

Thumb Land Conservancy NEWS

March 17, 2017

Bob Putze Abbottsford Road Property 7.8-Acre Conservation Easement Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

Today, Saint Patrick's Day, Bob Putze and I signed the conservation easement and baseline assessment report for his property, got everything notarized, and recorded it all at the Saint Clair County Register of Deeds. So it is now official. Bob Putze became the first private landowner to place a TLC conservation easement on his property. On top of that, we did it on the day of the green.

Bob's land adjoins the Port Huron State Game Area in Clyde Township, along Abbottsford Road, and is a very nice northern forest community with lots of White Pine, and tall Red Pines that Bob planted in 1964. The ground-level vegetation is diverse and of good native quality with the usual species of cool sandy soils in the Port Huron area including three species of lycopodium, Wintergreen, Low Blueberry, Canada Mayflower, Michigan Holly, and others. It is potential habitat for Michigan Endangered Painted Trillium which is known from sites within a mile.

As I wrote before, Bob is a very reverent man who loves God's creation. He bought the land in 1964, feeling a spiritual connection to it. For years, he has wanted to make sure that the natural habitat remains protected. The conservation easement provides the legal basis for that protection in perpetuity, or essentially for as long as the legality of conservation easements is recognized. Bob and I have both known Janet Kruger, President of the Clyde Historical Society, for years. Janet told me last spring that I should talk with Bob because he really wanted to protect his land. Turns out Bob and I have connections that go even further back. Many years ago, my father cruised the streets of Port Huron with Bob's brother, Howard, who drove a Ford Edsel. Later, in the early 90's, Bob pulled some water-lilies from the newly constructed ponds around the Super Kmart and Sam's Club in Port Huron Township. He planted them in his pond at home. Guess who planted the water-lilies at the Super Kmart and Sam's Club. Yes, I did, in 1993. Makes me wonder how many ponds have been planted with those water-lilies. For those that get the Times Herald, Bob was featured on the front page about a week ago because his power was out for 6 days after the big wind storm. Hopefully, because of this conservation easement, we'll get him in the paper again.



Dead End Woods Sanctuary Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

A big THANK YOU to our newest TLC member Brian Martin for cutting and hauling dead ash trees that recently fell in the back yards of two Dead End Woods neighbors on Blueberry Lane. We are still suffering the effects of the Emerald Ash Borer, which has killed nearly every mature ash tree in our region over the past decade. Most trees have fallen, but a few still stand. Brian Martin and I spent a few hours cutting up the trees on Sunday February 26, then returned the following Sunday to remove some of the wood and stack the remainder for a neighbor. Brian then cut down a few dead ash trees further in the woods that threatened to fall over the property line. Because so many residences surround the sanctuary, we need to monitor the trees regularly. But there are many things we should do and there are few helpers. Some larger trees lean toward the yards and are probably beyond what I can handle without professional help that we really can't afford.

I enjoyed working with Brian and sharing old stories. Brian is an old Wilson Drive neighbor. I knew his brothers years ago from our Scout Troop 169 in Fort Gratiot, but hardly knew Brian as he was a few years ahead in school and soon joined the Marines. In recent years we reconnected on Facebook, but hadn't taken the opportunity to actually meet again until a few Sundays ago. For those with property along the water, Brian is the owner and operator of Martin

Marine Services. He does all kinds of underwater work, is very handy with various gadgets, and builds some fine and sea worthy boat hoists.



Anchor Bay Woods City of New Baltimore, Macomb County

On February 28, I met with officials of the City of New Baltimore, Macomb County Planning, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, and the Executive Director of Six Rivers Land Conservancy to discuss an effort to protect over 300 acres of forest on the border of Macomb and Saint Clair Counties in the City of New Baltimore, known as Anchor Bay Woods. The TLC Gerrits Sanctuary, a nearly 40-acre parcel, includes about 20 acres of Anchor Bay Woods. I've been trying to encourage protection of Anchor Bay Woods since about 2000. It appears there is now a serious effort. I was asked by Macomb County Planning to provide a summary of preservation of existing natural wetland as a method of wetland mitigation for MDEQ permits, and how that could be used to offset acquisition costs for the Anchor Bay Woods parcels. As a wetland consultant, I've coordinated several of these wetland preservation projects in the area, which is how the TLC got the Dead End Woods Sanctuary and Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary. This is also how we have gotten the opportunity to provide paid stewardship for the 51-acre Michigan Road preserve in Port Huron Township and the 12-acre Algonquin Power preserve in Huron County.



Super Kmart / Sam's Club Preserve Port Huron Township, Saint Clair County

On February 26, I assisted the Port Huron Township Fire Department in an attempt to burn the invasive Phragmites Reed in the wetlands behind the old Super Kmart and Sam's Club. Try as we did, we could not get a significant burn. Small areas flared-up around noon as the air temperature increased, but the burn failed to sustain itself. I concluded that it was simply too cold. Otherwise, considering it was February, it was a nice day to burn. We started at about 10 AM. It was sunny and the temperature was probably in the high 20's. By noon, the sun was still out and it felt like it was in the low 40's but the actual temperature was only 33, probably about 10 degrees too cold to get a good burn. Having burned our hay fields for years, and other natural areas, I know that slightly higher air temperature, lower humidity, full sunshine, and a breeze can make a big difference.

I was impressed with the organization of the approximately 30 firefighters under the leadership of Fire Chief Craig Miller, some also from the Kimball Township Fire Department. Chief Miller gave me a radio so I felt very connected to the whole operation although I couldn't see everyone. The first task was to ensure all personnel and dangerous objects were removed from the burn area. The burn was announced on loud speakers, crews inspected the ground, and even a drone was overhead to view the wetlands from the air. Next, backfires were lit by two wildland fire specialists and fire lines were secured. Then, fires were set with drip torches up-wind. These burned a little, but soon went out. Plan B involved building small brush pile fires to light the Reed, but even that failed. The best burn of the day was achieved near noon with a large propane torch that shoots out a flame a few feet. As the wind briefly picked up, a roughly

50 by 20-foot area blazed, but was quickly reduced to a smolder. Finally, Chief Miller called it a day and we broke for lunch. We will try again in late March or early April.



February Gathering and Executive Board Meeting Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

Thanks to TLC board member Dorothy Craig, our last gathering on February 19 was another pleasant time of visiting, discussing business, and sharing tasty food. Special guests included Terry McFadden, Wildlife Biologist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Janet Kruger and Connie Bates of the Clyde Historical Society, former Wilson Drive neighbor Brian Martin, and my father Bob Collins.

2017 Port Huron State Game Area Initiative Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

At our February meeting, we discussed plans for 2017 stewardship in the Port Huron State Game Area with MDNR Wildlife Biologist Terry McFadden, co-manager of the PHSGA. We are planning two Garlic Mustard pulls, on June 3 and June 10 near the end of Ford Road. We will send out notifications with more details in May. We will also update our stewardship web site at: <https://sites.google.com/site/thumbstewardship/home>

We plan to conduct other stewardship in the PHSGA including removal of invasive honeysuckle, autumn-olive, and buckthorn, oak-pine regeneration with controlled burns and cutting of mesophytes such as Red Maple, trail and fire pit restoration, erosion control, litter clean-up, and other activities as we are able.

Historic North Street Station Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

Work continues slowly at the North Street post office, rail station and general store property. TLC paid the remaining property taxes for 2016. Clean-up has continued, thanks especially to TLC board member Kay Cumbow. A local metal-detecting enthusiast, Fred Feldhouse, has found a lot of modern junk just below the ground surface in preparation for detecting deeper in the spring and summer. He is very hopeful of finding some interesting historical objects and is saving everything for us. The building is in need of roof repair. My neighbor and I are planning to install used sheet metal over the roof for temporary protection until we fully restore the structure. We will probably work on the roof in April and will send out a notification with more detail.

Algonquin Power, Deerfield Wind Energy Wetland Mitigation Site Stewardship Huron Township, Huron County

After some delay in conducting stewardship on this 12-acre swamp forest preserve about 4 miles west of Port Hope, Algonquin Power has negotiated an agreement with the landowner to allow the TLC to do much needed invasive shrub removal during the deer hunting season when the adjoining land is leased to hunters. We had planned on cutting invasive Japanese Barberry back in November but were unable due to the objection of a deer hunter claiming we would spook the deer. We are now able to freely to conduct the removal.

Because of lost time, we will probably have the bulk of the barberry sprayed along the east edge of the forest, and later hand-remove more isolated shrubs in the interior of the forest. Control of Japanese Barberry appears to be the most critical invasive weed issue on the site at this time. Forest was cleared on the adjoining property east of the preserve last year, which greatly increased light penetration on the east side of the remaining forest, causing Japanese Barberry to dominate the area.

2017 Saint Clair County Earth Fair Goodells, Wales Township, Saint Clair County

Retired school teacher, Al Lewandowski, will play botanist Charles K. Dodge on behalf of the TLC and Clyde Historical Society at the 2017 Saint Clair County Earth Fair. Al is a friend from back in the days of the Thumb Bioregional Alliance with a flare for dressing up as odd characters and singing along with his guitar. Al will dress in period clothing, circa 1900, greet people, and speak some parts from script, but we might also be surprised what Al comes up with.

Charles Dodge was a botanist from Port Huron in the early 1900's who advocated for protection of that part of the Black River valley that eventually became the Port Huron State Game Area. Here's a link to an article I wrote about Charles Dodge back in 2004 for The Lakeshore Guardian paper: http://www.huronecologic.com/thumb_habitats062004.htm

The 2017 Saint Clair County Earth Fair is on Friday, April 28 and Saturday, April 29, 9AM to 4PM at Goodells County Park. For more information, see the Earth Fair web site at: <http://www.earthdayfair.com/>

TLC Needs Help

The TLC still needs the help of an accountant to prepare an audited financial statement that we can submit with grant applications. We could also use anyone interested in writing grants. Please contact me if you know of anyone that can help.

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