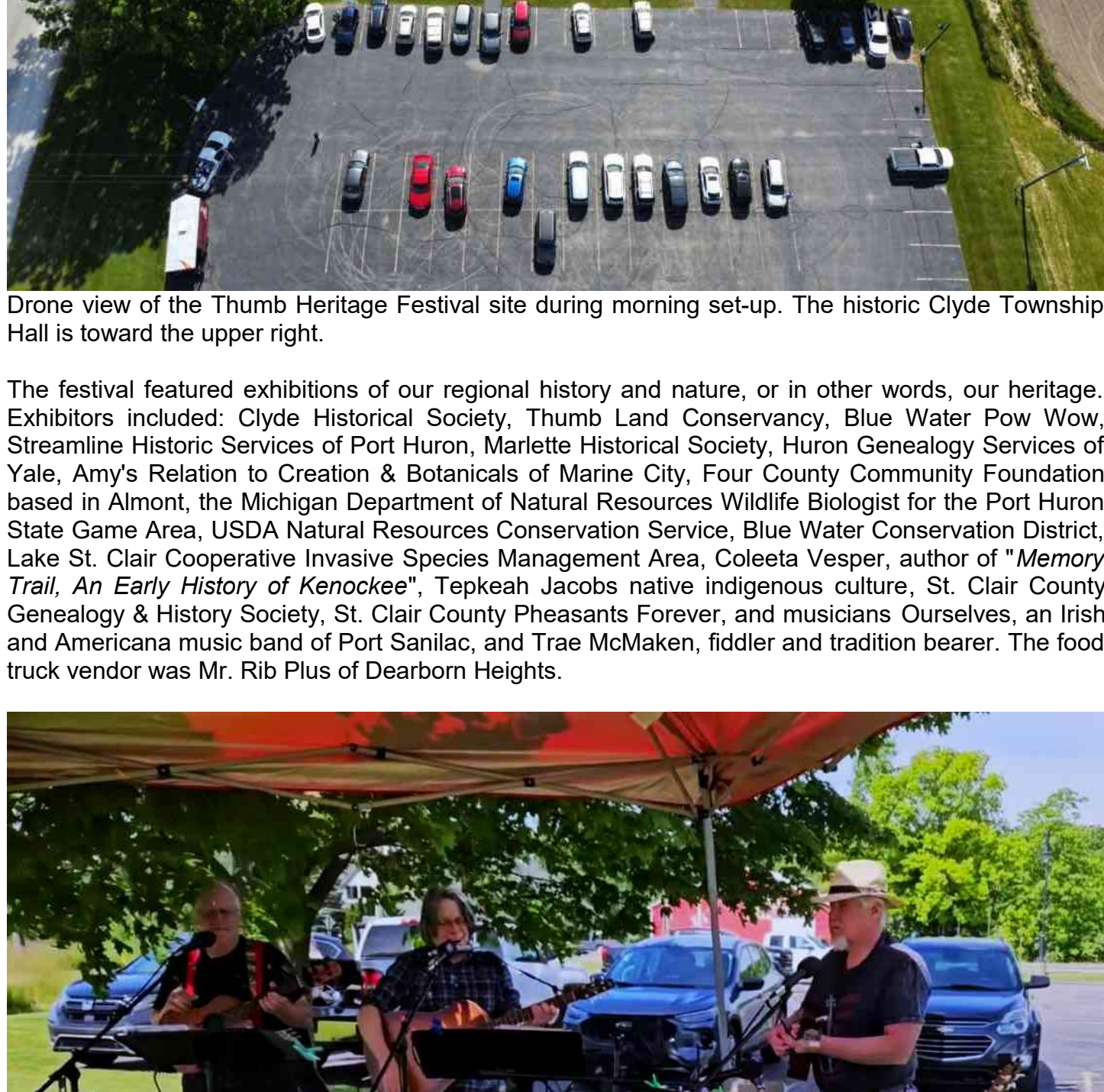


Thumb Land Conservancy News

2024 June 27

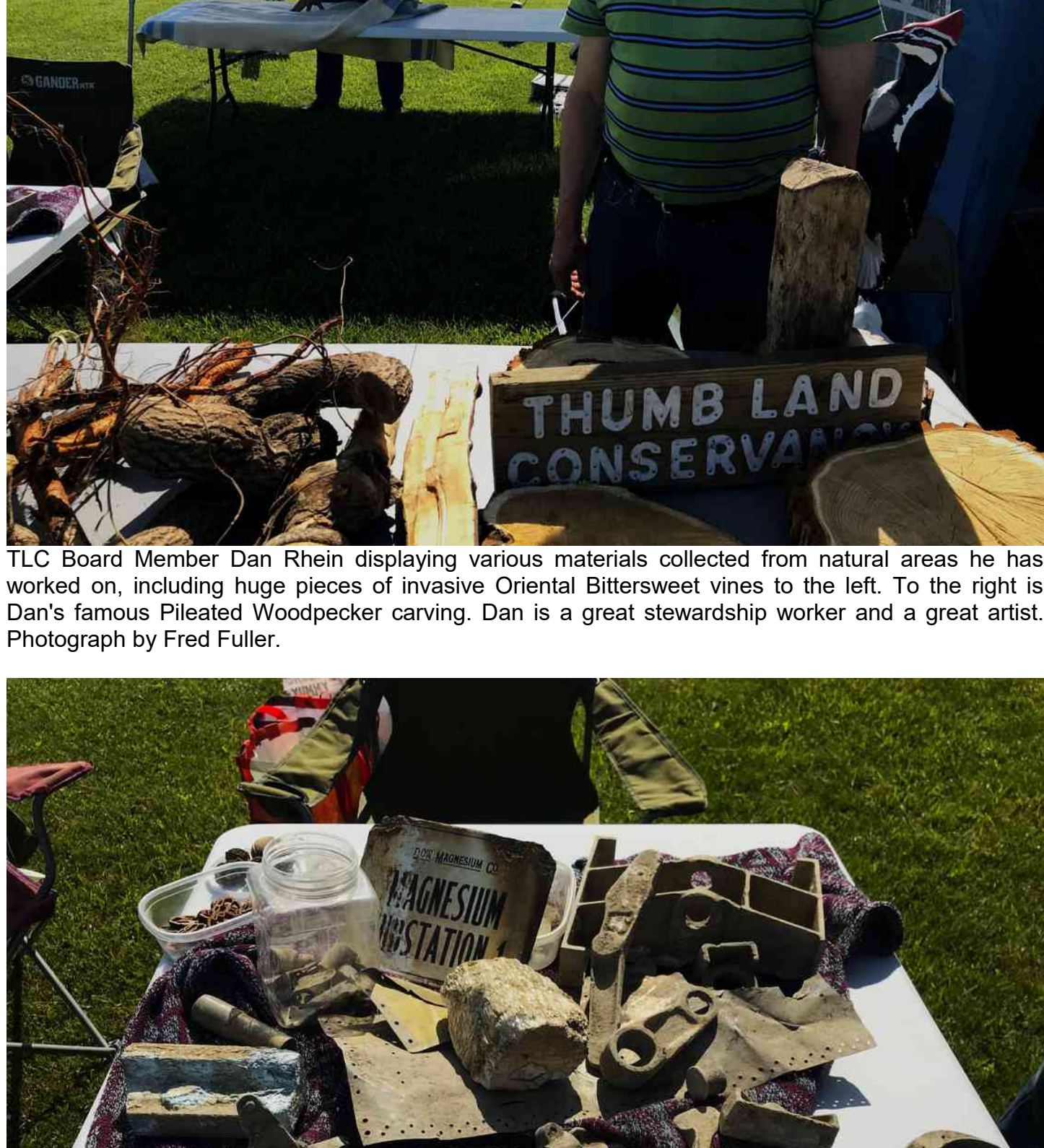
Thumb Heritage Festival

The TLC and Clyde Historical Society held the first Thumb Heritage Festival on June 1 at the historic Clyde Township Hall located at Bill Bears Memorial Park. It was well attended considering the lack of media coverage and that it was our first time for this event. We estimate that about 150 people participated.

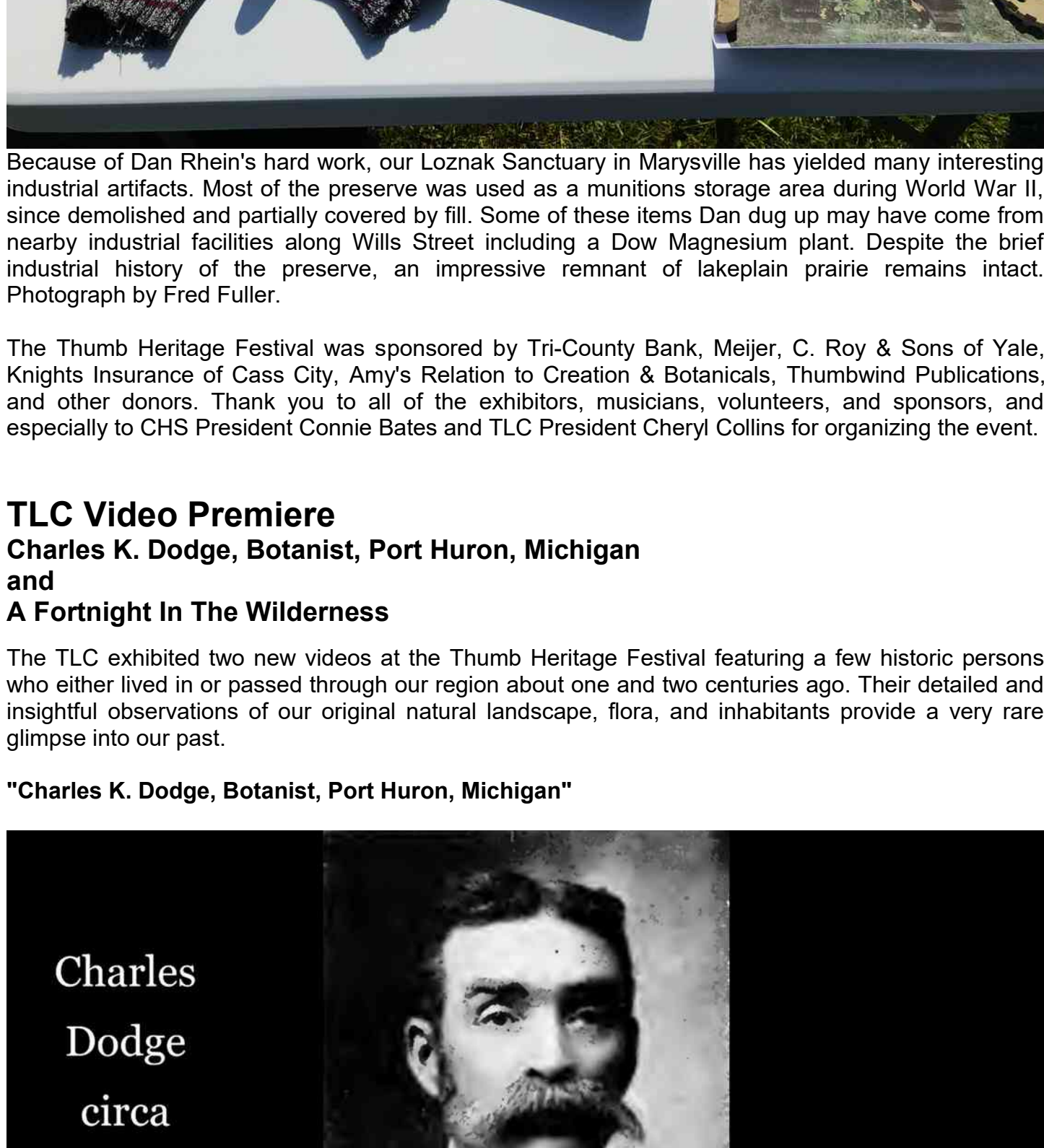


Drone view of the Thumb Heritage Festival site during morning set-up. The historic Clyde Township Hall is toward the upper right.

The festival featured exhibitions of our regional history and nature, or in other words, our heritage. Exhibitors included: Clyde Historical Society, Thumb Land Conservancy, Blue Water Power Wow, Steamline Historic Services of Port Huron, Marlette Historical Society, Huron Genealogy Services of Yale, Amy's Relation to Creation & Botanicals of Marine City, Four County Community Foundation based in Almont, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Biologist for the Port Huron Clyde Game Area, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Blue Water Conservation District, Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area, Coleeta Vesper, author of "Memory Trail, An Early History of Kenoskee", Tepkeah Jacobs native indigenous culture, St. Clair County Genealogy & History Society, St. Clair County Pheasants Forever, and musicians Ourselves, an Irish and Americana music band of Port Sanilac, and Trae McMaken, fiddler and tradition bearer. The food truck vendor was Mr. Rib Plus of Dearborn Heights.



Ourselves playing "I've Been Everywhere", lyrics customized to mention Crowell and a beet truck.



TLC Board Member Dan Rhein displaying various materials collected from natural areas he has worked on, including huge pieces of invasive Oriental Bittersweet vines to the left. To the right is Dan's famous Pileated Woodpecker carving. Dan is a great stewardship worker and a great artist. Photograph by Fred Fuller.



Because of Dan Rhein's hard work, our Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville has yielded many interesting industrial artifacts. Most of the preserve was used as a munitions storage area during World War II, since demolished and partially covered by fill. Some of these items Dan dug up may have come from nearby industrial facilities along Willis Street including a Dow Magnesium plant. Despite the brief industrial history of the preserve, an impressive remnant of lakeplain prairie remains intact. Photograph by Fred Fuller.

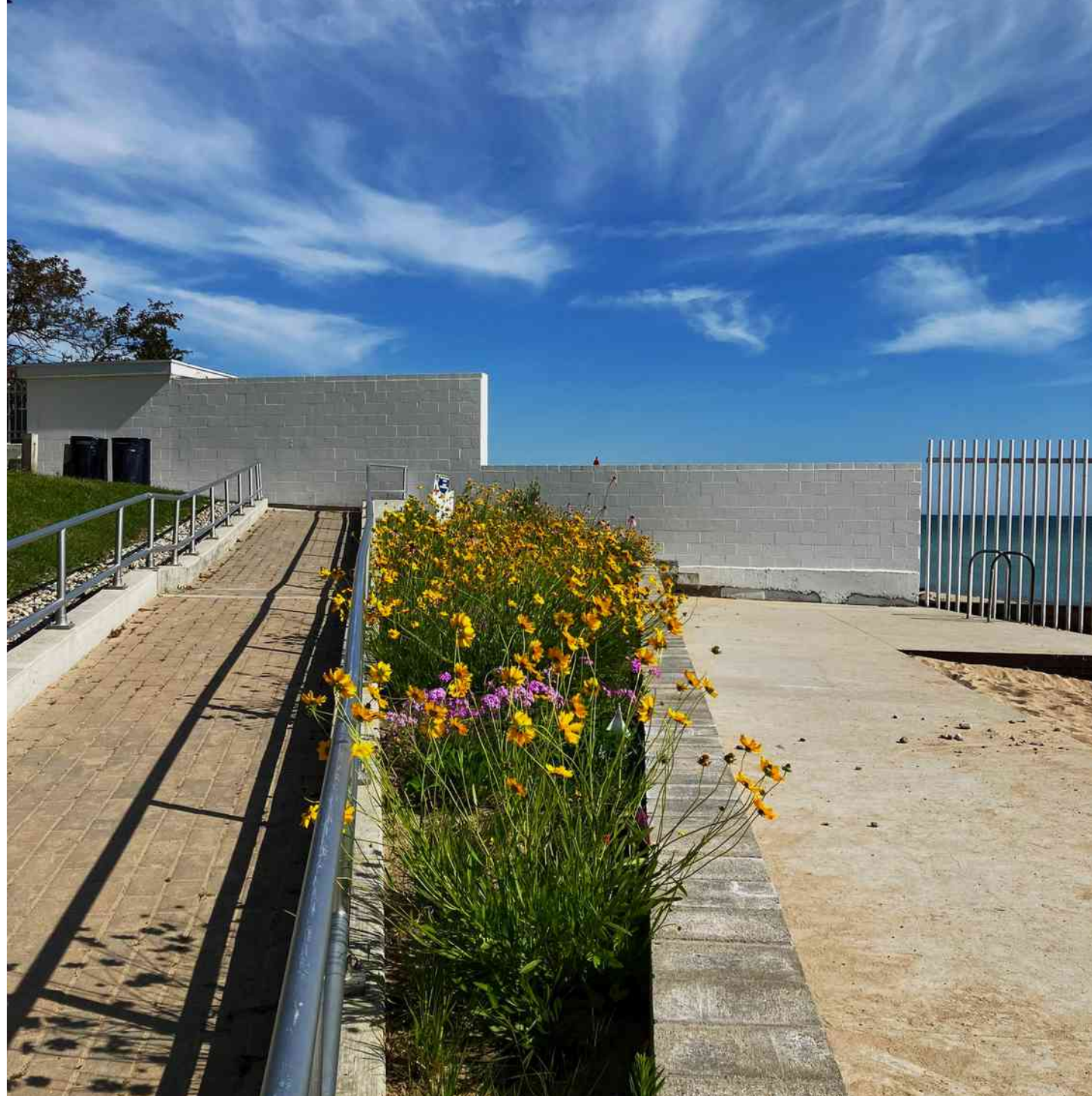
The Thumb Heritage Festival was sponsored by Tri-County Bank, Meijer, C. Roy & Sons of Yale, Knights Insurance of Cass City, Amy's Relation to Creation & Botanicals, Thumbwind Publications, and other donors. Thank you to all of the exhibitors, musicians, volunteers, and sponsors, and especially to CHS President Connie Bates and TLC President Cheryl Collins for organizing the event.

TLC Video Premiere

Charles K. Dodge, Botanist, Port Huron, Michigan and A Fortnight in The Wilderness

The TLC exhibited two new videos at the Thumb Heritage Festival featuring a few historic persons who either lived in or passed through our region about one and two centuries ago. Their detailed and insightful observations of our original natural landscape, flora, and inhabitants provide a very rare glimpse into our past.

"Charles K. Dodge, Botanist, Port Huron, Michigan"



Charles Dodge circa 1900 age 56

Our first video features TLC Huron botanist Charles K. Dodge, who, among other accomplishments, compiled "Flora of St. Clair County, Michigan and the Western Part of Lambton County, Ontario" in 1900. He also advocated for protection of the Black River valley, what later became the Port Huron State Game Area. Watch the video at the following link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/12mRbTKpV_sDgSdih4nHg5TPhMsu5Bb8/view

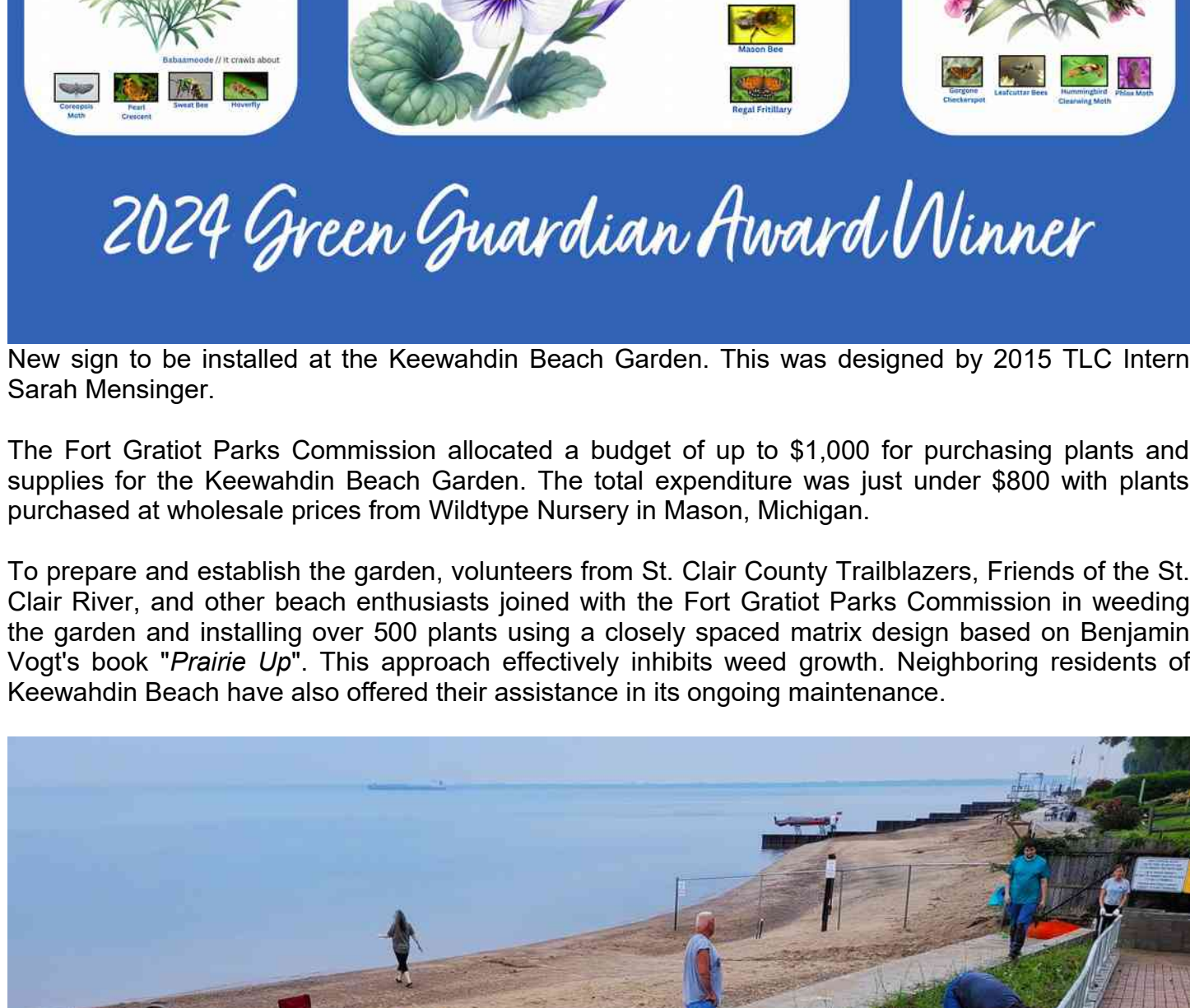
"A Fortnight in The Wilderness"



Our second video features the 1831 journey of Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustav de Beaumont from Detroit to Saginaw, along the west edge of the Thumb and their detailed observations of flora, fauna, and the people of the region, particularly Native Americans. Alexis de Tocqueville is the well-known French author of "Democracy in America" which was used as a text book in American schools for decades and has often been quoted by politicians and others. Watch the video at the following link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L3X6iQInNTYghy15S1qkqg32LVY8Xk8i/view>

Keewahdin Beach Wildflower & Pollinator Garden

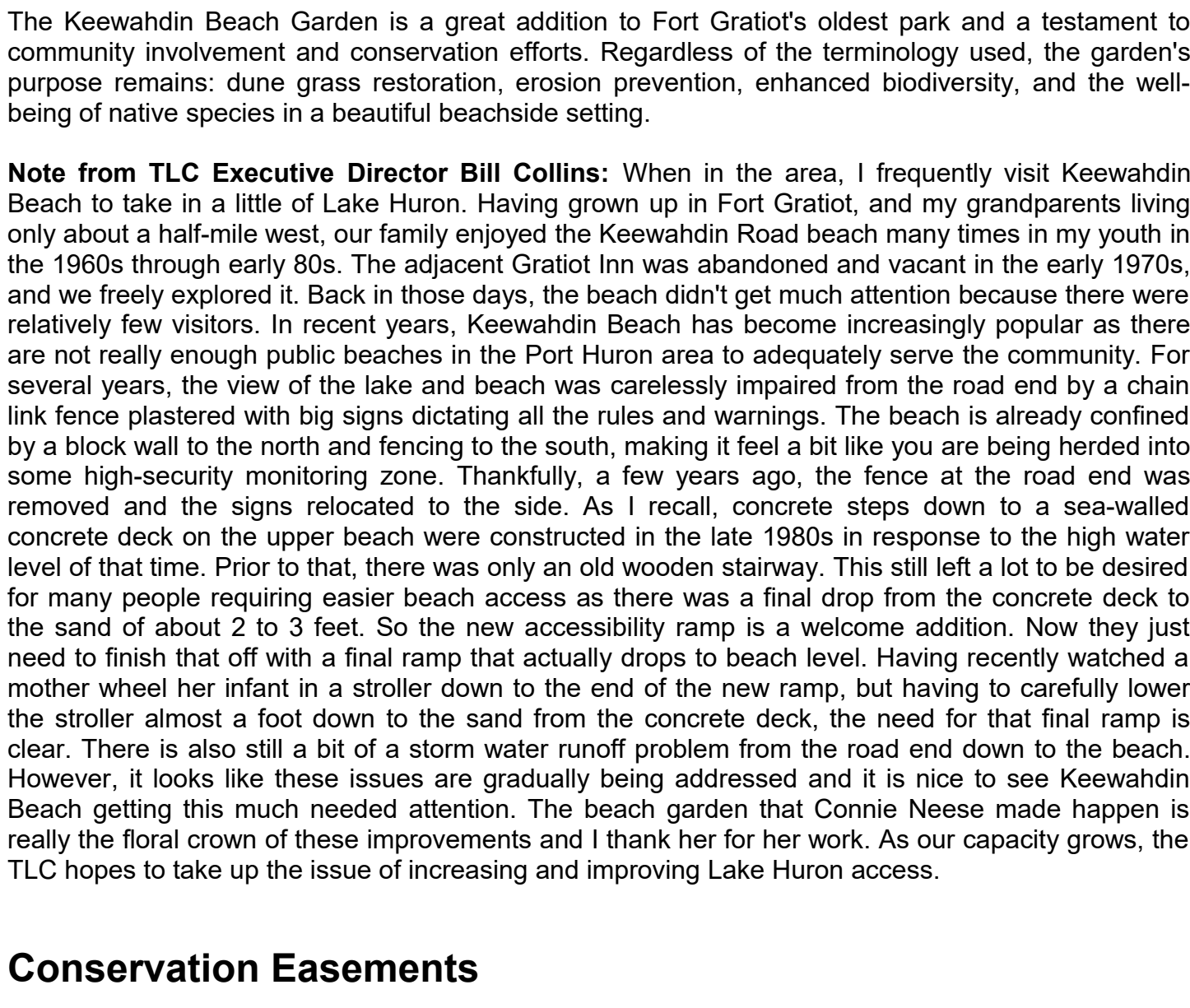
If you visit Keewahdin Beach on Lake Huron at the end of Keewahdin Road in Fort Gratiot Township, you can't help but notice a new native wildflower and pollinator garden planted alongside a newly constructed concrete accessibility ramp down to the beach. TLC Member Connie Neese not only planned and coordinated the planting of the garden, but planted much of it in the fall of 2023 and continues to weed it in her spare time.



TLC Member Connie Neese and the Keewahdin Beach Garden. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Keewahdin Beach, established in 1899 is the oldest park in Fort Gratiot. The recent beach accessibility and erosion project included the creation of the 500-square-foot planting space aimed at dune grass restoration. This space, several feet above Lake Huron's high-water mark, was planted with a combination of native grass, flowering herbs (or forbs), and a shrub to prevent erosion, support native biodiversity, and enhance the aesthetic appeal of the beach area. Several criteria used to select the plants included the following:

- Adaptation to full sun and dry sand
- Less than 3 to 4 feet tall to maintain views of Lake Huron from the bench and parking areas
- Ability to allow root development before winter set in
- A ratio of 60% native grasses to 40% seasonal flowering plants
- At least one blooming species from spring through fall



View north of the new Keewahdin Beach Garden. Photograph by Connie Neese.

As part of the planning process, beach users were surveyed for their reactions to various terms used to describe the purpose of the garden and garner public support. "Dune Restoration" seemed to puzzle most people. "Pollinator Habitat or Garden" made some people fearful of stinging bees filling the beach. "Butterfly Garden" received overwhelming support from beach users. Regardless, the plant selection remained consistent. The following native plant species were planted in the new garden at Keewahdin Beach:

Schizachyrium scoparium (Little Bluestem): A native bunch grass reaching 2 to 4 feet in height, ideal for the beach garden environment due to its deep roots. It serves as a larval host plant for several species of skipper butterflies.

Prunus pumila (Sand Cherry): This shrub, native to Great Lakes dunes and few other places worldwide, grows up to 6 feet tall. It is a host plant for swallowtail butterflies and blooms white in the spring.

Asclepias tuberosa (Butterfly Weed): A 1 to 3-foot tall plant with orange blooms from June to August, it serves as a larval host plant for Monarch butterflies.

Coreopsis lanceolata (Sand Coreopsis): This 2 to 3-foot tall plant blooms in yellow from June to August and supports the caterpillars of six local caterpillar species.

Echinacea pallida (Pale Purple Coneflower): With a height of 3 to 4 feet, it features purple blooms from June to August and acts as a larval host plant for Silvery Checkerspot butterflies.

Liatris aspera (Rough Blazing Star): Standing at 3 to 4 feet tall, it blooms pink from July to September and supports the larvae of six local caterpillar species.

Phlox pilosa (Prairie Phlox): This 2 feet tall plant boasts purple-pink blooms from May to July and provides habitat for six local caterpillar species.

Rudbeckia hirta (Black-eyed Susan): Reaching 3 feet in height, it features yellow blooms from June to September and serves as a larval host plant for more than 30 caterpillar species.

Viola sororia (Common Blue Violet): A low-growing plant, only 4 to 6 inches tall, with purple blooms from April to June and supports several fritillary butterfly species as larval hosts. It was already on-site and left in place.

Keewahdin Beach Garden

FORT GRATIOT PARKS

<p>Little Bluestem - Mashkosiwi (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)</p>	<p>Sand Cherry - Sewa komin (<i>Prunus pumila</i>)</p>	<p>Butterfly Weed - Ininiwanzhi (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)</p>	<p>Rough Blazing Star</p>
<p>Pale Purple Coneflower Waahgizisobagoons (<i>Echinacea pallida</i>)</p>	<p>Diagram showing root systems for various plants: Little Bluestem, Sand Cherry, Butterfly Weed, Rough Blazing Star, Pale Purple Coneflower, Sand Coreopsis, Blue Violet, and Prairie Phlox.</p>	<p>Black-eyed Susan - Ozaawisa-waahligwan (<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>)</p>	<p>Prairie Phlox (<i>Phlox pilosa</i>)</p>
<p>Sand Coreopsis (<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>)</p>	<p>Blue Violet (<i>Viola sororia</i>)</p>	<p>Prairie Phlox (<i>Phlox pilosa</i>)</p>	

2024 Green Guardian Award Winner

New sign to be installed at the Keewahdin Beach Garden. This was designed by 2015 TLC Intern Sarah Mensinger.

The Fort Gratiot Parks Commission allocated a budget of up to \$1,000 for purchasing plants and supplies for the Keewahdin Beach Garden. The total expenditure was just under \$800 with plants purchased at wholesale prices from Wildtype Nursery in Mason, Michigan.

To prepare and establish the garden, volunteers from St. Clair County Trailblazers, Friends of the St. Clair River, and other beach enthusiasts joined with the Fort Gratiot Parks Commission in weeding the garden and installing over 600 plants using a closely spaced matrix design based on Benjamin Vogt's book "Prairie Up". This approach effectively inhibits weed growth. Neighboring residents of Keewahdin Beach have also offered their assistance in its ongoing maintenance.

Planting the Keewahdin Beach Garden in September 2023.

The Keewahdin Beach Garden is a great addition to Fort Gratiot's oldest park and a testament to community involvement and conservation efforts. Regardless of the terminology used, the garden's purpose remains: dune grass restoration, erosion prevention, enhanced biodiversity, and the well-being of native species in a beautiful beachside setting.

Note from TLC Executive Director Bill Collins: When in the area, I frequently visit Keewahdin Beach to take in a little of Lake Huron. Having grown up in Fort Gratiot, and my grandparents living only about a half-mile west, our family enjoyed the Keewahdin Road beach many times in my youth in the 1960s through early 80s. The adjacent Gratiot Inn was abandoned and vacant in the early 1970s, and we freely explored it. Back in those days, the beach didn't get much attention because there were relatively few visitors. In recent years, Keewahdin Beach has become increasingly popular as there are not really enough public beaches in the Port Huron area to adequately serve the community. For several years, the view of the lake and beach was carelessly impaired from the road end by a chain link fence plastered with big signs dictating all the rules and warnings. The beach is already confined by a block wall to the north and fencing to the south, making it feel a bit like you are being herded into some high-security monitoring zone. Thankfully, a few years ago, the fence at the road end was removed and the signs relocated to the side. As I recall, concrete steps down to a sea-walled concrete deck on the upper beach were constructed in the late 1980s in response to the high water level of that time. Prior to that, there was only an old wooden stairway. This still left a lot to be desired for many people requiring easier beach access as there was a final drop from the concrete deck to the sand of about 2 to 3 feet. So the new accessibility ramp is a welcome addition. Now they just need to finish that off with a final ramp that actually drops to beach level. Having recently watched a mother wheel her infant in a stroller down to the end of the new ramp, but having to carefully lower the stroller almost a foot down to the sand from the concrete deck, the need for that final ramp is clear. There is also still a bit of a storm water runoff problem from the road end down to the beach. However, it looks like these issues are gradually being addressed and it is nice to see Keewahdin Beach getting this much needed attention. The beach garden that Connie Neese made happen is really the floral crown of these improvements and I thank her for her work. As our capacity grows, the TLC hopes to take up the issue of increasing and improving Lake Huron access.

Conservation Easements

Have you thought about permanently protecting your woods, wetland, meadow, or restored backyard? For acreage, the easiest way is donating to a land conservancy, whether now or through a will or trust. Otherwise, you should consider placing a conservation easement on the land. In addition to the satisfaction of protecting it while you are here and after you are gone, there are potential tax benefits:

- 1) According to Michigan Public Act 446 of 2006, the property tax on land under a conservation easement does not come uncapped or "pop up" upon sale or transfer to a new owner. This is not only good for the new owner, but may benefit the current owner by making their property more attractive to potential buyers.
- 2) The local tax assessor may decrease the property tax on land under a conservation easement. There is no guarantee and this is highly variable from one municipality to another.
- 3) An owner who places a conservation easement on their land may claim a charitable donation for the value of the easement on their federal income tax statement. The potential benefit depends on the appraised value of the easement and whether the owner takes an itemized deduction. If so, a non-farm landowner can deduct up to 50% of their adjusted gross income for up to 15 years, or until the value of the conservancy easement has been fully deducted. Farmers can deduct 100% of the adjusted gross income for up to 15 years, or until the value of the conservation easement has been fully deducted.

As usual, we need to make clear that the TLC is not qualified to offer expert tax advice. Before making any conclusions, landowners are highly encouraged to consult with their own legal, financial, and tax advisors.

To answer some common questions about conservation easements: 1) Conservation easements do not give public access to private land, even though the legal agreement is called an "easement"; 2) Conservation easements do not give a conservancy ownership of the property; 3) Conservation easements do not restrict sale or other transfer of the land, but all future landowners must abide by the terms of the original easement; 4) Conservation easements do not need to cover an entire property; 5) Conservation easements are intended to protect land in perpetuity and can be removed only by a court order; 6) Conservation easements can be written to allow specific land uses and reasonable development of structures that are of minor impact that are compatible with the terms of the easement; 7) Land conservancies are required to inspect the conservation easement premises at least once per year; 8) Land conservancies are required to notify the landowner of violations of the terms of the conservation easement, require remediation of violations, and legally defend the easement in court if necessary; 9) The TLC requires some level of endowment funding to cover our annual inspection and reporting, and to potentially defend the easement in the future; and 10) Conservation easements can be placed on land under mortgage or other loan only if the lender agrees to subordinate their interest in the property to the conservation easement.

For more information about conservation easements, property donations, and other ways to protect land, contact us at 810-346-2584 or mail@ThumbLand.org.

Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta*

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

Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta* on the TLC Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville on June 26, 2024. Photograph by Bill Collins.

While trying to decide which plant I would be investigating next, my mother celebrated her 88th birthday! I remember as a child, Mom telling me her favorite flower was the Black-eyed Susan. I did a quick search to see if there are any health benefits to this lovely plant, and, you guessed it, there are! So, in honor of my mother, the Black-eyed Susan is the feature of this article. I hope you enjoy learning a bit more about this cheerful plant.

A little background about the Black-eyed Susan - *Rudbeckia hirta* which was named after botanist Olaf Rudbeck and his father Olaus Rudbeck who created Sweden's first botanical garden. This plant was made Maryland's State Flower in 1918 and inspired the school colors for the University of Southern Mississippi. *Rudbeckia hirta* has a long history of being used by Cherokee, Chippewa, Iroquois, Potawatomi, Shuswap, and Seminole peoples for parasitic infections in children (root tea and wash), sores (wash from root), earache (root sap or juice), venereal diseases, generalized swelling, snake bites (poultice of root and leaves), fever medicine, cold and flu remedy (root tea), sore eyes, headaches (cold infusion of flowers), fevers (cold infusion of flowers) and as a yellow dye for rushes used to make woven mats.

Very interesting indeed, but just who was Susan? Perhaps, Susan came from a poem by John Gay (1685-1732) titled "Sweet William's Farewell to Black-eyed Susan: A Ballad". Here is a link to the poem: <https://allpoetry.com/Sweet-William's-Farewell-to-Black-eyed-Susan-A-Ballad>. We will likely never know for certain but since I am a romantic at heart, I really like this theory!

Now on to business! *Rudbeckia hirta* is a member of the Asteraceae or Aster Family and is native to eastern and central North America and has been naturalized in western North America and China. The Black-eyed Susan prefers full sun and moderately dry soil. You can often spot her in prairies, meadows, fields, open deciduous woods, along roads and in ground that has been disturbed. This plant can be annual, biennial, or perennial depending on the habitat and genetic characteristics. It has a single taproot with upright stems that are covered by hair. Lance shaped leaves are alternate and mostly basal about 4 to 7 inches long, covered by hair and each with 3 prominent veins. Each stem has only one daisy like composite flower head that blooms from June to October. (Hmmm, maybe this is why Mother has an affinity for this flower since it is in bloom for her birthday?) Flowers are up to 4

inches in diameter with 10 to 20 beautiful yellow ray florets and a brown or black dome shaped cone in the middle which is made up of many small disc florets. Bracts are also covered with hair. This plant ranges in height from 12 to 39 inches and width from 12 to 18 inches. It is a drought tolerant plant and reproduces by seed only.

Black-eyed Susans are widely used in parks and gardens for aesthetic purposes and to control soil erosion. They are also a host for bordered patch, gorgone checkerspot and silvery checkerspot butterfly larva and provide shelter and food for some birds including goldfinches and house finches. Roots, leaves and flowers can be used to make teas, decoctions, extracts, poultices and washes to support health. Flowers and leaves should be harvested in the morning when in peak bloom and roots should be harvested after the plant has produced seeds by digging deep to get the entire taproot. Use the plant materials fresh, or dry them for later use.

There are over 250 constituents or chemical compounds in *Rudbeckia hirta* with the main categories of fatty acids, amino acids, organic acids, hydroxycinnamic acids, flavonoids, coumaric acid, and especially sesquiterpenes. For a complete list, please review the supplementary material for the article [Preliminary Phytochemical and Biological Evaluation of Rudbeckia hirta Flowers](#) (nlh.gov). Those constituents act on the body as thrombolytics (clot dissolving), antioxidants, analgesics (pain relieving), immune stimulant, anti-inflammatories, antifungals, anti-cancers. More specifically, they help with supporting the body when ailing with earaches, irritated skin, sores, cuts, scrapes, colds, flu, weakened immune system, parasite infections in children, fungal infections (especially candida parapsilosis), tuberculosis, gram positive and some gram negative bacterial infections, snake bites and generalized swelling. Research is also being done on the use of this plant for certain types of breast cancer.

Regarding safety with Black-eyed Susan, use it with caution if you have an autoimmune disease. Conflicting information abounds regarding toxicity to cats. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was contacted June 26, 2024 and they informed that the plant is NOT poisonous to cats but it may cause some GI upset.

Preparing Black-eyed Susan for use is actually quite simple. For an earache, you can use sap or juice from fresh roots and place 1 to 2 drops in the affected ear morning and night until completely recovered. A decoction of the root can be made with 1 cup of plant material to 1 pint of water, bringing it to a boil then reducing the heat and simmering for about 20 minutes and then straining out the plant material. Allow to cool a bit to use as a wash for skin ailments and swelling. The root decoction can also be drunk daily for weakened immune systems, colds and flu until symptoms are gone and for parasites in children. An extract of dried plant material (mostly root and leaves) and alcohol in a 1:20 ratio (or use your own folk method) can be used for tuberculosis, bacterial infections, fungal infections, generalized swelling and antioxidant activities. For snake bites, a poultice can be made of the leaves and/or root by macerating or blending it with just enough water to make a paste and then placing it on the affected area until the swelling is reduced.

As always, if using Black-eyed Susan as a supplement to your health, you should consult with your primary care provider because nothing in this article has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration. The above information is not intended to diagnose, treat, or cure any diseases, it is for informational purposes only.

My hope is that after reading this article you will have gained a new appreciation for Black-eyed Susans and their uses. Just a reminder if you do choose to harvest this plant, make sure to correctly identify it and that it is from a healthy stand. Only harvest about 1/3 of the stand. While it is so tempting to harvest from roadsides, it is really not a good idea due to possible contaminants from vehicles, potentially having been sprayed with chemicals from road workers or farmers, and your physical safety being close to traffic. You can take pictures of them or enjoy their simple beauty. I'd love to have a further conversation if you are interested. Stop by Amy's Relation to Creation & Botanicals, LLC in Marine City, Michigan and have a cup of tea and a conversation or just say "Hi". Thanks for reading and Happy Birthday Mom!

To see an extensive bibliography of references for Black-eyed Susan, see Amy's blog at: <https://amysrelationcreation.com/2024/06/27/black-eyed-susan-rudbeckia-hirta/>

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



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

For a schedule of events see: <https://amysrelationcreation.com/upcoming-events/>. Upcoming events include:

- Every Sunday, 9 am - Bible Study
- April 4 through December 31 - open late on Thursdays until 8 pm
- Third Thursday of every month - Sidewalk Sale

Prelude To The Afternoon Of A Catbird

By Bill Collins, TLC Executive Director



Gray Catbird along Huffman Drain Branch 9A, Marysville, 2007. Photograph by Bill Collins.

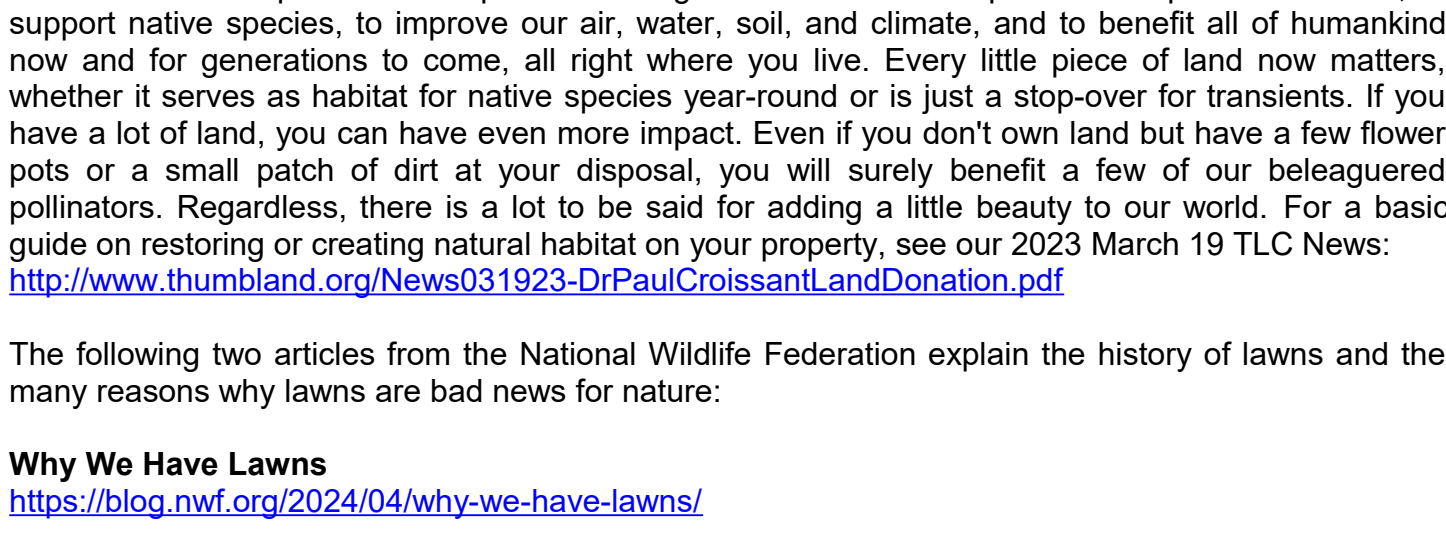
During my work as a wetland consultant, I would often find myself in an unbearably hot and humid summer afternoon flagging wetland boundaries way out in some nearly impenetrable tangle of shrubs and vines ... sweating profusely, out of drinking water, endless mosquitoes, tired, feet wet and hurting, tunneling through brush, tripping over everything, snapped in the face by branches, better yet if trying to move through Prickly-ash or Multiflora Rose, often walking through Poison Ivy, removing Wood Ticks from my neck, stung by Yellow Jackets a few times ... all while trying to discern a wetland boundary, collect plant, soil, and hydrology data, take photos, wondering how I'm going to make it a quarter or half-mile back through this stuff to the car, and questioning what I'm doing out there and whether anyone will really make use of my work. It can get very miserable.

But more than a few times, a little winged guardian who thrives in these tangled domains, came to keep me company and encourage me. It was the Gray Catbird. At first, maybe just 10 feet away, (it was hard to know in these dense thickets) the catbird would angrily interrogate me with little chirpy barks. Soon realizing I was in no condition to provide a reasoned account of myself, the catbird would then rebuke me with whining meows, imbued with hyperbole, expounding on the immense harm done to itself and others by my careless intrusion, and imploring me to leave by the shortest route. Its petitioning and pleading clearly ignored, the stalwart catbird would then sternly inform me that it would closely monitor my activities while escorting me out of its brushy home. About then, I would finally give in to its emotional appeal and reply in catbird language, informing my pesky host that I was sorry but must continue my work, hopefully for its own good if its shrub swamp was spared from development, and that I wanted to get out of there just as bad or more than it wanted me out. At once annoyed, but reluctantly acknowledging my predicament, the catbird's meows seemed to grow calmer and slightly amicable, maybe even sympathetic, as it accompanied me on my ridiculous path while holding an extended conversation. Seeing to it that I kept moving along and satisfied that it had completed its mission, the catbird would unceremoniously part ways as I emerged into the refreshing shade of an adjoining woods, or field where I could at least walk normally again, left alone to continue my silly wetland labors or stagger back to civilization. Thank you catbird.

The Gray Catbird

By Tom Dennis

Gray Catbird, *Dumetella carolinensis*



Gray Catbird along Huffman Drain Branch 1, Port Huron Township, Saint Clair County, 2007. Photograph by Bill Collins.

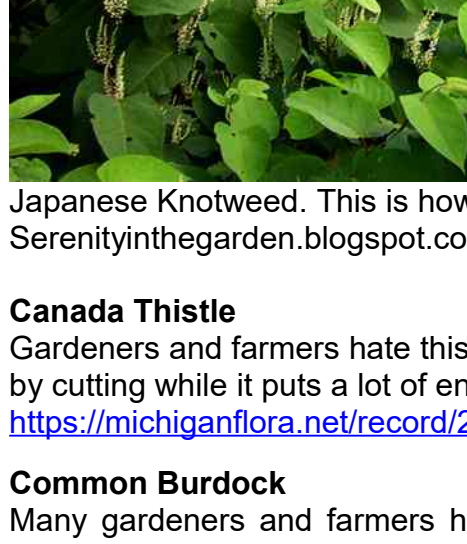
If you have thick shrubs in your yard or live near the edge of a wooded area, that slender gray bird that is eating the grape jelly that you meant for orioles is the beautiful and sleek Gray Catbird. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology says "If you're convinced you'll never be able to learn bird calls, start with the Gray Catbird. Once you've heard its catty meow you won't forget it." Let's take a close look at why this creature is a joy to have as a summer visitor.

The sexes are indistinguishable except by behavior during mating season. They are a handsome bird with a solid gray back and underparts with the exception of a bright rusty patch under the tail. The legs, bill, tail, and top of the head are black and their eye is dark red to gray-black in color. Their overall dimensions are reminiscent of a slim robin and they weigh in at an average of just under 1.5 ounces. They are short-distance migrators whose breeding range extends north only to the southern edges of Canada and as far west as the Rocky Mountains. They are year-round inhabitants along most of the Atlantic seaboard states and extend their winter range from there to the Gulf of Mexico shores of the U.S., Mexico, and Cuba.

Gray Catbirds are a member of the mimid family that includes thrashers and the well-known Northern Mockingbird. They copy the songs of many other birds including Blue Jays and Belted Kingfishers and also mimic tree frogs and mechanical sounds. They also have the ability, through the design of their amazing syrinx, to make two sounds simultaneously! The songs that they bring together incorporate their namesake cat mew and may last up to ten minutes. Unlike most songbirds that sing from a high and visible perch, the Gray Catbird prefers to sing from a secluded perch in a dense tree or shrub. Although they are shy in their art of singing, they are quite inquisitive and you can easily entice them to leave their thick cover to investigate if you make soft "pishing" sounds.

The genus name *Dumetella* is based on the Latin term dumus meaning "thorny thicket" and therefore means "small thornbush-dweller". These birds are most famous for eating fruits and berries but 50% of their diet is insects of which they consume a large variety. If you are fortunate enough to see one feeding on the ground you will notice that they toss leaves and other debris aside with the bill rather than scratching with their feet like many bird species. They nest in dense thickets close to the ground and they do a good job of recognizing their own eggs thus protecting their nests from brood parasites such as Brown-headed Cowbirds and cuckoos.

To attract Gray Catbirds, plant shrubs in your yard near deciduous trees. The best shrub choices are those with small fruit such as serviceberry, dogwood, and elderberry. They also need a steady diet of insects to feed their young and to meet their protein needs so... please avoid or strictly limit use of pesticides and as I've said before, let creation do the job of balancing nature.



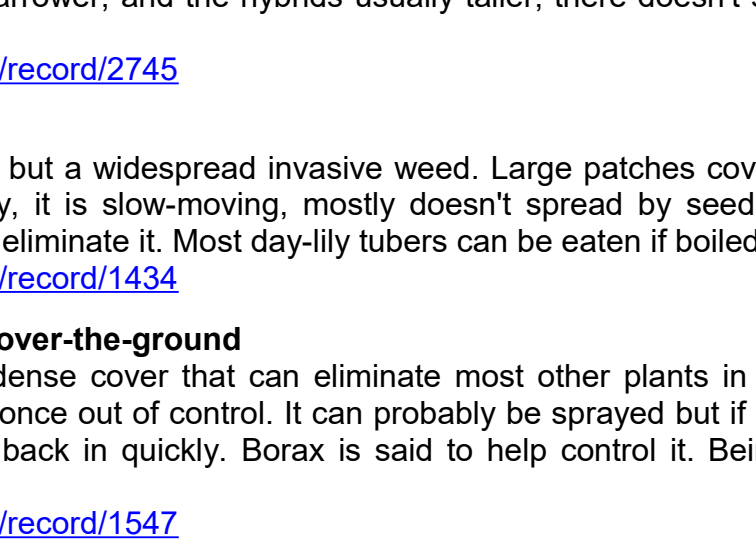
You can learn more about birds and nature by attending Blue Water Audubon meetings. Check the Blue Water Audubon Society Facebook page for the latest meeting details, local bird sightings, discussions, and events. Be sure to "friend" us!

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

You Got The Power In 2024

Save Nature Any Place! Sustain Animals & Plants!

In 2024, we are continuing to highlight restoration of natural habitat on private land, neighborhood efforts, and programs like Homegrown National Park, National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat, and the TLC Naturehood registry.



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

The following two articles from the National Wildlife Federation explain the history of lawns and the many reasons why lawns are bad news for nature:

[Why We Have Lawns](https://blog.nwf.org/2024/04/why-we-have-lawns/)
[Why We Shouldn't Have Lawns](https://blog.nwf.org/2024/04/why-we-shouldnt-have-lawns/)

Lawns are now estimated to cover about 40 million acres, or about 2% of the land area of the contiguous United States (lower 48 states); an area almost the size of Wisconsin. Lawn watering accounts for about 9 billion gallons of daily water use in the US during the growing season, or about 3% of the total daily freshwater use. Many tons of fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, pesticides, and other toxins are applied to lawns every year. A lot of this ends up running off into waterways or seeping down to ground water. In addition, it is estimated that about 17 million gallons of gasoline are spilled each summer while refueling garden and lawn-care equipment in the US. The nearly constant operation of lawn mowers, leaf blowers, and weed whips in suburban neighborhoods makes for a lot of exhaust emissions and noise pollution.

Not only are lawns bad for nature and peace-of-mind, but they are bad for most financial budgets. The US landscaping services market has been estimated to be as high as \$183 billion. Of this, it is estimated that nearly \$60 billion annually is spent in the US just on lawn care. To put these figures in perspective, the total US Department of Defense budget request for 2025 was about \$850 billion. So, the US is currently spending the equivalent of roughly 21% of our military defense budget on lawns and landscaping, and about 7% specifically on lawns. Average expenditure and time spent on lawn care by US households is variable according to different studies, but is about \$500 to \$600 per year and about 3 to 4 hours per week. Keep in-mind, this is average. Many people spend well over \$600 per year, especially when they buy a new mower. In Michigan, lawn care is limited largely to May through October, but is nearly year-round in southern states.

People are free to choose their priorities, but these figures on national and household lawn expenditures make it hard to take some complaints about inflation too seriously, especially seeing the huge areas that many residents are compelled to mow. These large properties would be better put into hay production and at least help serve some purpose. It could be argued that this spending is good for our economy because it generates employment, and that's a valid point. However, just because something makes money circulate, like the illegal drug trade, doesn't necessarily make it a good thing. Many people employed in lawn and landscaping could be far better employed in ecological restoration, if only the average person cared enough to want it. Our world needs that work far more than lawn care. We need to look beyond quantity of jobs and consider the quality and the significance of work to our world. There's lots of bad work out there that pays well, and a lot of good work that really needs to be done that few are doing.

None of this is intended to denigrate reasonable mowing. In fact, the TLC has the entrances of two of our preserves regularly mowed to improve public access and control some weeds. We simply want to discourage excessive mowing and encourage landowners to consider natural alternatives to manicured lawns that will help native plants and animals. Our thanks as always to Jack McLiver of Lighthouse Lawn Care in Fort Gratiot.

The Creeping Barberous Invasion Of Our Bittersweet Privetcy

Have you been thinking about invasive weeds lately? Probably not, but summer is a really good time to go out and destroy them if it's not 90-plus degrees. It seems there's no end to invasive weeds increasing in our region. One of our latest invasive nightmares is Oriental Bittersweet. There are parts of northern Oakland County, southern Lapeer County, and Macomb County, that are absolutely covered by these vines that eliminate nearly all other vegetation and pull down mature trees. The Port Huron State Game Area is increasingly full of bittersweet, spread by birds that move through the Black River valley. We rarely encountered bittersweet on sites until about 10 years ago, and now it's on nearly every site we look at.

Below are links to the most common and worst invasive weeds you are likely to encounter in our region, including natural areas and your yard. Many others could be added to this list, but they are generally not as widespread. These are some of the most ecologically and also economically damaging, and the most difficult to eradicate for different reasons. Some, like Oriental Bittersweet and Garlic Mustard, are fast-spreading and take over everything once established. Others, like Lily-of-the-valley and English Ivy, are slow-spreading, but very commonly planted and also eventually take over large areas. Others, like Siberian Elm and White Mulberry, spread far and wide by seed, and are difficult to control because they are fast-growing and develop tree roots after a few years that keep resprouting unless dug up. Others, like Japanese Knotweed and Creeping Charlie, are nearly impossible to eradicate without very serious and expensive efforts over several years.

Herbs

Garlic Mustard

All over southern Michigan. The TLC has been removing this weed from our Dead End Woods Sanctuary for 14 years. Moves around a lot, especially from people dumping their grass clippings into the edge of woods. The entire plant is edible and has a very nice garlic flavor.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/598>

Japanese Knotweed

Extremely hard to eradicate once established. Native to East Asia and thrives on the sides of active volcanoes, if that tells you anything. The smallest root pieces can resprout from deep underground years after the plant is dug up and fragments of the stems can also root. Widespread, especially in older suburban areas and ditch banks in the northeast US where it excludes nearly every other plant.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/2776>

Head-high Japanese Knotweed. This is how bad it gets. Do not plant this stuff! Photograph by Tom Heutte. Serenityinthegarden.blogspot.com

Canada Thistle

Gardeners and farmers hate this weed. Very aggressive in fields. Short of spraying, it can be set back by cutting while it puts a lot of energy into flowering.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/284>

Common Burdock

Many gardeners and farmers hate this weed too. Very persistent, but continued cutting can set it back. Otherwise, the roots can be dug up and are very tasty in spring and early summer, fried and lightly salted. A very medicinal plant also, used to heal burns and other skin issues.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/225>

Dame's Rocket

A persistent weed of old clearings, especially older residential areas. It can be set back by continued cutting or pulling, but otherwise, it takes over.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/655>

Wild Parsnip

This is a fast-spreading weed of ditches and old moist clearings. It produces so much seed that it requires continuous and early cutting or pulling to set it back. While the roots can be eaten like parsnip, the rest of the plant can cause severe blistering of skin, especially when combined with sun exposure.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/134>

Giant Ragweed

Considered a Michigan native, especially of river floodplains and open muck soils, but becomes invasive in many places where it would not otherwise naturally occur. The tall stems make good bean pots when still green. Apparently, Giant Ragweed pollen is responsible for most of the allergies blamed on goldenrods.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/1545>

Phragmites, Reed

You know this one from ditches and open wetlands everywhere. It eliminates almost all other plants. It can be eliminated by flooding for at least 2 to 3 years. Cutting or mowing prior to flooding helps. Otherwise, it almost always requires spraying of glyphosate. Where cat-tail is dominant, Phragmites is generally excluded, but don't count on that for too long.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/2184>

Reed Canary Grass

A common invasive grass of open wetlands or just moist ground that forms large patches that tend to eliminate most other plants. Early mowing can help set it back, but it usually requires spraying of glyphosate.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/2190>

Purple Loosetrife

Native to wetlands of Eurasia and now widespread in Michigan wetlands. Frequently spread by gardeners that like the bright purple flowers. It can exclude native plants in some settings, but it has spread by bird. One of our latest invasive nightmares is Oriental Bittersweet. There are parts of northern Oakland County, southern Lapeer County, and Macomb County, that are absolutely covered by these vines that eliminate nearly all other vegetation and pull down mature trees. The Port Huron State Game Area is increasingly full of bittersweet, spread by birds that move through the Black River valley. We rarely encountered bittersweet on sites until about 10 years ago, and now it's on nearly every site we look at.

Narrow-leaved Cat-tail

A Eurasian species that has gradually displaced and/or hybridized with our native Broad-leaved Cat-tail. Aside from being narrower, and the hybrids usually taller, there doesn't seem to be a significant detriment to wildlife.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/2745>

Day-lily

Very commonly planted. Slow-spreading but its dense cover eventually eliminates most other plants. Beautiful flowers and smell, but a very persistent invasive. Tarping or heavy mulching for a few years can help. Caution is suggested if hand-picking because the skin can absorb a powerful compound that can cause heart failure in some people. The plant is quite poisonous.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/828>

Japanese Spurge, Pachysandra

A popular ground cover planted by many residents. It is slow-spreading, but like other invasive weeds, will eventually dominate large areas.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/687>

Shrubs

Common Privet

Planted as a hedge all over. Long established in the dune and swale complex of Fort Gratiot, it covers nearly 100% of the understory in some areas. Spread by birds and mammals. Major cutting, digging, burning, and herbicide treatments are all required to eradicate privet across large areas.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/1139>

Common Privet in the dune and swale forest off Fort Gratiot. Large stems develop sharp spines and it covers huge areas. Eradicate privet wherever you find it! Photograph by Bill Collins.

Japanese Barberry

Widely planted ornamental shrub that dominates many woodlands, especially in Huron County where it forms nearly pure head-high stands in woodlands. Deer ticks are also hanging out on barberry. Spread by birds. The berries and plant are mildly toxic to humans but is medicinal.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/541>

Head-high Japanese Barberry covering a forest in Huron County. Don't plant this stuff! Photograph by Bill Collins.

Winged Euonymus

Widely planted ornamental shrub that forms dense patches in semi-wooded areas. Spread by birds. The berries and plant are mildly toxic to humans but also medicinal.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/803>

Multiflora Rose

Readily moves by bird into many different areas, from field to forest, and grows fast once established. The thorns are sharper and larger than cat claws. Forms impenetrable thickets after several years. We see it nearly everywhere. The fruit (rose hips) taste great in late October or early November.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/2543>

Common Buckthorn

A very persistent shrub or small tree that has taken over huge areas of the eastern US. Widely spread by bird. It forms dense stands that exclude most other plants. Continued cutting, burning, herbicide treatment, and digging are required to control it. The berries and plant are mildly toxic to humans, and as you may have read in our December 2023 news, causes blue pee.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/1214>

Glossy Buckthorn

A very persistent shrub of wetlands that has taken over huge areas across the eastern US. Widely spread by bird. It forms dense stands that exclude most other plants. Continued cutting, burning, herbicide treatment, and digging are required to control it. The berries and plant are mildly toxic to humans, and as you may have read in our December 2023 news, causes blue pee.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/2411>

Autumn-olive

A fast-spreading upland shrub of old fields, spread by bird. The berries are also edible for humans and taste pretty good. It forms dense stands that exclude many other plants. Continued cutting, burning, herbicide treatment, and digging are required to control it.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/1193>

Russian-olive

Very similar to Autumn-olive. A fast-spreading upland shrub of old fields, spread by bird. The berries are also edible for humans and taste pretty good. It forms dense stands that exclude many other plants. Continued cutting, burning, herbicide treatment, and digging are required to control it.
<https://michiganflora.net/record/1192>

Tartarian Honeysuckle (and other non-native honeysuckles)

A relatively fast-spreading upland shrub of old fields and woodlands that forms dense thickets that can exclude most other plants. Continued cutting, burning, herbicide treatment, pulling, and digging are required to control it. The berries and plant are mildly toxic to humans.

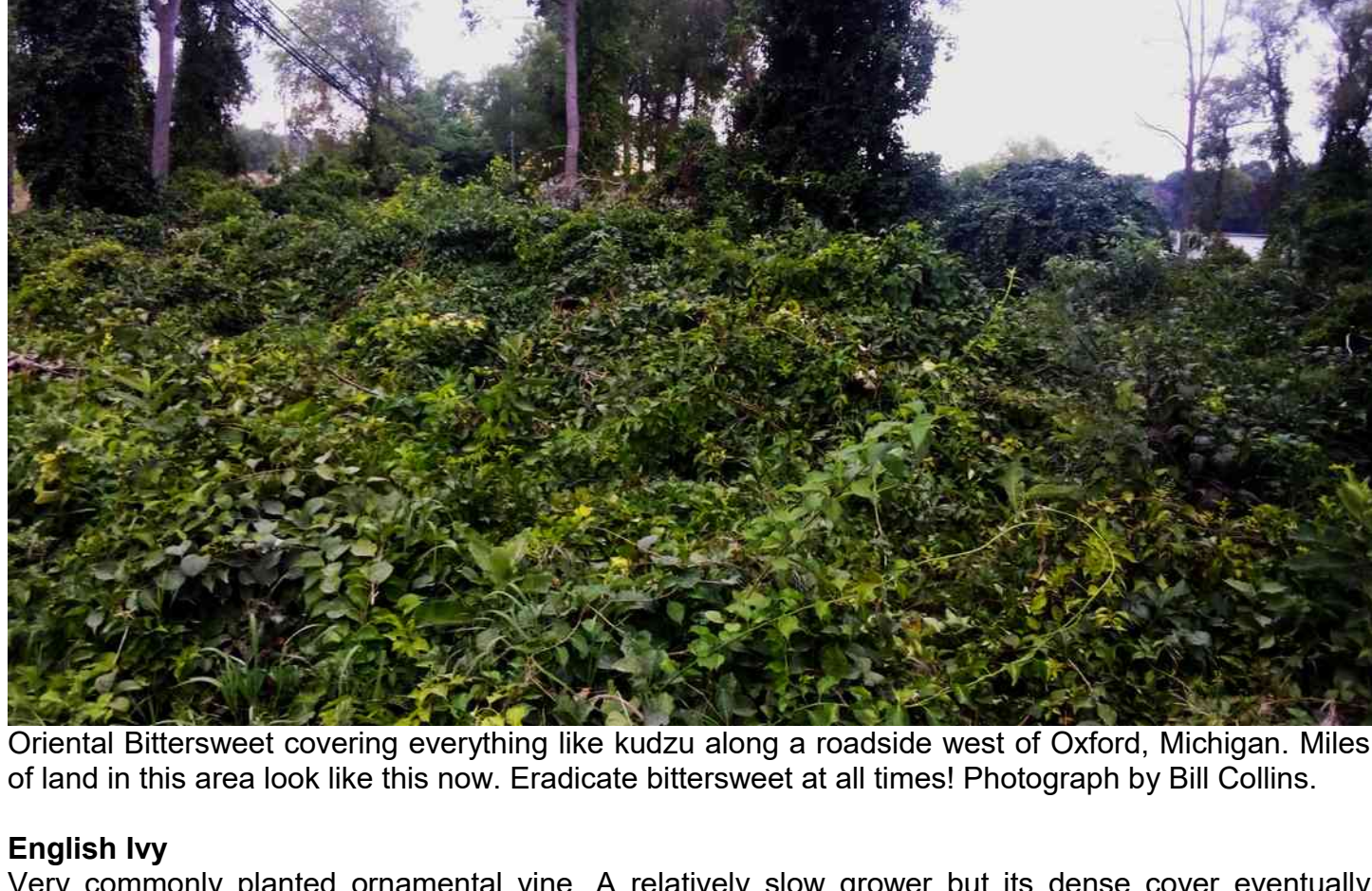
<https://michiganflora.net/record/727>

Vines

Oriental Bittersweet

An emerging disaster in the Thumb. A fast-growing vine that eventually covers everything and can even pull down mature trees. Spread by birds. The Port Huron State Game Area and Black River valley in general is increasingly full of it. Becoming widespread in the dune and swale complex along Lake Huron also.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/801>



Oriental Bittersweet covering everything like kudzu along a roadside west of Oxford, Michigan. Miles of land in this area look like this now. Eradicate bittersweet at all times! Photograph by Bill Collins.

English Ivy

Very commonly planted ornamental vine. A relatively slow grower but its dense cover eventually eliminates most other plants. Some people have an allergic reaction to it like Poison Ivy and it is slightly toxic if ingested. If planted along a property line or fence line, as many people do, it keeps spreading into adjoining properties which makes it a real pain.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/2903>

Periwinkle, Myrtle

Very commonly planted ground cover. A slow grower but its dense cover eventually eliminates most other plants. The plant is slightly toxic to humans.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/166>



A solid mat of Periwinkle in the Port Huron State Game Area along the old Ford Road trail. Do not plant Periwinkle please, unless it is very confined. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Trees

White Mulberry

Widespread, especially in older urban and suburban areas. Spread by birds into many different open and wooded areas. Berries are edible and quite tasty, but other parts of the tree are said to be mildly hallucinogenic.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/1702>

Siberian Elm

Widespread, especially in older urban and suburban areas. Easily spreads by blowing seeds and is fast-growing. The branches are very brittle and responsible for a lot of power outages.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/2750>

Black Walnut

Native to our region, but its natural range is mostly south of Michigan. It becomes a weed in most areas and difficult to get rid of because it's fast-growing and sets deep roots fairly quickly. Of course, the nuts are very edible and the tree is said to be medicinal.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/1496>

Black Locust

Similar to Black Walnut, Black Locust is native to North America, but its natural range is well south of Michigan, in the Appalachians, Ozarks, and southeast US in general. It is a real weed tree in our region. Patches of Black Locust exclude most other plants and spread quickly by suckers. There are a few patches on the west Shorewood Forrest parcels and several big patches on the sand ridges along M-25. The tree is toxic to humans except for the flowers and supposedly the seeds are edible if cooked. The seed pods are said to be quite poisonous.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/1343>



Dense growth of Black Locust suckers cover part of a sand ridge west of Shorewood Forrest in Fort Gratiot. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Callery Pear, Bradford Pear

This is an emerging super-weed tree that has taken over huge areas to the south and west of Michigan, especially along the east edge of the Great Plains. Very widely planted as a landscape tree over the past 30 to 40 years. It eventually excludes most other vegetation. The pear fruit is generally not edible or palatable. Callery Pear trees have invaded our Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/2531>

Tree-of-heaven (not)

Highly invasive, fast-spreading, and very fast-growing weed tree, especially in older urban and suburban areas. Easily spreads by blowing seeds. Colonizes along sides of buildings, cracks in sidewalks, and any other ground.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/2686>

Catalpa

A relatively fast-growing weed tree, but spreads more in response to disturbed or bare soils. Produces huge amounts of winged seeds that blow all over. Widely planted, especially in older urban and suburban areas and on old farmsteads. Parts of the tree range from mildly toxic to very poisonous.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/560>

Norway Maple (including dark red-leaved ornamental varieties)

Invasive in native woodlands and like other weed trees, a constant problem because it roots in flower beds and other garden areas.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/2652>

Box-elder

A relatively fast-growing weed tree, spread by winged seeds, often blown great distances on top of snow. Colonizes building edges, fields, and many other areas, especially in older urban and suburban areas and around old farmsteads. Like several other native trees, good in the right place, serving an important function in colonizing and reforesting cleared areas and river floodplains, but otherwise a weed.

<https://michiganflora.net/record/2649>

Noxious Weeds

Many of the "noxious weeds" listed in weed ordinances are not really that weedy in most areas. They simply spread rapidly in disturbed soil. Once the soil and vegetation stabilizes, many of these so-called weeds disappear after a few years. Otherwise, they are relatively easy to eliminate. This includes species like Wild Carrot, most of the mustard species (except Garlic Mustard), sow thistles, and Lesser Ragweed.

For more information, see the following links. There is not a real good central web site that covers Michigan invasive weeds and how to control them.

A Field Identification Guide to Invasive Plants in Michigan's Natural Communities

<https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/invasive-species/InvasivePlantsFieldGuide.pdf>

Michigan Invasive Plants

<https://www.michigan.gov/invasives/id-report/plants>

Michigan Invasive Species Program

<https://www.michigan.gov/invasives>

MISIN - Michigan Invasive Species

<https://www.misin.msu.edu/states/michigan/>

Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA)

<https://www.michiganinvasives.org/lakeclaircisma/>

TLC Summer Stewardship

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

Date	Activity	Location
June - August	park entrance and trail work	Bidwell Sanctuary
June - August	Black Locust removal	Croissant Sanctuary
June - August	entrance and trail work, prairie restoration	Loznak Sanctuary
June - August	invasive weed removal	Dead End Woods Sanctuary

Clyde Historical Society

The Clyde Historical Society meets on the third Thursday of each month. Their next meeting is July 18 at 6:30 pm at the historic Clyde Township Hall located at Wildcat Road and M-136. The Clyde Historical Society promotes history, education, and preservation in Clyde Township.

On August 18, the Clyde Historical Society will hold their annual Pie Social from 1 to 4 pm at the historic Clyde Township Hall. Enjoy an afternoon of learning local history of Clyde Township and our surrounding area. Plus enjoy some delicious pie.

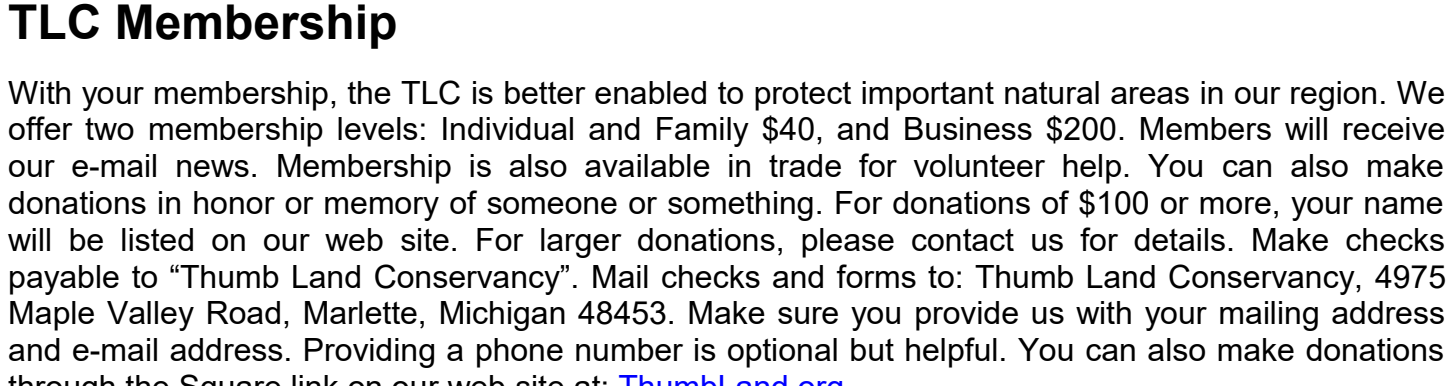
For more information, see the Clyde Historical Society Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481890455361159/>

GoodSearch.com

You can support the TLC or another charity every time you search the internet by using GoodSearch.com. When you create an account and sign-in, GoodSearch donates about one cent per search to a charitable cause of your choice. The web site is a little confusing because it is part of GoodShop.com, which is another way to raise donations for a charity. To sign up for GoodSearch, do the following:

- Go to GoodSearch.com
- At the upper right, click on "Sign Up".
- After signing-up, you should be directed to select a charity for donations.
- If you are not directed to charities, go to GoodSearch.com/Causes to search for and select a charity by alphabetical order.
- The TLC is listed at GoodShop.com/Nonprofit/Thumb-Land-Conservancy.



You need to stay signed-in when you search the internet in order to raise funds for your selected charity. GoodSearch uses the Yahoo search engine. The TLC has collected over \$100 in donations from searches by our members. At about one cent per search, it's a slow way to raise funds, but it adds up and the TLC can use all the help we can get to protect land.

TLC Membership

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

