

Thumb Land Conservancy NEWS

December 22, 2017

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

TLC Christmas Gathering

Thank you once again to TLC board member Dorothy Craig for opening her home and providing her hospitality, food, and drink for our 2017 Christmas gathering this past Sunday. And thanks also for use of your computer and wall for the slide presentation Dottie. I presented what was intended to be an abbreviated review of Thumb natural areas (not quite there yet), followed by historic photos and a video of North Street provided by new TLC member John Schomaker, ending with a TLC year-in-review in photos. There were technical difficulties, but next time will be better.

We had several guests, including my dad Bob Collins, our granddaughter Tiffany Reagin, our neighbors from near Brown City, Carl Hallead Sr., Darlene Hallead, Carl Hallead Jr., and his daughter Kyria, and Lawson Meisner and Lee Holekamp from the Clyde Historical Society. Carl Hallead Sr. has been putting the metal roof on the North Street house.

Deerfield Wind Energy Preserve, Huron Township, Huron County, Michigan

Cutting of invasive Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose has continued at the Deerfield Preserve. We now have most of the primary barberry occurrence cut in over a 1-acre area. In March and April we start hitting the barberry with fire. After that we can make sure we get all of the lone barberry shrubs lurking deeper in the woods, and maybe even start cutting on adjacent parcels, which will help keep barberry from reinvading the preserve.

This past Saturday I had the pleasure of working with a crew of six guys from Port Austin Bible Campus / Michigan House of Hope. They did a great job. I only recently discovered this Christian facility for homeless families south of Port Austin. Believe it or not, they are the only place that provides housing and support for entire families in Huron, Tuscola, and Sanilac Counties. I would expect more from all the good people here in the Thumb.

The Port Austin Bible Campus is in the process of transitioning to the Michigan House of Hope with a new director, Jeff Kramer, who drove the crew out to the site and stayed to work with us through the afternoon. The Michigan House of Hope crew consisted of director Jeff Kramer, another Jeff, Chuck, Peyton, Tyson, and "Shaggy". I never did get Shaggy's real name but did learn that he was active in Scouts and the Young Marines in Lapeer County, so he already knew how to start a campfire fast with birch bark, as did Peyton who wore a rabbit fur hat and knows a lot of biology and wilderness survival skills. Tyson provided the musical accompaniment on his smart phone. I never thought I'd be working on the preserve while listening to Pink Floyd. Turns out the other Jeff grew up in Port Huron so we know

some people in-common and traded stories about our PH memories. Chuck pretty much kept to himself and worked right along. He even brought his own mug which served well when the pot of water on the fire was hot enough for hot chocolate. The campfire-roasted sausages were also a real hit with the guys. Director Jeff Kramer did very well in the snow for someone just moved here from Phoenix, Arizona. He looked like a native Michigander. I look forward to working with the Michigan House of Hope crew again.



Michigan House of Hope Director, Jeff Kramer, with Jeff.



Peyton and "Shaggy".



Chuck



Cooking sausages on the campfire.



Peyton cutting down barberry.



Jeff showing a positive work spirit.



Tyson and “Shaggy” hitting the barberry hard !

If you would like to help Michigan House of Hope take care of our work crew and homeless families in the Thumb, here are links to their web sites below. Director, Jeff Kramer says they especially need firewood to heat some of their residential buildings that aren't equipped with heating systems. I'm sure they can always use food and cash as well. Residents also need employment along with affordable housing and transportation if they need to relocate.

Port Austin Bible Campus: <http://www.portaustin.net/pabc/>

Michigan House of Hope: <https://www.michiganhouseofhope.com/>

North Street Station, Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

If you can help the North Street project financially, we really could use your donation. We still need to pay for the property acquisition, which was covered by a private loan of about \$11,000. We also need money for materials. I am still hopeful we can get the bulk donated, such as paint and new boards, but I've had to buy a lot of roofing screws and nails and other things. We donated the sheet metal. Most of all, for now, we need to be able to reimburse our neighbor Carl for his work, use of his truck, trailer, generator, and so on.

TLC fundraising

We need help from anyone on writing grant applications, producing membership materials, and funding promotions.

TLC 2017 Year-In-Review

At our 2017 Christmas gathering this past Sunday, I presented a TLC year-in-review in photos, which I haven't done before but seems to be such a good idea I decided to list our accomplishments below. I'd like to add photos but this message would be too large to send. If you've been keeping up on our e-mail news, you've seen most of the photos. Otherwise, just go to the News section of our web site at <http://www.ThumbLand.org> .

January

- The Times Herald newspaper of Port Huron featured an article about the TLC acquisition and restoration of the historic North Street post office, general store, and railroad station in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County: <http://www.thetimesherald.com/story/news/local/2017/01/02/groups-restoring-north-street-station-and-post-office/95905210/>
- Created a Port Huron State Game Area Initiative web site in cooperation with botanist John Fody to promote invasive weed control and ecological restoration in the Port Huron State Game Area and, eventually, other State game areas: <https://sites.google.com/site/thumbstewardship/home>
- Drafted a baseline assessment report and conservation easement for the 7.8-acre Bob Putze Forest Preserve in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County.

February

- Cleaned and repaired the historic North Street property in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County. Metal detecting conducted by local historian Fred Feldhouse.
- Held a special February TLC gathering and first quarter executive board meeting at the home of Dorothy Craig in Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County. Guests included Terry McFadden, Wildlife Biologist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Janet Kruger and Connie Bates of the Clyde Historical Society, and tree felling specialist Brian Martin.
- Gave presentation to officials of the City of New Baltimore, Macomb County Planning Department, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, and Six Rivers Land Conservancy about protection of Anchor Bay Woods, 300+ acres of forest on the border of Macomb and Saint Clair Counties in the City of New Baltimore, adjacent to the 38.5-acre TLC Gerrits Sanctuary.
- Assisted the Port Huron Township Fire Department in attempted burn of invasive Phragmites Reed in the wetlands at the 18.5-acre Super Kmart and Sam's Club preserve in Port Huron Township, Saint Clair County west of Port Huron.

March

- Cut dead ash trees along edge of Dead End Woods Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County with tree felling specialist Brian Martin.
- Completed a baseline assessment report and conservation easement for the 7.8-acre Bob Putze Abbottsford Road Property in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County.

- Metal detecting conducted by local historian Fred Feldhouse at the historic North Street property in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County uncovered remnants of the old Pere Marquette railroad.

April

- Participated in the 2-day Saint Clair County Earth Fair at the Goodells County Park with partner organization Clyde Historical Society.

May

- Pulled invasive Garlic Mustard at the 17-acre Dead End Woods Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot, Saint Clair County.
- Installed metal roofing on the historic North Street rail station, post office, and general store in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County with Carl Hallead.

June

- Pulled invasive Garlic Mustard at the Port Huron State Game Area in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County.
- Conducted monitoring and vegetative sampling on the 12-acre Deerfield Preserve in Huron Township, Huron County, west of Port Hope.
- The Sanilac County News published the TLC press release about the 7.8-acre Bob Putze Preserve conservation easement in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County near Ruby:
http://sanilaccountynews.mihomepaper.com/news/2017-06-07/News/Be_like_Bob_Putze_preserve_your_land.html

July

- Installed metal roofing on the historic North Street rail station, post office, and general store in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County with Carl Hallead
- Cut invasive Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose on the 12-acre Deerfield Preserve in Huron Township, Huron County, west of Port Hope.

August

- Assisted partner organization Clyde Historical Society with the annual summer festival at Bill Bearss Park in Clyde Township, Saint Clair County.
- Cut invasive Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose on the 12-acre Deerfield Preserve in Huron Township, Huron County, west of Port Hope.

September

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October

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November

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- Cut invasive Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose on the 12-acre Deerfield Preserve in Huron Township, Huron County, west of Port Hope.

December

Cut invasive Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose on the 12-acre Deerfield Preserve in Huron Township, Huron County, west of Port Hope with work crew from Port Austin Bible Campus: <http://www.portaustin.net/pabc/> and Michigan House of Hope: <https://www.michiganhouseofhope.com/>

- Held the annual TLC Christmas gathering and fourth quarter executive board meeting at the home of Dorothy Craig in Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County.

Ecology News

Forest Destruction In Southeast Michigan – A few Saturdays ago I had some wetland work in western Macomb County and after, I went to look at a restoration site I worked on a few years ago. Development is suddenly increasing this year and acreage is for sale all over. The most depressing sight on my drive through Macomb County was along the west side of Campground Road, north of 29 Mile Road, in Washington Township, where it appears that about 30 acres of forest has been clear-cut, and another roughly 80 acres of mature oak forest is staked-out and roads are being cleared for a huge residential development. Well, that pretty much cancels-out any gains the TLC made in preservation.

Just 200 years ago, a very short time in ecological history, about 95% of the Thumb was forested; a small part of a primeval forest that extended across eastern North America and beyond. Most of what remains our forest in southern Michigan is now relegated to highly fragmented woodlots, much of it perpetually degraded and immature due to clearing, over-cutting, lack of forest species recruitment, expansion of invasive species, and tree diseases. These forest remnants are critical havens and living museums for plant populations that colonized the post-glacial landscape thousands of years ago and have held-out since. Most have nowhere else to go but survive in their particular woodlot, or eventually die-off. In the face of global climate change, these isolated populations are doomed without the ability to move north or south across fields, roads, and development. Fragmentation, or narrowing and reduction of forest, increases common edge species while eliminating uncommon interior woodland species by degrading the quality of the habitat. Interior forest exists well inside the edge of forest fragments or woodlots where competition from edge species is minimal, and where normal shade and moisture are maintained. Interior vegetation in southern Michigan includes American Beech, Sugar Maple, Yellow Birch, Eastern Hemlock, Witch-hazel, and a myriad of woodland wildflowers such as trillium. Forest birds such as Wood Thrush are particularly vulnerable to fragmentation, resulting in nest invasion and territorial displacement by Cowbirds and other birds of open habitats.

The largest forests remaining in the Thumb are along the Cass River, the glacial interlobate region of hills and lakes extending from Tuscola County down into Oakland County, and the Port Huron State Game Area. Look at an aerial photograph of the Thumb and you can see there isn't much left. Most of it was cleared decades ago, but just as forest started to make gains in recovery, large-scale clearing for agriculture increased from the early 1990's due to federal ethanol production mandates. Corn prices have since dropped and even with recent technological advances, the wisdom of using corn to produce ethanol is still questionable. So goes the often senseless history of destruction that humans impose on our planet.

The many benefits of forest include wildlife habitat, maintenance of atmospheric and water quality, moderation of climate through carbon assimilation, timber, fuel, food, medicine, hunting, recreation, and scenic and aesthetic values. The value of wilderness, or something close to it, may be immeasurable. Some have even argued that the United States of America owes in large part, its independence to the fact that North America had so much forest, while Europe had little as a result of being cleared for agriculture, habitation, and war for many more centuries than this side of the Atlantic Ocean. With no more than 15% of our landscape remaining forested, most of it highly fragmented, and only about half consisting of mature woodland, it's high time for meaningful forest protection in southeastern Michigan, and across the globe. For one thing, all the climate initiatives in the world won't do much good if we cut down all of our forest. This is a time when we should be increasing forest. If you thought the ash tree die-off caused by the Emerald Ash Borer was bad, just wait. There are several other major diseases moving our way that will kill most of the oaks, American Beech, Eastern Hemlock, and other native trees, leaving us with what; poplars, willows, Boxelder, catalpa, Chinese Elm, Tree-of-Heaven, and buckthorn? Uh yeah. Wonderful, But that's the direction we're headed. It would at least behoove us to maintain local sources of hardwood trees for firewood in case of an extended emergency that interrupts our fragile and vulnerable infrastructure.

What to do about forests? Support your local land conservancy for one thing. If you own forest, or any natural area, let's talk about putting a conservation easement on it. There are ways for neighborhood groups to organize and purchase natural areas near them for recreation, while also increasing the value of each individual residence. Are you interested in working with the TLC on a forest protection strategy? Please contact us. Of course, this is a big issue that will require a lot of work on many fronts. With that in mind, read the next article below.

Green Amendment - I frequently listen to Public Radio, mostly WKAR 90.5 FM from Michigan State University, my alma mater, for classical music, but often WUOM 91.7 FM from the University of Michigan for news. WUOM features a very informative program about current Michigan issues called "Stateside".

This past Tuesday, Stateside featured an interview with Maya K. van Rossum, Delaware Riverkeeper and author of a new book, "*The Green Amendment, Securing Our Right to a Healthy Environment*". Van Rossum says that in protecting the environment, our existing laws have largely failed us, and I mostly agree. As she states in her book, it is routinely just a matter of industries obtaining the right permits to pollute or otherwise degrade our environment. I would argue that there has been progress in protecting the environment, but for the little successes which have corrected numerous no-brainer problems, there are immense set-backs that are not being dealt with and new issues constantly emerging. For example, there are about 2,000 new chemicals introduced into commerce in the US every year, many with woefully inadequate testing to determine potential impacts to the environment and human health.

Van Rossum states that the recent Flint water crisis is an example of what happens when there is no recognition of our right to clean water. She believes that adding a "green amendment" to state

constitutions and, eventually, our federal constitution, would ensure that our government truly seeks to protect our health, safety, and environment. Montana and Pennsylvania have already adopted such green amendments. Van Rossum is advocating for “environmental constitutionalism”, and I believe the time is long over-due for us to strongly assert our basic constitutional rights to a healthy, natural, and sustainable environment in the United States of America, and eventually across the world. After all, we have only one environment and this one is going to need to be livable for a long time. If people can’t understand environmentalism from that basic anthropocentric perspective, maybe there’s just no hope.

I couldn’t tell you how many times over the years that I’ve considered the rights of “...*Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*” in the Declaration of Independence. How can I have true happiness when my natural surroundings are being torn down around me? We had a decade-long break from widespread development in southeast Michigan, but it has returned over the past year. It’s devastating to see forest and other natural areas destroyed, especially at a time when I believe every little piece of nature remaining has become critical. I would offer as evidence, among many other things, the case of the Monarch butterfly, and a recent study finding that we may have lost about 75% of the total number of winged insects, including critical pollinators. I believe that people have a right to some amount of natural environment where they live, and specifically, sustainable native plant and animal communities within walking distance.

So I contacted Maya van Rossum about starting a green amendment effort here in Michigan. We’ve exchanged a few e-mails and she wants to connect with environmental groups here and make a presentation. If you’re interested in helping, or starting a green amendment effort in your state, please contact me.

Here’s a link to the Stateside program:

<http://michiganradio.org/post/green-amendment-would-help-michiganders-defend-their-right-clean-water-author-says>

Here’s a link to van Rossum’s book, “*The Green Amendment, Securing Our Right to a Healthy Environment*”:

https://www.amazon.com/Green-Amendment-Securing-Healthy-Environment/dp/1633310213/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1503944705&sr=1-1&keywords=%22green+amendment%22

In Defense of Nature – Well, we’ve dealt with the law, and now on to the human mind and spirituality. While on the road, occasionally I will tune-in to EWTN radio to hear what the catholics are up to. My close friend, Father Ken Overbeck in Plymouth, Massachusetts would be proud. I used to listen to EWTN radio host Al Kresta quite a bit when he was protestant and on WMUZ in Detroit in the 90’s. The last I heard EWTN was after working at the Deerfield Preserve a few weeks ago, but surprisingly, although I was near Port Austin, the station, based in Baraga up in the Keweenaw Peninsula, was coming in loud and clear.

I’m used to catholic programming being more cerebral than most protestant programs, and I was not disappointed on this day. The EWTN program Bookmark, featured teacher and author Dr. Benjamin Wiker, Professor of Political Science, Director of Human Life Studies, and a Senior Fellow at the Veritas Center for Ethics and Public Life at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. Before that, he was at Marquette University, then St. Mary’s University, and Thomas Aquinas College where he taught political philosophy, philosophy, theology, history, the history and philosophy of science, the history of ethics, the Great Books, Latin, and mathematics.

In Dr. Wiker's new book, *"In Defense of Nature"*, he attempts to make the case that the "ecology" of human nature is as important as the ecology of nature, or of natural ecosystems consisting of land, water, air, plants, animals, and so on. As he states on his web page:

"In Defense of Nature shows that while both nature and human nature are equally important, there is a significant obstacle threatening the acceptance of this expanded account of ecology. The Left understands the exquisite, delicate harmony of the natural order, and why environmental pollution is harmful. The Right understands the exquisite, delicate harmony of the human moral order, and why moral pollution is harmful. Each side will tell you how very little a deviation it takes to cause disaster to the natural or to the moral order. But each refuses to see the other's argument. In Defense of Nature allows both the Left and the Right to see what the other sees so clearly, and how it all fits together, from toxic landfills and global warming, to internet addiction and human trafficking."

While I understand what he's getting at, and appreciate his perspective, I would argue that the word "ecology" should be reserved for the scientific study of natural ecosystems. In my opinion, the integration of human nature or psychology or values expands the notion into something beyond ecology, something more holistic like a spirituality. I'm not saying this is wrong, or that it wouldn't lead to much greater insight into the human place in the world and a global restoration of nature. Ultimately, we all experience everything through our brains, and the strange universe of quantum mechanics shows us that, apparently, the observer affects the observed. Could it be that, at least in part, the degraded condition of our minds is responsible for the environmental degradation we experience in the world? But until I read the book, I can only base my opinion on Dr. Wiker's interview and web site. I did, however, very much appreciate his respectful treatment of nature and ecology in the interview. It was very fitting as the reason I was up there in the Port Austin area was because I was working on stewardship of a nature preserve. I find it very encouraging when Christians acknowledge the significance of God's creation, but am disappointed they mostly don't give it more than a passing interest. If they ever think about creation, they frequently get hung-up on verses 27 and 28 in the first chapter of Genesis:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

In my opinion, the key words here, in this King James Version, in regard to a discussion on ecology, are "replenish", "subdue", and "dominion". Does "replenish" refer to the human population? If so, does it imply there were humans on the earth before Adam and Eve? Or, does "replenish" refer to all of creation? Does "subdue" mean control and obliteration? Or, does it mean to use wisely, explore, discover, understand, and improve? Does subduction mean to track down and destroy, or to seek a partner and friend? And then there is the word "dominion". That's a big word. In my mind it implies something far more profound than domination. To truly have dominion over the world seems to me something wonderful, like what we were created for. The concept should bring with it a sense of stewardship, care for all of creation, and a huge responsibility. But unfortunately, most people just bow to the whims of an unrestrained free market system, in the mistaken belief in an imaginary freedom. Maybe this gets back to the essence of the curse in Genesis, and why thinking like Dr. Wiker's in *"In Defense of Nature"* is probably more important now than ever.

EWTN Bookmark:

<https://www.ewtn.com/bookmark/>

Bookmark - *"In Defense of Nature"* (after *Saints vs Scoundrels* about 2/3 through video at 18:14):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT8XR6V8Jb8&list=PL66752F72224387D4&index=7>

Dr. Benjamin Wiker, "*In Defense of Nature*":

<http://www.benjaminwiker.com/in-defense-of-nature.html>

Merry Christmas one and all.

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