive to gardening and produce farms. Before it was drained, the muck swamp would have provided great habitat for *Thuja occidentalis* and other vegetation of conifer swamp such as Arbor Vitae or Northern White-cedar - *Thuja occidentalis* and Tamarack - *Larix laricina*. Most of Section 16 and the dune and swale complex in Saint Clair County was cedar swamp prior to Euro-American settlement, as mapped by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory.



Black Spruce with cones. Credit: Wikimedia: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:MPF>

## Pre Euro-American Settlement Vegetation

By TLC Executive Director Bill Collins

Ecologists often write or talk about pre-settlement vegetation; in other words, the vegetation that existed before settlers of largely European ancestry destroyed vast areas of the native flora for timber, agriculture, and development. In North America, this generally began a little over 200 years ago, although up to 400 years earlier in the east. Prior to this, indigenous people likely hunted several large ice age mammal species to extinction, converted land to agriculture, and manipulated natural areas with fire. However, the scale of the destruction was not so vast or so sudden as that wrought by European settlers, and low-intensity fires generally maintained natural fire-dependent communities and species.

While some refer to a "pre-settlement" time without distinguishing whose settlement, it's important to recognize that there were "settlers" in North America and other parts of the world prior to the arrival of the Europeans; those being the indigenous people. There is a further distinction that should be made about the last settlers, or unsetlers, of North America. Most of the first wave of settler expansion into the American frontier were later-generations of European-Americans, born in eastern North America and who generally adopted an American settler mentality. This was observed and clearly noted by Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustav de Beaumont during their 1831 journey across the eastern United States where they found that first-generation Europeans largely stayed in towns and cities. This wasn't the case for later waves of European settlers after the early 1800s, particularly settlement of northern Michigan. For lack of a better term, and avoiding the cultural complexities, "pre-settlement vegetation" is sometimes replaced by "circa 1800 vegetation" when referring to Michigan flora.

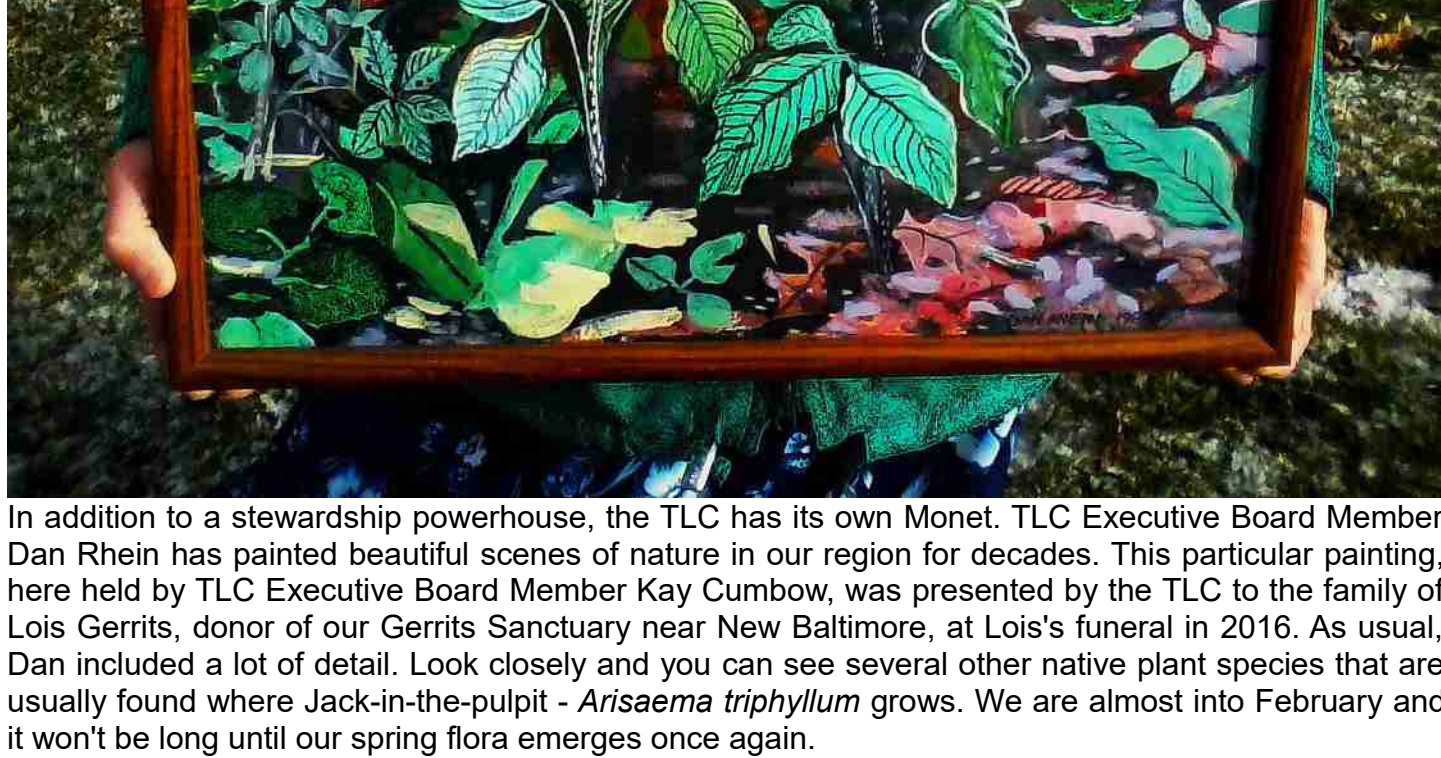
Ecologists can make a lot of educated guesses about the original vegetation of an area by knowing the climate, micro-climate, landscape, soils, hydrology, and other conditions, and then extrapolating from remnant plant communities in the same region. In Michigan, and in other regions, we are very fortunate to have old surveyor notes that provide general descriptions, and often detailed observations, of the vegetation and other natural features that existed prior to widespread destruction.

In 1787, the United States Continental Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance, establishing a government for the Northwest Territory, the region which eventually became Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Earlier, the Congress required the thirteen colonies to relinquish their claims to most land west of the Appalachians, including the Northwest Territory, and cede their claims to the federal government. The largest cession was from Virginia in 1784, which included parts of Michigan. In 1795, the Congress directed that Native American rights in the Northwest Territory be eliminated by treaty. With control of the Northwest Territory consolidated, it was to be surveyed according to the Land Ordinance of 1785, which established the United States General Land Office, and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. These laws provided for division of uninhabited federal territory into 6-mile by 6-mile square townships, and each township into 36 1-mile by 1-mile square sections. Surveys were planned for Michigan after the Treaty of Detroit in 1807, but delayed by the War of 1812. Government surveyors began working in Michigan in 1815 by establishing a base line and principal meridian, from which the locations of townships and sections were established. By 1820, crews in Michigan finished surveying all of the land south of Flint and east of Jackson, and over the next five years, completed the southern third of the Lower Peninsula. Surveyors then spent 4 years correcting errors and resurveying many township and section lines. The survey of Michigan was completed in 1851, except for some resurveys of inland lakes, rivers, and islands.

Among many things, surveyors were required to note were: species and diameters of 2 to 4 trees at each section corner and major trees on section lines; locations of every river, creek, bottom land, prairie, swamp, marsh, grove, and windfall; landscape character, whether level, rolling, broken or hilly; soil conditions; timber and undergrowth; widths, course, surface, and bed of rivers or creeks; and streams; all bottom land conditions, whether wet, dry, subject to inundation, and depth; all springs of water, whether fresh, saline, or mineral, with course and width of stream flow from them; all lakes and ponds, describing banks, depth, and water quality; all coal banks, cliffs, caves, sink holes, quarries, and ledges with descriptions; and all waterfalls and mill sites. Surveyors noted the locations of large natural disturbances, such as recent wildfires, large tree blow-downs, and beaver floodings, and also noted trails and settlements of Native Americans and early European Americans.

The detailed notes taken by surveyors for the General Land Office (GLO) have been very useful in describing Michigan's natural landscapes prior to intensive lumbering, agriculture, and urban development, when original post-glacial habitats or plant communities were still largely intact. Ecologists from the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) developed a methodology to translate the notes of the GLO surveys into a map of Michigan's vegetation before American settlement. Approximately 80 different land cover types were recognized from the GLO survey records by ecologists using present knowledge of native vegetation. Several factors, however, make the GLO survey maps unreliable to some degree at a small scale. The GLO surveys primarily covered only section lines and some interior lines. There were certainly variations in vegetation that the resolution of the survey and mapping was never intended to account for. Variations in landscape, hydrology, and vegetation are presumed to have occurred throughout the general vegetation zones mapped. Another factor is that the MNFI mapping relies primarily on USDA soil mapping, which also does not account for many small-scale variations in landscape and hydrology.

The best source for maps showing vegetation in Michigan prior to Euro-American settlement is the MNFI web site at <https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/resources/vegetation-circa-1800>



Vegetation Circa 1800 of Saint Clair County, Michigan, North Part, Michigan, shown in pink, as did much of southern Michigan. The dune and swale complex along Lake Huron, shown in green, consisted largely of cedar swamp. Reddish areas were mixed hardwood swamp. Light green areas were mixed conifer swamp. Notice the pale green area in Kimball Township at the point where Black River turns east. This area consisted of Hemlock - White Pine forest on the extensive sand, apparently deposited by glacial meltwater as it flowed south across what became the Black River valley, before flowing east and southeast to what became the Saint Clair River. It's almost as though a load of sand was dropped as the meltwater over-shot the bend in the river. The large light blue area in the northwest of the county was part of the now largely drained Capac Swamp, consisting of open water and marsh with bog or muskeg, surrounded by mixed conifer swamp.

## Jack-in-the-Pulpits

By TLC Executive Board Member Dan Rhein



In addition to a stewardship powerhouse, the TLC has its own Monet. TLC Executive Board Member Dan Rhein has painted beautiful scenes of nature in our region for decades. This particular painting, here held by TLC Executive Board Member Kay Cumbow, was presented by the TLC to the family of Lois Gerrits, donor of our Gerrits Sanctuary near New Baltimore, at Lois's funeral in 2016. As usual, Dan included a lot of detail. Look closely and you can see several other native plant species that are usually found where Jack-in-the-pulpit - *Arisaema triphyllum* grows. We are almost into February and it won't be long until our spring flora emerges once again.

## TLC Membership

With your membership, the TLC is better enabled to protect important natural areas in our region. We offer two membership levels: Individual and Family \$40, and Business \$200. Members will receive our e-mail news. Membership is also available in trade for volunteer help. You can also make donations in honor or memory of someone or something. For donations of \$100 or more, your name will be listed on our web site. For larger donations, please contact us for details. Make checks payable to "Thumb Land Conservancy". Mail checks and forms to: Thumb Land Conservancy, 4975 Maple Valley Road, Marlette, Michigan 48453. Make sure you provide us with your mailing address and e-mail address. Providing a phone number is optional but helpful. You can also make donations through the Square link on our web site at: [ThumbLand.org](https://www.thumbland.org).