

Thumb Land Conservancy NEWS

July 2, 2016

3 New Preserves in Saint Clair County

Last week was a very good week for nature protection in the Blue Water Area. Finally, I can tell you with almost 100% certainty that nearly 70 acres of land will be preserved on three sites in Saint Clair County as mitigation for permitted wetland impacts for a project of the Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner. The three new preserves include: 1) The 29.65-acre Marzolf Preserve north of Lapeer Road and west of Range Road in Kimball Township; 2) A 20-acre portion of the 160-acre Shorewood Forrest Preserve south of Brace Road and east of Parker Road in Fort Gratiot Township; and 3) The 19.49-acre Water Works Preserve west of M-25 between Metcalf Road and Brace Road in Fort Gratiot Township. In total, 36.31 acres of wetland are being preserved on 69.34 acres of land as mitigation for 4.47 acres of wetland impact in the Stocks Creek Drain Improvement Project in Kimball Township. None of the wetland to be impacted in the drain project is of high quality, much of it consisting of ditches and other areas that were dredged years ago. This is preservation that has been at least 5 years in the making. These are not TLC preserves, but it hardly matters. Preservation is preservation. However, the new Water Works Preserve will add 19.5 acres to the south end of our Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary, effectively increasing it to 31 acres. I hope to post more details on the TLC Blog soon.



Fort Gratiot Township



Kimball Township

Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary Addition

Saint Clair County removed the 0.23-acre parcel at the southeast corner of the Peltier Sanctuary from the tax sale auction coming up in August. Drain Commissioner Bob Wiley now owns the parcel and will transfer it to the TLC upon payment. Total due is \$1,795.00. We are

still about \$500 short of the total needed. Last I spoke with Bob, he said no rush, but we probably should finalize this soon. Thanks to those who have donated.



0.23-acre Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary addition.

Dead End Woods Garlic Mustard and Spikenard

On June 23 I ended up in Fort Gratiot and finished picking the remaining Garlic Mustard near the dead end of Wilson Drive, where we first started picking it about 6 years ago and likely where the invasion started in the Dead End Woods Sanctuary. Hopefully next year we will see almost none in this area. There was one spot further to the north that had a bunch of 1-year-old and maybe 2-year-old non-flowering plants covering about 100 square feet. I crawled and pulled all of it, obliterating all garlic Mustard in that spot. We have made tremendous progress and thanks to all of you who have helped. I was a little surprised to see that the seed pods were not as progressed in ripening as I thought they would be. Maybe a combination of our dry and somewhat cool weather so far. This means there is probably still time to pick Garlic Mustard without the seed pods breaking open. I brought all of it home, dried it in the back of a car, and partially burned it. I'll be burning the rest soon. I am saving the ash to send to a friend to use as pottery glaze. Did you know that various plant ashes have been used to glaze pottery for centuries? We'll see what Garlic Mustard does. Could be a new market.

While out in the Dead End Woods, I checked on the Spikenard – *Aralia racemosa* that Dan Rhein and I found back in 2008. There are still at least 2 large plants out there. We may want to do some seed collecting and minor habitat management to see if we can't encourage more of this rare but unprotected species. Spikenard has a coefficient of conservatism of 8, meaning that on a scale of 10, it scores quite high as a species associated with our original native plant communities that existed prior to European settlement.

<http://michiganflora.net/species.aspx?id=187>



TLC Board Member Dan Rhein and Spikenard in 2008.

Genesee County Water Line

As some of you know, I've worked on parts of the new Genesee County Karegnondi Water Line, on and off for the past four years as a wetland and ecological consultant to the engineers on a few sections in Lapeer County, Genesee County, and the Lake Huron intake facility at Fisher Road and M-25 in Sanilac County. Last week, the MDEQ issued a permit for the final Lapeer and Genesee sections. I am happy to say that the final approved route avoids significant impact to natural areas over the roughly 18 miles I worked on in Lapeer and Genesee Counties. The Lake Huron intake facility also avoided any significant impacts. I was especially concerned about an earlier proposed route through the Hogsback Area of the Genesee County Holloway Reservoir Park along the border of Lapeer and Genesee Counties, south of Columbiaville.

Thankfully, that route was abandoned. It would have impacted a high quality natural area of old-growth Beech – Sugar Maple forest, mature southern swamp, a nice ravine and stream valley with uncommon ferns, and the very unique Hogsback Ridge, an unusual forested glacial end moraine, esker, or similar ice-contact feature with strange oblong pits running the length, possibly resulting from high volumes of water flowing around embedded ice chunks at the edge or even under the last melting glacier.

I was first told about the “Hogsback” by an old woman that owns the Tepee Gift Shop about 2 miles northeast and I wanted to see it from that moment. It was my fortune, in a way, that a few months later I was told that I needed to walk over the Hogsback to inspect a possible water line route. Cheryl and I spent a few days out there last summer. I highly suggest you visit the Hogsback and vicinity if you ever get a chance. I know at least one other person reading this, besides Cheryl, knows the area very well. For us in southeast Michigan, it looks more like Kentucky or Tennessee out there. The Hogsback even has a bit of a spooky feel to it. Think that old Fleetwood Mac song “Hypnotized”. The easiest way to get there is to park at the end of Coldwater Road west of Hasler Creek, in Genesee County, and walk down the old road ROW, over a small bridge over Hasler Creek, then turn right or southeast and walk up on the ridge. At that point, you are on the northwest part of the Hogsback. Keep walking on top to the southeast, along the west side of the lake, and you will see the strange oblong pits that I described. Otherwise, for a longer walk, park at the west end of Coldwater Road in the park on the Lapeer County side and walk west on the old road ROW until you get to the same ridge above Hasler Creek along the west side of the lake. That is the same place where you would walk in from the Genesee County side. From there you can continue walking on the ridge for about a half-mile southeast before it ends.

I am fully aware that the Genesee County Water Line is a controversial project. However, my role in this and other projects is to minimize the ecological impact while trying to help the client avoid as much trouble as possible. If I had not worked on this project, there are many other consultants that would have gladly done it, and most of them really don't care much about what is impacted. They mostly care about money and getting the next big project.



Topographic map showing the Hogsback extending northwest to southeast. Notice the strange oblong pits.
The red line was a proposed water line route. The blue triangle is a big sledding hill at the end of Washburn Road.



A pit on the Hogsback.



Maidenhair Fern and Skunk-cabbage along the upper edge of wetland at the base of the Hogsback.



Ravine south of the Hogsback area.

Bill

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