



**June 27, 2019**

## **Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Project Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County**

For some of us, the effort to protect large tracts of beach ridge and swale forest in Burtchville Township dates back to the early 2000's, and even earlier, to the late 1980's when Fred Fuller and I worked for Bertha Daubendiek of the Michigan Nature Association. Finally, on May 26, after about 7 months of negotiating and thanks to the determined work of our realtor, Dave Ladensack of Summit Realty in Burtchville, the TLC received a signed purchase agreement for the 42-acre Bidwell Trust property north of Metcalf Road. The Bidwell property contains some of the best beach ridge and swale forest of what little remains from Ohio to the Saginaw Bay. The TLC now has just over a year to fundraise and close on the property. Our thanks also to Nadine Scahill of Realty Executives, Home Towne, representing the Bidwell family, for making this happen.

Adding greatly to our good news, on June 18 the TLC was notified that we will receive a matching grant of \$150,000 from the Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan for acquisition of the Bidwell Trust property. This grant will fund half the project cost, which includes the land purchase and a substantial stewardship endowment. Most of the credit goes to Carls Foundation Executive Director, Elizabeth Stieg, who realized our vision for the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. Elizabeth met with us to look at the Bidwell site on April 19. That day, seeing the extensive forest and even hearing the stormy waves of Lake Huron crashing on the distant beach, the coastal environment and potential of this place for natural recreation made a great impression.

William and Marie Carls established the Carls Foundation in 1961 to fund children's welfare and preservation of natural areas. Bill Carls immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1924 at the age of 21. With his training and experience in European apprentice programs, he was readily employed with major industrial companies in Detroit. In 1945, Bill Carls started Numatics, Inc. in his garage. The company is headquartered in Highland, Michigan and remains a leading worldwide manufacturer of industrial air valves.

The Carls Foundation has funded a lot of land preservation in Michigan and in our region where few other foundations have. A local project includes the Michigan Nature Association's Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary in Kimball Township with a large population of Michigan Endangered Painted Trillium. The Carls Foundation has also funded the Six Rivers Land Conservancy in their efforts to acquire large parts of Anchor Bay Woods in New Baltimore adjacent to our Gerrits Sanctuary in Ira Township. For more information about the Carls Foundation, see their web site at: <http://CarlsFdn.org/> .

## **Silver Trails Scout Reservation**

## Grant Township, Saint Clair County

Now for the really bad news. As most of you probably know, Silver Trails Scout Camp has essentially been sold to a gravel company. The agreement is said to be binding and final terms contingent on gravel testing. As if to intentionally kill any happiness we might have enjoyed because of our Bidwell property success, it was only 3 days later that we received rumors about Silver Trails. Details of the sale agreement such as price, terms, actual companies involved, extent of gravel mining proposed, and other items are unclear. Regardless, the situation is not good at all for anyone who has enjoyed the outstanding beauty of the 270-acre camp. Silver Trails is truly irreplaceable. Much of the background information on Silver Trails, the sale, and how you can help, is available at: <http://SaveSilverTrails.info> .

I started going to Silver Trails in 1974, my first year in Boy Scouts. I followed my friend and TLC board member Scott Ferguson into Fort Gratiot Troop 169. Thanks to the encouragement of our great Assistant Scoutmaster, Orville Swick, I first worked on summer camp staff in 1978 at the age of 15 under the guidance of TLC board member Chris Walker, then with Croswell-Lexington Troop 322 and the Nature Director at Silver Trails. The start of my formal nature education was when Chris walked me around the camp and taught me the names of almost every plant we saw and every bird we heard. I can never thank him enough for his interest in training me up as a young naturalist and the next Silver Trails nature director. I continued working on camp staff teaching nature and other subjects almost every summer through 1986. For many of those summer camp weeks, TLC board member Dan Rhein and I worked together teaching nature. Dan and I were regularly recruited for nature programs at Silver Trails through the 1980's. I could tell you hundreds of stories about Silver Trails and about the hundreds of people from across Saint Clair and Sanilac Counties who were part of the wonderful camp comradery. We all had great times at Silver Trails, possibly never to be repeated.

For those of you who have never been to Silver Trails, the camp is an impressive and unusual natural area located about 1 mile north of the Port Huron State Game Area along the west side of the Black River. The landscape is a series of plateaus and valleys cut by the ancient confluence of Silver Creek with the Black River. The camp entrance from Jeddo Road, complete with stone gateway pillars, is located on the south plateau. To the east, across the large events field, are high forested bluffs along the Black River valley. One point in particular provides a very scenic view out over the valley with a nearly 80-foot vertical drop down to the river where you can watch birds fly below. Near this area, you can walk a switchback trail on the forested hillside down to the Black River floodplain where we sometimes camped. Back up top, west of the switchback, you can walk a forested trail along the top rim of the Silver Creek valley. From certain points you can peer through the branches of Eastern Hemlock, Yellow Birch, and Arborvitae down to the old canoe pond where many of us earned our boating merit badges, caught turtles, and discovered leeches. From a once barren slope above the canoe pond known as Dead Man's Bluff, it is possible to look out about a half-mile over the tree tops to the north end of the camp. Back at the log cabin-styled Rotary Lodge, also known as the mess hall, built in 1948 by local Rotary Clubs, you can walk north or west down long wooden stairways to the main campsites in the broad valley below carved out by the ancient windings of Silver Creek. It's a beautiful mature forest of Sugar Maple, Black Maple, American Beech, Eastern Hemlock, and Yellow Birch with campsite names like Chippewa and Hemlock Point. Down here is where most of the summer camp program happened from the founding of Silver Trails in 1945 through the mid 1980's. The old swimming pool was down here where everyone earned their swimming merit badge and some of us did the Mile Swim. Behind the swimming pool was the staff area where we lived in tents half the summer. To the west is the old George Flott Nature Lodge with charms not unlike a deep woods cottage

or hunting cabin. Further west was the old James West Cabin, sometimes used as the trading post, where you could buy a cold pop and make a basket or some leather craft. Not far down the trail is the council fire ring where so many hundreds of scouts, scouters, and scouting families gathered around big bonfires on late summer evenings and watched funny camp skits, Order of the Arrow Native American dancing, listened to stories, and sang together. Further down the trail, tucked up against a hillside, is the rifle and archery range where we earned those merit badges. Back east you'll find a footbridge over Silver Creek. Head east before crossing the bridge and you'll walk past the location where the old Number 9 Tree grew, the symbol of Silver Trails. Keep heading east and you'll pass the Swift Water and Stony Creek campsites just before the canoe pond. Back west at the foot bridge, cross Silver Creek, turn west, and you will end up at the chapel where we had our worship services and many scouters got married, including my wife and I. Keep heading west and you can walk up an old stairway made from railroad ties to the "back forty" campsites on the west plateau with names like Kit Carson, Dan Boone, and Fueslein. Head back east down past the chapel to a trail heading north and you will walk through one of the most beautiful old-growth forest areas in the region, packed full of woodland wildflowers like White Trillium, Red Trillium, Bloodroot, Hepatica, Dutchman's Breeches, Solomon's seal, Wild Ginger, Toothwort, Blue Cohosh, and Wild Leek. Forest birds include Wood Thrush, Veery, Ovenbird, Eastern Wood Pewee, Flycatchers, and many warblers. Certainly, Silver Trails is a place where rare species could very well occur, including the Cerulean Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Red-shouldered Hawk, Large Toothwort, Goldenseal, Ginseng, and others. Further north, small streams have cut deep shaded ravines and left narrow ridges covered by Eastern Hemlock and Yellow Birch. These hidden places served as the ceremonial sites for Order of the Arrow members in Chickagami Lodge 180. North of here was the other "back forty" on the north plateau that was once a big farm field planted with young pine trees by scouts before my time. At the top of the north bluff was an old campsite named Baden Powell where we ventured once in a while. Now that is all gone and replaced by a massive gravel pit, approved in 1992. It was to be a lake for the camp within 15 to 20 years. 27 years later and there is no useable lake. Apparently, a combination of gravel greed and financial pressure on the former Blue Water Council led to more and more digging until they started in on the beautiful forest in the north of the camp and even took out one of our Order of the Arrow sites.



Silver Trails Scout Camp boundaries outlined in yellow. Although the gravel pit on the north end of the camp has filled with water, the surrounding grades have not been restored as promised to provide access.



A steep ridge in the north of Silver Trails covered by Eastern Hemlock and Yellow Birch.



View down from a ridge to a deep ravine cut by streams flowing through the north of the camp.

Grant Township definitely wants to buy Silver Trails and protect it as a park, ideally with camping still available. The Thumb Land Conservancy will assist them in applying for a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant. The fund has millions of dollars from oil and gas revenue sharing available for park acquisitions just like Silver Trails. Grant Township potentially scores quite high for a Trust Fund grant and has a very good chance of being fully funded. The Six Rivers Land Conservancy, active primarily in Oakland and Macomb Counties, is also ready to help and can access The Conservation Fund, a low-interest loan fund, to buy Silver Trails and hold it until Grant Township receives grant funding. The Trust for Public Land, a national group working to protect park land, is also interested in helping with Silver Trails. The hard part is that the Michigan Crossroads Council of the Boy Scouts of America is apparently in a binding agreement with AMC Mid Michigan Materials and we may never get the opportunity to protect the camp.

For more information about Silver Trails and what you can do to help, please see: <http://SaveSilverTrails.info> and feel free to call the Thumb Land Conservancy office at 810-346-2584.

## **Garlic Mustard Pulls Dead End Woods Sanctuary, Fort Gratiot Township Saint Clair County**

We conducted our annual Garlic Mustard removal on the Dead End Woods Sanctuary back on May 24 and 25. Our usual spot near the dead end of Wilson Drive is still looking good with very few Garlic Mustard plants found this spring. Removal activity is shifting further east several hundred feet, but some Garlic Mustard patches might be moving west. Fortunately, there is a natural barrier where the woods is too wet for Garlic Mustard to spread back to the dead end.

While out there, I checked on our little population of Spikenard – *Aralia racemosa*. It seems to be stable and possibly increased by a few plants. At some point we will attempt to spread this uncommon plant species to other parts of the sanctuary.



Foamflower – *Tiarella cordifolia* in full bloom surrounded by the leaves of Yellow Trout Lily – *Erythronium americanum*. Just a few of the many native plants we are trying to protect in the Dead End Woods Sanctuary. Foamflower is assigned a coefficient of conservatism of 9 out of 10 in Michigan, meaning that it truly represents our original native flora.



A few of the Spikenard – *Aralia racemosa* plants just leafing out in the Dead End Woods

Sanctuary. Spikenard is a very uncommon species of mature forest, assigned a coefficient of conservatism of 8 out of 10 in Michigan. Just one of the species demonstrating that the Dead End Woods Sanctuary is an important living museum of our native flora.

## **Garlic Mustard Pulls Port Huron State Game Area, Clyde Township Saint Clair County**

On June 1 we conducted our third annual Garlic Mustard removal in the Port Huron State Game Area. For only about a half-day of work, we made a lot of headway on setting back the Garlic Mustard in our usual area northeast of the Ford Road trail end near the Black River. In addition to pulling the mature flowering plants, we put one of our weed torches to work on the thousands of Garlic Mustard seedlings, only a few inches tall, which cover the ground beyond where we have been pulling the past two years. While some of the native plants are burned in the process, the torch does not kill the roots or bulbs of most perennials. Our native plants are generally fire-adapted and will return. Garlic Mustard is a biennial plant, meaning that it lives only a few years before flowering, seeding and dying. Because of this it is more susceptible to fire and likely most of the seedlings are completely killed. In addition, the fire kills any seed that might remain dormant on the ground surface from last year.

Garlic Mustard appears to have originally colonized a historically disturbed area where the trees were pushed over and the ground partially graded decades ago, apparently by the DNR to create an opening for deer or other game species. This area, now with younger trees and a more open canopy, appears to be the source of Garlic Mustard intrusion into the surrounding mature forest. If we can control the Garlic Mustard in this area, we should be able to eventually eliminate it from the surrounding areas.

On a different note, before we drove up the trail to our work area, we met six bird watchers in two different groups at the Ford Road gate. The first was a husband and wife from the area who are beginning birders and very interested in the great diversity of warblers. The next was four guys from the Rochester area who were loaded with new scopes, cameras, and other gear. It was very encouraging to see that the Port Huron State Game Area truly is a regional attraction for birders and other naturalists. The guys from the Rochester area mentioned the web site eBird.org. I think that site and others have played a big part in getting more people out to local natural areas: <https://ebird.org/home>



Burning Garlic Mustard seedlings with a weed torch while being careful of Sugar Maple seedlings and other native plants.



TLC board member, Kay Cumbow, with an arm load of Garlic Mustard.

## **Second Annual TLC Yard Sale Yale Bologna Festival, July 26-28**

The TLC will hold our second annual yard sale at the Yale Bologna Festival on July 26 through July 28 in the front yard of Fred Fuller's house at 203 South Main Street in Yale, Michigan. If you have any items that you would like to donate to the sale, please drop them off on Fred's front porch or bring them to the sale. Look for a yellow Victorian style house with gray trim on the west side of Main Street. It's the second house south of Wood Street and the Sunoco gas station. See the map below.



If you have any items you don't want to leave on the porch, please call Fred Fuller at 810-304-0276 or call the TLC office at 810-346-2584 to make arrangements. You can also donate baked goods and we could use some volunteers to sit at the sale.

For more information about the Yale Bologna Festival, see this web site:  
<https://www.yalechamber.com/yale-bologna-festival.html>

## Ecology News

The Ecology News this time is all about Silver Trails Scout Camp. If our community and our political representatives can't all work together to protect a place like Silver Trails, then really, what is everyone willing to let go? Don't think that the Port Huron State Game Area, just a mile south, won't be the next gravel target. We've been dealt a very bad hand by the Michigan Crossroads Council of the Boy Scouts of America and AMC Mid Michigan Materials. For that they should never be forgiven. But, they are far out-numbered and there are better places to get gravel.

Many local townships, including Grant Township, have been using crushed limestone on the roads with great results. The limestone covered roads are practically as smooth as pavement with very few pot holes. Township officials say that the crushed limestone lasts far longer than gravel.

Of course, limestone extraction also requires natural area destruction, but it is largely concentrated in a few large pit mines in northern and southern Michigan and there is far more material available per acre than gravel. The limestone layers being mined extend to depths of several hundred feet, whereas gravel layers are much thinner. Existing limestone reserves in just one Michigan quarry are estimated to last at least another century. Maybe by that time we'll be using crushed asteroid fragments shipped from the moon, or we'll finally get our flying cars, or maybe we won't be too worried about the roads. While there are negative impacts caused by any resource extraction, limestone appears to be a far more sustainable option for now in Michigan.

## **2019 TLC Membership**

With your membership, the TLC is better enabled to protect important natural areas in our region. We offer three membership levels: 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 membership form available at this link: <http://www.thumbland.org/MembershipForm.pdf> . Make checks payable to "Thumb Land Conservancy". Mail checks and forms to: Thumb Land Conservancy, 4975 Maple Valley Road, Marlette, Michigan 48453.

William Collins  
Executive Director  
Thumb Land Conservancy  
4975 Maple Valley Road  
Marlette, Michigan USA 48453  
810-346-2584  
[mail@ThumbLand.org](mailto:mail@ThumbLand.org)  
[ThumbLand.org](http://ThumbLand.org)