



**October 15, 2019**

**William Collins, Executive Director  
Thumb Land Conservancy**

This summer was exceptionally busy for the TLC with new land protection and other work on the horizon. At the same time, it deeply pains me to report that, at this point, 2019 will go down as the year we lost Silver Trails Scout Reservation. For anyone that has ever visited Silver Trails, and especially walked through the forest north of Silver Creek, this is a place that should never have been lost. The greed and apathy that led to this is nothing but disgusting, and that's about all I want to say for now.

### **TLC Q3 Board Meeting**

The TLC held our third quarter board meeting on September 19 at the home of board member Dorothy Craig in Fort Gratiot, next to our Dead End Woods Sanctuary. Dottie is a wonderful hostess and we always enjoy watching the parade of wildlife in her backyard.

Our special guests were Bob and Pam Haas from Grant Township in Saint Clair County. Bob and Pam have been active in the Blue Water Audubon Society for many years and we have recently worked together in our shared opposition to the sale of Silver Trails Scout Reservation. Bob is retired from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and is an expert on the Black River. In addition, he has been conducting a butterfly and moth survey for at least a few years now and he shared some of his findings with us. We are very fortunate to have Bob and Pam in our midst.

### **Second Annual TLC Yard Sale Yale Bologna Festival**

The TLC held 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 in Yale. Thanks to the generosity of donors and hard work of our board members, we raised \$475 which helped us eliminate our general fund deficit. If you want to donate any sale items for next year, please contact us to make arrangements.

### **Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park**

## Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County

The TLC is continuing fundraising efforts to purchase the 42-acre Bidwell Trust property in Burtchville Township, a critical addition to the future Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. As mentioned in our previous news update, we will receive a \$150,000 matching grant from the Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, which will fund half the project cost. We began applying for grant funding back in January of this year, and later updated the applications based on our late May purchase agreement. We applied to several other foundations through the summer, some of whom we have met with and others we are still awaiting a response from as some do not make funding decisions until the last quarter of the year.

1 Mehta Preserve  
2 Fort Gratiot County Park  
3 MNA Galbraith Preserve  
4 TLC Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary  
5 St. Clair County Drain Commissioner Water Works Preserve  
6 Blue Water Development Preserve  
7 St. Clair County Drain Commissioner Shorewood Forrest Preserve  
8 St. Clair County Drain Commissioner Shorewood Forrest Preserve  
9 Shorewood Forrest Preserves (3)  
10 Presbyterian Villages Lake Huron Woods Preserve  
11 Fort Gratiot Nature Park

**SOUTHERN LAKE HURON COASTAL PARK**

**Lake Huron**

**Bidwell Preserve**

*The future Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park is located on an ancient coastal landscape of parallel beach ridges and wetland swales with rare species unique to the Blue Water Area.*

*The coastal forest is vital for migratory birds that move and nest along Lake Huron.*

*When completed, the park will feature a nearly 4 mile trail.*

**Thumb Land Conservancy**  
**42-Acre Bidwell Preserve Acquisition**  
Part of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park  
Connecting Fort Gratiot to Lakeport State Park

**Thumb Land Conservancy**  
ThumbLand.org • 810-346-2584 • mail@ThumbLand.org

Our sincere thanks again to the Carls Foundation for sharing our vision of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. The Carls Foundation was established in 1961 to fund children's welfare and preservation of natural areas. Certainly, the SLHCP project will fulfill both of these objectives. 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/> .

The Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner recently acquired a 60-acre parcel just a few hundred feet northwest of the Bidwell Property, located in the same beach ridge and swale complex. Roughly half of the parcel being wetland, the Drain Commissioner plans to preserve the land under a conservation easement as mitigation for impacts to State-regulated wetland necessary for county drain projects. The TLC will likely assist in the planning and stewardship of this property. We have also had favorable discussions about establishing a trail through the property that would eventually connect with a larger trail to the south. This 60-acre addition will extend the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park almost to Norman Road, only about a half-mile south of Lakeport State Park.

We are also now talking with Fort Gratiot on how best to complete the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park and trail through the Township. The new Township Supervisor, Rob Crawford, is interested in the project and understands the potential benefits to the community.

## **New Bertha's Haven Sanctuary Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County**

The Michigan Nature Association (<https://michigannature.org/>) approached the TLC a few years ago about taking ownership of their Galbraith Plant Preserve which is located only about 150 feet north of our Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary, in the same beach ridge and swale landscape along Lake Huron in Fort Gratiot. The Galbraith Plant Preserve is only 0.62 acre and we have been watching over it when we go out to the Peltier Sanctuary, so we agreed to accept it. The deed was finalized a few weeks ago and we now officially own the preserve.



Our new Bertha's Haven Sanctuary shown in orange boundaries just north of our Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary.

MNA founder and director, Bertha Daubendiek, established this preserve back in 1972 as a spot to transplant native wildflowers that were located on the adjacent Detroit Water Board property before they developed the Lake Huron water intake facility. Most of the TLC board knew Bertha Daubendiek as she lived in Saint Clair County for many years and we were all active in local environmental issues. In 1990, Bertha even walked with me from Metcalf Road to show me the plant preserve. She relied on two walking canes at that time and it was quite an effort for her. The preserve is small, but any little piece of nature that could be protected was important to Bertha.

The TLC wanted to rename the preserve in honor of Bertha, but at the same time, avoid confusion with the MNA's Bertha A. Daubendiek Plant Preserve in Columbus Township. Therefore, we chose the name, "Bertha's Haven", borrowing part of an older name for the preserve. We are not planning to run a trail through this very small sanctuary, but it will eventually be included within the boundaries of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. Thank you to the Michigan Nature Association for this little gift - Bertha's Haven Sanctuary.

## Loznak Property City of Marysville

Our attorney, Tim Lozen of Lozen and Kovar, PC in Port Huron (<http://www.lozenlaw.com/>) also approached us a few years ago about accepting donation of 11.5 acres adjacent to an industrial area along Wills Street in Marysville, east of Busha Highway. We were initially not enthusiastic about the land because, based on aerial photographs, it appeared to be very low quality due to previous disturbance. However, upon walking the site, to our surprise, it is a fairly nice recovering natural area with elements of lakeplain prairie and patches of young forest full of Paper Birch saplings and other native vegetation.



Oblique view of the Loznak property donation in yellow boundaries.

These days, every scrap of natural area is significant, but it was a question of how much liability the TLC should take on for this particular land with an industrial history. In this case, the property has a few things going in our favor. It is adjacent to the old Port Huron and Detroit Railroad line which has some historical interest. The Wills Sainte Claire Auto Museum is only a few hundred feet north of the property also. We are hoping to partner with a historical group who might eventually own the property. It is also adjacent to an approximately 26-acre natural area of unique

forested ridge and swale landscape which has an interesting alluvial origin along the Saint Clair River dating back almost 5,000 years ago. Eventually, the TLC could partner with a few groups to create a combined historical and natural park.

## **Springborn Wetland Mitigation Bank East China Township, Saint Clair County**

The TLC began limited stewardship this summer on the 27-acre Springborn Wetland Mitigation Bank just north of Marine City. As with the Deerfield Wind Energy wetland mitigation site near Port Hope in Huron County, the Springborn project came to us from Bourke Thomas of Atwell, a large engineering and environmental consulting firm (<https://www.atwell-group.com/>). The TLC has provided contract stewardship for several sites with existing wetland preserved as mitigation for State-permitted wetland impacts. The Springborn Wetland Mitigation Bank is essentially the first constructed and restored wetland that we have worked on as a conservancy. However, as a private wetland consultant, I have worked on many constructed or restored wetlands, including design, planting, management, and monitoring.



View east across the Springborn Wetland Mitigation Bank.

First, we inspected the site to identify and prioritize stewardship issues. Apart from the need for further surface hydrology development, as usual, the biggest concern is invasive weeds, particularly Reed – *Phragmites australis* and Reed Canary Grass – *Phalaris arundinacea*. We photographed the site and made a cursory inventory of the vegetation to document native plants present and what planted species were successful. In cooperation with the mitigation bank owner, we asked Bob Bryson of Great Lakes Phragmites Cutter and Champion Marine Services (<http://greatlakesphragmitescutter.com/>) to spray the Phragmites patches with glyphosate in early September. At this point, Bob will be back out to spray the Reed Canary Grass in the spring. The TLC is also planning limited burning in the early spring. Invasive weed control alone is likely to keep us busy on this site for the next few years. Protection of the thousands of planted tree seedlings across the site will also require a lot of work. At some point, we may start limited seeding and transplanting of locally endemic native plants to enhance the wetland.

## **New Conservation Easement Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County**

If all goes well, the TLC will soon place and hold a conservation easement on about 80 acres of forested wetland and upland complex in Fort Gratiot Township. This will not only protect a large area of relatively non-fragmented forest, but allow the new owner of the land to afford the property taxes. The forest is a mix of southern swamp and small scattered upland knolls with northern plant species, all on seasonally inundated to moist sandy soils. This sort of southern-meets-northern forest is characteristic of the Blue Water Area, where nearby Lake Huron maintains cooler summers and warmer winters. Vegetation includes Red Maple, Red Oak, Paper Birch, Sassafras, Tuliptree, Witch-hazel, Spicebush, Red Trillium, Yellow Trout-lily, and many other species.

The Fort Gratiot Township Assessor contacted us in late August explaining the dilemma. The prospective landowner really wanted to buy the land and develop only a small portion as a residence, but upon sale, the property taxes would increase significantly and make the land unaffordable. The assessor wondered if we could delineate the wetland across the property and the taxes could be reduced on that basis. I explained that would be a fairly costly proposition and then there is no guarantee that the wetlands will remain protected in trade for a tax break. Instead, I suggested that we put a conservation easement on that part of the land that will remain undeveloped, giving the Township a legal guarantee that the land will remain protected in perpetuity. The assessor and the buyer like this idea, so we should be drafting the new easement soon.

Granted, not many assessors are this agreeable to reducing property taxes, so if you consider a conservation easement, you should consult with your local assessor if you are anticipating any tax abatement. Otherwise, a conservation easement is one of the few ways that you can legally protect your land in perpetuity, basically as long as our legal system supports such easements. With a good land conservancy holding the easement, you can be assured that your property will remain protected no matter the future ownership. Conservation easements, despite being called “easements” do not allow public access. A conservation easement is simply a legal agreement between a landowner and a conservancy or similar conservation group or agency. Most easements can be customized to allow uses that you and the conservancy agree upon. While most conservation easements are written to preserve natural areas and allow for passive uses and minor impacts such as trails, firewood cutting, and hunting, many easements also allow for farming or limited structural expansion.

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

## **Deerfield Wind Energy Preserve Stewardship Huron Township, Huron County**

Cutting and burning of invasive Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose continued at the Deerfield Preserve through the spring and early summer. We will be increasing our work before winter sets in. At this point, we are ahead of the barberry and most of the larger plants across the east half of the preserve will soon be eliminated. Please contact us if you are interested in helping.



Deerfield Wind Energy Preserve shown in May of this year with virtually no Japanese Barberry where it was very dense prior to our work.



## **Historic North Street Station Clyde Township, Saint Clair County**

Clean-up and maintenance of the building and yard continued this summer. We will have a few more work days this fall. Please contact us if you are interested in helping.

## **Silver Trails Scout Reservation Grant Township, Saint Clair County**

On September 16, Silver Trails Scout Reservation was sold to AMC Mid Michigan Materials. Now this great camp is at their mercy. In a media statement, Rob Wilson, Vice President of AMC MMM said their "... next steps would include discussions with local governments and conservancies". Note that "conservancies" is plural. Since that time, the Wilson's have allegedly said that they have no intention of dealing with the TLC. So beyond Six Rivers Land Conservancy based in Oakland County, what "conservancies" they intend to hold discussions with is unclear. My impression from a discussion with Bill Deater, Supervisor of Grant Township, is that AMC MMM is not going to discuss Silver Trails any time soon as they supposedly are not planning to "do anything" with the camp until 2021. Well, based on their previous statements, the real truth is elusive and yet to be seen. Rob Wilson also said in his media statement that, "Our intention is always to preserve the best assets of our community." What really does that mean when a gravel company buys one of the best natural areas in the region with the intention of mining it?



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

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, Dan Beard, 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. Southeast of the plateau was an old campsite named Baden Powell where we ventured once in a while, and up on top was another old campsite named Voyageur. 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.



Dedication ceremony of the Rotary Lodge and Silver Trails Scout Reservation on June 20, 1948. Assembly of speakers and musicians on the north porch of the Rotary Lodge.



Dedication ceremony of the Rotary Lodge and Silver Trails Scout Reservation on June 20, 1948. Gathering of Scouts and public north of the Rotary Lodge.



Dedication ceremony of the Rotary Lodge and Silver Trails Scout Reservation on June 20, 1948. Flag raising north of the Rotary Lodge, overlooking the Silver Creek valley to the northwest.

Grant Township 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. If AMC Mid Michigan Materials really cares about “the best assets of our community” they will give Grant Township the opportunity to buy Silver Trails. For more information about Silver Trails and what you can do to help, please see: <http://SaveSilverTrails.info> . Please contact the Thumb Land Conservancy office at 810-346-2584.

## Ecology News

The Ecology News is still 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.

### **3,000,000,000 North American Birds Gone Since 1970**

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/09/three-billion-north-american-birds-have-vanished-1970-surveys-show>

Three billion, or nearly 30% of North American birds have been lost since 1970 due to habitat loss and other factors. Grassland birds have been hardest hit, with a loss of 53% across 31 species. Even common species like sparrows and blackbirds, and introduced species like starlings and house sparrows, have declined. While the causes of this massive decline have not been exactly determined, surely habitat loss due to expanding development and agriculture has been a major factor. The decline in grassland birds in particular seems to point to agriculture. Just consider that there are now about 250 million more people in North America than in 1970, the population having nearly doubled. Also, agriculture has generally shifted to more intensive cropping and away from more compatible uses such as pasture and hay fields. To make things worse, agriculture has greatly expanded in South America, particularly in Brazil, where many bird species over-winter. So this huge loss of birds should really be no surprise.

### **Trump's New Rules Aren't The Greatest Threat To Endangered Species**

<http://suindependent.com/trumps-new-rules-arent-greatest-threat-endangered-species/>

I won't vouch for this web site because some of the content appears to be on the edge of being offensive. However, I found that this particular author plainly says what needs to be said. Most people are not willing to acknowledge that massive habitat loss due to constant human population growth is far and away, the single most important cause of disappearing wildlife. Other factors are important, but focusing on them is kind of like arranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Rather than all of North America, this author's focus is on the US and immigration. In 1970, the US population was just over 200 million and now it is at nearly 330 million. Each American consumer accounts for the loss of about a half acre of land on average. Between 2001 and 2017, more than 24 million acres of natural lands were permanently modified or lost to development. This is the equivalent to the loss of about nine Grand Canyons, 10 Yellowstones, or 49 Great Smoky Mountain National Parks in just 16 years.

### **Leave the Leaves**

<https://www.nwf.org/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2019/09-25-19-Leave-the-Leaves>

As usual, all the bad news is bewildering, which is an ironic choice of words if you think about it. So what can the average person do to help? Here's one very simple thing, and instead of more work, it will create much less work for you. Leave your leaves! Don't rake ... if you can get away with it. Obviously, North America was not raked before our ancestors arrived, and there's no need to do it now. Natural lawns or flower beds or gardens or wooded areas will only benefit from leaving your leaves. Leaves create natural mulch that builds the topsoil, adds nutrients, improves percolation, and helps suppress weeds. Leaves provide wildlife habitat for all kinds of animals, especially small invertebrate creatures that are the basis of the food chain for so many birds. Insect larvae, slugs, snails, sow bugs, centipedes, and all kinds of little creatures live and over-

winter in fallen leaves. Leaves provide food, cover, and nesting material. They provide a growing medium for all kinds of fungus. They sequester and store carbon. They smell good and look beautiful. If nothing else, you can use them to mulch your garden. If I thought it would all be clean with no Tree-of-heaven seeds, I'd love to have people drop off piles of leaves in our garden to compost. Leave the leaves!

## **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.

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