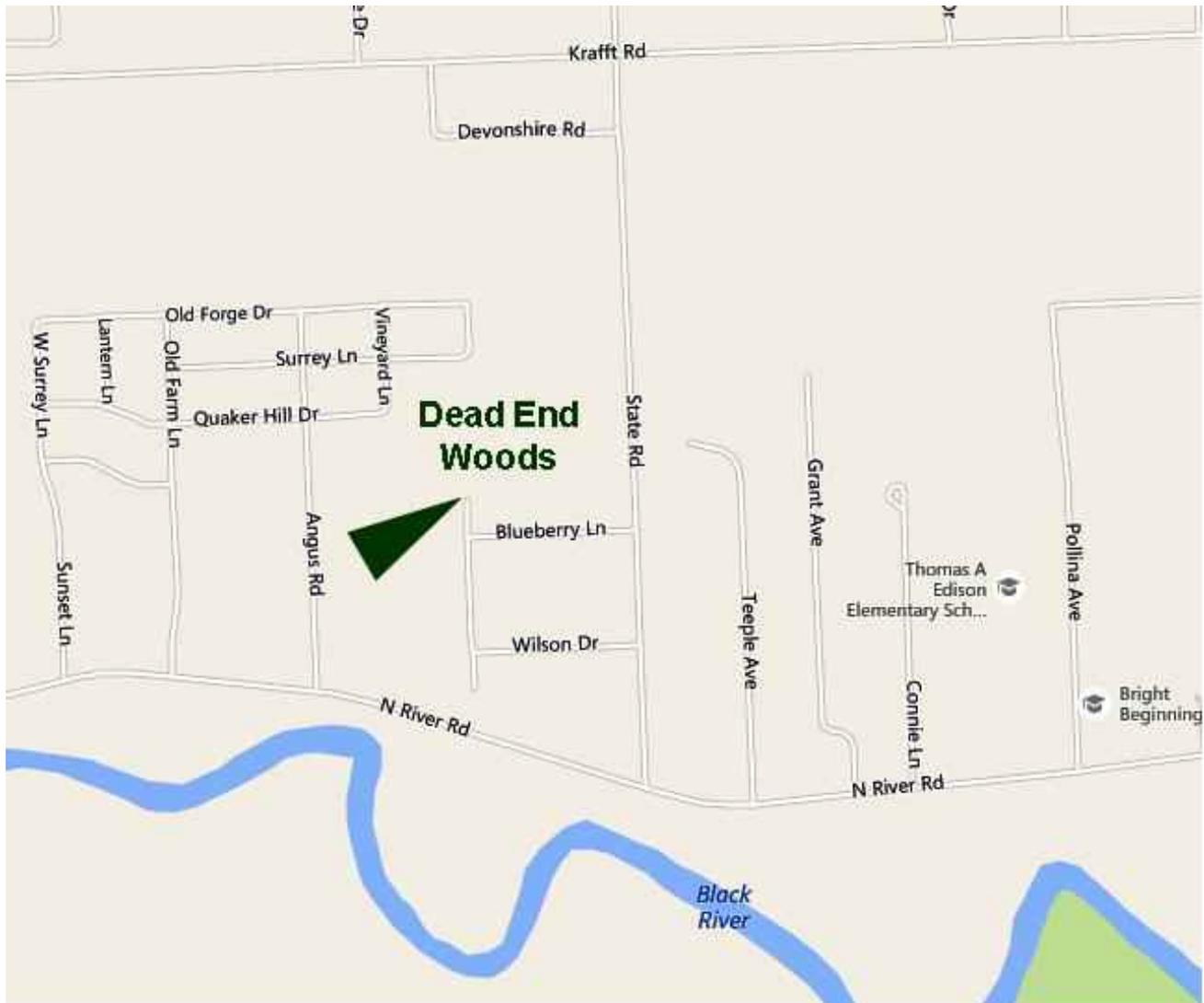


# Thumb Land Conservancy News 2020 March 09

William Collins, Executive Director  
Thumb Land Conservancy

## 2020 First Quarter Executive Board Meeting Saturday, March 21, 1:00 to 5:00 PM

The TLC will hold our first quarter executive board meeting on Saturday, March 21 from 1:00 to 5:00 PM at the home of board member Dorothy Craig at 3685 Wilson Drive in Fort Gratiot, next to our Dead End Woods Sanctuary. We will plan our spring and summer stewardship among other business. The gathering is very informal. Show up when you can. All are welcome. A dish to pass, snacks, or beverages are appreciated. Please RSVP if you plan to attend.



## Blue Water Indigenous Alliance Port Huron Meeting Saturday, March 14, 1:00 to 3:00 PM

The Blue Water Indigenous Alliance Port Huron is meeting at the Port Huron Museum located at 1115 Sixth Street this coming Saturday, March 14 from 1:00 to 3:00 PM. All are welcome and a potluck meal will be provided, so please bring a dish to pass. The Thumb Land Conservancy is planning to be there.



Some of our members may have read about the Blue Water Indigenous Alliance Port Huron in the Times Herald:

<https://www.thetimesherald.com/story/news/2019/08/03/new-powwow-breathing-life-into-old-tradition-honor-native-american-culture/1904986001/>

<https://www.thetimesherald.com/story/news/2020/01/19/indigenous-group-identifies-property-build-cultural-centers-but-no-plans-set/4477077002/>

The BWIAPH is a non-profit community-based organization focused on restoring, reviving, and sustaining local Indigenous culture and community in the Blue Water Area. They want to educate the community to provide a healthy and meaningful prosperous future for all. As part of this revitalization, the BWIAPH plans to establish Indigenous Education and Culture Centers in Port Huron and Algonac, near the former sites of the Black River and Swan Creek Bands of Ojibwe.



Burtch Creek at Ode Zibi.

The TLC and the BWIAPH share common goals, so much so that it turns out we even tried to purchase the same property independently, without knowing of each other. Back in July of 2018, the TLC submitted an offer on 3.35 acres along Burtch Creek in Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County that we thought would make a good kayak and canoe launch to access Lake Huron, only about 3,000 feet downstream. Our low offer and counter offer were rejected and we did not pursue it further. In speaking with Joshua Whiting of BWIAPH a few months ago, turns out he bought the property for BWIAPH. He also saw the potential of the land for a kayak and canoe launch and for a Community Learning Center, which BWIAPH is now developing, which will include a wigwam and other things. The property is now known as “Ode Zibi” which means “Heart River” in the Anishinaabe language, referring to the Saint Clair River and Lake Saint Clair. The TLC hopes to work with the BWIAPH as our missions and interests overlap. To learn more about the BWIAPH and Ode Zibi, see their web site at: <https://bwiaph.org/>.

## **TLC 2019 Annual Report**

The TLC 2019 Annual Report is now available on our web site, at the lower left of the home page: <http://ThumbLand.org/>. As usual, the TLC carried on stewardship, education, and fundraising in 2019. Following are some highlights of the year:

- Eagle Scout candidate, Will Fuller, and volunteers from Algonac Scout Troop 223 completed installation of new boundary signs around the 38.5-acre Gerrits Sanctuary in Ira Township, Saint Clair County. Will and his crew also conducted invasive weed control. Thank you Will and everyone who helped.
- With the help of Dave Ladensack of Summit Realty, the TLC negotiated a purchase agreement in May for the 42-acre Bidwell Trust property, part of the proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park in Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County. Thank you Dave.
- The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan awarded a matching grant of \$150,000 to the TLC for acquisition of the Bidwell Trust property, part of the proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park in Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County. A BIG THANK YOU to The Carls Foundation.
- The TLC assisted the Friends of Silver Trails in advocating for protection of Silver Trails Scout Reservation, a 270-acre camp about 2 miles west of Jeddo and 1 mile north of the Port Huron State Game Area along the west side of the Black River. Thank you Friends of Silver Trails. We have not reached the Trail's End yet.
- The Michigan Nature Association donated the new 0.62-acre Bertha's Haven Sanctuary to the TLC. Bertha's Haven is located only about 150 feet north of our Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County. Thank you MNA.
- The TLC conducted on-site inspections and drafted a baseline assessment and a conservation easement that will protect over 79 acres of the 84.6-acre Koester parcel, located in one of the largest tracts of southern hardwood swamp remaining in Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County. Thank you Darrin and Kim Koester, and Fort Gratiot Township Assessor Lisa Shagena.
- Loznak Real Estate Enterprises donated the new 11.5-acre Loznak Sanctuary to the TLC. Located on former industrial land in the City of Marysville, the sanctuary contains an interesting mix of lakeplain prairie, wooded swamp, concrete foundations dating to World War II, and a railroad spur. Thank you Richard Loznak, Attorney Tim Lozen, and EH&S Services President Jim Hollenbeck.

## **Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park**

### **42-Acre Bidwell Preserve, Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County**

On February 13, the Community Foundation of Saint Clair County awarded the TLC a grant of \$20,000 for purchase of the Bidwell Preserve and the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project. It's good to have local support for the project and we thank the foundation for sharing our vision. With this grant and other donations, our fundraising total is now at about \$220,000, leaving us with another \$85,000 to raise by the end of July. We could use your help. Please consider contributing whatever you can to save this very important part of our local natural heritage by mailing a donation or by credit card through the secure PayPal link on our website: <http://www.thumbland.org/> Your donation will be a tax-deductible charitable contribution. By making a donation to help the TLC purchase this property, you will not only be helping to protect a very significant natural community in Michigan's Thumb, you will also be helping to protect land near your home, available for recreation, bird watching, education, and enjoyment of nature in a small coastal wilderness just north of Port Huron. For more information, see our Project page at: <http://www.thumbland.org/projects.html> with an updated project summary at: <http://www.thumbland.org/SouthernLakeHuronCoastalParkSummary02152020.pdf> and an updated major project funders page at: <http://www.thumbland.org/ProjectFundersDetailedDescription.pdf>



## Beach Ridge and Swale Complex

A line of several preserves and parks currently extends along Lake Huron through Fort Gratiot and Burtchville Townships. The preserves are largely 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 and trail connecting the Port Huron area to Lakeport State Park. The proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park would encompass most of the remaining beach ridge (or dune) and swale complex along the eastern shoreline of Michigan's Thumb region. The beach ridge and swale complex is a formation of parallel sand ridges and muck wetlands deposited from about 4,500 years ago. This unique Great Lakes landscape is very limited in Michigan and now covers just a small part of Fort Gratiot and Burtchville Townships in Saint Clair County where it ranges from about a quarter-mile to a half-mile wide. It originally extended from the Blue Water Bridges into southern Sanilac County. The formation north of Port Huron is the most significant occurrence remaining from Ohio to the Saginaw Bay. The coastal forest habitat supports rare and uncommon species found in few other regions and is vital for migratory birds that move and nest along Lake Huron. Ongoing threats to the beach ridge and swale complex include residential and commercial development along the M-25 highway corridor, speculative land clearing and grading, forest fragmentation, sand mining, invasive weeds, overgrazing by deer, loss of forest canopy due to tree pests or diseases, and incursions by off-road vehicles.



The beach ridge 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. At the same time, few understand the character and significance of this land because there is very limited public access to it. Routing a trail up through this coastal forest will provide a great opportunity for recreation and a small coastal wilderness experience within just a few miles of Port Huron. The proposed coastal trail will increase safe pedestrian access to public parks, as opposed to access along road shoulders with traffic, noise, exhaust, and safety concerns. The Bidwell Preserve and proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park will get people out in nature without having to travel across the state. The park will educate people about significant natural features where they live, not a few hundred miles away.

## **Loznak Sanctuary 11.5 Acres, City of Marysville**

Early spring is here and soon we will begin a detailed inventory of plant and animal species on our new 11.5-acre Loznak Sanctuary in the City of Marysville. The property was donated to the TLC in December by Richard Loznak of Loznak Real Estate Enterprises, LLC in memory of his parents, Charles and Elizabeth Loznak. The Loznak Sanctuary is located adjacent to an industrial area between Wills Street and the CSX Railroad east of Busha Highway.

Despite limited use as part of a munitions factory during World War II, much of the property remained natural and is now covered by remnant lakeplain prairie and young forested wetland. The remains of concrete foundations in the forest are reminiscent of monuments. Adding to the historical interest is an old railroad spur running through the middle of the Loznak Sanctuary. The spur connects to the old Port Huron and Detroit Railroad along the west side of the sanctuary, now owned and operated by CSX Transportation. This spur is one of a few that serviced this small industrial area that sprung up suddenly as the United States entered World War II in December of 1941.



Lakeplain prairie habitat and the railroad spur on the Loznak Sanctuary.



Part of a concrete foundation in the forest on the Loznak Sanctuary with wetland beyond.

From a distance, the field across the east half of the Loznak Sanctuary appears ordinary. But upon closer examination, it is full of plant species characteristic of lakeplain prairie, including Riddell's Goldenrod - *Solidago riddellii*, Mountain Mint - *Pycnanthemum virginianum*, and Fringed Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita*. Historic aerial photographs and mapping show that, other than brief use appearing to begin and end with World War II, the land was left mostly undisturbed. A 1937 aerial photograph shows the Loznak Sanctuary and vicinity was part of a large swath of vacant open land along the Saint Clair River which may have been farmed. We have found similar lakeplain prairie vegetation in the Marysville area where land use was not so intensive and fallow fields serve as refugia for plants remnant of original populations that existed prior to European-American settlement.

Michigan Threatened Sullivan's Milkweed – *Asclepias sullivantii*, a rare lakeplain prairie plant found in only 8 southeast counties in Michigan, is known from several locations in the Marysville area.



The white flowers of Mountain Mint surround the deep blue of Fringed Gentian in a lakeplain prairie remnant northwest of Marysville, just west of Range Road.



Riddell's Goldenrod setting seed in a lakeplain prairie remnant along the Saginaw Bay and the Kawkawlin River north of Bay City, Michigan.



Fringed Gentian in a lakeplain prairie remnant northwest of Marysville, just west of Range Road. Yes, that is the actual blue of the flowers.



Sullivan's Milkweed, a Michigan Threatened species, in a lakeplain prairie remnant in the north end of Marysville, just east of Range Road. Sullivan's Milkweed is recorded from only 29 locations in Michigan, with 10 in Saint Clair County. Note the reddish upturned leaves that are characteristic of the species.

We are still in the process of discussing options and plans for the Loznak Sanctuary with potential partners, including the Port Huron and Detroit Railroad Historical Society (<http://phdrailroad.com/>). At this point, we envision the Loznak Sanctuary as a small park highlighting the interesting combination of natural area, World War II industrial history, and railroad history relating to the old Port Huron and Detroit Railroad. Our thanks again to attorney, Tim Lozen of Lozen and Kovar, PC in Port Huron (<http://www.lozenlaw.com/>) for making this donation happen. Our thanks also to Jim Hollenbeck of EH&S Services in Port Huron for completing the phase 1 environmental site assessment for the TLC (<https://www.facebook.com/EHS-Services-246483582068278/>).

## Koester Conservation Easement 79.4 Acres, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

The TLC has completed a baseline assessment and draft conservation easement for the new 79.4-acre Koester Conservation Easement located directly south of the Township Hall in Fort Gratiot Township. The new Koester Conservation Easement will protect one of the larger and least fragmented forest tracts in the area. The forest community is a complex of mature second-growth southern hardwood swamp and hardwood-conifer swamp with minor upland inclusions on low mounds and ridges. The vegetation includes plants that have held out on the site for centuries, including Silver Maple, Red Maple, Green Ash, Bur Oak, Black Oak, Basswood, Sassafras, American Hornbeam, Witch-hazel, Speckled Alder, Dwarf Raspberry, Marsh-marigold, Sensitive Fern, Royal Fern, Spinulose Woodfern, Bracken Fern, White Avens, Wintergreen, and Yellow trout-lily. Unfortunately, invasive Glossy Buckthorn is now widespread on the site.



Plant communities across the Koester Conservation Easement.

Because Fort Gratiot is located within a transitional zone between southern and northern flora, plant species diversity is typically quite high in relatively undisturbed forests in the Blue Water Area where nearby Lake Huron maintains cooler summers and warmer winters. Some of the native species on the Koester Conservation Easement site that are typically of a more northern distribution in Michigan include Paper Birch, Eastern White Pine, Eastern Hemlock, Speckled Alder, Black Chokeberry, Meadowsweet, Low Sweet Blueberry, Dwarf Raspberry, Wintergreen, Goldthread, Canada Mayflower, Wild Sarsaparilla, Foamflower, Wood Anemone, Bracken Fern, Royal Fern, Northern Lady Fern, Ground-pine, and Ground-cedar. Likewise, there are species that are typically of a more southern distribution, including Black Oak, Sassafras, Tulip Tree, and Spicebush. Further increasing plant diversity is the presence of tip-up mounds or pit and mound microtopography across forested wet sands like the Koester Conservation Easement site. These are low mounds and shallow pits created by centuries of large trees being uprooted, mostly by storms. Where the tree uprooted is a pit and beside it is a low mound where dirt gradually fell off the roots in a pile. Sometimes, groups of trees were blown over together, creating long pits and small ridges. The presence of tip-up mounds means that an area was never farmed, and likely, the forest has remained intact.



The bright red berries of Michigan Holly in the swamp on the south end of the Koester Conservation Easement site.

The south end of the Koester Conservation Easement site was partially logged in recent years but tree removal appears to have been limited largely to dead ash. The logging left a lot of deep tire ruts in the south end, but the forest plant community is still intact. While such disturbance is often excessive, we have seen interesting things happen after logging in similar swamp forest areas, like our Dead End Woods Sanctuary just over a mile southwest. That property was logged about 10 years prior to acquisition by the Thumb Land Conservancy in 2008. While the log extraction was quite destructive, the ground still bearing deep tire ruts from heavy equipment, during our 2008 species survey, we found a few uncommon native plants that had not been observed in the Dead End Woods

previously. These included Spikenard – *Aralia racemosa*, American Hazelnut – *Corylus americana*, and Cardinal Flower - *Lobelia cardinalis*, which all appeared to benefit from the moderate gaps in the forest canopy. There was also a very significant increase in Tulip Tree – *Liriodendron tulipifera* seedlings and saplings across much of the Dead End Woods. The increase of these plant species after forest cutting would not normally be surprising as they respond to increased light. But as some species were never seen before, or increased with such density from only a few trees, suggests that a seed or root bank was stimulated.

The conservation easement will allow the new owners of the property, Darrin and Kim Koester, to afford the property taxes on this large parcel, which had not been sold for many years. Upon sale, the property taxes would have increased significantly and made the land unaffordable for the Koester's as a residence. The Fort Gratiot Tax Assessor was agreeable to reducing the taxes significantly in trade for a conservation easement on the majority of the parcel. The Koester's are constructing a single-family residence on only about 5 acres in the north end of the parcel on land that was cleared decades ago. This area is now partially wooded and dominated by planted pines along with very common or weedy species such as Apple, Black Cherry, hawthorn, Gray Dogwood, Autumn-olive, Common Buckthorn, Tartarian Honeysuckle, Common Blackberry, Late Goldenrod, Panicked Aster, and grasses. The TLC has encouraged the Koester's to remove invasive shrubs like buckthorn and honeysuckle and will assist them with management of the conservation easement in the future to improve the native forest community.



Darrin Koester on his ATV along the Warner Drain, working in the north end of the property.

A conservation easement is one of the few ways that you can legally protect your land in perpetuity, basically as long as our legal system supports such easements. With a good land conservancy holding the easement, you can be assured that your property will remain protected no matter the future ownership. Conservation easements, despite being called “easements” do not allow public access. A conservation easement is simply a legal agreement between a landowner and a

conservancy or similar conservation group or agency. Most easements can be customized to allow uses that you and the conservancy agree upon. While most conservation easements are written to preserve natural areas and allow for passive uses and minor impacts such as trails, firewood cutting, and hunting, many easements also allow for farming, selective logging, or limited expansion of new buildings and other structures. Assessors are often not agreeable to reducing property taxes, so if you consider a conservation easement, you should consult with your local assessor if you are anticipating any tax abatement.

Beyond a conservation easement, the best way to protect nature on your land is to donate it to a conservancy. This can be done by will, or you can donate it now with a lifetime use provision. The TLC owns one preserve where the previous owner was granted a lifetime right to deer hunt on the property. If you have a natural area that you want to protect, please contact us.

## Land Trust Alliance Water Quality Survey

The Land Trust Alliance (<https://www.landtrustalliance.org/>) represents and assists land trusts or conservancies across the United States. As part of an effort to improve water quality protection assistance, they are surveying Great Lakes land trusts to learn more about existing efforts and resources needed. The survey will help the Land Trust Alliance and Great Lakes funders implement future programs to support water quality restoration. The survey and planning phase is funded, in part, by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, headquartered in Flint, Michigan.

The TLC occasionally receives requests to participate in such surveys, but we have chosen to complete very few. This survey seemed like one we should complete, in part because we are currently fundraising to acquire 42 acres of coastal wetland forest only about a quarter mile inland from Lake Huron. With all of the money out there supposedly dedicated to the Great Lakes and coastal wetlands, you would think that protection of such areas should almost be easy, yet funding is very hard to come by. We think the Land Trust Alliance should know this.

It seems far too much money is being thrown at studying, planning, prioritizing, monitoring, and half-hearted restoration while far too little funding is available for land acquisition and actual protection. Watershed plans often seem more about funding someone's position or generating consultant fees than actually doing meaningful work. Based on what we see, water quality restoration efforts are largely confined to the waters themselves, conveniently out of the way of interfering with private property. The benefits of these projects often seem quite over-stated. If more money was simply allocated for land acquisition, we believe water quality would be much further ahead.

So, our survey responses should be read in light of our experience here in the Thumb – Too little funding for land protection, and a lot of dancing around the real causes of environmental degradation. Our responses also provide some insight about the TLC organization - Our focus, challenges, and room for improvement. Notes are added to clarify some responses which were not submitted with the survey.

**Question 1:** Land trust name. **Answer:** *Thumb Land Conservancy*

**Question 2:** Contact name. **Answer:** *William Collins*

**Question 3:** Email address. **Answer:** *mail@ThumbLand.org*

**Question 4:** For your land trust's most recent fiscal year ending in 2019, approximately how much was the annual operating budget of your land trust? **Answer:** *\$10,000.* [Note: *This figure does not include the "in-kind" value of volunteer labor, which increases our typical annual operating budget by nearly \$40,000.*]

**Question 5:** Not including contractors or consultants, how many full time equivalent staff (FTEs) do you have? **Answer:** *0.* [Note: *The only staff of the TLC is the Executive Director. It is effectively a full-*

*time position but unpaid other than, currently, limited compensation earned through a contract to steward the Deerfield Wind Energy wetland preserve in Huron County.]*

**Question 6:** Does your organization have land protection criteria or a strategic conservation plan to guide your land protection work? Click all that apply. **Answer:** *Neither.* Please describe the main elements of your land protection criteria and/or or a strategic conservation plan. Is your organization planning to update these? **Answer:** *The TLC is interested in protecting all natural areas as they are increasingly destroyed. While we do not have specific criteria for land protection, we would generally not allocate major funding for, or otherwise pursue acquisition of land that is not of exceptional ecological quality, including community type and functions. We do however, accept donation and conservation easements on most land regardless of ecological quality. We know what types of natural areas are important or unique in our region, but with funding opportunities so limited for acquisition and protection, it has not been necessary to prioritize or strategize in any great detail.*

**Question 7:** What is your mission? **Answer:** *The Thumb Land Conservancy formed in 2008 to provide an organization dedicated to natural area protection in the Thumb: Saint Clair, Sanilac, Huron, Tuscola, Lapeer, and Macomb Counties. The TLC is working to protect exemplary landscapes and natural communities representative of the Thumb region. The TLC supports protection of all natural areas as most benefits of nature are obtained and enjoyed locally. We believe it is especially important that children have natural areas nearby where they can play, grow, and learn.*

**Question 8:** What are the key drivers of your conservation activities? **Answer:** *In the Thumb region it is important to make use of any opportunity available for land protection as funding and interest is very limited. The TLC has made use of State wetland mitigation requirements to obtain two of our preserves. We have benefited from the same wetland mitigation requirements in generating a small income by conducting stewardship on four sites, not owned by the TLC, preserved as mitigation for State-permitted wetland impacts. In 2019-20, the TLC has been able to attract more funding to a major acquisition project, 42 acres of coastal wetland forest along Lake Huron, but most of the funding has been provided from outside of our region. Otherwise, the TLC identifies needs, such as invasive weed control, and we try to mobilize as many volunteers as possible. Three years ago we started removing invasive Garlic Mustard in the Port Huron State Game Area, which we continue as an annual event. This year we are hoping to conduct a controlled burn in lakeplain wet prairie along the Saginaw Bay in cooperation with the MDNR.*

**Question 9:** What watersheds do you work in? Please click all that apply. **Answer:** *1) Great Lakes - Saginaw Bay; 2) Great Lakes - Western Lake Erie.* [Note: *Watersheds draining to the Saint Clair River, Lake Saint Clair, and Detroit River are included in the larger Western Lake Erie watershed. Southern Lake Huron was not a choice in this survey.*]

**Question 10:** Is water quality a conservation objective for your land trust? **Answer:** *Yes.* Please briefly describe your conservation activities related to these objectives: **Answer:** *Water quality is an objective of the TLC only to the extent that it benefits from our protection of wetlands, streams, and natural areas in general.* [Note: *Of course, water quality is very important, however, as a land conservancy, it is not our primary objective. Despite the many organizations and large amounts of funding dedicated to water quality issues, especially for the Great Lakes, much of the effort has been limited to the actual waters of the Great Lakes and major watercourses where it doesn't interfere with private land interests. As a result, there has been a long-standing disconnect between land use and efforts to improve water quality.*]

**Question 11:** What are the biggest challenges to advancing land conservation to address Great Lakes water resources and water quality? **Answer:** *The absolute biggest challenge to our work is the lack of funding, especially in our region, for land acquisition. There is a lot of funding available for so-called "restoration" projects that largely seem to produce marginal benefits. Permanent protection by land acquisition or conservation easement is the best way we can ensure long-term conservation. Regulations are vulnerable to interpretation, enforcement, political will, and lately, executive and legislative undermining. Restoration only gets us so far, and follow-up on these projects seems weak.*

**Question 12:** What are the most promising opportunities for advancing land conservation to address Great Lakes water resources and water quality? **Answer:** *The TLC has been able to make use of State (MDEQ / MDEGLE) wetland mitigation requirements to directly preserve about 30 acres of natural area, while also working with two Saint Clair County Drain Commissioners to protect about 300 acres of land using the same wetland mitigation opportunity. We believe that much more wetland in our region could be protected with small improvements in the mitigation program, such as provisions for preservation banking similar to the current banking provisions for restored and constructed wetlands. Mitigation has created a market for wetland protection that is fully funded by permit applicants. Mitigation should be further expanded to account for forests and other natural areas, all of which contribute to protection of water resources along with many other benefits. [Note: The private sector has enormous capacity to address environmental issues. The services of nature must be factored into our economic system if we are to approach a complete accounting of our impacts and provide for real restoration and sustainability. Impacts to water quality and all aspects of the environment should rightfully be incorporated into the true cost of all products and services. We could kind of get by without doing that even just 100 years ago, but not now with about 6 billion more people on the planet.]*

**Question 13:** If we create a program to assist land trusts in better protecting water resources, what tools would help you? Please rank all that apply in order of significance, with 1 being your top choice. If you use the drag feature to order your priorities, please ensure those that do not apply have a blank rating. **Answer:** *1) Funding for water-focused acquisition and restoration projects; 2) Funding to increase organizational capacity; 3) Policy/advocacy around water protection issues; 4) Strengthening and/or creating regional collaboratives.*

**Question 14:** Since your land trust was founded, how many transactions has your organization completed? How many acres have you conserved? **Answer:** *Conservation Easements - Number of Transactions – 2; Conservation Easements - Number of Acres – 87; Fee Ownership - Number of Transactions – 6; Fee Ownership - Number of Acres – 80; Acquired and Conveyed to Any Other Entity - Number of Acres – 0.*

**Question 15:** During the last calendar year (1/1/2019-12/31/2019), how many transactions did your organization complete? How many acres did you conserve? **Answer:** *Conservation Easements - Number of Transactions – 1; Conservation Easements - Number of Acres – 79; Fee Ownership - Number of Transactions – 2; Fee Ownership - Number of Acres – 12.*

**Question 16:** Currently, does your organization acquire conservation easements and/or fee land? **Answer:** *Yes.*

**Question 17:** Please describe your service area and your priority focus areas. If available, please send a map to [midwest@lta.org](mailto:midwest@lta.org) that displays your focal or priority conservation areas, or that identifies where you are actively working with landowners. **Answer:** *The TLC serves the Thumb region of Michigan: Saint Clair, Sanilac, Huron, Tuscola, Lapeer, and Macomb Counties. We are focused on protection of higher quality natural areas but believe that all natural areas are increasingly important as we lose more every day. Our focus currently, is on acquiring 42 acres of forested beach ridge (dune) and swale complex as part of the proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park north of Port Huron, Michigan.*

**Question 18:** Do you have digitized maps or shapefiles of your protected properties? **Answer:** *No.*

**Question 19:** Do you use ARCGIS or similar digital mapping software to assist with your conservation programs? **Answer:** *No. If not, please specify your barriers to using mapping software: Answer: Too expensive and really not necessary. [Note: GIS and other digital mapping would certainly be helpful and would greatly enhance our capabilities in producing interactive mapping products.]*

**Question 20:** Do your current water conservation targets include (check all that apply): **Answer:** *1) Streams and rivers; 2) Wetlands; 3) Great Lakes shoreline; 4) Headwaters; 5) Groundwater recharge areas.*

**Question 21:** Do your conservation easements include riparian and/or coastal zone restrictions?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question 22:** If yes, what type of restrictions are typically included in your conservation easements? Check all that apply. **Answer:** 1) *Vegetation management/cutting restrictions;* 2) *Approval of permitted habitat improvement activities;* 3) *Prohibition on diverting, extracting, or polluting groundwater or surface water;* 4) *Natural water courses, lakes, rivers, streams, creeks, or wetlands may not be altered or impounded;* 5) *Prohibition on surface alteration, Prohibition on pesticide or herbicide use.*

**Question 23:** Do your existing conservation easements include best management practices for farming, forestry or other land uses? **Answer:** Yes.

**Question 24:** If yes, how do your conservation easements address best management practices (BMPs)? Check all that apply. **Answer:** 1) *We require approval of plans for enhancement and restoration activities (planting stream buffers, forest restoration, etc.).* Other or comments: **Answer:** *Our current easements prohibit farming, large-scale timber harvest, and other disturbance beyond limited firewood cutting, trail maintenance, hunting, and passive recreation. Otherwise, we require approval of a specific plan before proposed activities are conducted. We would normally incorporate BMP's as applicable.*

**Question 25:** If you hold land in fee, are BMPs for water quality included in your management plans? **Answer:** Yes. Please describe your most common BMPs: **Answer:** *Two of our preserves are protected by State conservation easements. Generally, we would not conduct any activities that would significantly affect water quality on any property.*

**Question 26:** Does your current landowner outreach include discussions around water resources and/or water quality? **Answer:** *Sometimes.*

**Question 27:** Does your land trust have an active stewardship program? **Answer:** Yes. Please describe (easement monitoring, managing violations, preserve management, restoration activities, tree planting, timber harvest, etc.) **Answer:** *We conduct annual monitoring (at least) and regular stewardship, primarily invasive weed control. [Note: The TLC conducts Garlic Mustard removal in the Port Huron State Game Area and has volunteered to coordinate stewardship on other preserves. We are hoping to expand our stewardship on certain public lands.]*

**Question 28:** In your annual conservation easement monitoring visits, do you discuss water resources and/or water quality with landowners? **Answer:** *Sometimes, if we think it is appropriate because of the property's water resources.*

**Question 29:** Do you work with conservation easement landowners to assess, evaluate or improve water quality (through technical assistance, restoration activities, education, etc.)? **Answer:** Yes. Please describe: **Answer:** *We have not done more than suggest certain restoration or enhancement activities.*

**Question 30:** Beyond your work with landowners, does your land trust take part in offering workshops, technical assistance, or other educational opportunities to the broader community to learn about BMPs or other stewardship actions they can take? If Yes, please describe. **Answer:** *As we have no paid staff, our capacity to assist landowners is very limited. However, we regularly provide educational information through our newsletter, web site, a few presentations, and activities such as earth fairs. [Note: The TLC is very interested in encouraging restoration and enhancement on all lands, and particularly on private lands that may not have any formal protection. We have produced a general guide to the landscapes and natural communities of the Thumb region, and would further like to produce a landowner guide to restoration, enhancement, and stewardship. If anyone is interested in assisting with this effort, please contact us.]*

**Question 31:** Has your land trust worked with conservation easement landowners to update, revise and/or strengthen older easements and/or management plans to address water protection or BMPs?

Check all that apply. **Answer:** 1) *No, but we would be interested in exploring how we can strengthen water protection provisions, when and where appropriate;* 2) *Other (please describe):* **Answer:** *We basically follow the Michigan model conservation easement language provided by Heart of the Lakes.*

**Question 32:** Is your organization actively pursuing restoration/enhancement activities as a conservation strategy to address water resources and/or water quality? Check all that apply. **Answer:** *No. [Note: While the TLC has conducted some restoration and enhancement work on existing protected land, such as Garlic Mustard removal in the Port Huron State Game Area, we believe our efforts should be focused on increasing the amount of protected natural areas.]*

**Question 33:** Is your organization using additional conservation strategies to achieve conservation goals related to water quality (brownfield redevelopment, mitigation banking, innovative partnerships, etc.)? **Answer:** *Yes. Please describe. We would be interested to hear whether and how these conservation strategies directly protect, improve, or restore water resources:* **Answer:** *As described previously, we have been able to make great use of State wetland mitigation requirements. We believe that expansion of this program would result in tremendous wetland and water quality benefits, particularly in our region.*

**Question 34:** Has your organization partnered on or led the development of a watershed management plan (according to state/federal guidelines)? **Answer:** *Yes. [Note: The TLC participated in meetings and made comment on the Sanilac County watershed plan for the upper Black River.]*

**Question 35:** What organizations do you partner with to protect water resources? Check all that apply. **Answer:** *1) State government (please specify below)* **Answer:** *1) Local government*

**Question 36:** Please describe your partnerships. **Answer:** *As described previously, the TLC has worked with two Saint Clair County Drain Commissioners to protect about 300 acres of wetland through wetland mitigation requirements of the MDEQ (now MDEGLE) providing for preservation of existing wetland at a 10:1 ratio as mitigation.*

**Question 37:** Are there additional potential partners or partnership opportunities that may help to advance land conservation and water quality protection in your region? **Answer:** *We have just begun to discuss participating in the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program with Ducks Unlimited. Previously, we were not able to attract enough grant funding to consider such programs. We have received commitments for about \$200,000 in grant funding so far in 2019-20 for our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project, but funding opportunities are so limited, we are not sure how long or for how many projects we might be able to sustain this level of funding and subsequent partnering. Funding available through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund would be a great asset to our pursuits and our partnerships. However, this funding is not made available to land trusts. Rather, it is largely reserved for the use of local governments, most of which are not very interested in land protection and real water quality protection. We would like to apply for other government funding sources, but have very little capacity to navigate their typically complicated and detailed application requirements. Administration of such grants may be currently beyond the capacity of the TLC as well.*

**Question 38:** Which funding sources has your land trust used to protect land and water resources? **Answer:** *1) Foundations; 2) Major donors / capital campaigns; 3) Mitigation funding.*

**Question 39:** If your organization is not able to implement water quality protection to the degree that you desire, what are your organization's barriers to doing so? Please rank all that apply in order of significance, with 1 being your top reason. If you use the drag feature to order your priorities, please make sure any that do not apply have a blank rating. **Answer:** *1) Limited staff and/or board capacity; 2) Lack of financial resources to expand current programmatic activities.*

**Question 40:** If Other, please describe. **Answer:** *[Respondent skipped this question]*

**Question 41:** Other general comments? **Answer:** *To repeat, lack of funding for land acquisition by land trusts, especially in the Thumb region, is a major impediment to our work here. There is also a general lack of interest in protecting but a few natural areas in our region, historically having been*

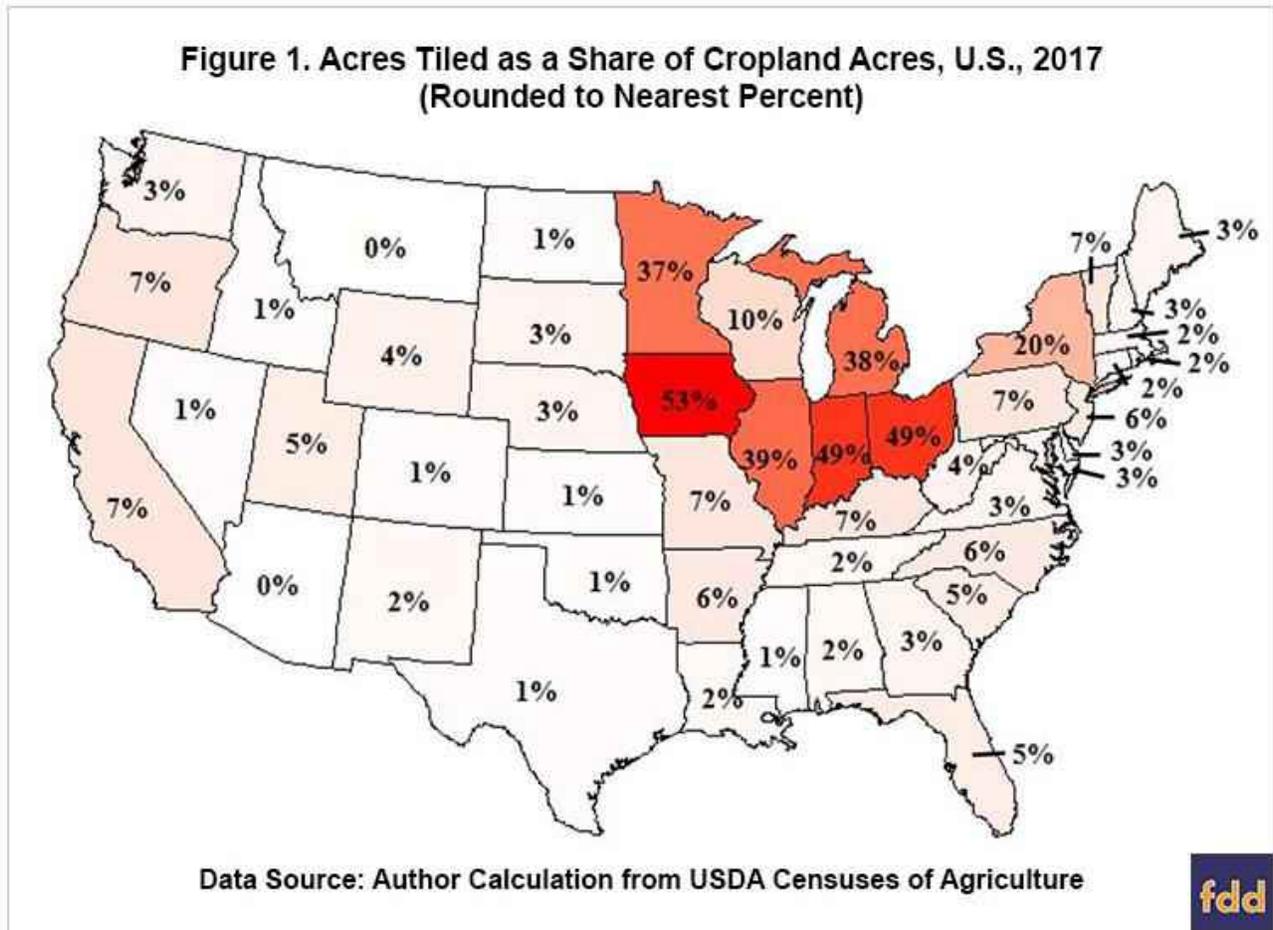
directed at Saginaw Bay or the Saint Clair River delta area (Harsens Island, Dickinsen Island, Algonac State Park). For example, the Mott Foundation is headquartered in Flint, not far west from here, and yet they do not fund land projects in our area, but have up along the Grand Traverse Bay. There is an overwhelming sense of indifference regarding natural areas in the Thumb region. Whether due to extensive farming to the north, or development to the south, the basis for lack of awareness and concern is uncertain. However, the region is no less important to water quality, in fact, probably more so as a source of agricultural discharge to western Lake Erie, and there are many great natural areas remaining here very worthy of protection.

End of survey.

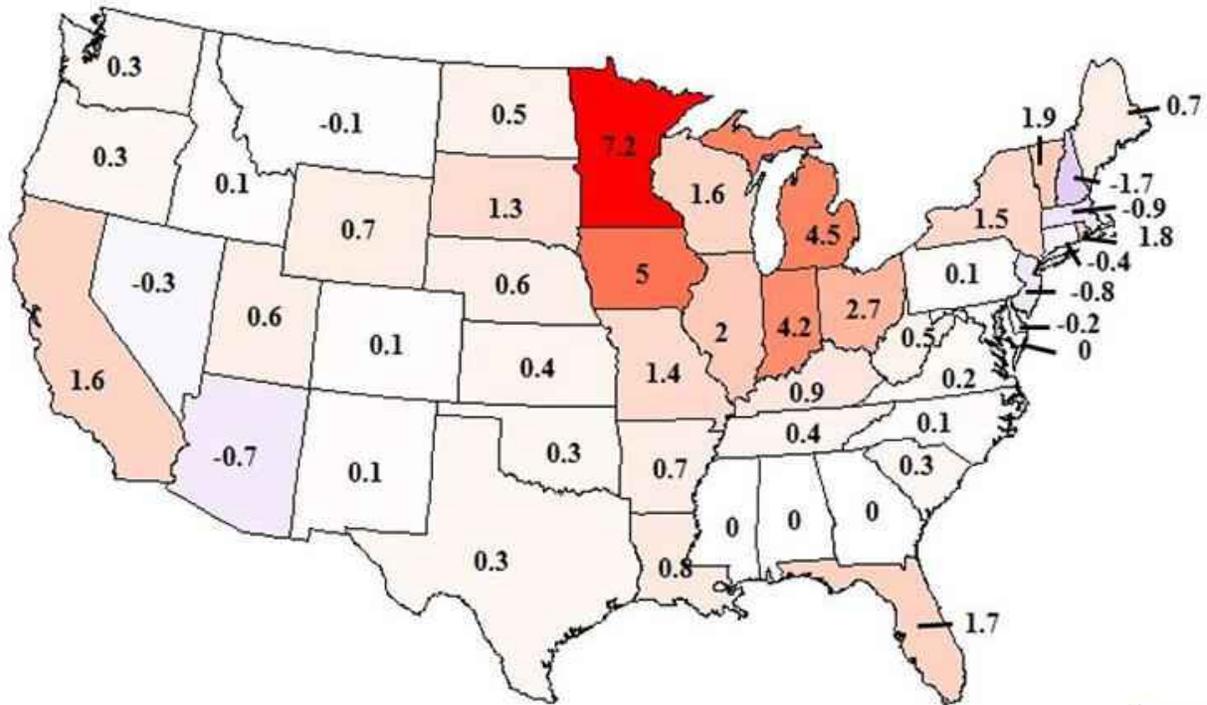
On the issue of water quality, some of us believe there's been an elephant in the room for several years, and it's growing bigger every year. That is tile drainage of agricultural fields. The amount of tilled land in the US increased by 7 million acres in just 5 years, between the 2012 and 2017, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, United States Summary and State Data, Volume 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 51, issued in April 2019 by the United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service:

[https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/index.php#full\\_report](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/index.php#full_report)

States that border the Great Lakes or are considered traditional Corn Belt states account for over 85% of all tilled land in the US. As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below, as of 2017, 38% of the crop land in Michigan was tilled, and 49% in Ohio. Tiled land increased by 4.5% in Michigan and 2.7% in Ohio from 2012 to 2017.



**Figure 2. Percentage Point Change in Use of Tile, U.S., 2012-2017**



Data Source: Author Calculation from USDA Censuses of Agriculture

fdd

For anyone who really cares about water quality, especially of the Great Lakes, these statistics and graphics should get your attention. The impacts of agricultural field tiling have been largely ignored or glossed over in planning sessions that the TLC has participated in. The supposed benefits of field tiling have more often been emphasized, particularly reduction in surface water runoff and soil erosion. However, runoff is not normally so much a concern in our region as most surface water settles in wetlands and percolates slowly to groundwater. Common sense says that using field tiling to more or less permanently lower the water table across large expanses of farm land and discharge it rapidly to the nearest watercourse has got to have an impact on regional hydrology and water quality. We already know that nitrates move relatively easily from farm fields into field tiles and become a problem in our waterways. The lack of significant vegetative buffers, floodplain, and woody debris along most ditches, drains, and channelized rivers furthers the problem. But what is particularly neglected is all of that lost groundwater storage capacity across huge parts of our landscape because of field tiling. How might this be affecting the high water levels of the Great Lakes? Add to this all of the lost surface water in wetlands and lack of nutrient assimilation. It's probably not coincidence that dead zones and toxic algal blooms have increased in western Lake Erie in recent years, one of the most intensive agricultural watersheds in the Great Lakes Basin with perhaps the highest percentage of tilled land. Looking at the maps of tilled cropland also brings into question the widespread decline of freshwater mussels across the Midwest.

Field tiling clearly benefits most crops under normal conditions and can significantly increase the productivity of agricultural land. Making existing farm land more productive is a good thing, for farmers, consumers, and the environment. But perhaps not every last field should be tilled, and for those that are, there are management systems and options that can mitigate for some of the impact. Until the issue is more seriously and broadly addressed, some of us believe that efforts to restore and protect water quality will continue to miss the target.

## Ecology News

It seems lately what little good news there is for nature is more than undone by bad news.

### **“No Virginia, and Virgil. Planting 1 Trillion Trees Is Not Going To Save The World”**

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/1/31/21115862/davos-1-trillion-trees-controversy-world-economic-forum-campaign>

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/to-combat-climate-change-see-the-forest-for-the-trees/>

This is a classic case of not seeing the forest for the trees. The total area of forest is far more important than number of trees, for many reasons, and commercial tree plantations almost never provide the biological value of natural forests. But beyond that, it matters what species of trees would be planted, where, how they will be protected, and many many other things. To be fair, planting trees is normally a good thing and this is a noble cause, but it probably needs to be thought out better. If you plant 1 trillion trees while the world cuts down 3 trillion trees ... well. Need proof? Search YouTube for videos of what the Russians are doing to the boreal forest across Siberia, particularly in Irkutsk, to supply Chinese demand.

### **Trump Administration Weakens the Migratory Bird Act**

<https://www.popsci.com/story/environment/migratory-bird-treaty-trump-gutted/>

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/newsroom/weakened-migratory-bird-treaty-act/>

While many people were caught up in the impeachment drama, the Trump administration was busy undermining good environmental protection. Almost like he planned it that way. In mid January it was elimination of regulations for vast amounts of wetlands and waterways across the US. In late January it was a proposed rule change that would end federal regulation of the unintentional killing of migratory birds. While this might seem relatively harmless, it would completely unrestrict activities and projects that are known to kill a lot of birds, like wind turbines in the wrong places, waste crude oil pits, mine waste ponds, forest clearing, and so on. Responsible businesses incorporate environmental protections into their project budgets, as they should, usually at minimal cost. Removal of federal protection is a big step backwards when we should be doing far more to help declining bird populations. Regulation is not usually fun, but it's time that many people look past their limited sphere of concern and realize that laws like the Migratory Bird Act were enacted for very important reasons.

Get out and enjoy the spring migration. It's here. The Starlings were back at the TLC office a few weeks ago. Then it was the Red-winged Blackbirds and Grackles, followed by a few Canada Geese and the first Robins about a week ago. Well, it's all bustin' loose now with flocks of Canada Geese, Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, and today even Killdeer. You can thank those that have supported the Migratory Bird Act for a lot of this.

### **The Bad News Continues For The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge**

<https://www.audubon.org/news/blms-final-environmental-review-arctic-refuge-drilling-glaringly-underestimates>

<https://www.audubon.org/news/amid-contradiction-and-controversy-plans-proceed-arctic-refuge-lease-sale>

Regarding Tundra Swans and many other migratory birds, the coastal plain of Alaska, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, provides critical summer habitat. Look at the range map for Tundra Swans and you'll see their narrow breeding range is highly concentrated along the extreme northern coastal areas of Alaska and Canada. But the bad news for birds and the environment in general continues with the Trump Administration in charge and lack of Congressional leadership. The impacts of proposed oil and gas extraction are vastly understated. Exploration activities are recklessly moving forward to serve a short-term political agenda, not the long-term interests of the American people. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is far from the Thumb, but its degradation will have impacts here, the least of which will be that we get to enjoy fewer north bound flocks of those wonderful Tundra Swans passing overhead in the early March sky.

## Bad News At The Southern Border Also

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/dozens-of-arizonas-iconic-cactuses-are-being-illegally-dug-up-and-sold-across-the-world/ar-BB10QFva>

Moving to our southern border, the news has been equally depressing. To be fair, while the border wall, its construction, and its maintenance, presents many troubles, it appears that the section through the south side of the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is mostly along an existing road. However, the public alarm is well deserved for routing the wall over Monument Hill, a sacred burial site for the Tohono O'odham Nation documented from at least 600 years ago. This route, which veers well north of the border, seems to have been chosen out of ignorance and complete disrespect. US Customs and Border Protection claims that crews are avoiding remains and artifacts, but the evidence suggests otherwise and federal regulations requiring them to do so have been waived. Similarly, they claim to be transplanting cacti and other significant plants, but the evidence suggests the effort has been minimal. Securing and controlling the border with a wall seems logical. The more important question is whether the benefits are worth the many costs.

Have you ever visited the Sonoran Desert? Have you ever stood next to a Saguaro cactus? Have you touched one? I have and I highly recommend it. Having recently read this article about increasing threats to the Saguaro and other cacti due to illegal collecting and selling, it occurred to me that an unintended benefit of the border wall may be to reduce this activity, assuming some cacti are moved south through Mexico. Giving it fair consideration, I notice in some photos there appear to be less Saguaro on the Mexican side of the border. This might be an indication of collectors, or general lack of protection, or just coincidence. Regardless, it is sad that the world has come to all of this trouble. I'm guessing that you are unlikely to buy a Saguaro any time soon, but if you buy a small cactus as are often sold in some stores, think twice about where it might have come from. Same goes for most things. Investigate.

## TLC Member Profile

**Donna Jurovcik**

**New Baltimore, Macomb County**



Typical of our new social media age, I got acquainted with Donna Jurovcik on Facebook shortly after we started the TLC Facebook page around 2012. Donna was the digital friend of an analog friend and former neighbor, Brian Martin, also a member of the TLC and skilled woodsman who helped us cut dead ash trees around our Dead End Woods Sanctuary. It was almost 8 years ago that I told my wife that we were eating at a restaurant in New Baltimore because it was highly recommended by my friend Donna, a woman on the internet whom I never met.

It's hard to know where to start and end in introducing Donna because she leads such a rich inner life combined with an outgoing enthusiasm for so many interests. Donna has been a member of the TLC since 2013. We even get a very nice card from her each Christmas. Among other things, Donna is an artist, a writer, a musician, an animal lover, and a naturalist with a gift for keen observation and deep insight. I am thinking specifically of the many sketches and paintings she has shared on Facebook in which she captured the movement of galloping horses,

imagined a western landscape covered once again by an ancient sea, or draws us into the tranquility of a bucolic garden retreat. At other times, it may be just a photograph of a common bird, tree, flower, or toad, appreciating its presence and wondering about its origins, its place in the world, its fate, and leaving us with some whimsical notion.

Donna grew up in Detroit, raised a family in Ferndale, and now lives in New Baltimore. Her professional career began in the economic hay day of Detroit as she has shared fond memories of working for large companies in a variety of responsibilities as a billing clerk, customer service representative, bookkeeper, payroll manager, financial investment expert, medical records transcriptionist, and financial administrative assistant. I also worked and lived across the Detroit area while employed by a large architectural and engineering firm. As Donna and I have discussed, along with that came yet a deeper appreciation for the culture and history of Detroit.

Donna has been involved in the arts for many years. She has been an active member of the South Oakland Art Association based in Royal Oak since 1974, first serving as an event hostess, the board of directors, and then president, and now an emeritus. Donna has sketched and painted for most of her life. Where to start with Donna's works? I've seen so many posted on Facebook over the past 8 years. Here is one that sticks in my mind and has an amazing story behind it. If only I had more time to write.



A Sandia symphony bears an ancient desert message for the one who listens and watches.

Along with natural artistic ability and lifelong enjoyment of artistic creation, we share a reverence for God's creation. For me, TLC board member Dan Rhein, and many people, the two have gone hand-in-hand, the one expanding the other. Art and nature seem quite closely connected. A leading ecological expert who produced some of the most foundational works on Michigan plant communities once told me that he started his work as an artist.

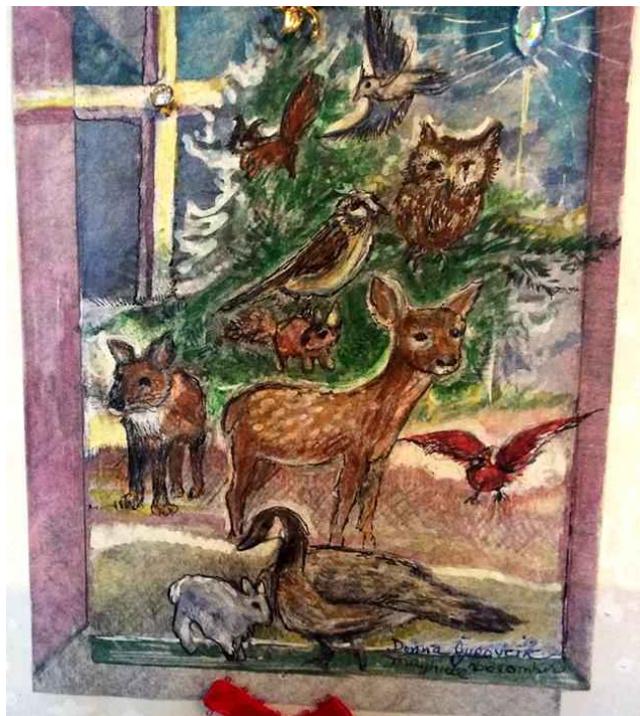
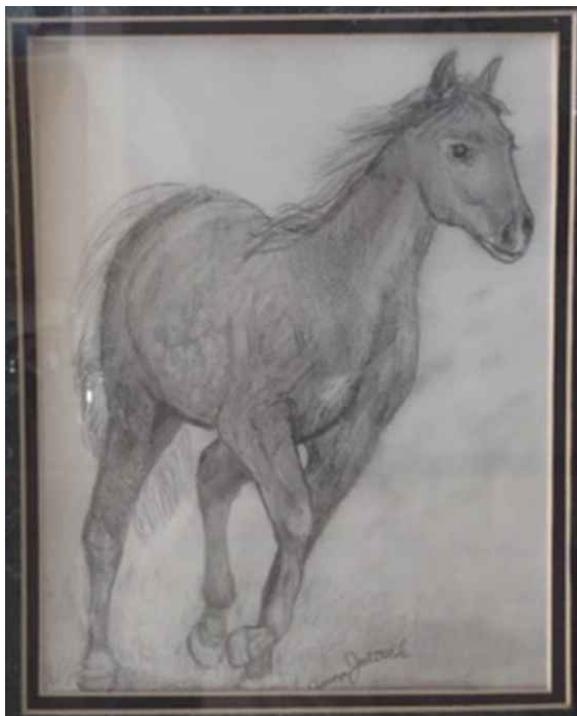
In preparation for this article, Donna sent me some thoughts. She says:

*"... I love sketching as it also composes verbally straight from the mind what happens when we care for our natural worlds ... To me, sketching while I watch the subject or drawing it from memory is a positive communion with nature, an attempt to refine my own sensibilities and understand my processes, a lifelong puzzle of delight and a membership card in natural - everything. At first glance and with much trepidation, the subject I am drawing becomes mine and somehow it seems alive. Reaching into the mind through their eyes first is the essence of its creation.*

*I use the same juicy paint mixtures used by the masters of oil or charcoal from an old burned out log with tiny branches....use it to sketch on blank newspaper plain paper or a good charcoal Grumbacher paper .... yes! The sound of the charcoal swishing across the surface, paper ... canvas ... mason board .... all add to the symphony music whether drama, comedy, rum-dum ya da da.... my screen. A good canvas painting by hand, I've come to figure, is a certain kind of adoration for the natural way of life. With no shortcuts to producing a correct anatomy in any living creature...the Earth is living too!*

*I like most of all coming up with the ingredients, nurtured through experience within me, like creating a wonderful delicious food to consume...invention or just plain "luck." The master of creation I am not, but do seem to make my life interesting enough to cause some interest. We just forge through life, don't we ... If it is in your mind, then it comes from your heart and true feelings.....go for that and you will achieve total satisfaction."*

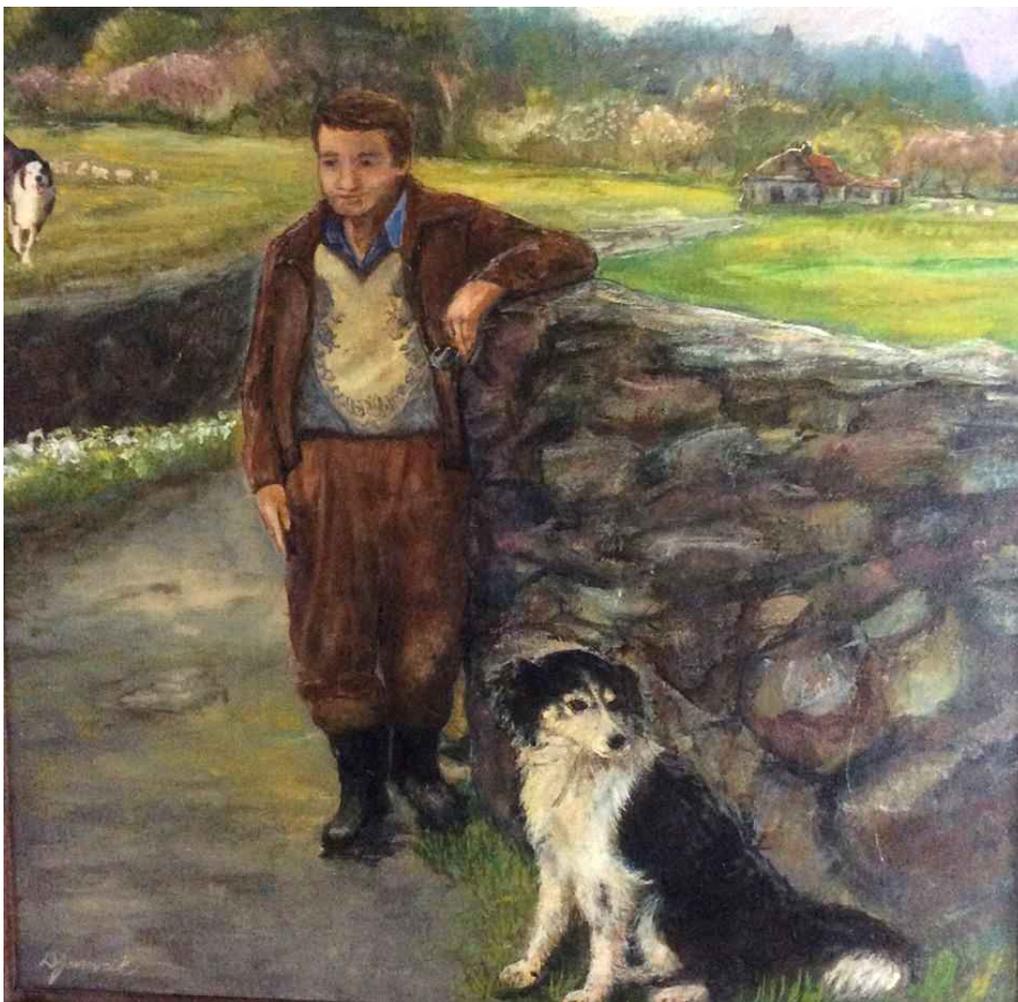
Like me, Donna uses words much like charcoal or brush strokes on the paper or canvas, sometimes rough sketching, and other times laboring over exactly the right words to express often hard-to-reach abstract thoughts. After reading her words, it should be no surprise that Donna draws upon a deep sense of fascination and optimism that she wants to share with the world. She says her motto is to: *"Learn to accept and keep trying no matter what. Don't let one window closing keep you from not opening another. Every moment going forward is a new beginning."* So very true if you ever hope to run a land conservancy. Even more so if you are dealing with cancer as Donna and so many other people are these days. I am happy to report that Donna wants you to know that she is on top of it and her prognosis looks very good. Thank you Donna for your continued interest and support for the TLC, and for brightening our world in your special way. Following are more of Donna's works.



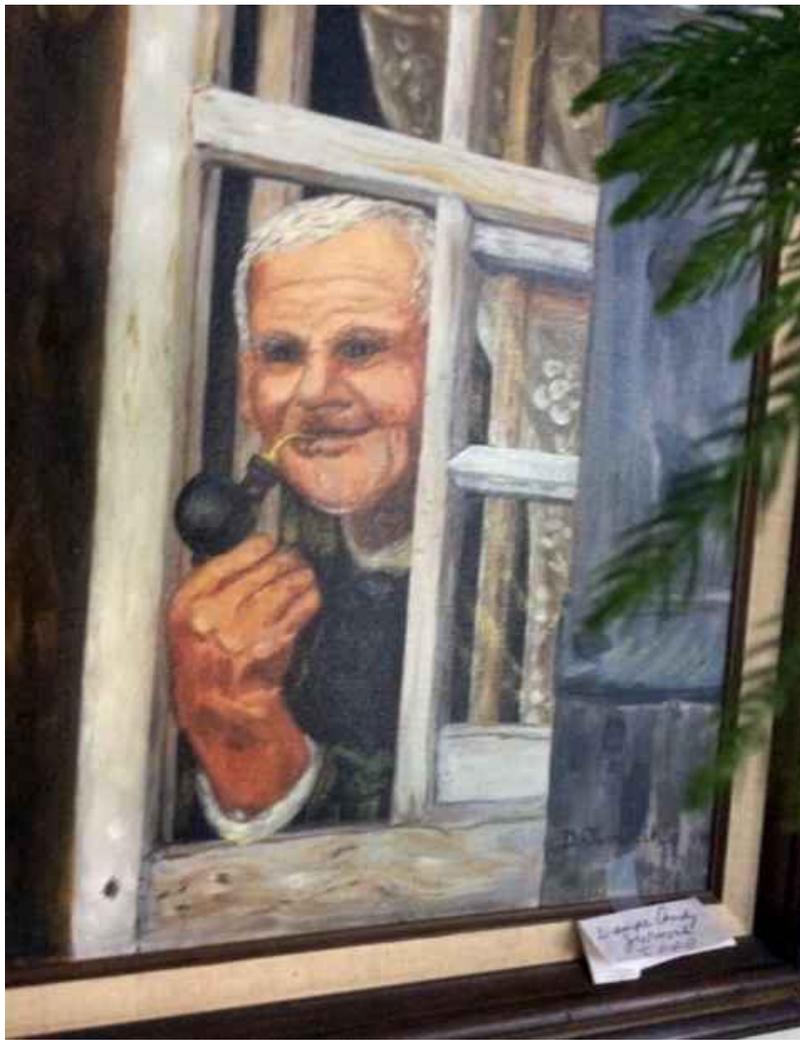
Left: Donna's dream horse. As a horse owner, I can say she got it exactly right, down to the look in its eye. Right: This looks like the view out Donna's window, and of another TLC person I know.



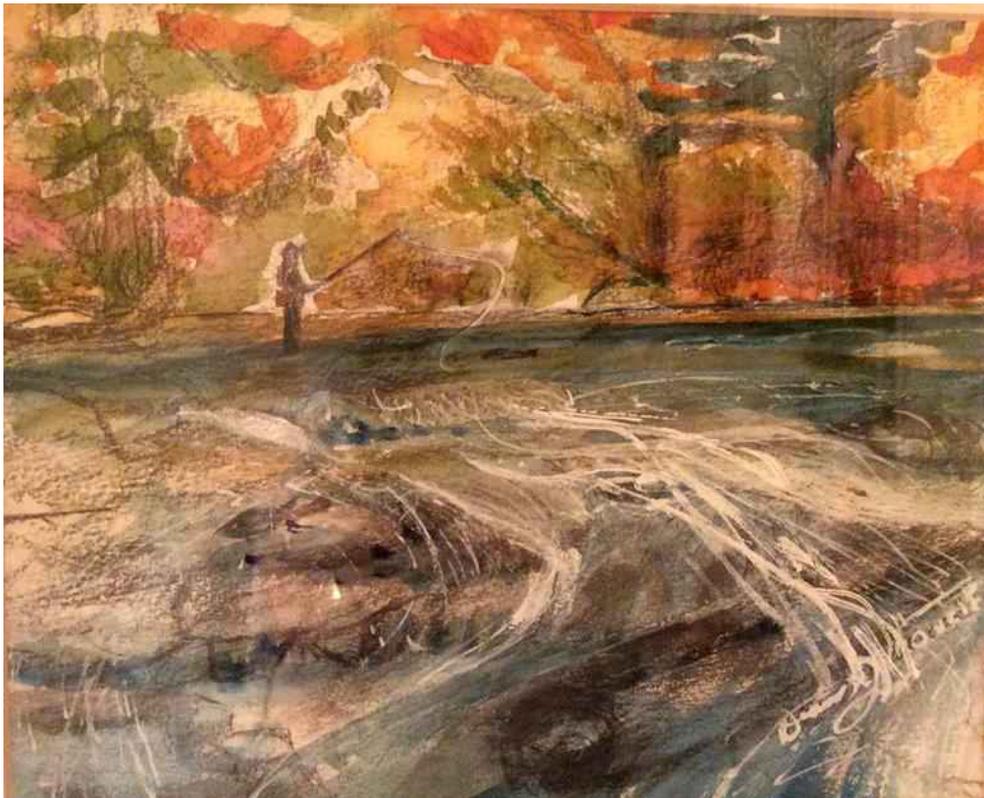
An ancient sea returned to a Utah-Nevada landscape through the power of Donna's brush.



Donna's beloved husband Bob as a young man, wearing his favorite sweater and imagined in a place where he wanted to be – a sheep pasture somewhere in the countryside of Ireland or the British Isles.



Donna's father-in-law, Andy Jurovcik, with his pipe after a hard day's work and dinner.



Fishing on the Ocqueoc River. Do you see the fish?



The Eagle.



Donna's true garden and tranquil haven in a dream land. This print hangs in the TLC office.

## 2020 TLC Membership

With your membership, the TLC is better enabled to protect important natural areas in our region. We offer three membership levels as shown below: Individual \$25, Family \$30, and Business \$100. Members will receive our e-mail news. Some of you are members based on your previous donations, volunteer efforts, or other 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. You may print and complete the form below. Make checks payable to "Thumb Land Conservancy". Mail checks and forms to: Thumb Land Conservancy, 4975 Maple Valley Road, Marlette, Michigan 48453

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