

Thumb Land Conservancy News

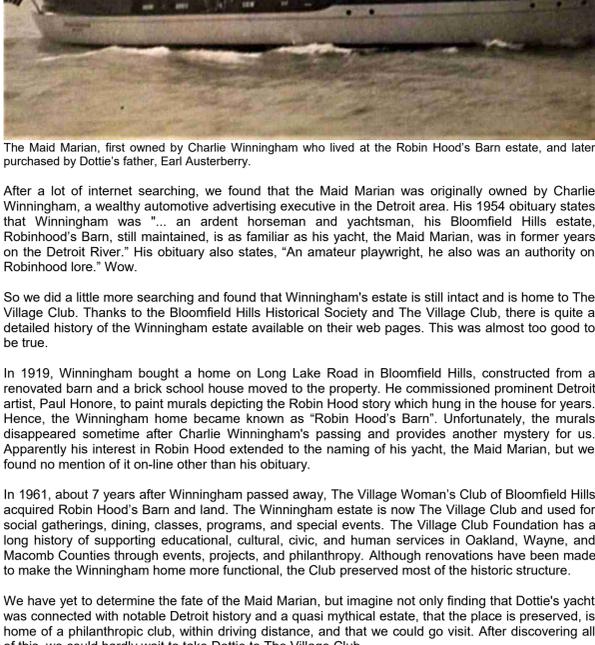
2022 November 13

Dottie's Day

The Village Club, Bloomfield Hills

October 13 was a very special day for our Senior TLC Board Member, Dottie Craig, now in her 91st year. We took her to The Village Club in Bloomfield Hills, home of The Village Club Foundation and a historic residence with a fascinating connection to Dottie's family.

A few years ago, Dottie showed us old photographs of her childhood home on Grosse Isle and the yacht her family owned named the "Maid Marian". Dottie and her family loved cruising the yacht on the Detroit River, Lake Erie, Lake Saint Clair, and Lake Huron, at least once making a voyage up to the Georgian Bay. She even had a little toy boat they towed behind the Maid Marian, hand-made especially for Dottie by a ship captain. Her father later sold the Maid Marian and she often wondered what happened to it.



The Maid Marian, first owned by Charlie Winningham who lived at the Robin Hood's Barn estate, and later purchased by Dottie's father, Earl Austerberry.

After a lot of internet searching, we found that the Maid Marian was originally owned by Charlie Winningham, a wealthy automotive advertising executive in the Detroit area. His 1954 obituary states that Winningham was "... an ardent horseman and yachtsman, his Bloomfield Hills estate, Robinhood's Barn, still maintained, is as familiar as his yacht, the Maid Marian, was in former years on the Detroit River." His obituary also states, "An amateur playwright, he also was an authority on Robinhood lore." Wow.

So we did a little more searching and found that Winningham's estate is still intact and is home to The Village Club. Thanks to the Bloomfield Hills Historical Society and The Village Club, there is quite a detailed history of the Winningham estate available on their web pages. This was almost too good to be true.

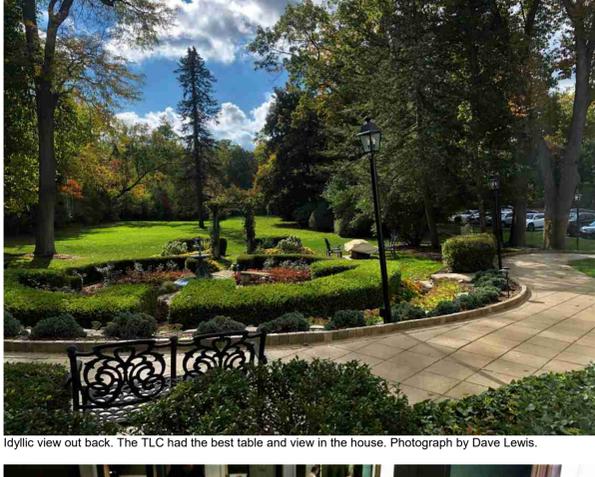
In 1919, Winningham bought a home on Long Lake Road in Bloomfield Hills, constructed from a renovated barn and a brick school house moved to the property. He commissioned prominent Detroit artist, Paul Honore, to paint murals depicting the Robin Hood story which hung in the house for years. Hence, the Winningham home became known as "Robin Hood's Barn". Unfortunately, the murals disappeared sometime after Charlie Winningham's passing and provides another mystery for us. Apparently his interest in Robin Hood extended to the naming of his yacht, the Maid Marian, but we found no mention of it on-line other than his obituary.

In 1961, about 7 years after Winningham passed away, The Village Woman's Club of Bloomfield Hills acquired Robin Hood's Barn and land. The Winningham estate is now The Village Club and used for social gatherings, dining, classes, programs, and special events. The Village Club Foundation has a long history of supporting educational, cultural, civic, and human services in Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb Counties through events, projects, and philanthropy. Although renovations have been made to make the Winningham home more functional, the Club preserved most of the historic structure.

We have yet to determine the fate of the Maid Marian, but imagine not only finding that Dottie's yacht was connected with notable Detroit history and a quasi mythical estate, that the place is preserved, is home of a philanthropic club, within driving distance, and that we could go visit. After discovering all of this, we could hardly wait to take Dottie to The Village Club.

COVID and other issues delayed our plans for almost two years. Finally, this summer, it looked like it was time to plan our trip. Several months back, we contacted The Village Club and the Bloomfield Historical Society, not knowing what reception we would get. After all, Dottie's family merely owned Charlie Winningham's old boat. Thankfully, they were eager to have Dottie share her memories of the Maid Marian at The Village Club and we began coordinating our visit.

Our contingent included of course TLC Board Member Dottie Craig, TLC President Cheryl Collins, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, and Bill's long-time friend and TLC Member Dave Lewis, who grew up in Bloomfield Hills. We arrived just before 11:00 am and were given a tour of the Club by the two Co-Historians, Linda Wilson and Linda Lang. It probably took a while for us to realize we were finally at Robin Hood's Barn and that it was happening.



The Living Room where the Robin Hood murals once hung. The wood beams are part of the original barn. Photograph by Dave Lewis.

We then had lunch at the best table in the Club, next to the patio windows with a very nice view of the grounds outside. The TLC even had our own name sign on the table with an autumn harvest centerpiece of colorful flowers and squash. Joining us at our table were The Village Club President Susan Sweeney, The Village Club Foundation President Laura Lee Kelsey, and the two Co-Historians, Linda Wilson and Linda Lang. The officers and managers of The Village Club were great hosts with attention to detail that made us feel very welcome. It was nice to get to know everyone and share our experiences in running our organizations.



This table with our own sign and the fall harvest display was very nice. Photograph by Dave Lewis.



Idyllic view out back. The TLC had the best table and view in the house. Photograph by Dave Lewis.

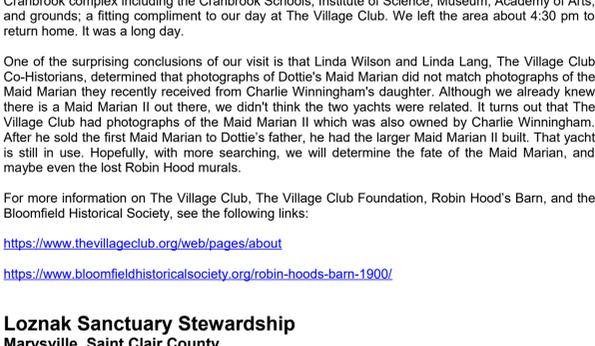


Left to right: TLC President Cheryl Collins, TLC Board Member Dottie Craig, The Village Club President Susan Sweeney, The Village Club Foundation President Laura Lee Kelsey, and TLC Member Dave Lewis. Photograph by Bill Collins.



Left to right: The Village Club Foundation President Laura Lee Kelsey, The Village Club Co-Historian Linda Wilson, The Village Club Co-Historian Linda Lang, and TLC Member Dave Lewis. Photograph by Bill Collins.

After lunch we continued our tour of The Village Club and then returned to the cozy living area next to the lit fireplace, the same room where the long lost Robin Hood murals once hung. Around us were the exposed wooden beams of the original barn that was converted into the Winningham home. Dottie shared her memories of the Maid Marian, the crew, and her family. We presented The Village Club with color copies and enlargements of Dottie's many photos. All of this was video recorded by the Club manager.



Left to right: TLC Member Dave Lewis, The Village Club Manager Stan Pena, The Village Club Co-Historian Linda Lang, and TLC Board Member Dottie Craig in front of the bar in the President's Lounge. Linda explained that during prohibition, the bar was concealed behind panels. Photograph by Bill Collins.



The Village Club Co-Historian Linda Lang and TLC Board Member Dottie Craig in the Winningham Room. Photograph by Bill Collins.



Group photo in Living Room. Back row left to right: TVCF President Susan Sweeney, TLC President Cheryl Collins, TVC Co-Historian Linda Wilson, TVCF President Laura Lee Kelsey, and TVC Co-Historian Linda Lang. Front row left to right: TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC Board Member Dottie Craig, and Dave Lewis, TLC Member and friend of Bill Collins. Photograph by TLC Membership and Communications Administrator Kim Stranraite.

Afterwards, we toured other parts of the Club, including the foyer and library, which appear much as they did when the Winningham's lived there. Co-Historian Linda Lang drew our attention to the tile in the foyer, which was made by the Moravian Tile Company in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. In the library, the plaster ceiling and sconces were created during the Arts and Crafts Movement in Detroit and research is ongoing regarding specific artisans.

Upon our departure, we were each given a gift bag including a hardcover cookbook entitled, *Popovers to Panache: Good With A Flair From The Village Club*. Thank you once again to The Village Club for being such good hosts. Co-Historian Linda Wilson did a great job of coordinating this event. As an interesting side note, Linda Wilson's family once owned WPHM radio station in Port Huron and lived in Fort Gratiot, so we have a Thumb connection.

After we left The Village Club about 3:00 pm. Dave Lewis guided us on a driving tour of the nearby Cranbrook complex including the Cranbrook Schools, Institute of Science, Museum, Academy of Arts, and grounds; a fitting compliment to our day at The Village Club. We left the area about 4:30 pm to return home. It was a long day.

One of the surprising conclusions of our visit is that Linda Wilson and Linda Lang, The Village Club Co-Historians, determined that photographs of Dottie's Maid Marian did not match photographs of the Maid Marian II out there, we didn't think the two yachts were related. It turns out that The Village Club had photographs of the Maid Marian II which was also owned by Charlie Winningham. After he sold the first Maid Marian to Dottie's father, he had the larger Maid Marian II built. That yacht is still in use. Hopefully, with more searching, we will determine the fate of the Maid Marian, and maybe even the lost Robin Hood murals.

For more information on The Village Club, The Village Club Foundation, Robin Hood's Barn, and the Bloomfield Historical Society, see the following links:

<https://www.thevillageclub.org/web/pages/about>

<https://www.bloomfieldhistoricalsociety.org/robin-hoods-barn-1900/>

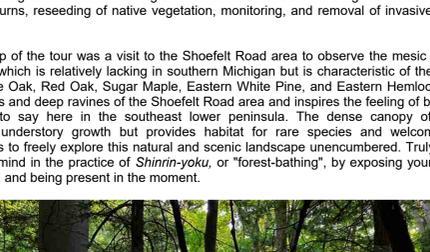
Loznak Sanctuary Stewardship

Marysville, Saint Clair County

Yānhdaw'ā yeh de yanhta' iyaen' - The Prairie is Near the River - Huron - Wendat

TLC Board Member Dan Rhein has continued his relentless "slow raze" on the Loznak Sanctuary this fall, removing invasive weeds, cleaning up debris along the railroad spur, digging up buried material and industrial artifacts, and restoring soil and native vegetation cover. Thanks to his work through the summer and fall, we are learning more about the interesting industrial history of this preserve and our little patch of lakeplain prairie continues to improve.

Invasive weed, unidentified ornamental pear trees, sparse patches of Phragmites Reed, and Spotted Knapweed, uncovered industrial pear trees, sparse sanctuaries of Phragmites Reed, and Spotted Knapweed in the remnant lakeplain prairie, and buckthorn in the adjoining forest to the west. Dan has been pulling an digging, making more room for the impressive mix of Riddell's Goldenrod, Showy Goldenrod, Stiff Goldenrod, Gray Goldenrod, Fringed Gentian, Rough Blazing-star, and Tall Boneset that were in all their glory this September and provided vital nutrition to migrating insects like Monarch butterflies.



Fringed Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita*. Photograph by Bill Collins.



Mountain-mint - *Pycnanthemum virginianum* with Fringed Gentian in background. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Of equal interest are the many bricks, fragments, metal scraps, and pieces of things that apparently date back to the industrial use of the property during World War II to produce munitions. At some point, we will take inventory of all these items and see if we can determine their origins and purpose.

Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary

Dryden Township, Lapeer County

We returned to the Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary on October 7 to check on the preserve and remove bagged debris and other junk we collected on our September 1 stewardship day. Work will continue on the preserve through the winter, including removal of a few invasive Black Locust trees and installation of a new preserve sign.

Thanks to an e-mail message forwarded to us by Kathy Dickens, Executive Director of the Four County Community Foundation, we have learned a little more history about our sanctuary and the surrounding land. Many years ago, the property was used as a band camp. We didn't get much detail other than the owner may have been a music teacher at Mount Clemens High School. The property was then purchased by a group of Ford Motor Company employees and was known as the Brooks Lake Campground. An abandoned structure south of the preserve was known as the Stone Cabin, one of several cabins used by the campers. The campground was later sold and all of the structures fell into disrepair, which explains most of the refuse we cleaned-up on and around the preserve.

Tranquil Ridge. There's a big valley and a lake out there when the leaves are off. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Regardless, the Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary sets atop an impressive landscape with a remarkable view over the adjacent forest valley and Brooks Lake below. Our sanctuary is a small part of a large, relatively untouched and sustainable mature forest ecosystem. With our continued work, it is only getting better.

Port Huron State Game Area Day

Kimball and Clyde Townships, Saint Clair County

By Blake Short, TLC Program Assistant

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division held the Port Huron State Game Area Day on September 24. Hosted by Kaitlyn Barnes, a new Wildlife Division Biologist covering our area, a guided tour showcased new habitat management sites and natural features across the Game Area.

For the better part of several decades, the Port Huron State Game Area (PHSGA) has been left largely unmanaged by the Wildlife Division, and partly for good reason. Much of the PHSGA is an apex in forest succession as evidenced by expansive old growth mesic forest in the uplands and rich floodplain forest in the Black River basin. Kaitlyn Barnes explained to tour participants that much of the interior of the PHSGA is intact and the natural communities are healthy, but areas showing signs of deterioration, such as road corridors, canopy gaps created by the loss of mature ash trees, and old pine plantations, could provide management opportunities to create habitat that is generally lacking within the PHSGA public lands. In other words, mature forest dominates the landscape, and while that is ecologically valuable, it does not provide as much habitat diversity as it could. Kaitlyn sees an opportunity for the Wildlife Division and its partners, like Pheasants Forever, to restore or reseed some of these degraded areas to provide critical habitat for local and migratory species.

Currently, Kaitlyn has three management projects in the M-136 and Kingsley Road area of the PHSGA, which were scheduled stops on the tour. The first stop was roughly 40 acres of extremely dense shrub thicket that is now being managed for American Woodcock habitat. The Wildlife Division has a management prescription for woodcock that has proven to be very effective and easy to implement by simply providing openings within the thicket for woodcock to feed on earthworms and flaunt their dazzling aerial courtship display that some refer to as "sky dancing". The remaining thicket around the openings provides roosting areas for observant female spectators and also cover during the heat of the day.

The next management area, just down the road, was an old Red Pine plantation that was succumbing to aggressive invasion of Oriental Bittersweet, a non-native woody vine capable of strangulating and killing mature trees. In an attempt to set back the advance of bittersweet, which had severely degraded the pine forest, roughly 5 acres was clear-cut. A few scattered hardwoods were left to provide additional open woodland habitat which is generally lacking on PHSGA lands. Kaitlyn noted that on-going management will be implemented for the site and that regular prescribed burns may be necessary to combat recurring growth of bittersweet in the cleared area.

Adjacent to the cleared forest is a third management area where the Wildlife Division is attempting to restore an old agriculture field back to grassland and wet meadow. Management activities will include prescribed burns, reseeding of native vegetation, monitoring, and removal of invasive vegetation as necessary.

The final stop of the tour was a visit to the Shoefelt Road area to observe the mesic northern forest community, which is relatively lacking in southern Michigan but is characteristic of the PHSGA. Old-growth White Oak, Red Oak, Sugar Maple, Eastern White Pine, and Eastern Hemlock decorate the upland ridges and deep ravines of the Shoefelt Road area and inspires the feeling of being "up north" as we like to say here in the southeast lower peninsula. The dense canopy of mature trees suppresses understory growth but provides habitat for rare species and welcomed shade for recreationists to freely explore this natural and scenic landscape unencumbered. Truly a great place to clear the mind in the practice of *Shinin-yuku*, or "forest-bathing", by exposing your senses to the natural world and being present in the moment.

Forest of the Port Huron State Game Area. Photograph by TLC Program Assistant Blake Short.

For more information about the PHSGA or other public lands in Michigan please visit <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/things-to-do/hunting/where>

North Street Station

Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

On September 23, the TLC conducted our annual removal of invasive Japanese Knotweed at our historic North Street Station. Thank you to Clyde Historical Society President Connie Bates, TLC Member Connie Neese, TLC Board Member Kay Cumbow, and TLC Program Assistant Blake Short for your work.



Left to right: Clyde Historical Society President Connie Bates, TLC Board Member Kay Cumbow, TLC Member Connie Neese, and TLC Program Assistant Blake Short. Photograph by TLC Program Assistant Blake Short.

We have accumulated a large pile of Japanese Knotweed over the past few years. Did you know that plant ashes are used to glaze pottery and that the ash of Japanese Knotweed produces a beautiful sea green glaze? If anyone out there is into pottery, let us know. We may soon have some glazing ash for you.

You can read more about Japanese Knotweed in our Ecology News section. It is a highly invasive weed in North America and almost impossible to get rid of without years of diligent removal. Even then, it can come back years later from small root fragments several feet below ground. Japanese Knotweed is native to the slopes of active volcanoes and is one of the first plants to colonize after an eruption. That should give you an idea of what we are up against. Thankfully, the patch at the North Street Station is still small and manageable. Wherever you see Japanese Knotweed, please destroy it, and please, never never plant it!

Bidwell Sanctuary Information Kiosk

Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park

Chèkhònènsink hitkwike schind lèkuwake -

Place among hemlock trees on sandy ground with sound of waves breaking – Lenape

The TLC is nearing completion of plans for an information kiosk to be located near the coastal trail entrance on the Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville Township. We have considered various designs and materials, using locally harvested wooden posts, sand stone fragments left on the preserved from the former residence, and a sheet metal roof. The kiosk portion of the structure will be roundish with panels to post information about the Bidwell Sanctuary, the ancient beach ridge (or dune) and swale ecosystem along Lake Huron, the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park and Trail, project supporters, and the TLC.

In April of this year, the TLC was awarded a grant for \$4,500 from the Bioregion Reparation Fund, a donor-advised fund established by the Full Circle EcoHouse of Prayer of Port Huron and administered by the Community Foundation of Saint Clair County. Sister Veronica Blake and Sister Concepción González, who are well-known members of the Blue Water area environmental community, initiated the Bioregion Reparation Fund in 2018 in order to carry on their legacy of ecological education, spirituality, and restoration in the bioregion defined by Lake Huron, the Saint Clair River and the Black River watersheds.

TLC Late Fall Stewardship

Details will be sent in future e-mails. If you want to work on your own on any of these, let us know.

Date	Activity	Location
September - December	clean-up and restoration	North Street Station
September - December	trail and park entrance work	Bidwell Sanctuary
September - December	clean-up and restoration	Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary

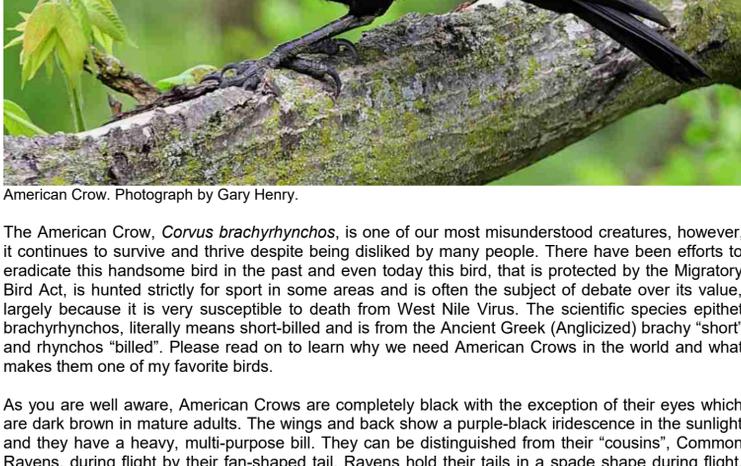
Clyde Historical Society

The meeting of the Clyde Historical Society is November 17, Thursday at 6:30 pm at the Ruby Lions Hall at 4535 Brott Road in Ruby. The Clyde Historical Society promotes history education and preservation in Clyde Township, including restoration of the historic Clyde Township Hall near the corner of M-136 and Wildcat Road, next to Bill Bearss Park. As usual, old maps and other historical items will be on display at the meeting.

For more information, see the Clyde Historical Society Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481890455361159/>

American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

By Tom Dennis



American Crow. Photograph by Gary Henry.

The American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*, is one of our most misunderstood creatures, however, it continues to survive and thrive despite being disliked by many people. There have been efforts to eradicate this handsome bird in the past and even today this bird, that is protected by the Migratory Bird Act, is hunted strictly for sport in some areas and is often the subject of debate over its value, largely because it is very susceptible to death from West Nile Virus. The scientific species epithet brachyrhynchos, literally means short-billed and is from the Ancient Greek (Anglicized) brachy "short" and rhynchos "billed". Please read on to learn why we need American Crows in the world and what makes them one of my favorite birds.

As you are well aware, American Crows are completely black with the exception of their eyes which are dark brown in mature adults. The wings and back show a purple-black iridescence in the sunlight and they have a heavy, multi-purpose bill. They can be distinguished from their "cousins", Common Ravens, during flight by their fan-shaped tail. Ravens hold their tails in a spade shape during flight. The usual "caaw, caaw" call of the American Crow also helps in identification as the Raven makes a "croaking" call and the Fish Crow (a smaller bird) makes a nasal sounding "cah". They are large birds varying in height from 16 to 32 inches and in mass from 11 to 21 ounces. The American Crow is also the only one of these birds found in our area and in fact, it would be extremely rare to find a Common Raven in the lower peninsula of Michigan except in the Northern-most "troll" counties (that's under-the-bridge in case you didn't know). American Crows are year-round residents of most of the continental United States and they are typically summer-only residents in most of Canada.

They are one of the most intelligent birds known to exist and one of few species documented as using simple tools. In addition to their typical vocalizations, they also mimic other birds and animals, including human voices. They can count, work out solutions to simple problems and they are fond of collecting shiny objects like keys, rings, and other trinkets which they will openly steal from us. Family life is important to crows and they often live with multiple generations that work, learn, and dine together just like good, old-fashioned human families! The family joins together in nest-building activities, usually in tall trees with nests up to 100 feet in the air and constructed of sticks and twigs. They are very adaptable in many ways and will nest on the ground if necessary. They occupy almost any habitat from urban to wild and being non-selective and advantageous omnivores they will clean up landfill dumps as well as the farmer's fields. Like many birds, they are especially fond of insects and thereby benefit us greatly. You may want to replace that scarecrow in your garden with a sign advertising "Juicy insects available here". Crows also join Northern Flickers in "anting" behavior during which they stand on an anthill and let the ants discharge formic acid. This not only helps the crows rid their bodies of parasites, it also renders the ants quite palatable.

Because American Crows are extremely sensitive to West Nile Virus, they also serve mankind as a bio-indicator warning species. This mosquito-borne, African virus was accidentally introduced to North America in 1999 and causes encephalitis in humans and our livestock. It is especially deadly to crows and their population has dropped by an average of 45% since its introduction with local population losses of up to 72% in a single season. Crows help us locate this disease when unusually large die-off occurs and it's important to understand the West Nile Virus isn't transmitted from Crows to man or other animals. The next time you see or hear a crow, I trust you will better appreciate their existence and count yourself blessed to have them on your yard list!

If you wish to learn more about birds you are welcome to attend Blue Water Audubon meetings held at The Point, 5085 Lakeshore Road, in Fort Gratiot. Please visit our Facebook page, "Blue Water Audubon Society", for meeting details and be sure to friend us.



Tom Dennis is a resident of Fort Gratiot where he and Laurie Melms Dennis, his wife of 45 years, 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. Thanks for reading, Don't forget to "Like" us on Facebook!

TLC Nominated Three Properties for MNRTF Acquisition

The TLC recently nominated three properties for State acquisition through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF). The MNRTF was established by State law in 1976 specifically for the purpose of acquiring and developing land for natural resource protection and public outdoor recreation. The MNRTF is funded on by Michigan oil, gas, and mineral extraction revenue sharing and has provided over \$1 billion for projects in all 83 counties of Michigan. The first project funded by the MNRTF was the acquisition of Saint John's Marsh Wildlife Area in southern Saint Clair County. For more information about the MNRTF, is available at this link: <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/Buy-and-Apply/grants/rec/mnrtf>

The TLC nominated three properties for State acquisition in 2022, including: 1) The Girls Catholic Youth Organization Camp on Lake Huron near Forester; 2) 113 acres of remnant lakeplain prairie along Saginaw Bay and the Kawkawlin River near Bay City; and 3) 35 acres near the north end of the Port Huron State Game Area in Grant Township.

Girls Catholic Youth Organization Camp, Forester

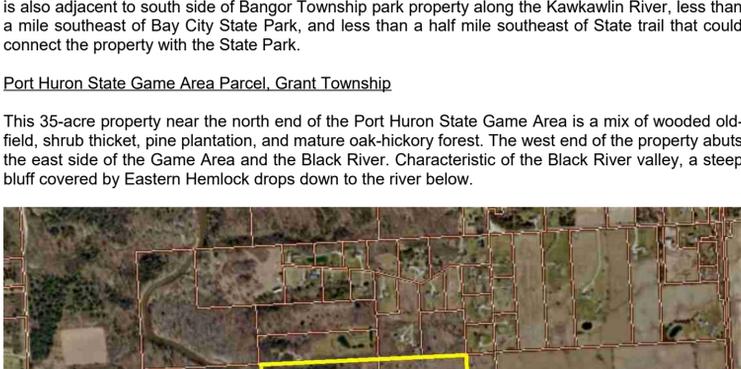
The TLC attempted to acquire the Girls Catholic Youth Organization Camp near Forester, without success. As a back-up, we requested that State of Michigan consider acquisition of the property as a State park. We also nominated the property for State acquisition through the MNRTF.



The Girls Catholic Youth Organization Camp is 24 acres with about 1,000 feet of Lake Huron shoreline, about 1,300 feet of stream, forested dune and swale complex supporting uncommon species, important coastal migratory bird habitat, a great beach, boating access, and several cabins. The property is valuable for recreation and resource conservation primarily because it would provide a large area of public access to Lake Huron, of which there is currently too little, and for which there is increasing demand, especially for the growing population of the Port Huron area, metro Detroit, and southeast Michigan in general. Closer access to the Great Lakes will become increasingly important with high fuel prices and a warming climate.

Morley Trust Lakeplain Prairie, Bay City

The Morley Trust lakeplain prairie on the north side of Bay City is 113 acres of remnant and recovering lakeplain wet prairie with oak-dominated beach ridges, located along the south side of the Kawkawlin River and about 2,000 feet southwest of the Saginaw Bay. Nearly the entire property, about 100 acres, consists of State-regulated and federally-regulated wetland. TLC Executive Director Bill Collins worked on this site as a wetland consultant for the owner in 2015 through 2018. TLC President Cheryl Collins and TLC Board Member Dan Rhein also worked on this site collecting lakeplain prairie plant seed to restore part of the wetland. Although much of the site was cleared and farmed prior to 2015, patches of lakeplain prairie remained intact with uncommon plant species including Riddell's Goldenrod - *Solidago riddellii*, Marsh Blazing-star - *Liatris spicata*, Fringed Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita*, Monkey-flower - *Mimulus ringens*, Indian Grass - *Sorghastrum nutans*, and Cord Grass - *Spartina pectinata* among other characteristic vegetation.

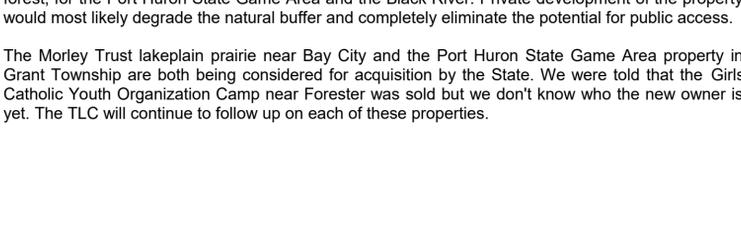


The property is extremely valuable for resource protection because it contains a large occurrence of lakeplain wet prairie, a State and globally imperiled natural community of which only about 1% of the original extent remains. Although the site has been impacted by farming, the potential for restoration of the original plant community is very high. The upland beach ridges on the site are also largely intact, covered by mature oak and characteristic of the original landscape.

The property's close proximity to the Kawkawlin River, Saginaw Bay, and a paved public trail along the west property line makes this site exceptional for potential recreation opportunities. A canal at the northwest corner of the property could provide small boat access to the Kawkawlin River and Saginaw Bay. Connecting trails with interpretive signs through the lakeplain prairie would be a great educational resource. The site is easily accessible to a large population in the Bay City area. The site is also adjacent to south side of Bangor Township park property along the Kawkawlin River, less than a mile southeast of Bay City State Park, and less than a half mile southeast of State trail that could connect the property with the State Park.

Port Huron State Game Area Parcel, Grant Township

This 35-acre property near the north end of the Port Huron State Game Area is a mix of wooded old-field, shrub thicket, pine plantation, and mature oak-hickory forest. The west end of the property abuts the east side of the Game Area and the Black River. Characteristic of the Black River valley, a steep bluff covered by Eastern Hemlock drops down to the river below.



The property is valuable for public recreation as it would provide access to about 80 acres of the Game Area that is very limited. Currently, the only way the public can access that part of the Game Area, which is nearly an island due to the broad meanders of the Black River, is to cross the river from adjacent public land on the west side. In addition, much of the adjacent public land also consists of steep bluffs which are difficult to traverse. Acquisition of the 35-acre property, combined with the approximately 80 acres of landlocked area, would effectively increase publicly accessible land in the Port Huron State Game Area by about 115 acres and open pedestrian access to approximately 8,500 feet of Black River frontage. Better access to this landlocked portion of the Game Area would increase hunting and fishing opportunities and also provide new access for stream and floodplain monitoring by the MDNR and other institutions.

The property is valuable for resource protection as it provides natural area buffer, particularly mature forest, for the Port Huron State Game Area and the Black River. Private development of the property would most likely degrade the natural buffer and completely eliminate the potential for public access.

The Morley Trust lakeplain prairie near Bay City and the Port Huron State Game Area property in Grant Township are both being considered for acquisition by the State. We were told that the Girls Catholic Youth Organization Camp near Forester was sold but we don't know who the new owner is yet. The TLC will continue to follow up on each of these properties.

The MNRTF provides the opportunity for anyone to nominate land for State acquisition. The chances of the State actually acquiring new land are small but it's worth trying sometimes. If you would like to nominate land, the nomination form is only two pages and available at the following link. : https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/-/media/Project/Websites/dnr/Documents/Forms/folder1/Nomination_form.pdf?rev=ed5e912121624d3cb4344e7b51be8d31&hash=D5F90238CBB2E9E61292568FDA21925

The Government Should Buy Camps

Recently, an opinion article in the Washington Post was brought to our attention entitled, *Why The Government Should Buy Boy Scout Camps* by reporter and columnist Tom Condon. Here is the link: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/09/14/boy-scouts-land-sale-government-conservation/>

The TLC has tried to encourage acquisition of camps in the Thumb by local municipalities with no success so far. As many of you know, Silver Trails Scout Reservation near Jeddo was sold to AMC Mid Michigan Materials back in 2019. Silver Trails is even mentioned indirectly in this Washington Post article with a link to a Detroit News article about the sale. This summer, the Girls CYO Camp near Forester was sold. We don't know who bought it yet.



Main entrance gate of Silver Trails Scout Reservation. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Tom Condon suggests in his Washington Post article that there should be a nationwide effort led by the federal government to buy and hold camps being off-loaded by the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, churches, and other organizations. This is a very good idea that would yield many returns on the investment over the long-term. Unfortunately, such an effort would be at least 15 years too late for many camps that have been sold. But, any that could be saved now would be worth the effort.

The recently signed federal Inflation Reduction Act includes billions of dollars for conservation and forestry. Condon suggests that a great way to use this funding would be to buy camps being sold by the Boy Scouts and other organizations. He explains that many of these camps include large tracts of land that are almost pristine with substantial waterfront and forest. Such large tracts of forest are vital to maintaining and restoring the world's environment. They are not only home to many rare and uncommon plants and animals, but provide oxygen, store vast amounts of carbon, protect water quality, and help prevent flooding.

In funding the purchase of camps, the federal government would help accomplish climate goals, fund much-needed environmental protection in general, and also protect youth camps and opportunities for outdoor recreation. Local governments and conservation organizations often try to save these camps, but they are usually given very late notice of sales and the challenge of fundraising in a short period of time is most often too overwhelming. The federal government would be able to cut through all of this.

Condon says in his article that the United States Department of Agriculture estimates that approximately 6,000 acres of open space, including forests, grasslands, and other natural areas, are destroyed in the US every day. That's very hard to imagine, but it doesn't take much thought to conclude that this trend, or anything close to it, is absolutely unsustainable. The logical conclusion doesn't look good. Regardless of your opinions about the climate and environment in general, everyone should ask themselves if this is the world they want to live in. It seems that such a prosperous nation as the United States should be making much better choices.

Another reason that the government should step in to buy these camps is that organizations like the Boy Scouts have a huge public obligation. There is a substantial public interest simply because these organizations have been tax-exempt and relied on public donations for decades. There is a huge public interest element to this issue that has not been considered. Our government ought to have a say on these camps on behalf of all of us that have helped fund them.

Father Ken Overbeck

By Bill Collins, TLC Executive Director

My friend Ken Overbeck visited Michigan in early October for a family wedding, so we met up in Clarkston and spent the day in the Flint area visiting a park and looking at a wetland project with TLC Program Assistant Blake Short. The three of us finished the day by grabbing some mighty tasty eats at Home Boy Barbecue near Flushing.



Father Ken contemplating the Flint River at the Flushing Township Nature Park. He was actually laughing because I told him to give me an interesting pose. He said, "How's this?". This is a very nice park by the way. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Ken and I grew up in Fort Gratiot and have been friends since the fifth grade. Both of our fathers worked at the Consumers Power gas refinery in Marysville and were friends also. Ken's father was a chemist and my father was a machinist, both enlisted regularly by the plant manager to assist in his hobby of building historically accurate cannons, among other "government" projects. Ken and I even worked together at Consumers Power in the summer of 1981, scraping and painting pipes. It was hard labor but often interesting as we explored the inner workings of the plant. Walking through the inside of a cooling tower in operation can be a beautiful experience, and we had some impressive views of the surrounding lands from the tops of condensation towers and flare stacks.

In later years, Ken and I went on a few camping trips with a group of friends from high school. We backpacked for several days on the Bruce Peninsula around the Georgian Bay in Ontario. Other trips included the Pinery Provincial Park in Ontario, the Rifle River State Recreation Area near Lupton, Michigan, and a trip down to Lafayette, Indiana to visit our friend at Purdue University.

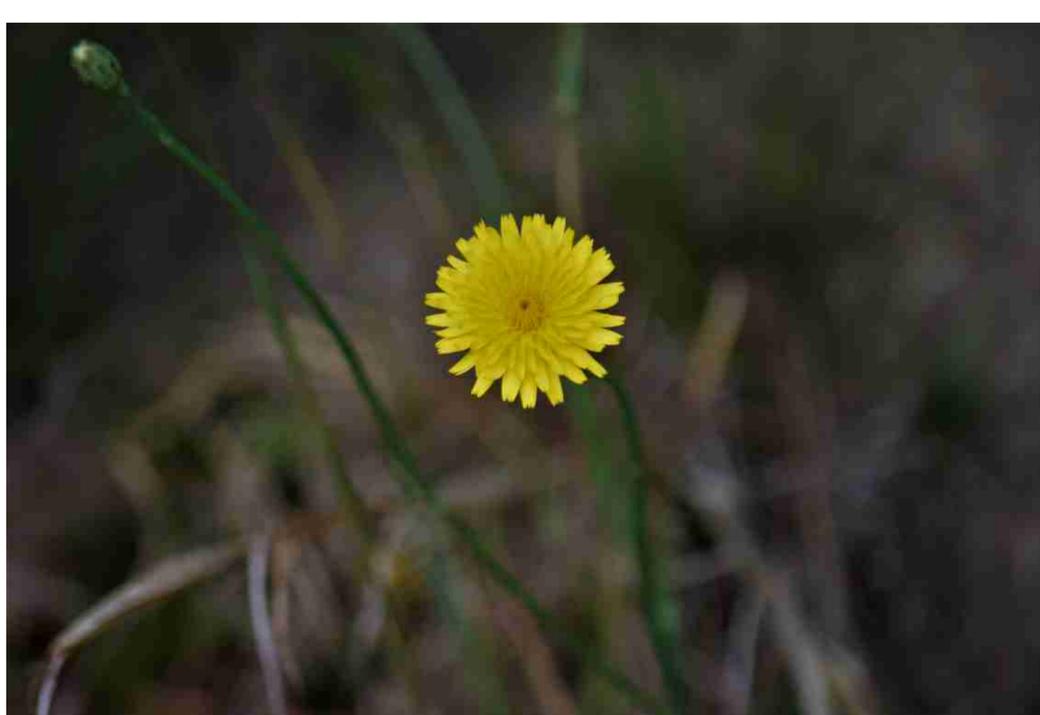
After attending college and working in southeast Michigan for a few years, Ken decided to attend a Catholic seminary. My wife and I traveled out to Massachusetts in 1997 to attend his ordination ceremony. Father Ken eventually became the pastor of the Saint Bonaventure Parish in Plymouth, Massachusetts where he supervised the construction of their new church. You can read about the parish at the following link. Near the bottom of the home page is a video presentation celebrating Ken's 25th year in the priesthood. I have known Ken since about the second photograph in the video: <https://www.stbonaventureplymouth.org/>

The *On Campus* tab at the far right top of the homepage links to a page dedicated to *Creatures and Critters on Campus* featuring some of the wildlife observed on the Saint Bonaventure church property. I like to think that I helped inspire some of this, although, knowing that Ken enjoys nature, is conscientious, and that both his parents were avid gardeners, maintaining that Ken enjoys flower beds at their home in Fort Gratiot, I think Ken comes to this naturally. The church is adjacent to a large complex of forest and marsh, and only about 1,000 feet west of Cape Cod Bay, so there is a diversity of wildlife on and around the property. Ken took many of the photographs on the web site, his favorite being the Osprey: <https://www.stbonaventureplymouth.org/kids-corner.html>

Given the opportunity to redevelop the Saint Bonaventure church property, located on an old farm field, Ken had in-mind to create a peaceful natural park to gently remind all who pass of the Creator. He wanted to steward the land to support the native plant and animal community, while at the same time, serve his parishioners. So rather than mow a huge lawn, Ken thought it better to grow hay instead, which is cut by a local farmer. Not only does the hay field feed the farmer's livestock, but it provides flowers for pollinating insects through most of the summer and habitat for grassland birds and other wildlife. Ken says that the field is normally full of Goldfinches. Following are a few of Ken's photographs taken around the church property.



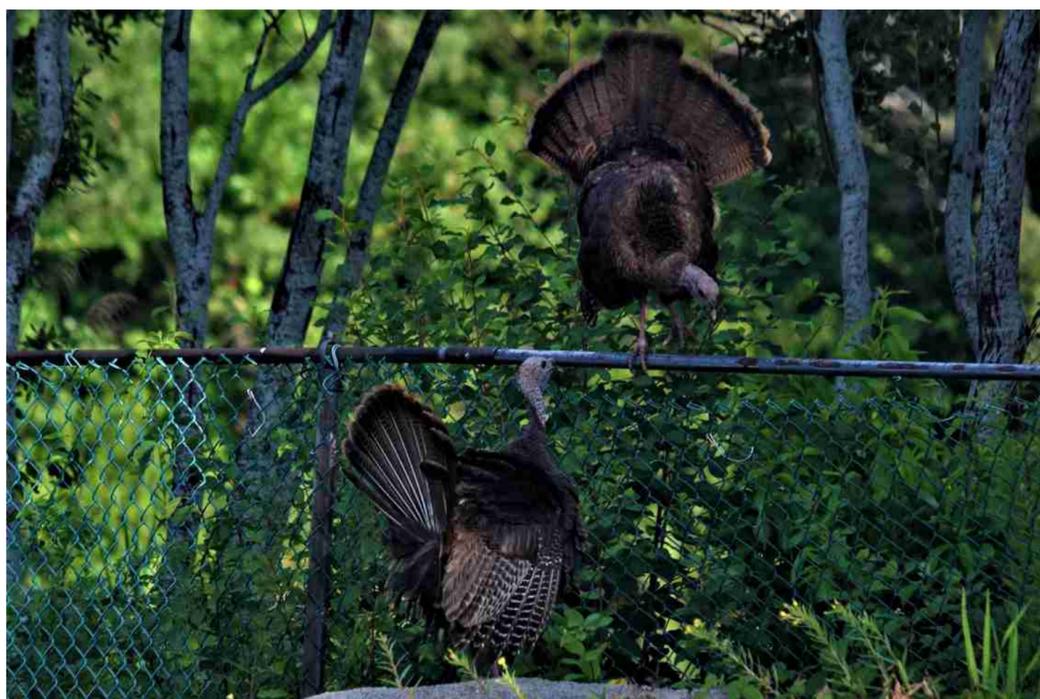
Bumblebee on a knapweed - *Centaurea* flower. Photograph by Father Ken Overbeck.



Cat's-ear flower - *Hypochaeris radicata*. Photograph by Father Ken Overbeck.



Cinnamon Fern - *Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*. Photograph by Father Ken Overbeck.



Wild Turkeys. They are naturally more nervous in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Photograph by Father Ken Overbeck.

As Ken says, you can't do everything to protect nature, but you can do a little with what you have. Thank you Father Ken for setting an example and being a good Christian steward of your parish's piece of God's creation.

Ecology News

If you have any ecologically oriented news articles you'd like to share, please e-mail them to us and they could be included in a future newsletter.

Why Experts Say You Shouldn't Bag Your Leaves This Fall

If you want to do something to help nature that provides a disproportionately large environmental benefit compared to the effort required, just leave your leaves.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/10/25/1131114849/leaves-fall-autumn-compost-mulch-grass-lawn-nutrients>

Let Fallen Leaves Lie, Gardeners In Netherlands Town Urged

It's about time.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/24/let-fallen-leaves-lie-gardeners-in-netherlands-town-urged-eindhoven>

'The American Lawn Feels Irresponsible': The LA Homes Ditching Grass For Drought-Friendly Gardens

These places look so much better without lawn, not to mention all of the other benefits.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/sep/24/los-angeles-drought-resistant-plants-lawns-landscaping>

Beech Leaf Disease Found In Southeast Michigan Counties: What To Know

It's been found in Saint Clair County. We already have Beech Bark Disease and a few other diseases killing our native American Beech. Likely another unaccounted external cost of international trade.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/beech-leaf-disease-found-in-southeast-michigan-counties-what-to-know/ar-AA13vBwv>

Report: Bird Populations In Decline Across US, Massachusetts. Some Species Near 'Tipping Point'

We did not see or hear any Bobolinks at the Bebezland Farm in Sanilac County this summer.

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2022/10/12/report-bird-populations-in-decline-across-u-s-massachusetts-some-species-near-tipping-point>

The Alien Shrub That Can't Be Stopped

Japanese Knotweed - A scary invasive. We've seen it cover miles of river banks in New York state.

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20221006-the-race-to-kill-the-worlds-most-invasive-weed>

Preventing Wildfire With The Wild Horse Fire Brigade

This makes sense. Return wild roaming herbivores to the West, keep wild horses and burros out of BLM holding facilities, save money, and reduce wildfire risk all at the same time.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/10/30/1131042723/preventing-wildfire-with-the-wild-horse-fire-brigade>

Drax: UK Power Station Owner Cuts Down Primary Forests In Canada

Be skeptical of claims of "green" and "sustainable", especially when it involves forests and biofuel.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-63089348>

The Michigan DNR's Wildtalk Podcast

A good mix of wildlife and outdoor information in these podcasts.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-michigan-dnrs-wildtalk-podcast/id1389858029>

Help Fund The TLC With CARS

Like many non-profit organizations these days, you can now support the TLC by donating old vehicles through CARS - Charitable Adult Rides and Services. CARS donates 70% of the net income from all vehicle donations to their non-profit partners such as the TLC.



Built on Trust
a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit

Depending on your tax situation, your vehicle may be more valuable as an itemized deduction than the income you might get by selling it. Not only do you avoid the hassle of advertising and dealing with potential buyers, but you don't need to get the vehicle in running condition. CARS accepts any vehicle, driveable or not.

To donate, see our donation page at: <https://careasy.org/nonprofit/thumb-land-conservancy>

Or call 855-500-7433

TLC Membership

With our membership, the TLC is better enabled to protect important natural areas in our region. We offer three membership levels as shown below: 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. Make checks payable to "Thumb Land Conservancy". Mail checks and provide us with your mailing address, 4975 Mable 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

