

Thumb Land Conservancy 2024 Annual Report



The 2024 extent of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park in the dune and swale forest of Fort Gratiot and Burtchville townships in Saint Clair County.



Thumb Land Conservancy

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The TLC was awarded major grant funding from the Consumers Energy Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to acquire at least three new preserves in Saint Clair, Bay, and Huron counties.

In June, the TLC held the first Thumb Heritage Festival with the Clyde Historical Society.

Throughout the year, our stewardship was focused on the Dead End Woods, Bidwell, and Loznak sanctuaries.

In late summer through late fall, the TLC collected local native plant seed to establish new populations on TLC sanctuaries.

In the fall, the TLC recruited three new workers to assist with program and stewardship.

The TLC began supporting a new initiative to designate the Saint Clair River Delta as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

The TLC produced new educational materials and programs consisting of articles, guides, and video presentations.

In October, the TLC acquired the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot, a new 80-acre addition to the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park and in December we began clearing part of the new coastal trail on the sanctuary.

The TLC joined the Land Trust Alliance and participated in a series of meetings with LTA throughout the year to review our organization.

The TLC has been steadily growing and increasing its capacity to be a sustainable force for natural area protection in the Thumb region.

William Collins
Executive Director

Thumb Land Conservancy 2024 Annual Report

2024 Year-In-Review

As usual, the Thumb Land Conservancy focused on land acquisition and preserve stewardship in 2024. The TLC was awarded major grant funding from the Consumers Energy Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to acquire at least three new preserves in Saint Clair, Bay, and Huron counties. In June, the TLC held the first Thumb Heritage Festival with the Clyde Historical Society. Throughout the year, our stewardship was focused on the Dead End Woods, Bidwell, and Loznak sanctuaries. In late summer through late fall, the TLC collected local native plant seed to establish new populations on TLC sanctuaries. In the fall, the TLC recruited three new workers to assist with program and stewardship. The TLC began supporting a new initiative to designate the Saint Clair River Delta as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. The TLC produced new educational materials and programs consisting of articles, guides, and video presentations. In October, the TLC acquired the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot, a new 80-acre addition to the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park and in December we began clearing part of the new coastal trail on the sanctuary. The TLC joined the Land Trust Alliance and participated in a series of meetings with LTA throughout the year to review our organization. Following is a summary of monthly activities.

January

- Issued press releases and prepared new grant applications for more Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park land acquisition.
- Cut invasive Black Locust trees on Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary for park entrance structures on the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Drafted Ducks Unlimited Wetland Conservation Program grant application to acquire 113-acre Morley Trust property; nearly 100 acres of imperiled lakeplain prairie along the south side of the Kawkawlin River in Bangor Township, Bay County.
- Drafted conservation easement for Sanilac County property with Sugar Maple forest.
- Began coordination of a potential land donation in Huron County.

February

- Finalized and submitted Ducks Unlimited Wetland Conservation Program grant application to acquire 113-acre Morley Trust property; nearly 100 acres of imperiled lakeplain prairie along the south side of the Kawkawlin River in Bangor Township, Bay County.
- Drafted conservation easement for Sanilac County property with Sugar Maple forest.
- Continued promotion of a potential land donation in Huron County.
- Continued coordination of habitat restoration for native plants and animals on residential land through Homegrown National Park, National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat, and TLC Naturehoods registry.

March

- Began planning first Thumb Heritage Festival with Clyde Historical Society.
- Drafted conservation easement for Sanilac County property with Sugar Maple forest.
- Continued coordination of a potential land donation in Huron County.
- Coordinated protection agreement for landowner in Lapeer County.
- Recruited new workers for TLC preserve stewardship and special projects.
- Continued clearing the coastal trail and cut invasive shrubs on the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Prepared and submitted Board of Review Appeal package to Brandon Township defending TLC tax-exempt status on the Croissant Sanctuary.

April

- Continued planning first Thumb Heritage Festival with Clyde Historical Society.
- Held first meeting with Land Trust Alliance to review TLC organization.
- Continued clearing the coastal trail and cut invasive shrubs on the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary.

May

- Continued planning first Thumb Heritage Festival with Clyde Historical Society.
- Produced video featuring historic Port Huron botanist Charles K. Dodge.
- Produced video featuring 1831 journey of Alexis de Toqueville and Gustav de Beaumont from Detroit to Saginaw.
- Continued annual removal of Garlic Mustard and other invasive weeds on the Dead End Woods Sanctuary.
- Continued clearing the coastal trail and cut invasive shrubs on the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Coordinated with TLC accountant to prepare and submit TLC tax return.

June

- Held first Thumb Heritage Festival with Clyde Historical Society.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Presented guide to common invasive weeds of the region in June TLC newsletter.
- Continued Land Trust Alliance TLC organizational review.

July

- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary, and conducted grass and weed removal as directed by the City of Marysville.
- Continued clearing the coastal trail on the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Continued Land Trust Alliance TLC organizational review.

August

- Coordinated acquisition of new 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary, 80 acres of dune and swale forest and part of our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.
- Finalized and submitted Ducks Unlimited Wetland Conservation Program grant application to acquire new preserves in Huron and Lapeer counties.
- Produced video featuring the hunting expeditions of Oliver Hazard Perry in the Thumb.
- Exhibited at the 2024 Hunting, Fishing, and Maritime Days at the Sanilac County Historic Village and Museum in Port Sanilac.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary, and conducted grass and weed removal as directed by the City of Marysville.
- Met with the Friends of the Saint Clair River to discuss native plantings and weed ordinance issues in the City of Marysville.
- Collected native plant seed to establish new populations on TLC sanctuaries.
- Continued Land Trust Alliance TLC organizational review.

September

- Coordinated acquisition of new 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary, 80 acres of dune and swale forest and part of our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.
- Coordinated with appraisers and Ducks Unlimited for release of grant funding from the North American Wetlands Conservation County for land acquisition in the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.
- Collected native plant seed to establish new populations on TLC sanctuaries.
- Continued clearing the coastal trail on the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary, and coordinated herbicide spraying of invasive Phragmites in Huron and Lapeer counties.
- Drafted and submitted application for 2024 Midwest Ensuring Conservation Permanence Risk Management Grant from the Land Trust Alliance.
- Drafted and submitted application for grant funding from the Four County Community Foundation to help fund land acquisition in Lapeer County.
- Prepared for Michigan Tax Tribunal hearing and defended TLC tax-exempt status on Croissant Sanctuary.
- Coordinated Silver Trails memorial service for Camp Ranger John Hardie.
- Recruited three new TLC program and stewardship assistants.

October

- Coordinated acquisition of new 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary, 80 acres of dune and swale forest and part of our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Continued clearing the coastal trail on the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Collected native plant seed to establish new populations on TLC sanctuaries.
- Assisted new TLC Program and Stewardship Assistant, Teddy Wiley, with Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar designation initiative.

November

- Continued clearing the coastal trail on the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Drafted drawings and application to Burtchville Township to develop Metcalf Road entrance of the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Collected native plant seed to establish new populations on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Conducted natural features survey of the 27-acre Lexington County Park on Lake Huron and made comment on a proposed accessibility plan.
- Assisted new TLC Program and Stewardship Assistant, Teddy Wiley, with Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar designation initiative.

December

- Submitted final drawings and application to Burtchville Township to develop Metcalf Road entrance of the Bidwell Sanctuary.
- Began clearing new coastal park trail on 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary.
- Coordinated acquisition of 5-acre Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park connection from Fort Gratiot Nature Park to 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary.
- Assisted new TLC Program and Stewardship Assistant, Teddy Wiley, with Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar designation initiative.

2024 TLC Supporters

- Michael and Gail Anderson, Fort Gratiot
 Connie Bates, Clyde
 The Carls Foundation, Bloomfield Hills
 Pete and Angelene Catlos, Fort Gratiot
 William and Cheryl Collins, Marlette
 Consumers Energy Foundation, Jackson
 Dr. Paul Croissant, Clarkston
 Dorothy Craig, Fort Gratiot
 Kay Cumbow, Lynn
 Ducks Unlimited, Dexter
 Richard Duthler, R.A. Duthler Land Surveyor, Imlay City
 Andrew and Natalie Ellis, Cass City
 Dr. Scott Ferguson, Clyde
 John Fodi, Marysville
 Four County Community Foundation, Almont
 Fred Fuller, Yale
 Huron County Community Foundation, Bad Axe
 Carol Kasprzak, Troy
 Dave Ladensack, Summit Realty, Lakeport
 Timothy Lozen and Mark Davidson, Lozen Davidson and Kovar, P.C., Port Huron
 Jack McLiver, Lake Huron Lawns, Lakeport
 David and Edwin Miller, Marlette
 Christine Powell and Bern Smith, Washington, D.C.
 RBF Construction, Flint
 Dan and Wendy Rhein, Port Huron
 Jeff Ronan, LochanDe IT Services, Port Huron
 Cathy Rovano, Sterling Heights
 SEMCO Energy Gas Company, Port Huron
 Blake Short, Port Huron
 Peggy Thorp and Jerry Orlowski, Lakeport
 Elizabeth "Bess" Touma, Washington, D.C.
 Chris Walker, Fargo, North Dakota

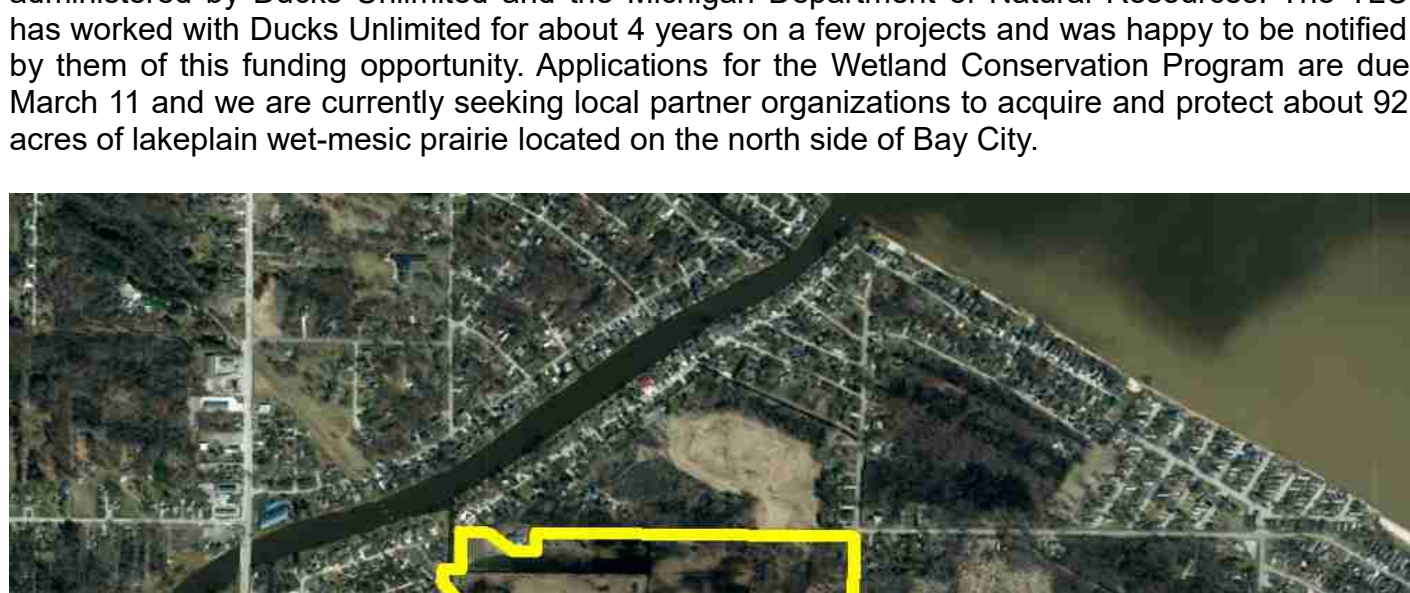
2024 TLC Project Contributors

- Croissant Sanctuary**
Brandon Township, Oakland County
 Dr. Paul Croissant, Clarkston
 Timothy Lozen and Mark Davidson, Lozen Davidson and Kovar, P.C., Port Huron
- Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary**
Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park
Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County
 The Carls Foundation, Bloomfield Hills
 RBF Construction, Flint
 SEMCO Energy Gas Company, Port Huron
 Dave Ladensack, Summit Realty, Lakeport
 Timothy Lozen and Mark Davidson, Lozen Davidson and Kovar, P.C., Port Huron
- Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park**
Fort Gratiot and Burtchville Townships, Saint Clair County
 Consumers Energy Foundation, Jackson
 Ducks Unlimited, Dexter
 Tracey Nesbitt, Cooper Nesbitt Appraisal, Port Huron
 Christine Powell and Bern Smith, Washington, D.C.
 Elizabeth "Bess" Touma, Washington, D.C.
- Loznak Sanctuary**
City of Marysville, Saint Clair County
 Dan and Wendy Rhein, Port Huron
- Deerfield Wind Energy Stewardship**
Huron Township, Huron County
 Huron County Community Foundation, Bad Axe
- Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary**
Dryden Township, Lapeer County
 Four County Community Foundation, Almont
 David and Edwin Miller, Marlette
- Anderson Conservation Easement**
Bloomfield Township, Huron County
 Michael and Gail Anderson, Fort Gratiot
- Ellis Conservation Easement**
Bloomfield Township, Huron County
 Michael and Gail Anderson, Fort Gratiot
 Andrew and Natalie Ellis, Cass City

Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Work Continues

Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

On November 15 of 2023, the TLC acquired a 27-acre addition to the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park on the west side of Shorewood Forrest subdivision in Fort Gratiot. The property is part of a broad swath of the coastal dune and swale forest along Lake Huron. Since then, the TLC has worked to publicize the project, secure more funding for land acquisition, and coordinate park development and stewardship opportunities.



Media Coverage

- In early January of 2024, the TLC issued a press release about the Shorewood Forrest parcel acquisition and received good media coverage from the Port Huron Times Herald, The Voice, WPHM 1380 AM radio, and the Yale Explorer.
- The Voice
<https://www.voiceenews.com/2024/01/11/thumb-land-conservancy-receives-funding-to-expand-fort-gratiot-township-park/>
- Times Herald
<https://www.thetimesherald.com/story/news/local/2024/01/11/thumb-land-conservancy-buys-land-for-southern-lake-huron-coastal-park/72175346007/>
- WPHM
<https://www.wphm.net/episode/january-15-bill-collins/>

Project Funding

THE CARLS FOUNDATION

We again thank The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills for a grant of \$100,000 that made this acquisition possible. The Foundation shares our vision for the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park and our work in the Thumb, a generally neglected region in terms of natural area protection.

We again thank Dr. Paul Croissant of Clarkston for his donation of 10 acres south of Ortonville, and RBF Construction of Flint for their purchase of about 2.7 acres of the commercial frontage along M-15. This allowed the TLC to raise an additional \$100,000 to pay for acquisition of the Shorewood Forrest parcel and also help provide a small endowment fund for preserve stewardship. Thank you also to other project funders, including SEMCO Energy Gas Company Port Huron and an anonymous donor.

In early January, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins received much needed assistance from David and Edwin Miller of Marlette, father and son, in cutting invasive Black Locust trees on our Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary in Dryden Township, Lapeer County. Thanks to their skilled tree felling experience, all but one Black locust tree near the edge of Lake George Road were felled. We are planning to get the last one in the near future. David and Edwin logged a pick-up full of the highly resistant Black Locust logs to be used to construct park entrance structures on our Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County; 42 acres of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park acquired by the TLC in 2020.



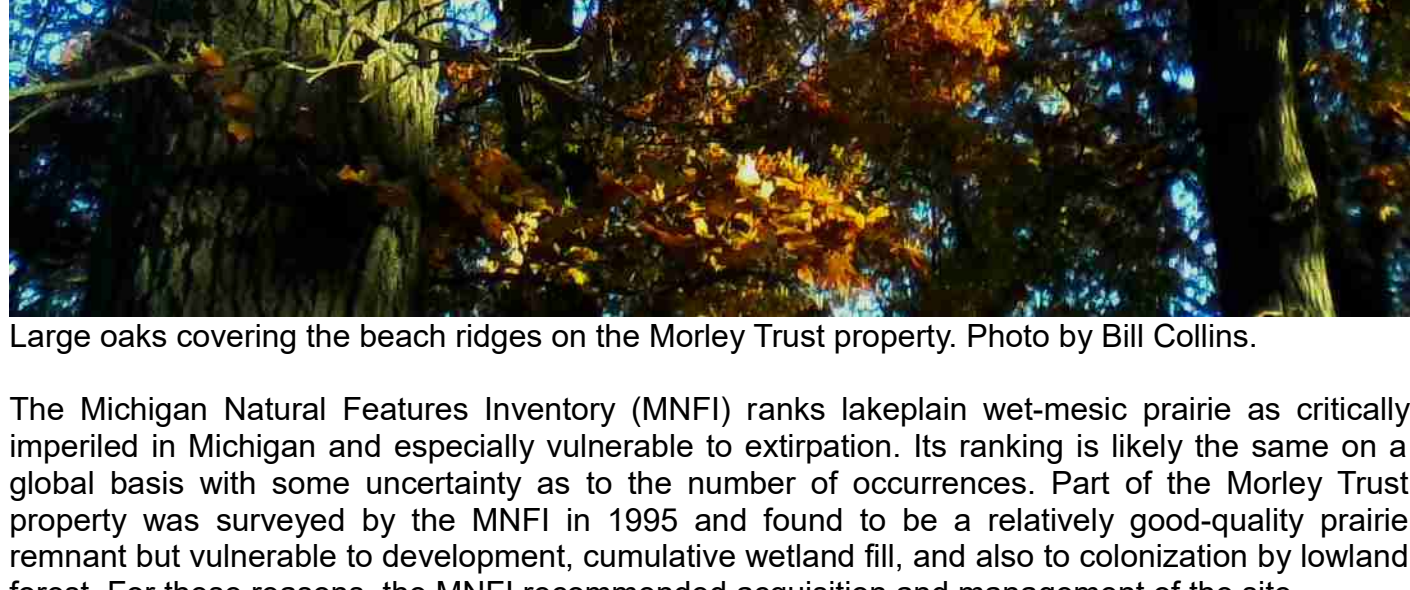
TLC Bidwell Sanctuary along the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park trail on February 14, 2024. Photo by Bill Collins.

Wetland Conservation Program Grant Application

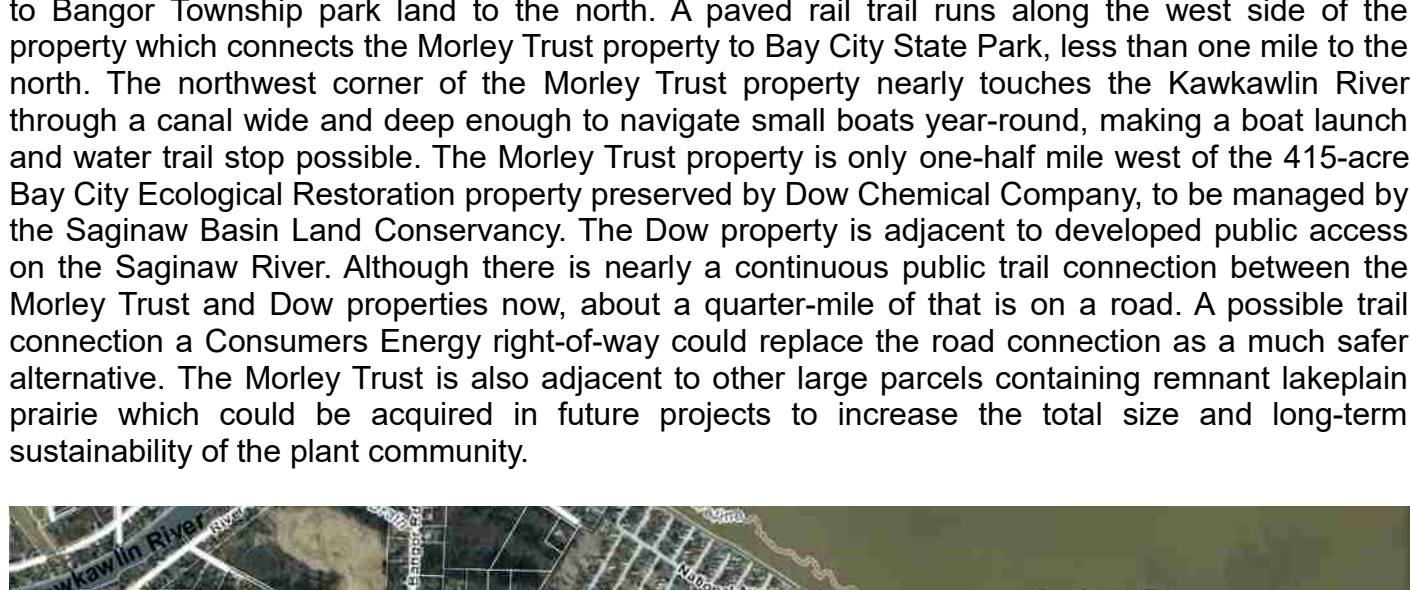
Morley Trust Lakeplain Prairie

Bangor Township, Bay County

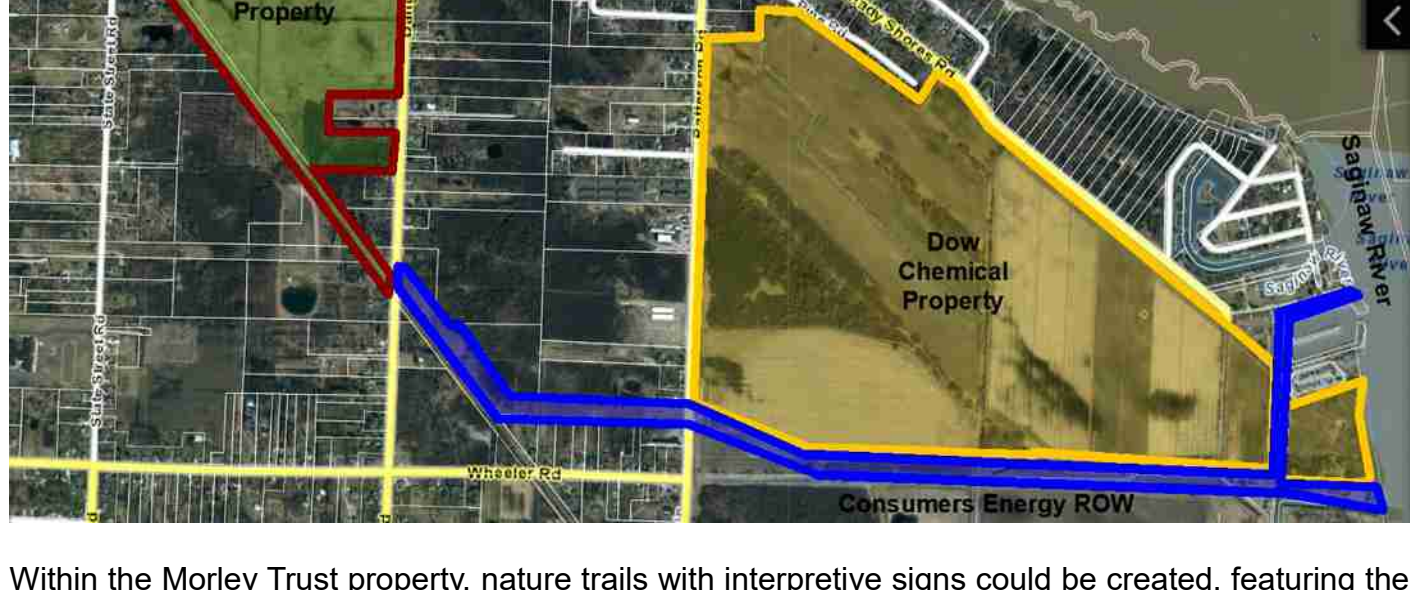
In early January, new State funding was announced for the Wetland Conservation Program, an initiative to enhance, restore, or conserve wetlands to benefit water quality and wildlife and aquatic habitat, and to support and enhance Great Lakes tourism and related economic sectors in the watersheds of Saginaw Bay and Western Lake Erie. The project and funding process is being administered by Ducks Unlimited and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The TLC has worked with Ducks Unlimited for about 4 years on a few projects and was happy to be notified by them of this funding opportunity. Applications for the Wetland Conservation Program are due March 11 and we are currently seeking local partner organizations to acquire and protect about 92 acres of lakeplain wet-mesic prairie located on the north side of Bay City.



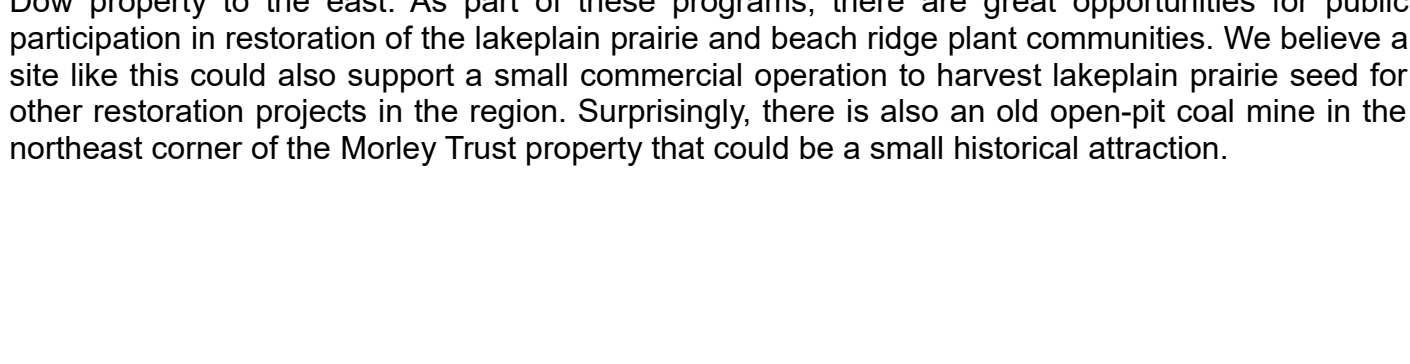
For a few years, the TLC has sought opportunities to protect the 113-acre Morley Trust property, located along the south side of the Kawkawlin River and less than one-half mile southwest of the Saginaw Bay in Bangor Township, Bay County. The site is covered almost entirely by remnant and recovering lakeplain wet prairie interspersed with oak-dominated beach ridges. TLC Executive Director Bill Collins worked on this site in 2015 through 2018 as a wetland consultant for the landowner. TLC President Cheryl Collins and TLC Board Member Dan Rhein also worked on the property, collecting lakeplain prairie plant seed to restore part of the wetland. Although portions of the site was cleared and farmed prior to 2015, patches of lakeplain prairie remain intact with uncommon plant species including Riddell's Goldenrod - *Solidago riddellii*, Marsh Blazing-star - *Liatris spicata*, Field Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita*, Monkey-flower - *Mimulus blaugensis*, Indian Grass - *Sorghastrum nutans*, and Cord Grass - *Spartina pectinata* among other characteristic vegetation.



Long seed spikes of Marsh Blazing-star on the Morley Trust property. Photo by Bill Collins.



Riddell's Goldenrod in-seed on the Morley Trust property. Photo by Bill Collins.



Large oaks covering the beach ridges on the Morley Trust property. Photo by Bill Collins.

The Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) ranks lakeplain wet-mesic prairie as critically imperiled in Michigan and especially vulnerable to extirpation. Its ranking is likely the same on a global basis with some uncertainty as to the number of occurrences. Part of the Morley Trust property was surveyed by the MNFI in 1995 and found to be a relatively good-quality prairie remnant but vulnerable to development, cumulative wetland loss, and also to colonization by lowland forest. For these reasons, the MNFI recommended acquisition and management of the site.

Wetland on the Morley Trust property is currently protected by State and perhaps federal jurisdiction. However, wetland regulations and rules have been severely limited by a recent US Supreme Court decision, *Whitford v. Supreme Court* review anticipated. It's possible that much of the legal basis for wetland protection in Michigan, which assumed substantial jurisdiction over federally regulated wetlands through a 1983 memorandum of agreement, could be eliminated by future judicial review and a change in legislative control and State administration.

Although farming on the Morley Trust property was restricted by the State, it is generally allowed by Federal wetland regulation. Even without land use threats, left unmanaged, the lakeplain prairie on the Morley Trust property will gradually be degraded by the lack the original fire regime that maintained these communities prior to Euro-American settlement. Eastern Cottonwood tree seedlings and saplings are already establishing across large parts of the site. Invasive weeds like Purple Loosestrife and Reed - *Phragmites australis* variety *australis*, are found to increase and could very well dominate the site without management.

The Morley Trust property has a lot going for it in terms of potential public recreation. It is adjacent to Bangor Township park land to the north. A paved trail runs along the west side of the property which connects the Morley Trust property to Bay City State Park, less than one mile to the north. The northwest corner of the Morley Trust property nearly touches the Kawkawlin River through a canal wide and deep enough to navigate small boats year-round, making a boat launch and water trail stop possible. The Morley Trust property is only one-half mile west of the 415-acre Bay City Ecological Restoration property preserved by Dow Chemical Company, to be managed by the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy. The Dow property is adjacent to developed public access on the Saginaw River. Although there is nearly a continuous public trail connection between the Morley Trust and Dow properties now, about a quarter-mile of that is on a road. A possible trail connection to Consumers Energy right-of-way could replace the road connection as a much safer alternative. The Morley Trust is also adjacent to other large parcels containing remnant lakeplain prairie which could be acquired in future projects to increase the total size and long-term sustainability of the plant community.

Within the Morley Trust property, nature trails with interpretive signs could be created, featuring the lakeplain prairie and oak-covered beach ridges. Interior paths could be suitable for other activities such as biking, cross-country skiing, and birding. Educational programs could be developed based on this imperiled ecosystem and these could be run cooperatively with other organizations on the Dow property to the east. As part of these programs, there are great opportunities for public participation in restoration of the lakeplain prairie and beach ridge plant communities. We believe a site like this could also support a small commercial operation to harvest lakeplain prairie seed for other restoration projects in the region. Surprisingly, there is also an old open-pit coal mine in the northeast corner of the Morley Trust property that could be a small historical attraction.

Other TLC Work

Huron, Sanilac, Saint Clair, and Lapeer Counties

As we have said before, the details of unfinished projects are best left until they are done. However, we could say in early 2024 that a few new preserves were somewhere between possible and very likely.

We were contacted in late 2023 about a potential land donation in Huron County exceeding 100 acres. There was also the possibility of establishing a large endowment fund to be used to acquire additional properties in Huron County.

In Sanilac County, we drafted a conservation easement for a nearly 50-acre property, a portion of which is covered by mature Sugar Maple and Red Oak forest. We are just waiting for the landowner to follow through.

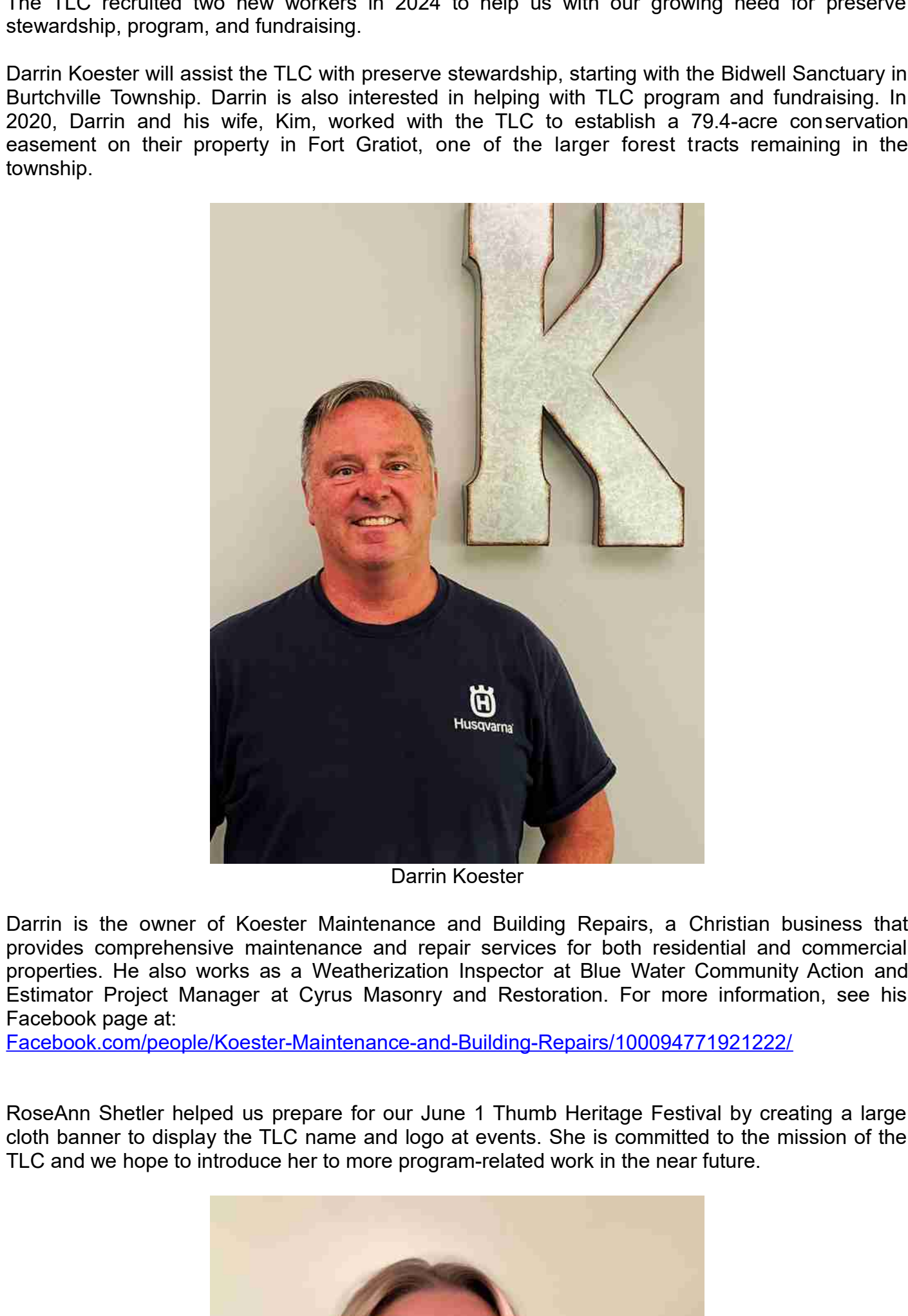
In Saint Clair County, a landowner would like to place a conservation easement on about 60 acres of land along the Pine River.

In Lapeer County, a landowner wants to ensure that their property will remain protected after they are gone. They took the first step on a protection agreement with the TLC.

Dead End Woods Sanctuary Annual Spring Stewardship

Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

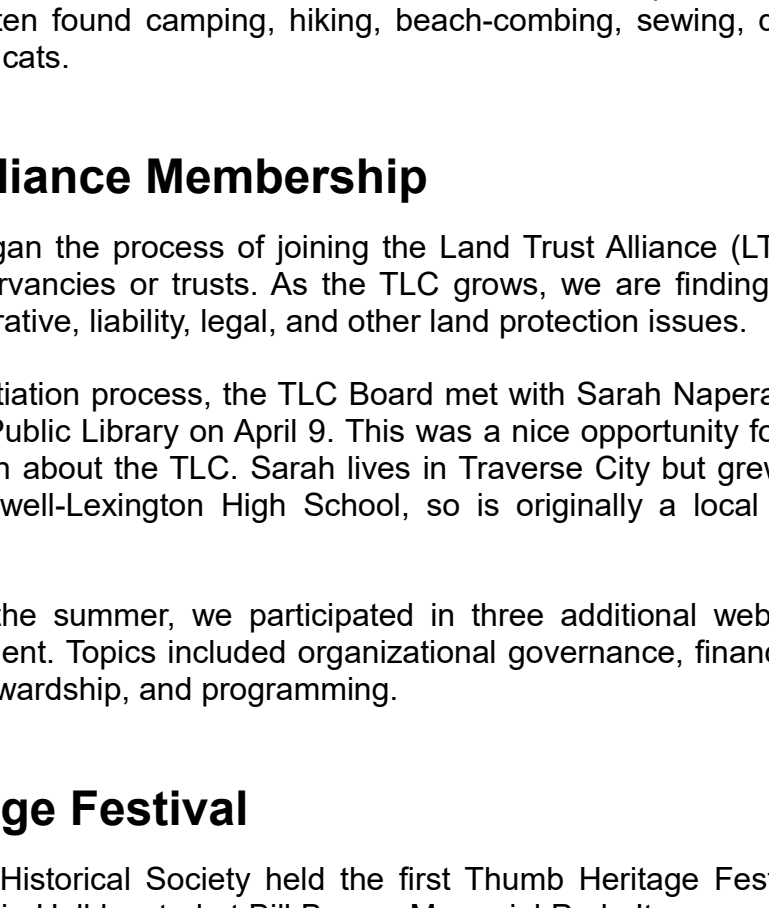
On May 18, we conducted our annual spring stewardship in the Dead End Woods Sanctuary, one of the most floristically diverse forests in Saint Clair County. TLC Program Assistant Blake Short will lead the work. This is always a great opportunity to see and learn spring wildflowers and other plants in this unique woodland preserve. Our focus for 14 years has been removal of invasive Garlic Mustard, a very tasty and nutritious invasive plant originally brought to North America from Europe as a culinary herb. With most of the Garlic Mustard removed on the sanctuary, we are now removing minor occurrences of Multiflora Rose, Japanese Barberry, and other invasive plants.



New TLC Helpers

The TLC recruited two new workers in 2024 to help us with our growing need for preserve stewardship, program, and fundraising.

Darrin Koester will assist the TLC with preserve stewardship, starting with the Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville Township. Darrin is also interested in helping with TLC program and fundraising. In 2020, Darrin and his wife, Kim, worked with the TLC to establish a 79.4-acre conservation easement on their property in Fort Gratiot, one of the larger forest tracts remaining in the township.



Darrin Koester

Darrin is the owner of Koester Maintenance and Building Repairs, a Christian business that provides comprehensive maintenance and repair services for both residential and commercial properties. He also works as a Weatherization Inspector at Blue Water Community Action and Estimator Project Manager at Cyrus Masonry and Restoration. For more information, see his Facebook page at: [Facebook.com/people/Koester-Maintenance-and-Building-Repairs/100094771921222/](https://www.facebook.com/people/Koester-Maintenance-and-Building-Repairs/100094771921222/)

RoseAnn Sheller helped us prepare for our June 1 Thumb Heritage Festival by creating a large cloth banner to display the TLC name and logo at events. She is committed to the mission of the TLC and we hope to introduce her to more program-related work in the near future.



RoseAnn Sheller

RoseAnn lives with her family in rural Lapeer County. She grew up on a small self-sufficient homestead in the Thumb where she enjoyed gardening, preserving food, and caring for animals. Her childhood instilled in her a deep appreciation for nature, animals, and holistic and natural health practices. She has plans to own her own self-sufficient homestead one day, and she hopes to inspire others to reconnect with nature and themselves. In her spare time, RoseAnn embraces an active lifestyle, often found camping, hiking, beach-combing, sewing, drawing, and spending time with her beloved cats.

Land Trust Alliance Membership

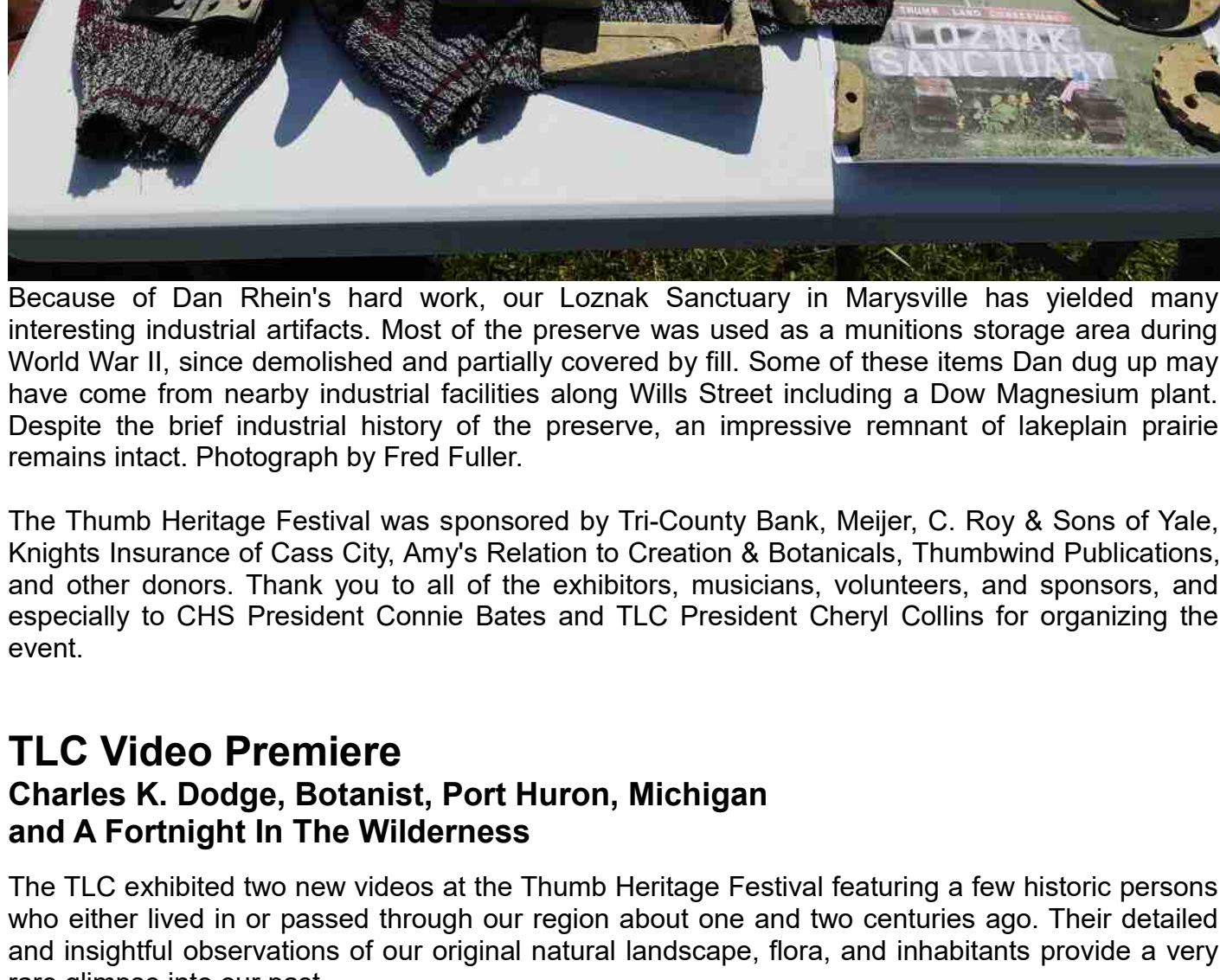
In 2024, the TLC began the process of joining the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), a national support group for land conservancies or trusts. As the TLC grows, we are finding that we require more guidance on administrative, liability, legal, and other land protection issues.

As part of our LTA initiation process, the TLC Board met with Sarah Naperala, a representative of the LTA, at the Yale Public Library on April 9. This was a nice opportunity for us to get acquainted and for Sarah to learn about the TLC. Sarah lives in Traverse City but grew up in Marysville and graduated from Croswell-Lexington High School, so is originally a local who understands our challenges here.

Over the course of the summer, we participated in three additional web meetings, all geared toward risk management. Topics included organizational governance, financial management, land transactions, and stewardship, and programming.

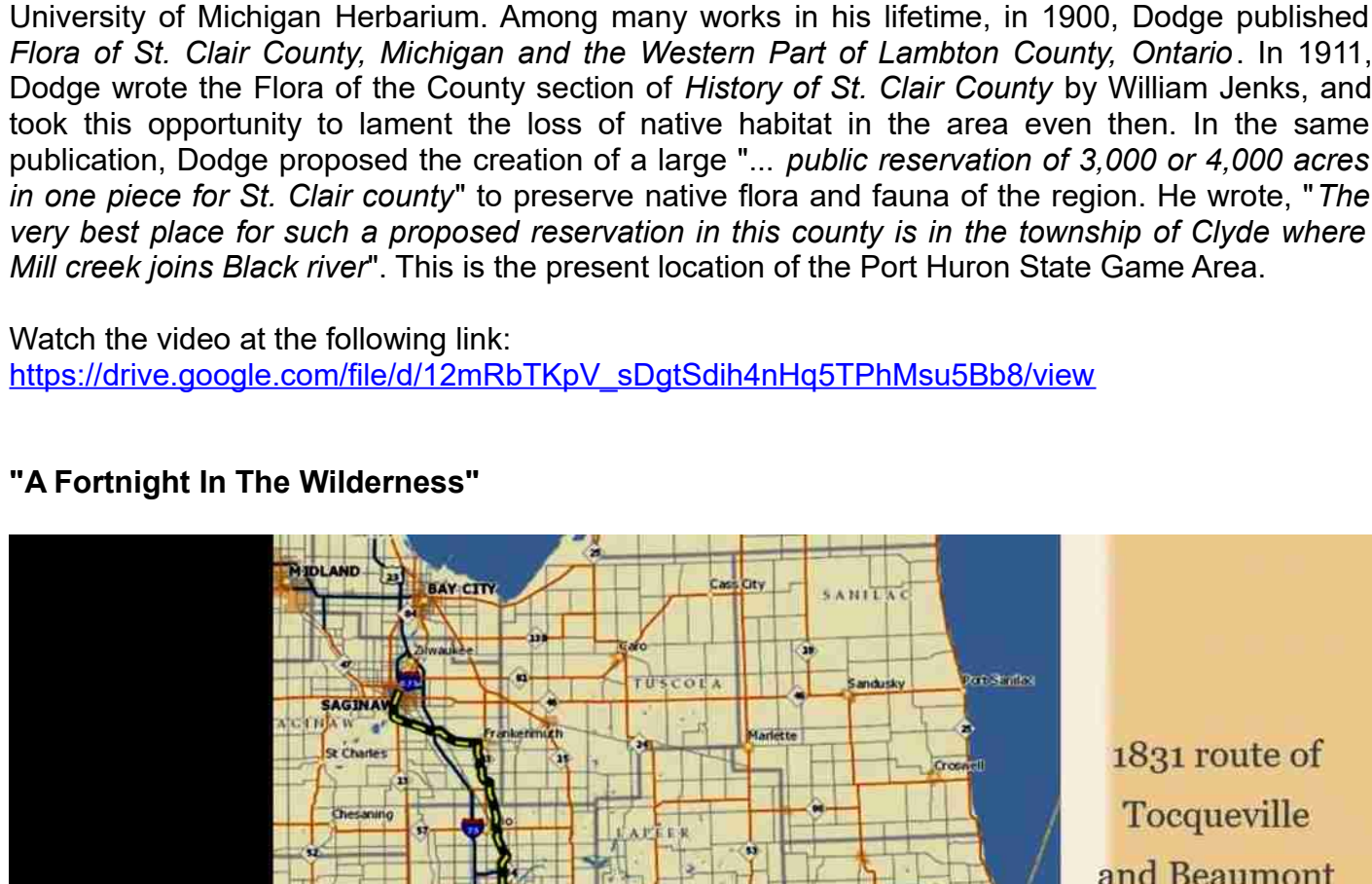
Thumb Heritage Festival

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

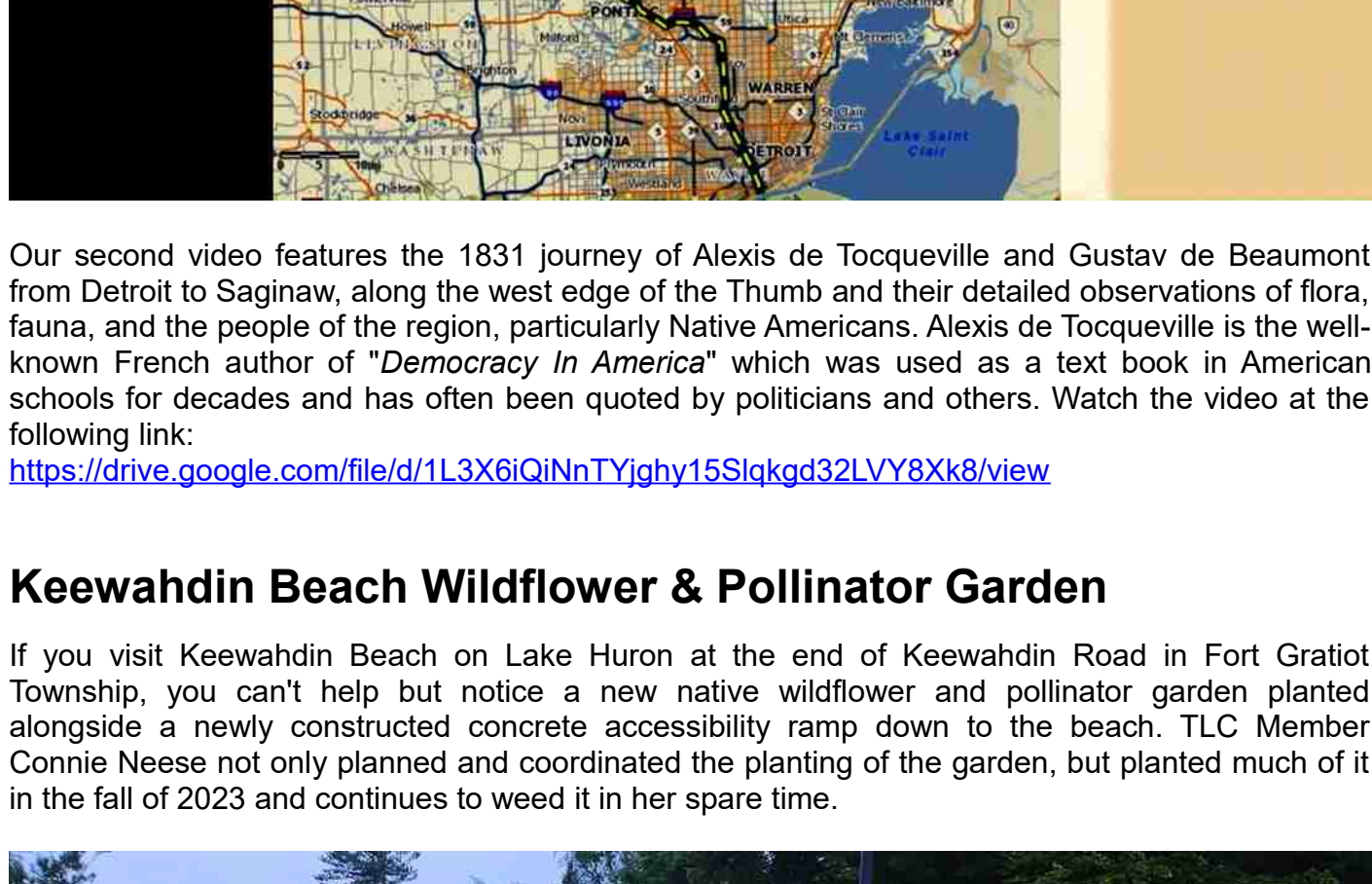


Drone view of the Thumb Heritage Festival site during morning set-up. The historic Clyde Township Hall is toward the upper right.

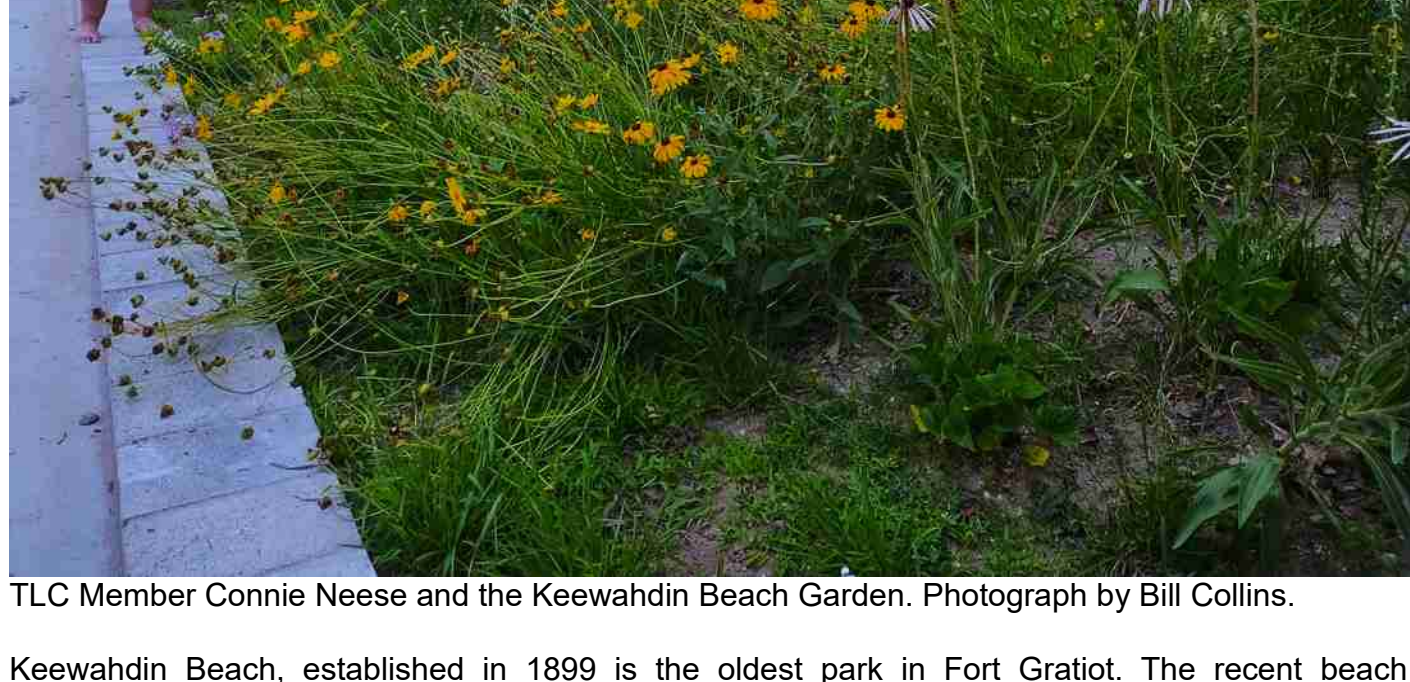
The festival featured exhibitions of our regional history and nature, or in other words, our heritage. Exhibitors included: Clyde Historical Society, Thumb Land Conservancy, Blue Water Pow Wow, Streamline Historic Services of Port Huron, Marlette Historical Society, Huron Genealogy Services of Yale,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



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



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



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

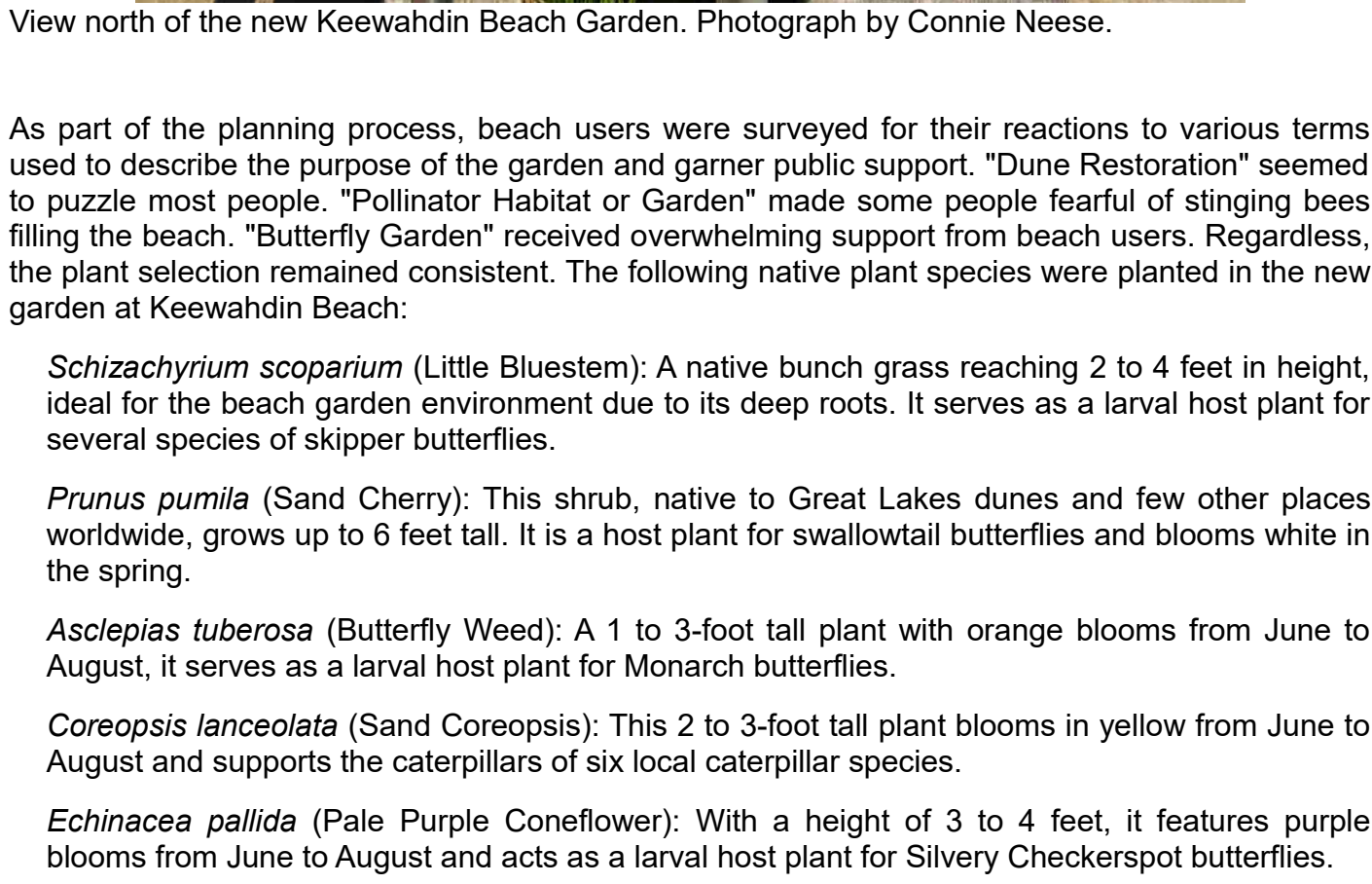
The Thumb Heritage Festival was sponsored by Tri-County Bank, Meijer, C. Roy & Sons of Yale, Knights Insurance of Cass City, Amy's Relation to Creation & Botanicals, Thumbwind Publications, and other donors. Thank you to all of the exhibitors, musicians, volunteers, and sponsors, and especially to CHS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

TLC Video Premiere

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

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

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



Our first video features Port Huron botanist Charles K. Dodge, a prolific botanist, active in the Port Huron area from 1876 through 1918. He was one of the first botanists to thoroughly explore Saint Clair County, adjacent Lambton County in Ontario, the Thumb in general, and the western shore of Lake Huron from Saginaw Bay to the Upper Peninsula. Charles Keene Dodge served as City Attorney of Port Huron, and later, as a Circuit Court Commissioner and City Controller.

In 1893, Dodge was appointed Deputy Collector of the United States Customs Office in Port Huron, and largely retired from legal practice, which afforded him much more time to pursue his true interest of botany. He eventually collected about 40,000 plant specimens, now held by the University of Michigan Herbarium. Among many works in his lifetime, in 1900, Dodge published *Flora of St. Clair County, Michigan and the Western Part of Lambton County, Ontario*. In 1911, Dodge wrote the Flora of the County section of *History of St. Clair County* by William Jenks, and took this opportunity to lament the loss of native habitat in the area even then. In the same publication, Dodge proposed the creation of a large "... public reservation of 3,000 or 4,000 acres in one piece for St. Clair county" to preserve native flora and fauna of the region. He wrote, "The very best place for such a proposed reservation in this county is in the township of Clyde where Mill creek joins Black river". This is the present location of the Port Huron State Game Area.

Watch the video at the following link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L3X6iQINnTYghy15Slqkgd32LY8Xk8/view>

"A Fortnight In The Wilderness"



Our second video features the 1831 journey of Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustav de Beaumont from Detroit to Saginaw, along the west edge of the Thumb and their detailed observations of flora, fauna, and the people of the region, particularly Native Americans. Alexis de Tocqueville is the well-known French author of "Democracy In America" which was used as a text book in American schools for decades and has often been quoted by politicians and others. Watch the video at the following link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L3X6iQINnTYghy15Slqkgd32LY8Xk8/view>

Keewahdin Beach Wildflower & Pollinator Garden

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Schizachyrium scoparium** (Little Bluestem): A native bunch grass reaching 2 to 4 feet in height, ideal for the beach garden environment due to its deep roots. It serves as a larval host plant for several species of skipper butterflies.
- Prunus pumila** (Sand Cherry): This shrub, native to Great Lakes dunes and few other places worldwide, grows up to 6 feet tall. It is a host plant for swallowtail butterflies and blooms white in the spring.
- Asclepias tuberosa** (Butterfly Weed): A 1 to 3-foot tall plant with orange blooms from June to August, it serves as a larval host plant for Monarch butterflies.
- Coreopsis lanceolata** (Sand Coreopsis): This 2 to 3-foot tall plant blooms in yellow from June to August and supports the caterpillars of six local caterpillar species.
- Echinacea pallida** (Pale Purple Coneflower): With a height of 3 to 4 feet, it features purple blooms from June to August and acts as a larval host plant for Silvery Checkerspot butterflies.
- Liatris aspera** (Rough Blazing Star): Standing at 3 to 4 feet tall, it blooms pink from July to September and supports the larvae of six local caterpillar species.
- Phlox pilosa** (Prairie Phlox): This 2 feet tall plant boasts purple-pink blooms from May to July and provides habitat for six local caterpillar species.
- Rubbeckia hirta** (Black-eyed Susan): Reaching 3 feet in height, it features yellow blooms from June to September and serves as a larval host plant for more than 30 caterpillar species.
- Viola sororia** (Common Blue Violet): A low-growing plant, only 4 to 6 inches tall, with purple blooms from April to June and supports several fritillary butterfly species as larval hosts. It was already on-site and left in place.

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

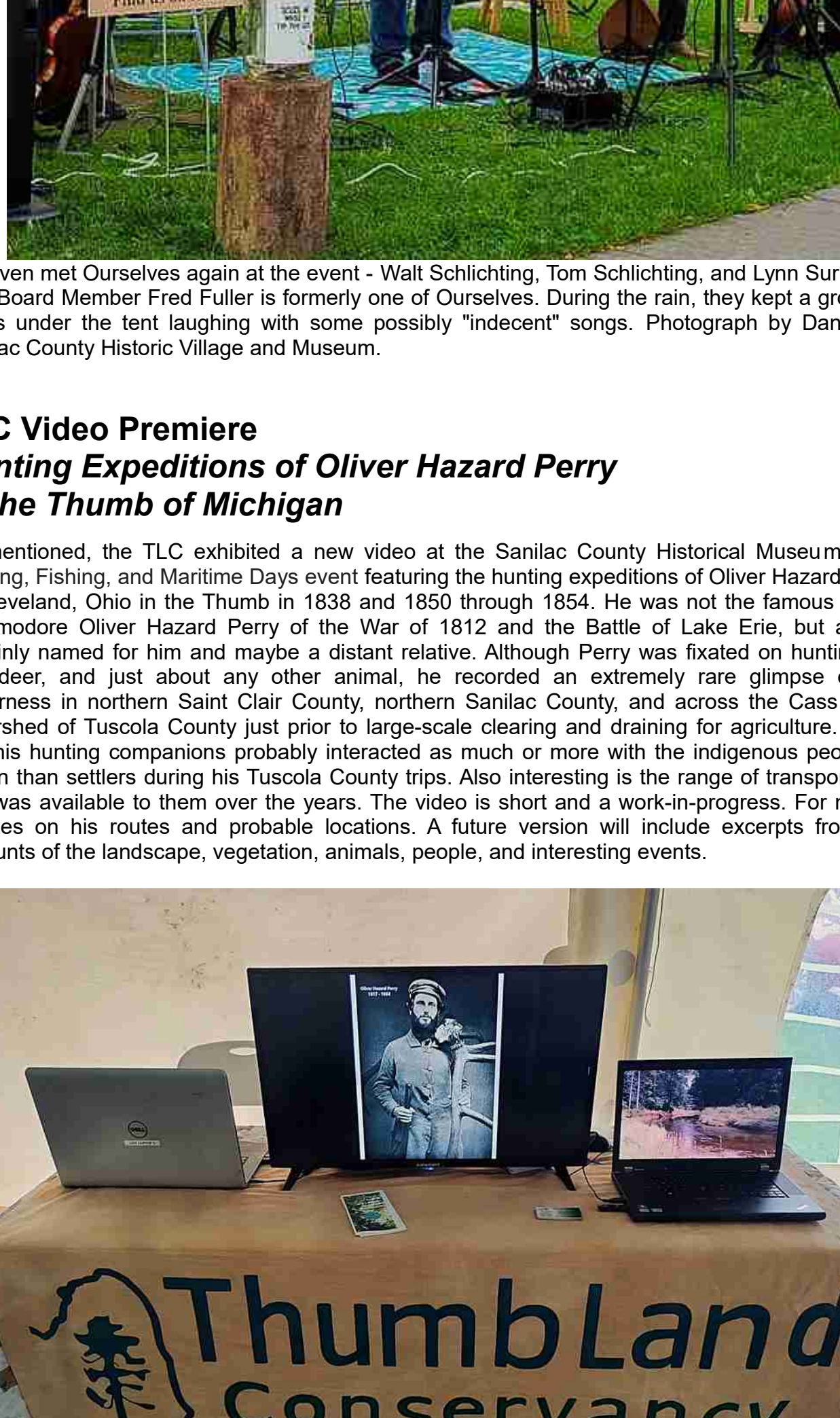
The Fort Gratiot Parks Commission allocated a budget of up to \$1,000 for purchasing plants and supplies for the Keewahdin Beach Garden. The total expenditure was just under \$800 with plants purchased at wholesale prices from Wildtype Nursery in Mason, Michigan.

To prepare and establish the garden, volunteers from St. Clair County Trailblazers, Friends of the St. Clair River, and other beach enthusiasts joined with the Fort Gratiot Parks Commission in weeding the garden and installing over 500 plants using a closely spaced matrix design based on Benjamin Vogt's book "Prairie Up". This approach effectively inhibits weed growth. Neighboring residents of Keewahdin Beach have also offered their assistance in its ongoing maintenance.

2024 Green Guardian Award Winner



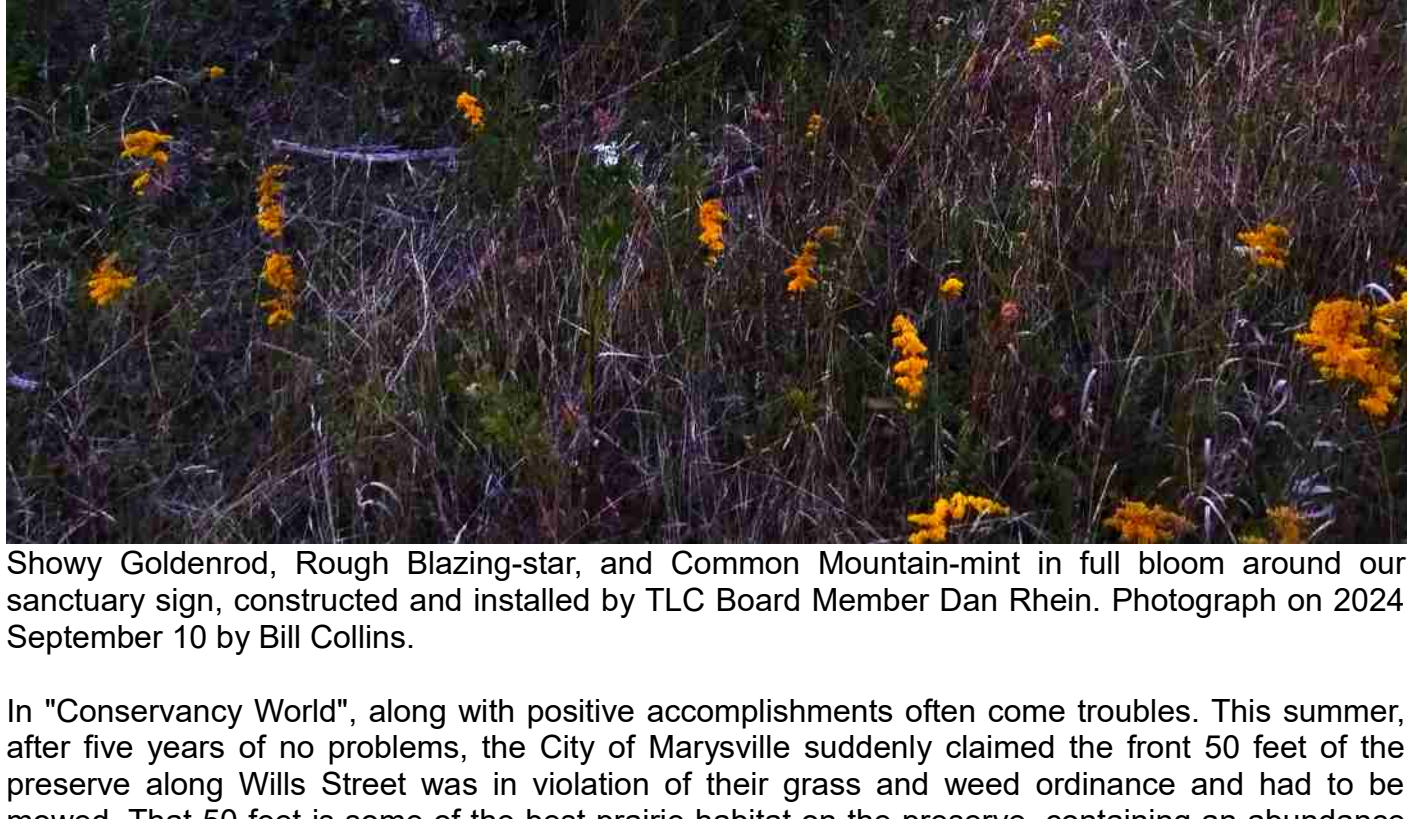
Lac Sainte Claire Habitants et Voyageurs de Detroit. Micki Smith made several of the items on the table, including some very nice beeswax candles. Photograph by Dan Finn, Sanilac County Historic Village and Museum.



We even met Ourselves again at the event - Walt Schlichting, Tom Schlichting, and Lynn Surbrook. TLC Board Member Fred Fuller is formerly one of Ourselves. During the rain, they kept a group of ladies under the tent laughing with some possibly "indecent" songs. Photograph by Dan Finn, Sanilac County Historic Village and Museum.

TLC Video Premiere *Hunting Expeditions of Oliver Hazard Perry in the Thumb of Michigan*

As mentioned, the TLC exhibited a new video at the Sanilac County Historical Museum 2024 Hunting, Fishing, and Maritime Days event featuring the hunting expeditions of Oliver Hazard Perry of Cleveland, Ohio in the Thumb in 1838 and 1850 through 1854. He was not the famous Naval Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry of the War of 1812 and the Battle of Lake Erie, but almost certainly named for him and maybe a distant relative. Although Perry was fixated on hunting elk and deer, and just about any other animal, he recorded an extremely rare glimpse of the wilderness in northern Saint Clair County, northern Sanilac County, and across the Cass River watershed of Tuscola County just prior to large-scale clearing and draining for agriculture. Perry and his hunting companions probably interacted as much or more with the indigenous people of region than settlers during his Tuscola County trips. Also interesting is the range of transportation that was available to them over the years. The video is short and a work-in-progress. For now, it focuses on his routes and probable locations. A future version will include excerpts from his accounts of the landscape, vegetation, animals, people, and interesting events.



The TLC exhibit at the 2024 Hunting, Fishing, and Maritime Days event showing the *Hunting Expeditions of Oliver Hazard Perry in the Thumb of Michigan* video at the center. Photograph by Bill Collins.

For a fascinating account of the expeditions of Perry in the Thumb, see this link:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N9Uoq8rkK3IKOPrCTPNYnpWXZ1P1RU/view?usp=sharing>

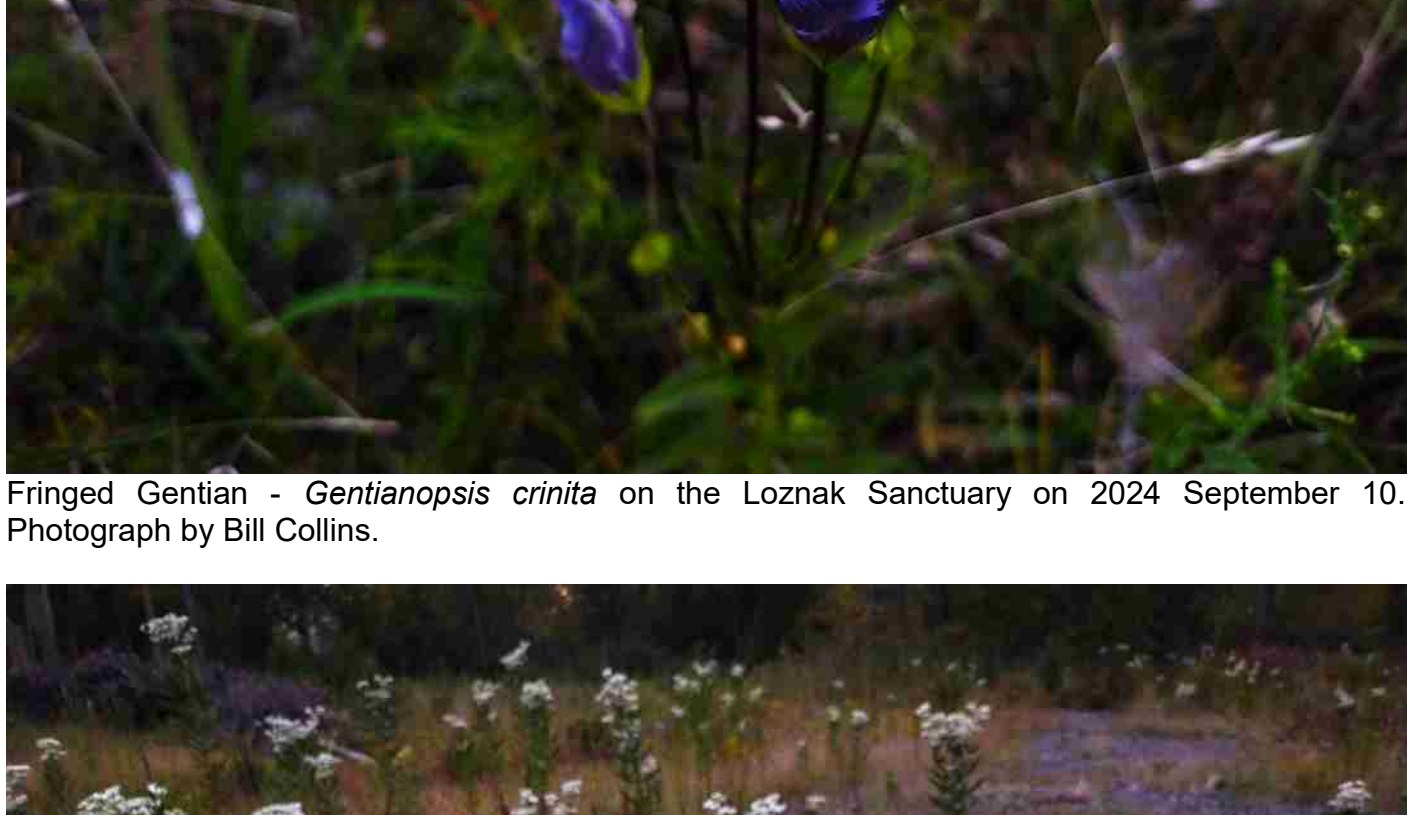
Loznak Sanctuary Marysville

A lot of much needed stewardship was accomplished on our Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville this summer through the continued hard work of TLC Board Member Dan Rhein. He has single-handedly set back large numbers of invasive weeds across the preserve, including Callery Pear - *Pyrus calleryana*, Autumn-olive - *Elaeagnus umbellata*, Common Buckthorn - *Rhamnus cathartica*, Spotted Knapweed - *Centaurea stoebe*, and yes, invasive Susan - *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*. He has also continued removing old fill debris and constructed four custom foot bridges over ditches made from found materials. He even made a preserve sign and installed it at the front of the sanctuary near Wills Street. Dan's work has allowed the native lakeplain prairie vegetation to expand across the Loznak Sanctuary and brought more public attention to the preserve.



Showy Goldenrod, Rough Blazing-star, and Common Mountain-mint in full bloom around our sanctuary sign, constructed and installed by TLC Board Member Dan Rhein. Photograph on 2024 September 10 by Bill Collins.

In "Conservancy World", along with positive accomplishments often came troubles. This summer, after five years of no problems, the City of Marysville suddenly claimed the front 50 feet of the preserve along Wills Street was in violation of their grass and weed ordinance and had to be mowed. That 50 feet is some of the best prairie habitat on the preserve, containing an abundance of Rough Blazing-star - *Liatris aspera*, Small Yellow Flax - *Linum medium* recorded from only 12 counties in Michigan, Tall Boneset - *Eupatorium altissimum* recorded from only 12 counties in Michigan, Riddell's Goldenrod - *Solidago riddellii*, Black-eyed Susan - *Rudbeckia hirta*, Foxglove Beard-tongue - *Penstemon digitalis*, Common Mountain-mint - *Pycnanthemum virginianum*, Oatgrass - *Danthonia spicata*, and even Michigan Special Concern Three-awned Grass - *Aristida longispica* recorded from only 9 counties in Michigan.

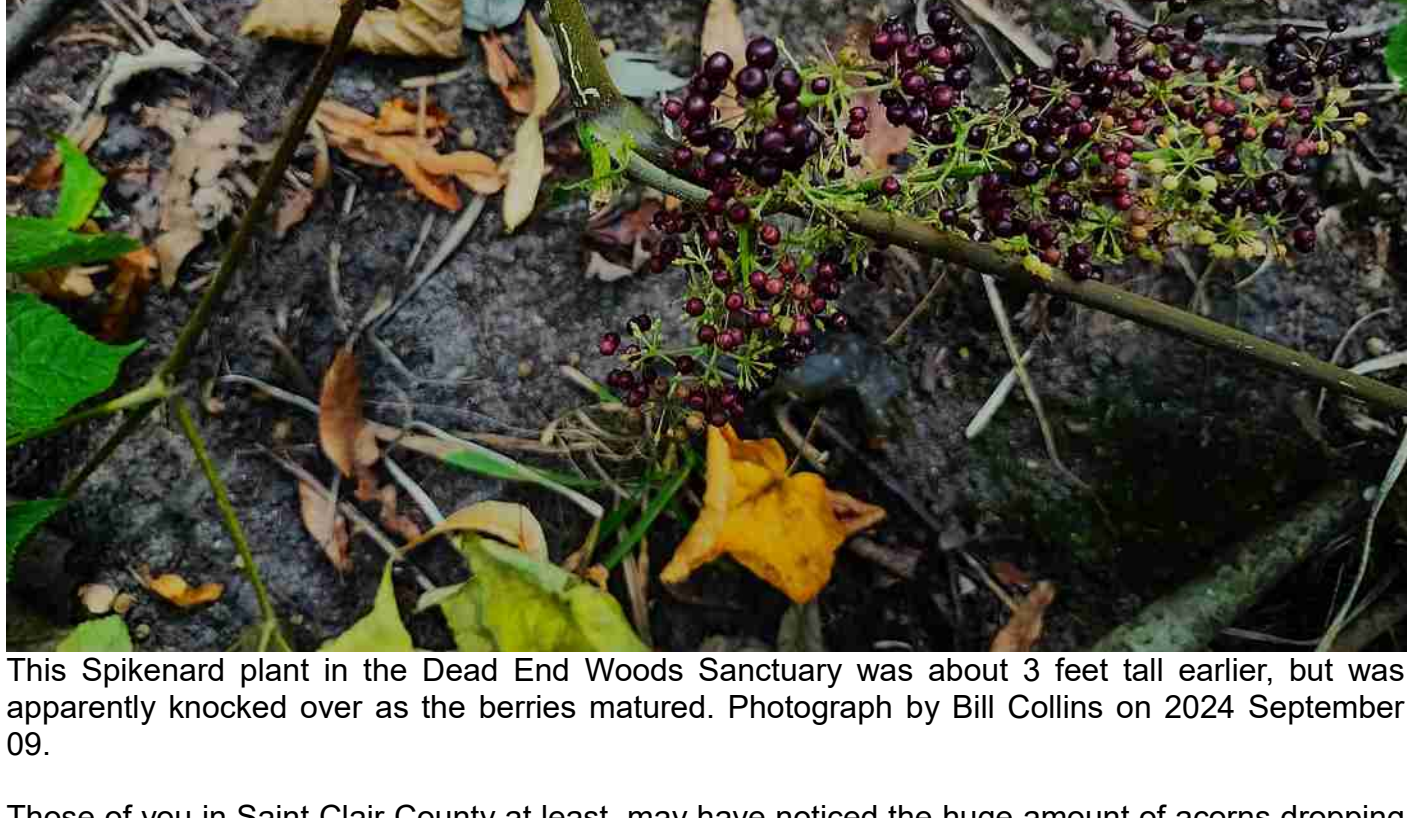


Rough Blazing-star on the Loznak Sanctuary on 2024 September 10. Photograph by Bill Collins.

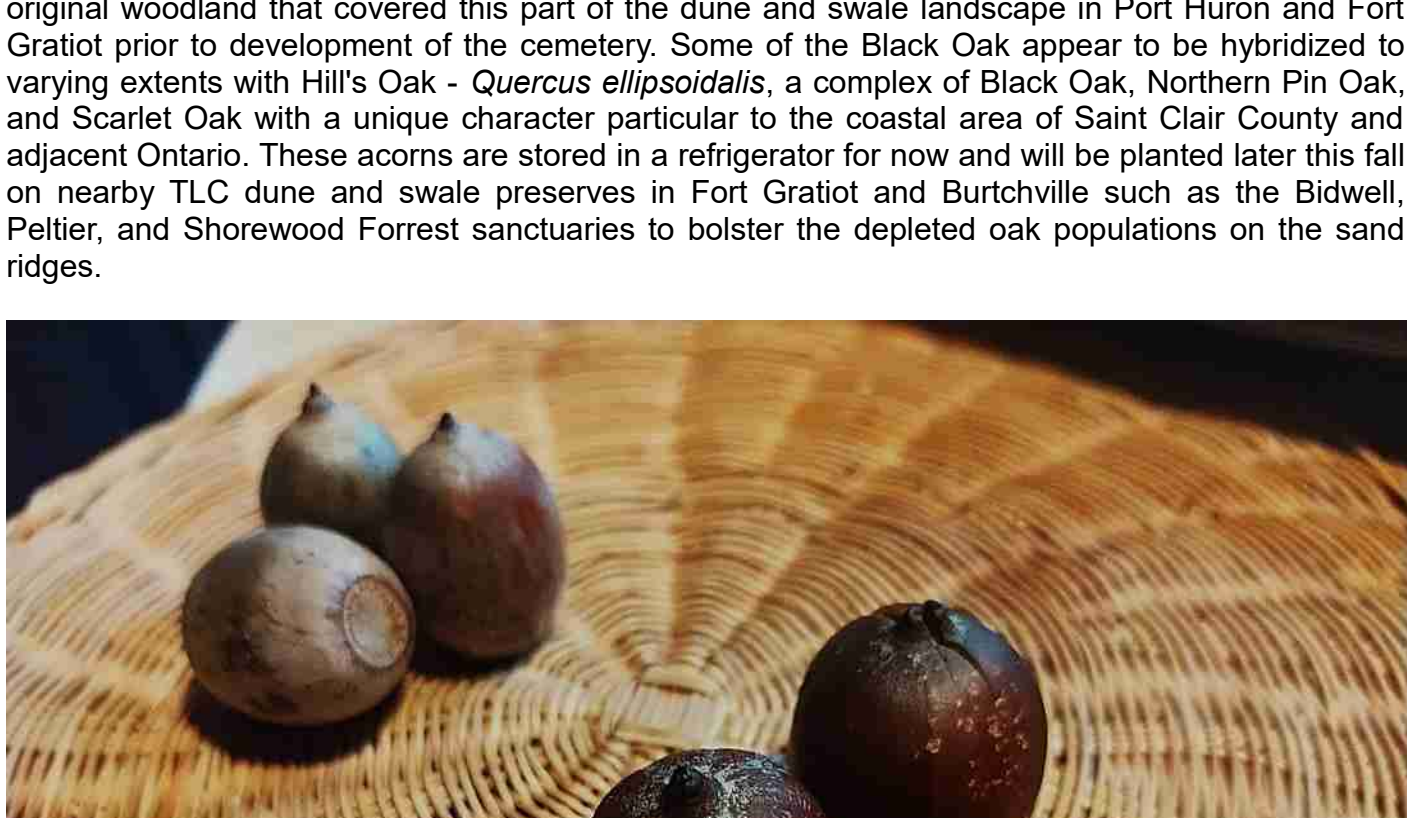


Riddell's Goldenrod being pollinated by an American Bumble Bee - *Bombus pensylvanicus* on the Loznak Sanctuary on 2024 September 10. Photograph by Bill Collins.

We have given only a few weeks to mow. We initially asked Marysville for a compromise on the mowing. Since they have not allowed us to burn the prairie as it should, we will need to mow the preserve this late fall or winter to mimic the natural fire regime that limits tree and shrub growth and favors lakeplain prairie plants. They did not respond favorably to this. Long story short, after having thoroughly read their ordinance and some communication with our attorney, we determined that we needed to simply mow the road ditch and remove so-called "noxious weeds" from the 50-foot strip along Wills Street. The only "noxious weed" listed in the ordinance that occurred on the preserve was Wild Carrot - *Daucus carota*. So, we weed whipped all of the Phragmites and other vegetation in 800 feet of road ditch along Wills Street and Dan Rhein pulled almost all of the Wild Carrot from the front 50 feet. A little over a month later, on September 11, we had Tri-County Aquatics of Washington in Macomb County spray most of the Phragmites on the preserve, the beginning of what we hope will be the long-term exclusion of Phragmites from the preserve.



Fringed Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita* on the Loznak Sanctuary on 2024 September 10. Photograph by Bill Collins.



Tall Boneset on the Loznak Sanctuary on 2024 September 10. Photograph by Bill Collins.

On August 26, the TLC joined a meeting of the Friends of the Saint Clair River and discussed similar problems they were having in Marysville with mowing of native vegetation and removal of milkweed from the Marysville Living Shoreline plantings along Saint Clair River, and reports by residents of ordinance violations and shading of milkweed and other native plantings in both Marysville and Port Huron. We discussed strategies to assist local communities with supporting native plant, pollinator, and wildlife habitats, revision of outdated ordinances, and developing a consistent milkweed and native plant management strategy. If anyone is interested in working with the TLC on these issues, please contact us.

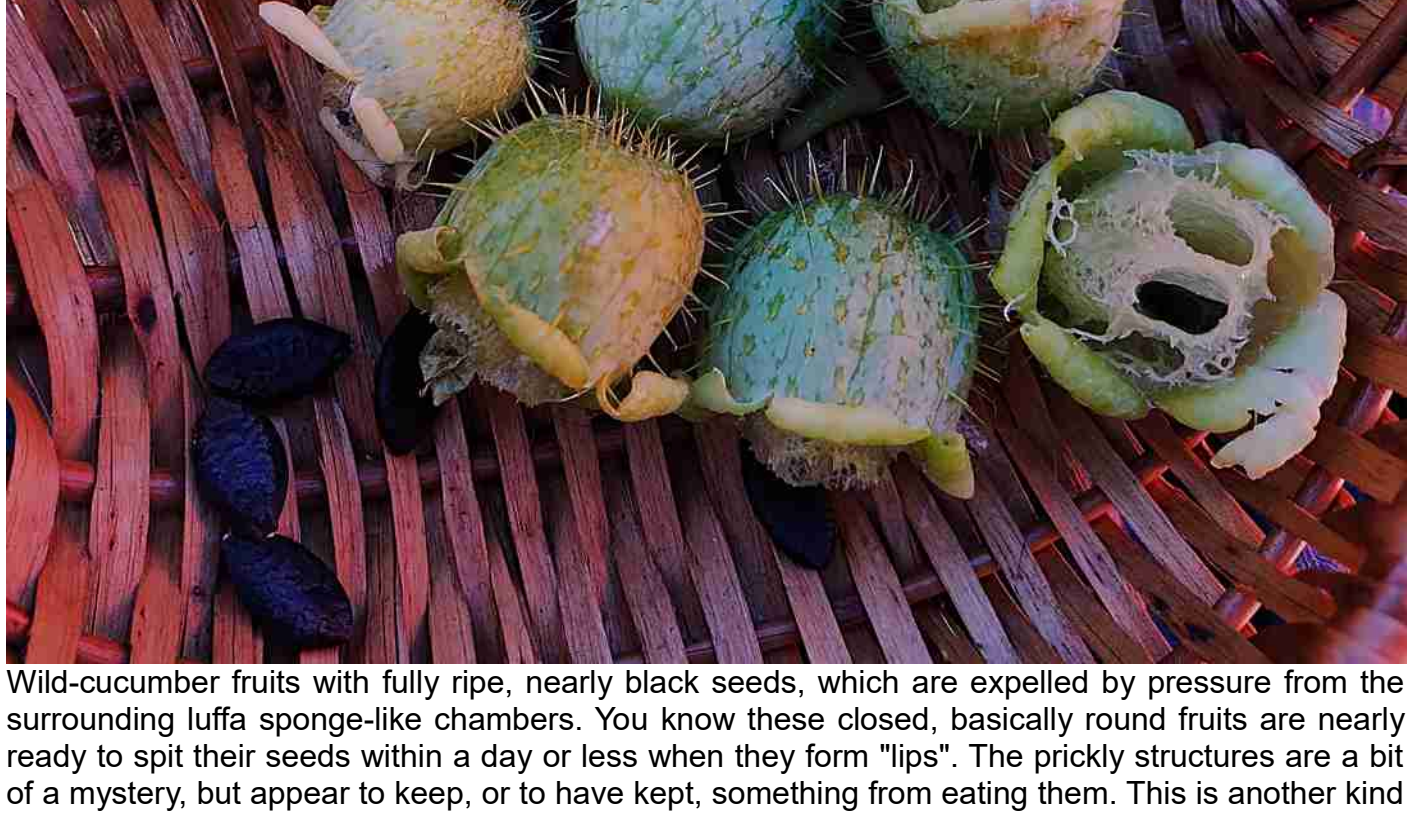
Native Seed Collection

This summer and early fall, the TLC collected seed from a few native plant species to assist dwindling colonies and propagate new populations on nearby preserves. A top priority this summer was Spikenard in our Dead End Woods Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot. There have only been 5 or 6 plants in the site since we first discovered them in 2008, and this year, only two plants flowered and set seed. Spikenard - *Aralia racemosa* is in the same genus as Wild Sarsaparilla - *Aralia nudicaulis* found in sandy and generally northern forests of the Thumb. Spikenard typically grows in heavier soils of mature mesic forests, but quite rare in our region. It has been assigned a coefficient of conservatism of 8 on a scale of 0 to 10, meaning that there is an 80% chance that the plants are remnant of the original plant community prior to Euro-American settlement.



This Spikenard plant in the Dead End Woods Sanctuary was about 3 feet tall earlier, but was apparently knocked over as the berries matured. Photograph by Bill Collins on 2024 September 09.

Those of you in Saint Clair County at least, may have noticed the huge amount of acorns dropping from the oak trees this fall. Apparently, growing conditions in 2023-24 led to a "mast year" for oaks in the region. Red Oak trees were especially laden, which began dropping immature acorns in mid-August, with continuous dropping of mature acorns through early October, peaking in the last weeks of September. We took advantage of this abundance to collect Red Oak - *Quercus rubra* acorns in Fort Gratiot, and Black Oak - *Quercus velutina* still collecting much of the *Quercus ridges* of Lakeside Cemetery and Mount Hope Cemetery in Port Huron. All of these oaks are remnant of the original woodland that covered this part of the dune and swale landscape in Port Huron and Fort Gratiot prior to development of the cemetery. Some of the Black Oak appear to be hybridized to varying extents with Hill's Oak - *Quercus ellipsoidalis*, a complex of Black Oak, Northern Pin Oak, and Scarlet Oak with a unique character particular to the coastal area of Saint Clair County and adjacent Ontario. These acorns are stored in a refrigerator for now and will be planted later this fall on nearby TLC dune and swale preserves in Fort Gratiot and Birchville such as the Bidwell, Pettier, and Shorewood Forrest sanctuaries to bolster the depleted oak populations on the sand ridges.

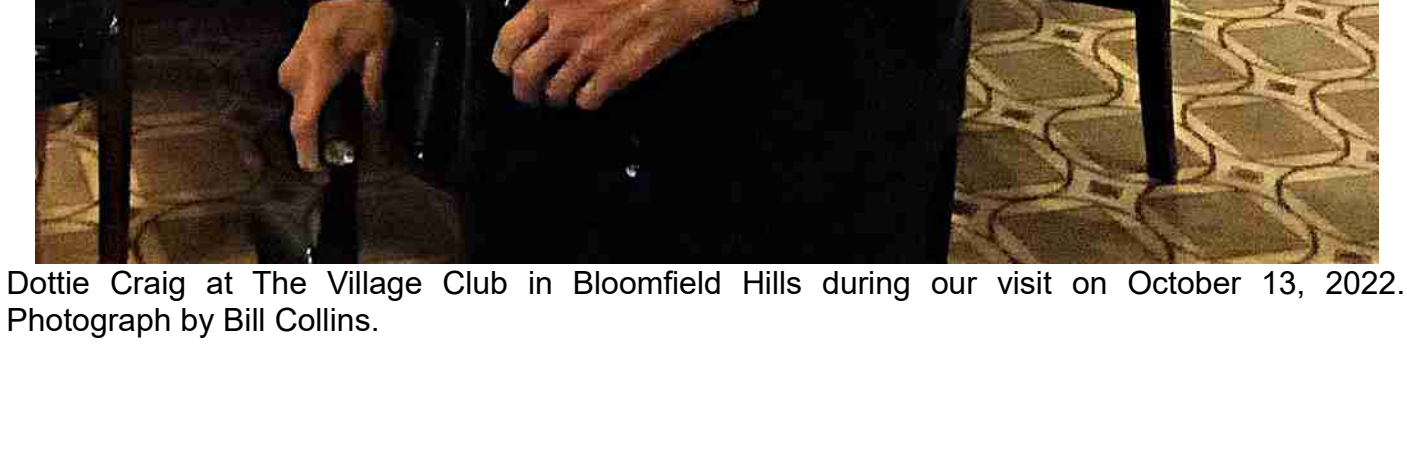


Red Oak acorns collected from two nearby trees of similar age in Fort Gratiot. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Other seeds collected from our Dead End Woods Sanctuary included Tulip Tree - *Liriodendron tulipifera* of mesic and wet-mesic forest with a coefficient of conservatism of 9, and Spicebush - *Lindera benzoin* of swamp forest, coefficient of conservatism of 7. Bladdernut - *Staphylea trifolia*, a native shrub of floodplain forest and swamps with a coefficient of conservatism of 9, was collected from a long-ago rescued colony in Oakland County to be planted on our Croissant Sanctuary south of Ortonville. All of these species generally reach the north edge of their range in our region.



Spicebush with mature fruits in the Dead End Woods Sanctuary. Photograph by Bill Collins on 2024 September 09.



Bladdernut fruits; thin, papery, mostly empty bladder-like husks containing a few seeds in each of the three chambers of each bladder. This kind of fruit is adapted to distribution by floating on water. Collected by new TLC Stewardship Assistant Jason Sawyer and TLC Executive Director Bill Collins on 2024 October 09. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Worthy of mention is an interesting plant known as Wild-cucumber - *Echinocystis lobata*, an annual vine of all kinds of open habitats, but especially along streams and edges of wetlands. While the coefficient of conservatism is only 2, it provides an interesting visual appeal in every way. The sweet-scented flowers support various insect pollinators and the seeds are eaten by larger birds and small mammals. The seed pods below were collected from a flower bed at our TLC Marlette office, originally from plants brought here likely by birds a few years ago. This is one of those plants that looks invasive as its vines grow quickly and can cover small trees. But, it is easily controlled by removing the vines early in the growing season as it is an annual. By September, there will likely be some seeds on the ground that will germinate the next year.

Wild-cucumber fruits with fully ripe, nearly black seeds, which are expelled by pressure from the surrounding luffa sponge-like chambers. You know these closed, basically round fruits are nearly ready to spit their seeds within a day or less when they form "lips". The prickly structures are a bit of a mystery, but appear to keep, or to have kept, something from eating them. This is another kind of fruit that appears to be adapted to distribution by floating on water. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Collecting, storing, and planting seed of native plants is one way to help bolster the diversity and resilience of natural areas. If nothing else, it is can be a relaxing way to get your mind off the troubles of the world and take a little satisfaction in doing something simple and good.

Dottie Craig Donation By TLC Executive Director Bill Collins

Our senior TLC Board Member, Dottie Craig, passed away last October 16 at the age of 92. She was a special member of the TLC Board. She loved having all of us together and generously made her home available for many of our board meetings, lunch cookouts during our spring stewardship in the Dead End Woods Sanctuary, and our first TLC annual meeting. Dottie was a joy to all of us in the TLC. She had a great sense of humor and we laughed about all kinds of things.

I first met Dottie in 2008 while flagging wetland boundaries and conducting a botanical survey with TLC Board Member Dan Rhein, on our soon-to-be established Dead End Woods Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot. Dottie lived at the dead end of Wison Drive next to the preserve and took quite an interest in the woods and our work. She especially loved all of the wild animals that visited her backyard, or that she could watch out her window in the adjacent woods. In 2009, she asked to host our cookouts in her yard during our spring stewardship of the Dead End Woods Sanctuary. She then invited us to use her house for board meetings. Soon after, we invited her to join the TLC Board. Dottie had health issues and couldn't easily travel to most of our board meetings which we held near Yale at the time, but she finally joined the board in 2013 at the age of 82.

Dottie Craig at the Village Club in Bloomfield Hills during our visit on October 13, 2022. Photograph by Bill Collins.

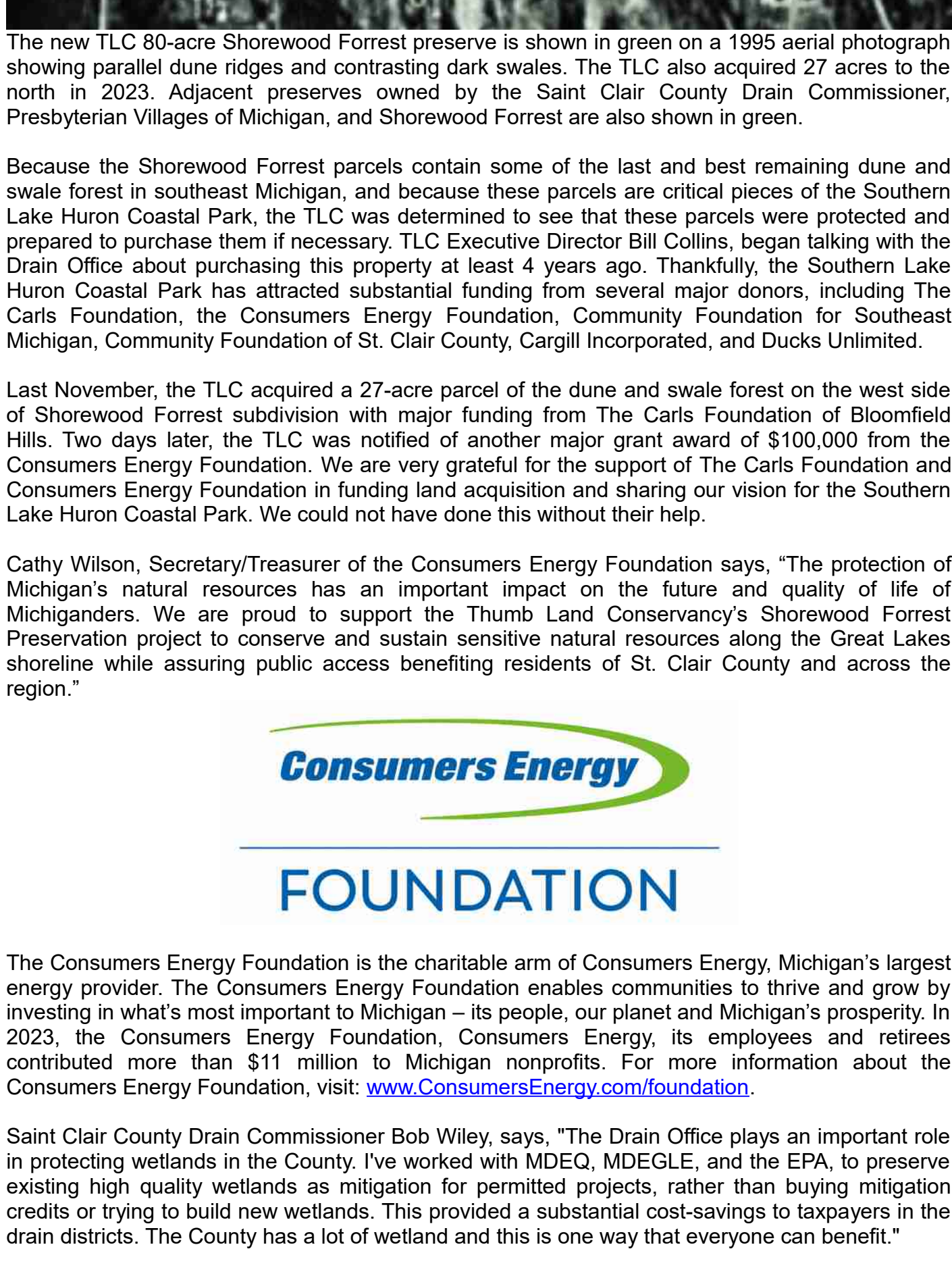
We were fortunate to be able to take Dottie to The Village Club of Bloomfield Hills on October 13 of 2022 to visit the former residence of Charlie Winningham, from whom Dottie's father purchased a yacht, the "Maid Marian", in the late 1930s. As a girl, Dottie and her family spent many days aboard the Maid Marian cruising the Detroit River, Lake Erie, Lake Saint Clair, and Lake Huron.

Dottie has continued to support the TLC by leaving us part of her trust, which has now given the TLC a little more funding to support our stewardship of the Dead End Woods Sanctuary and pursue more land preservation. Thank you Dottie. You are truly missed.

80-Acre Shorewood Forest Parcel Addition To The Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Fort Gratiot

Some of you may have read about our new preserve addition in the [Times Herald](#) or [Blue Water Healthy Living](#). On October 23, the TLC closed on purchase of the south 80-acre Shorewood Forest parcel in Fort Gratiot. This important acquisition of dune and swale forest was made possible by a grant of \$100,000 from the Consumers Energy Foundation, which the TLC was awarded last November.

In 2014, Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner, Bob Wiley, purchased two 80-acre Shorewood Forest parcels west of the Shorewood Forest subdivision as future wetland mitigation for County drain projects. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, now the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (MDEGLE), allowed for preservation of existing high quality wetlands as mitigation, or replacement, for State-regulated wetlands eliminated by State-permitted projects. While the north 52 acres of the parcel is protected by two State conservation easements established as mitigation for two County projects, the south 28 acres of the parcel, along Carrigan Road, has remained unprotected for 10 years. MDEGLE has since required that permit applicants purchase wetland mitigation credits from mitigation banks whenever possible. These are mostly privately restored wetland mitigation areas that have been monitored and approved by MDEGLE, and typically cost over \$100,000 per acre of credit. This has greatly limited the opportunities for preservation of existing wetland as mitigation across much of the state. With little prospect of using the additional unprotected wetland on the Shorewood Forest parcels as mitigation, the Saint Clair County Drain Office determined that they would need to sell the property in the near future.



The new TLC 80-acre Shorewood Forest preserve is shown in green on a 1995 aerial photograph showing parallel dune ridges and contrasting dark swales. The TLC also acquired 27 acres to the north in 2023. Adjacent preserves owned by the Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner, Presbyterian Villages of Michigan, and Shorewood Forest are also shown in green.

Because the Shorewood Forest parcels contain some of the last and best remaining dune and swale forest in southeast Michigan, and because these parcels are critical pieces of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park, the TLC was determined to see that these parcels were protected and prepared to purchase them if necessary. TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, began talking with the Drain Office about purchasing this property at least 4 years ago. Thankfully, the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park has attracted substantial funding from several major donors, including The Carls Foundation, the Consumers Energy Foundation, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Community Foundation of St. Clair County, Cargill Incorporated, and Ducks Unlimited.

Last November, the TLC acquired a 27-acre parcel of the dune and swale forest on the west side of Shorewood Forest subdivision with major funding from The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills. Two days later, the TLC was notified of another major grant award of \$100,000 from the Consumers Energy Foundation. We are very grateful for the support of The Carls Foundation and Consumers Energy Foundation in funding land acquisition and sharing our vision for the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. We could not have done this without their help.

Cathy Wilson, Secretary/Treasurer of the Consumers Energy Foundation says, "The protection of Michigan's natural resources has an important impact on the future and quality of life of Michiganders. We are proud to support the Thumb Land Conservancy's Shorewood Forest Preservation project to conserve and sustain sensitive natural resources along the Great Lakes shoreline while assuring public access benefiting residents of St. Clair County and across the region."



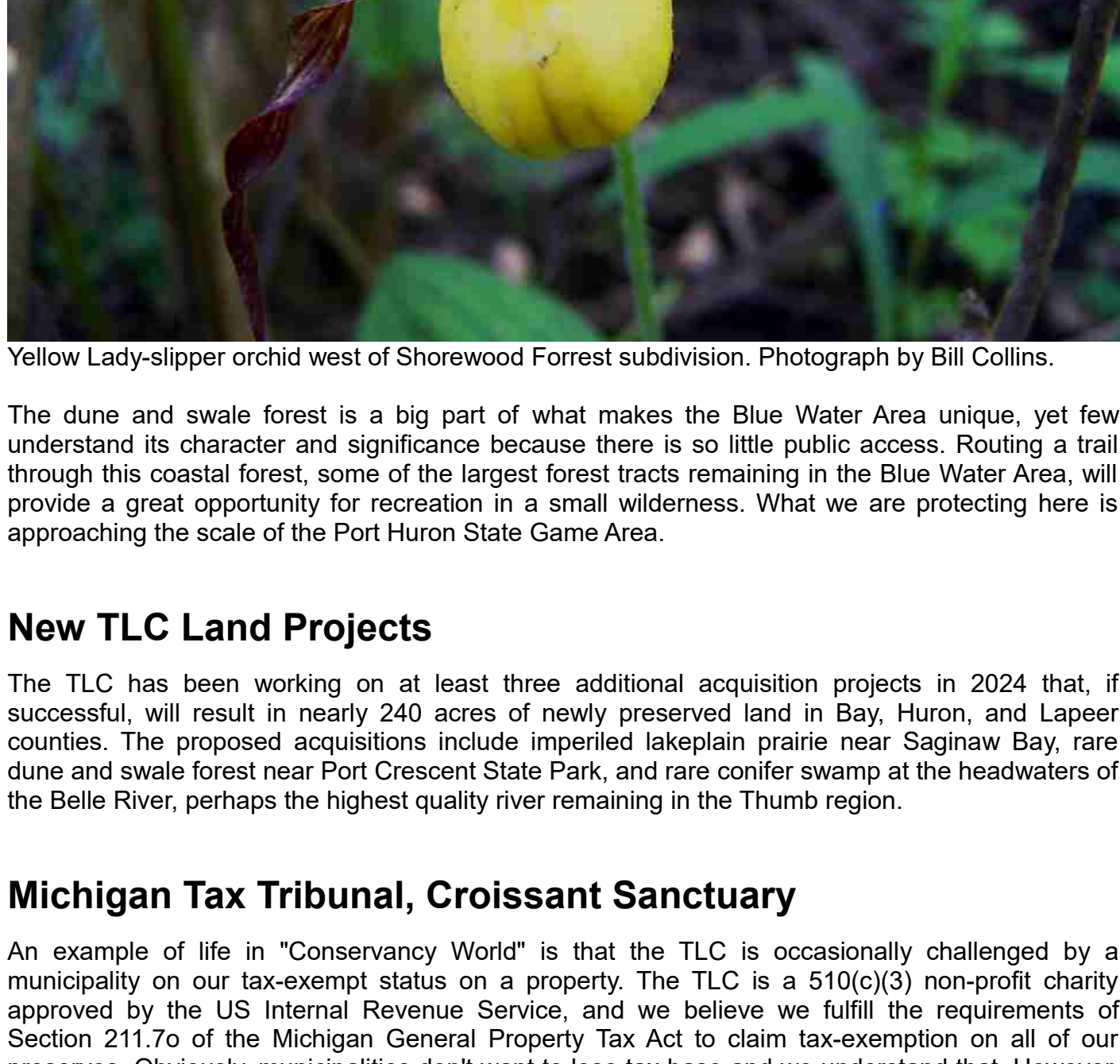
The Consumers Energy Foundation is the charitable arm of Consumers Energy, Michigan's largest energy provider. The Consumers Energy Foundation enables communities to thrive and grow by investing in what's most important to Michigan – its people, our planet and Michigan's prosperity. In 2023, the Consumers Energy Foundation, Consumers Energy, its employees and retirees contributed more than \$11 million to Michigan nonprofits. For more information about the Consumers Energy Foundation, visit: www.ConsumersEnergy.com/foundation.

Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner Bob Wiley, says, "The Drain Office plays an important role in protecting wetlands in the County. I've worked with MDEQ, MDEGLE, and the EPA, to preserve existing high quality wetlands as mitigation for permitted projects, rather than buying mitigation credits or trying to build new wetlands. This provided a substantial cost-savings to taxpayers in the drain districts. The County has a lot of wetland and this is one way that everyone can benefit."

The TLC has worked for 16 years to protect the dune and swale forest in Saint Clair County and now owns over 160 acres of it in Fort Gratiot and Burtchville. In 2010, the TLC acquired 11.5 acres of the dune and swale forest in Fort Gratiot as a donation from Dr. Syed Hamzavi and the Peltier family. In 2014, the TLC assisted the Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner in acquisition of about 180 acres of dune and swale forest in Fort Gratiot as mitigation for county drain projects. In 2020, the Consumers Energy Foundation, The Carls Foundation, and other supporters funded the TLC's acquisition of 42 acres of the dune and swale forest along the north side of Metcalf Road in Burtchville. In 2023, the TLC acquired another 27 acres in Fort Gratiot with funding from The Carls Foundation, and also assisted Presbyterian Villages of Michigan in finalizing protection and management plans for a 42-acre conservation easement at their Lake Huron Woods assisted living facility in Fort Gratiot.

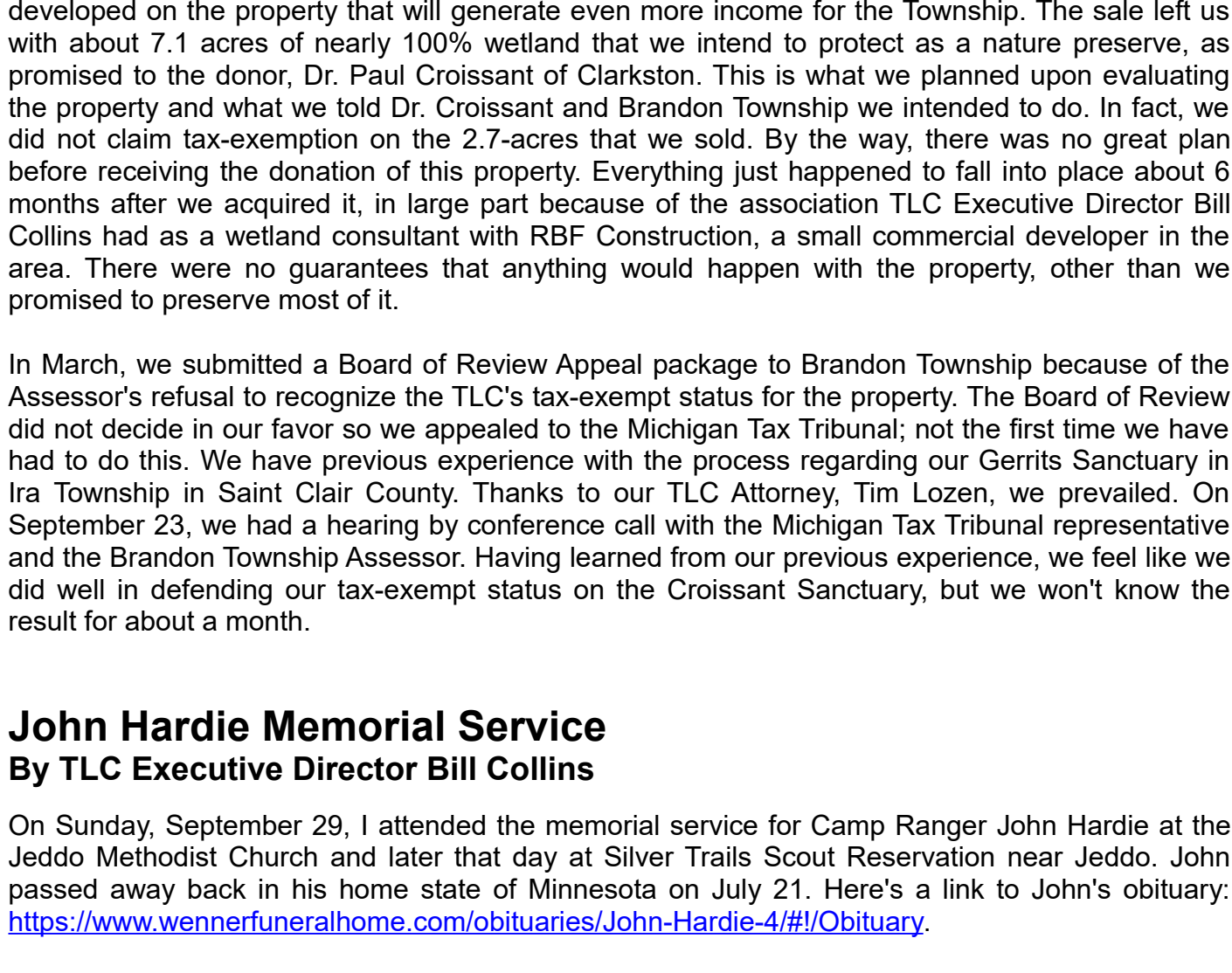
The Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park will eventually protect a 4.5-mile long section of the dune and swale forest north of Port Huron, a rare coastal ecosystem, and one of only a few areas remaining from Lake Erie to the Saginaw Bay. Plans are to route a trail on the main dune ridges from near the Fort Gratiot Nature Park at Carrigan and Parker Roads, up to the day-use area of Lakeport State Park. We believe the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park will be a regional attraction when completed, and has already greatly increased public access for passive recreation in the Blue Water Area.

For thousands of years, the land in Michigan was depressed by the weight of a roughly 2-mile high layer of glacial ice. As the last glacier began melting back in Michigan about 14,000 years ago, the land began rising and is still rising slightly. As the land rose at different rates, the old Georgian Bay outlet of the early Great Lakes was blocked about 7,500 years ago, causing the waters of early Great Lakes, known as the Nipissing Great Lakes, to rise about 15 feet above the present elevation. This early stage of the Great Lakes was still draining out the old Chicago outlet to the Mississippi River, but about 4,500 years ago, drainage redirected to the old Saint Clair River outlet which quickly dune-out. The high water rapidly drained, leaving a series of parallel sand ridges separated by mucky wetland troughs or swales from about 1 to 2 miles inland from the present shoreline. The ridges were wind-blown dunes and the mucky swales were shrub swamp for decades if not centuries before becoming forested and covered largely by a diverse mix of Black Oak, Eastern Hemlock, Eastern White Pine, Red Maple, Paper Birch, Northern White-cedar, Tamarack, and Black Ash.



Wetland swale west of Shorewood Forest subdivision. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Despite many impacts over the past 200 years, the dune and swale forest is still an amazing place and supports many unique and uncommon species like Purple-flowering Raspberry, nearly identical to Thimbleberry of the Upper Peninsula, Yellow Lady-slipper orchids, Blue-spotted Salamanders, Eastern Hognose Snakes, and a great variety of migratory birds that move and nest along Lake Huron.



Yellow Lady-slipper orchid west of Shorewood Forest subdivision. Photograph by Bill Collins.

The dune and swale forest is a big part of what makes the Blue Water Area unique, yet few understand its character and significance because there is so little public access. Routing a trail through this coastal forest, some of the largest forest tracts remaining in the Blue Water Area, will provide a great opportunity for recreation in a small wilderness. What we are protecting here is approaching the scale of the Port Huron State Game Area.

New TLC Land Projects

The TLC has been working on at least three additional acquisition projects in 2024 that, if successful, will result in nearly 240 acres of newly preserved land in Bay, Huron, and Lapeer counties. The proposed acquisitions include imperiled lakeplain prairie near Saginaw Bay, rare dune and swale forest near Port Crescent State Park, and rare conifer swamp at the headwaters of the Belle River, perhaps the highest quality river remaining in the Thumb region.

Michigan Tax Tribunal, Croissant Sanctuary

An example of life in "Conservancy World" is that the TLC is occasionally challenged by a municipality on its tax-exempt status on a property. The TLC is a 510(c)(3) non-profit charity approved by the US Internal Revenue Service, and we believe we fulfill the requirements of Section 211.70 of the Michigan General Property Tax Act to claim tax-exemption on all of our preserves. Obviously, municipalities don't want to lose tax base and we understand that. However, we feel that the value added by nature preserves to the community far outweighs what little property tax is lost. In most cases, the addition of a preserve actually results in a net increase in tax revenue as the value of nearby homes increase. There are many arguments in favor of land preservation versus lost tax base that could be presented here, but we'll save that for another time.

Regarding our Croissant Sanctuary in Brandon Township, Oakland County, no doubt an exceptional case for us, the TLC significantly increased the local tax base when we sold the approximately 2.7 acres of commercial frontage along M-15 to a commercial developer. Not only did the sale price result in an increased valuation, but there will soon be at least one business developed on the property that will generate even more income for the Township. The sale left us with about 7.1 acres of nearly 100% wetland that we intend to protect as a nature preserve, as promised to the donor, Dr. Paul Croissant of Clarkston. This is what we planned upon evaluating the property and what we told Dr. Croissant and Brandon Township we intended to do. In fact, we did not claim tax-exemption on the 2.7-acres that we sold. By the way, there was no great plan before receiving the donation of this property. Everything just happened to fall into place about 6 months after we acquired it, in large part because of the associated TLC Executive Director Bill Collins had as a wetland consultant with RBF Construction, a small commercial developer in the area. There were no guarantees that anything would happen with the property, other than we promised to preserve most of it.

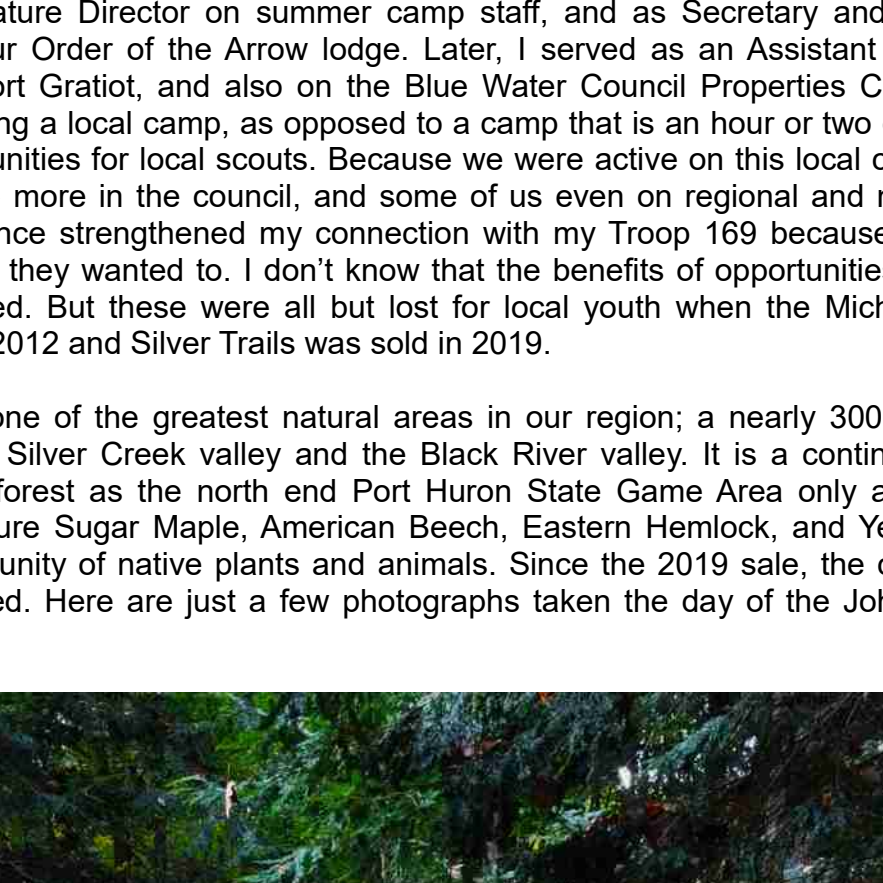
In March, we submitted a Board of Review Appeal package to Brandon Township because of the Assessor's refusal to recognize the TLC's tax-exempt status for the property. The Board of Review did not decide in our favor so we appealed to the Michigan Tax Tribunal; not the first time we have had to do this. We have previous experience with the process regarding our Gerrits Sanctuary in Ira Township in Saint Clair County. Thanks to our TLC Attorney, Tim Lozen, we prevailed. On September 23, we had a hearing by conference call with the Michigan Tax Tribunal representative and the Brandon Township Assessor. Having learned from our previous experience, we feel like we did well in defending our tax-exempt status on the Croissant Sanctuary, but we won't know the result for about a month.

John Hardie Memorial Service

TLC Executive Director Bill Collins

On Sunday, September 29, I attended the memorial service for Camp Ranger John Hardie at the Jeddo Methodist Church and later that day at Silver Trails Scout Reservation near Jeddo. John passed away back in his home state of Minnesota on July 21. Here's a link to John's obituary: <https://www.wennerfuneralhome.com/obituaries/John-Hardie-4/#/Obituary>.

Ranger John Hardie's memorial service was the big event of the fall for those of us who participated in the old Blue Water Council and was weeks in the making. The service was all about remembering and honoring Ranger John, seeing old friends, and getting back to Silver Trails for only a few short hours. Thanks to so many people for making this happen, including John's daughter, Carla Hardie Tuttle-Petrosi, scouter Bob Wiley for getting us permission to visit the camp, and scouter Don McLane and his crew for preparing the camp for our arrival and service, among many others for attending.



John Hardie was the Camp Ranger of Silver Trails for 30 years, from 1966 through 1996. As I said at the memorial service, Ranger John was our camp caretaker, our ever jolly camp host, our spirited entertainer, and our reverent master of ceremonies. I knew him well, as did TLC Board Members Chris Walker and Dan Rhein, having worked together in a summer camp staff from 1978 through the mid 1980s, first as an assistant to Chris Walker, and later with Dan Rhein. TLC Board Members Fred Fuller and Scott Ferguson were also scouts in the Blue Water Council. It must say something about scouting and Silver Trails that five of our Executive Board Members are former scouts and scouters.

It would be very hard to run a camp like we had in Silver Trails without a camp ranger. From his beginning years in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Ranger John Hardie fit the part perfectly and was one of the greatest. Former scout, camp staffer, and Order of the Arrow Lodge Chief Jon Hardman came all the way from Chicago for the memorial service. As Jon said in his presentation, Silver Trails is Ranger John Hardie, and Ranger John Hardie is Silver Trails. He made it what it was in our day. His spirit fills the camp.

For those of us fortunate enough to have grown up going to Silver Trails, it was an experience unmatched for most youth today. The Blue Water Council, which covered all of Saint Clair and Sanilac counties, involved hundreds of scouts and scouting families annually, and thousands over several decades, for 75 years, from 1945 through 2020. We not only had great times at a wonderful 300-acre camp with mature forest, miles of trails, steep bluffs and ravines, streams, a pond, a river, canoes, rowboats, a pool, lots of secluded camping sites, a big mess hall, and several cabins, but we interacted with many other youth in outdoor programs; most scouts at least one week each summer, but also year-round campouts and events.

Not only did we learn and have a lot of fun, but we experienced something bigger than ourselves that made us feel that a large organization was always going to be there for us. I made friends and acquaintances across two counties that felt like an extended family. As a youth and young adult, I worked as a Nature Director on summer camp staff, and as Secretary and Camp Promotions Chairman for our Order of the Arrow lodge. Later, I served as an Assistant Scoutmaster in my Troop 169 in Fort Gratiot, and also on the Blue Water Council Properties Committee. The nice thing about having a local camp, as opposed to a camp that is an hour or two drive away, is that it provides opportunities for local scouts. Because we were active on this local camp level, we went on to participate more in the council, and some of us even on regional and national levels. This broader experience strengthened my connection with my Troop 169 because I saw how far our guys could go if they wanted it. I don't know that the benefits of opportunities like those we had can be measured. But these were all but lost to local youth when the Michigan councils were consolidated in 2012 and Silver Trails was sold in 2019.

Silver Trails is one of the greatest natural areas in our region; a nearly 300-acre camp located along the lower Silver Creek valley and the Black River valley. It is a continuation of the same landscape and forest as the north end Port Huron State Game Area only a mile to the south, abundant by mature Sugar Maple, American Beech, Eastern Hemlock, and Yellow Birch, with a covered community of native plants and animals. Since the 2019 sale, the camp has remained largely untouched. Here are just a few photographs taken the day of the John Hardie memorial service:



The road down from the James West cabin to the Council Ring. Photograph by Bill Collins on 2024 September 29.



The Council Ring fire as participants arrive. Back in our day, 100 to 200 scouts, scouters, and family members would fill these seats on summer camp, Family Nights. Photograph by Jon Hardman on 2024 September 29.



The Council Ring fire as participants arrive. Photograph by Bill Collins on 2024 September 29.



Forest north of Silver Creek. Photograph by Bill Collins on 2024 September 29.

Blake Short, New TLC Board Member

In our third quarter TLC Executive Board meeting, TLC Stewardship Assistant Blake Short of Port Huron, was chosen as our newest board member. Blake is a naturalist who began working with the TLC in May of 2022. Among other projects, Blake led our annual stewardship on the Bidwell Sanctuary, clearing much of the new coastal park trail. He led our annual Garlic Mustard removal on our Dead End Woods Sanctuary, and assisted in stewardship of the Deerfield Preserve in Huron County, our North Street Sanctuary, and our Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary. He also represented the TLC at the Port Huron State Game Area Day in September of 2022 and assisted us in nomination of properties for State acquisition through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund.



Right to left: New TLC Board Member Blake Short, TLC Member Connie Neese, TLC Board Member Kay Cumbow, and Clyde Historical Society President Connie Bates at the North Street Station in September of 2022. Photograph by Blake Short.

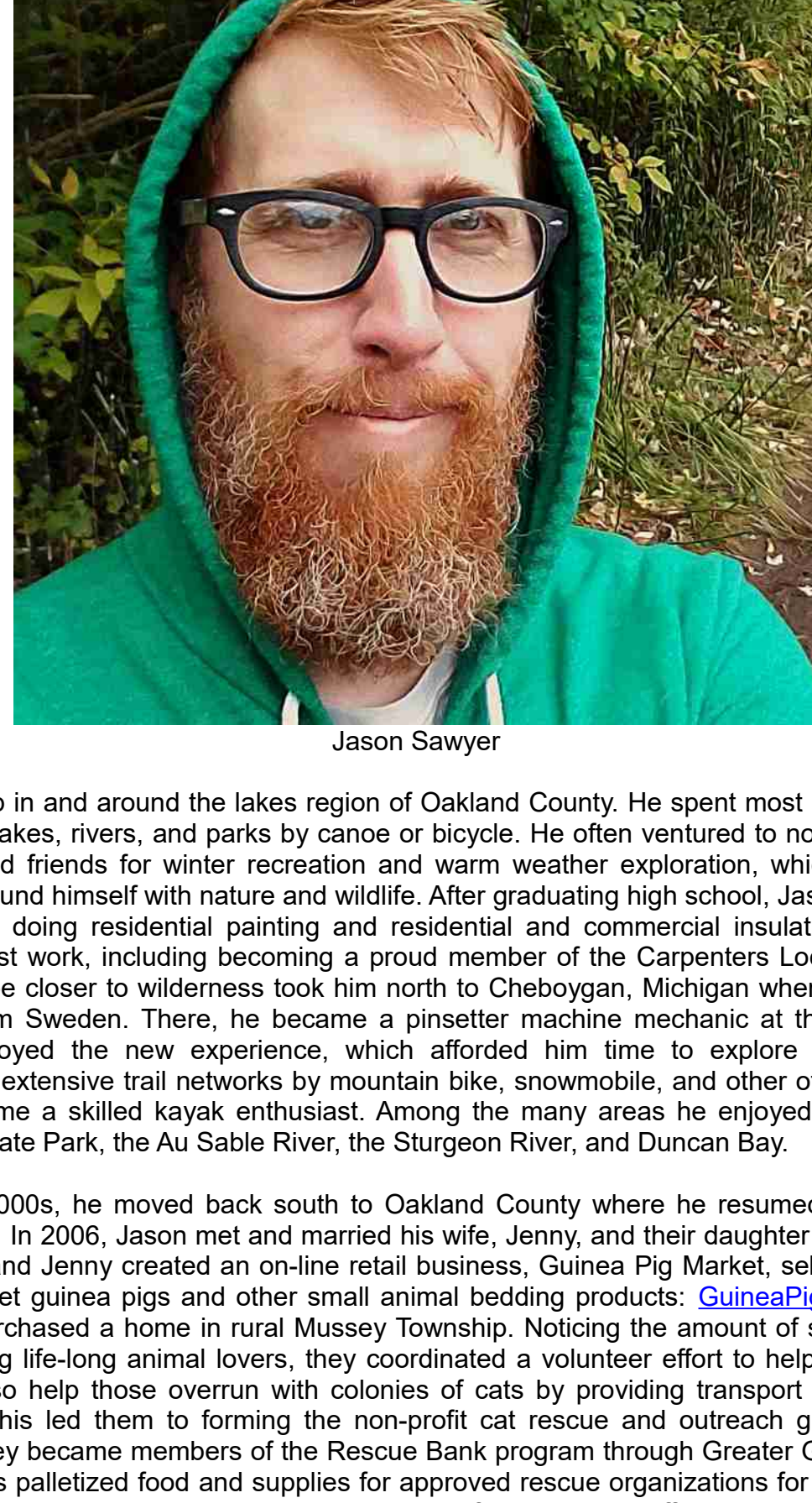
Blake grew up in the Lakeport area, actually right across from our Bidwell Sanctuary where he wandered as a kid. With family roots in West Virginia, he returned there in his early 20s, which got him very connected with the natural world. He returned to Michigan and attended Ferris State University where he earned a BS degree in Environmental Biology. While at Ferris State, he was Vice President and Project Manager of the Mycology Club, culturing various fungi, leading field trips, and collecting mushrooms in the nearby Manistee National Forest. Returning to Port Huron, he was a summer intern with the Friends of the Saint Clair River, working on science communications and stewardship. He was also employed full-time growing gourmet mushrooms for Olive and Grow Mushrooms in Chesterfield Township in Macomb County. He was then employed by TLC Executive Director Bill Collins with Huron Ecology for over a year as a private wetland consultant. He is now employed by GEI Incorporated as an ecological consultant, working on invasive species control, habitat restoration, wetland services, botanical surveys, and rare species surveys across Michigan.

In his spare time, Blake does a lot of mushroom collecting, especially in the Port Huron State Game Area. He grew up sailing and still takes a small boat out on Lake Huron. He is also a musician, playing guitar and mandolin, particularly Americana and Blue Grass.

New TLC Helpers

Jason Sawyer, Stewardship Assistant

The TLC has a new part-time Stewardship Assistant, Jason Sawyer, 49, of Capac. Jason and his wife, Jen, run Mystery's Hoard cat shelter in Capac. Mysterys-Haven.org, a non-profit cat shelter. They also volunteer to coordinate and deliver food and supplies to similar organizations from a distribution center in Detroit. He has been doing nice work on clearing the final segments and maintaining the coastal trail on our 42-acre Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville. With little previous background, Jason picked-up quickly on identifying invasive weeds like Common Privet, Japanese Barberry, and Oriental Bittersweet, and also on important native plants on the Bidwell Sanctuary like Purple-flowering Raspberry. Soon we will start work on the new information kiosk and other structures at the entrance.



Jason Sawyer

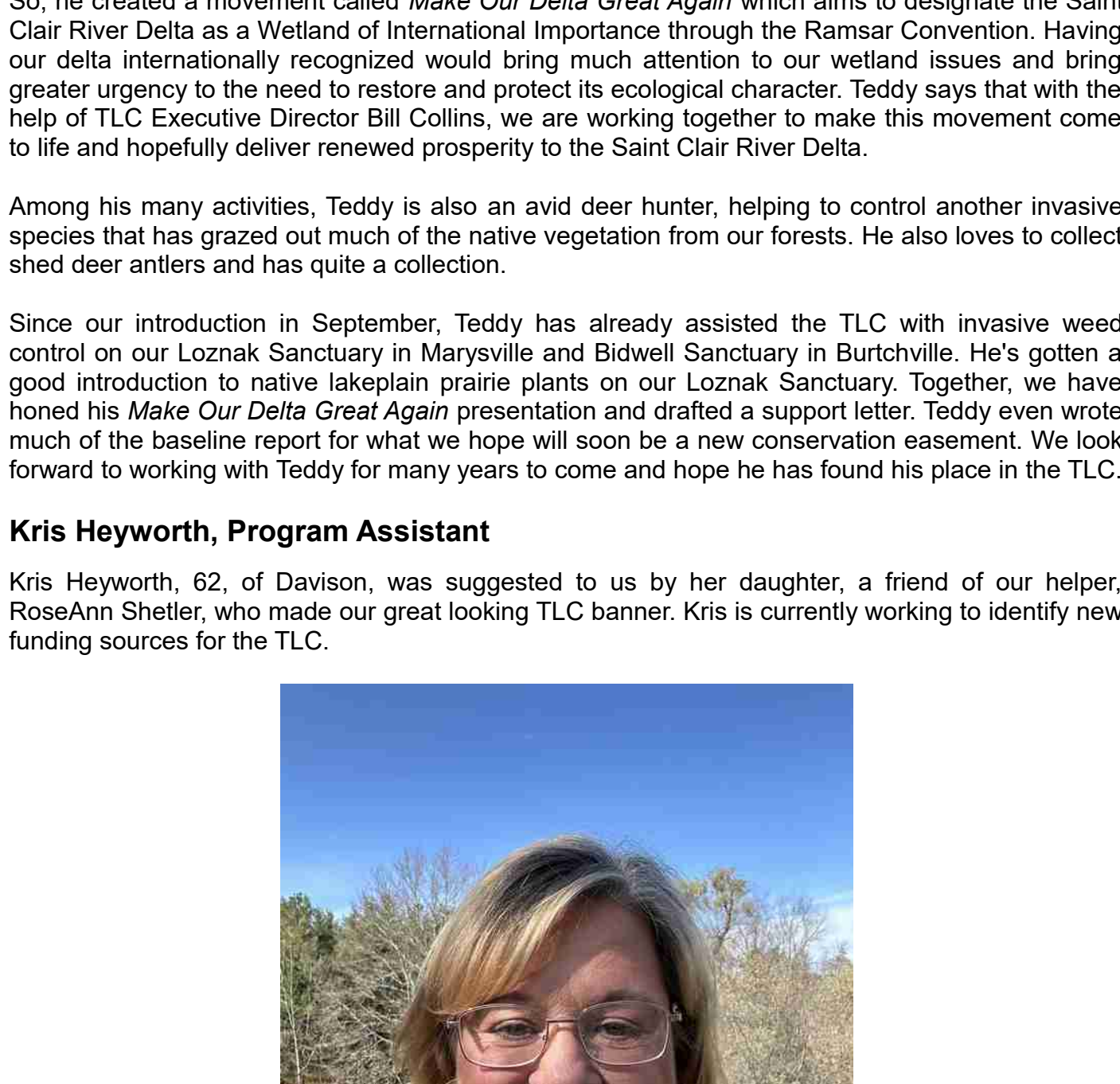
Jason grew up in and around the lakes region of Oakland County. He spent most of his childhood exploring the lakes, rivers, and parks by canoe or bicycle. He often ventured to northern Michigan with family and friends for winter recreation and warm weather exploration, which solidified his desire to surround himself with nature and wildlife. After graduating high school, Jason worked as a skilled laborer doing residential painting and residential and commercial insulation. After many years of honest work, including becoming a proud member of the Carpenters Local Union 1234, his desire to be closer to wilderness took him north to Cheboygan, Michigan where his ancestors emigrated from Sweden. There, he became a pinsetter machine mechanic at the local bowling alley and enjoyed the new experience, which afforded him time to explore the wilderness, especially the extensive trail networks by mountain bike, snowmobile, and other off-road vehicles. He also became a skilled kayak enthusiast. Among the many areas he enjoyed exploring were Cheboygan State Park, the Au Sable River, the Sturgeon River, and Duncan Bay.

In the early 2000s, he moved back south to Oakland County where he resumed his residential laborer career. In 2006, Jason met and married his wife, Jenny, and their daughter Abby was born. Together, he and Jenny created an on-line retail business, Guinea Pig Market, selling hand-made products for pet guinea pigs and other small animal bedding products: GuineaPigMarket.com. In 2010, they purchased a home in rural Mussey Township. Noticing the amount of stray cats in the area and being life-long animal lovers, they coordinated a volunteer effort to help stray and feral cats. They also help those overrun with colonies of cats by providing transport and funding for sterilization. This led them to forming the non-profit cat rescue and outreach group, MysteryHaven.org. They became members of the Rescue Bank program through Greater Goods Charities, which provides palletized food and supplies for approved rescue organizations for only the cost of transportation. They became integral core volunteers for the Detroit affiliate, unloading freight and distributing goods to over one hundred approved groups in Michigan and Ohio. Being part of this program allows them to provide food and supplies at no cost to those in need caring for cats and dogs in their vicinity. Since the beginning Mystery's Haven, Jason and Jenny have aided in sterilizing over 500 cats in the area and strive to continue these efforts with much appreciation to their supporters. Their program is strictly run based on the donations of compassionate people and organizations.

Jason relishes the opportunity to become part of the TLC. He says that the principles and efforts of the TLC align perfectly with his love of our precious natural land and his desire to preserve our wilderness for further generations. Likewise, the TLC has enjoyed working with Jason and is impressed with his enthusiasm and his ability to take charge with little guidance. We are fortunate that our TLC President occasionally seeks out local animal groups and connected with Jen.

Teddy Wiley, Program and Stewardship Assistant

Teddy Wiley, 51, of Marysville contacted us in mid-September out of concern about the forest adjacent to the 51-acre Michigan Road preserve in Port Huron Township that the TLC monitored and stewarded for Saint Clair County in 2011 through 2015. The land east of the preserve has been for sale for several years and he would like to see it protected. As we tell anyone interested in protecting natural areas, if you take the lead on the project, the TLC will most likely assist as we are able. Teddy is impressively self-educated in ecology, regional natural communities, native species, and learning more by the week. The TLC is happy to provide new opportunities for local naturalists and help cultivate their interest and enthusiasm. It was almost immediately clear that Teddy is the type of person we've been hoping would join our effort for several years.



Left to right: TLC Member John Fody, TLC Program and Stewardship Assistant Teddy Wiley, and TLC Board Member Dan Rhein at the Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville on 2024 September 24. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Teddy is also heading-up an effort to nominate the Saint Clair River Delta - Saint John's Marsh, Harsens Island, Dickinson Island, Squirrel Island, Seaway Island, Bassett Island, Saint Anne's Island, Walpole Island, and adjacent lands, as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance: Ramsar.org/about/our-mission/wetlands-international-importance. This designation should help provide new funding opportunities to control invasive Reed - *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*, among other invasive weeds, which has eliminated native vegetation and degraded wildlife habitat across vast areas of the Saint Clair River Delta and the Great Lakes region. More complete control of invasive *Phragmites* would eventually lead to restoration of the Saint Clair River Delta ecosystem as a whole. There are currently only four Ramsar wetlands in our general region, including the Saint Clair National Wildlife Area on the eastern shore of Lake Saint Clair, Humbug Marsh in the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge along the west shore of the Detroit River, Point Pelee National Park on the north shore of Lake Erie, and Long Point National Wildlife Area also on the north shore of Lake Erie. As for Ramsar designated wetlands in general, the US has relatively very few compared to other parts of the world.

Teddy says that since he was a child, he has always been fascinated with the natural world and all it had to offer. From the age of 5, he sought out wetland areas to catch and release snapping turtles and other small reptiles and amphibians. For some reason, he has always been attracted to catching snapping turtles and wetlands. He says it kind of came natural to him. It was snapping turtles that introduced him to wetlands and the many issues they currently face. He gradually realized that the majority of the wetlands in the Saint Clair River Delta and Saint John's Marsh were under siege from invasive Reed or *Phragmites*. Any homes that the turtles once had were destroyed by *Phragmites*, which even kills some turtles when they get caught in it.

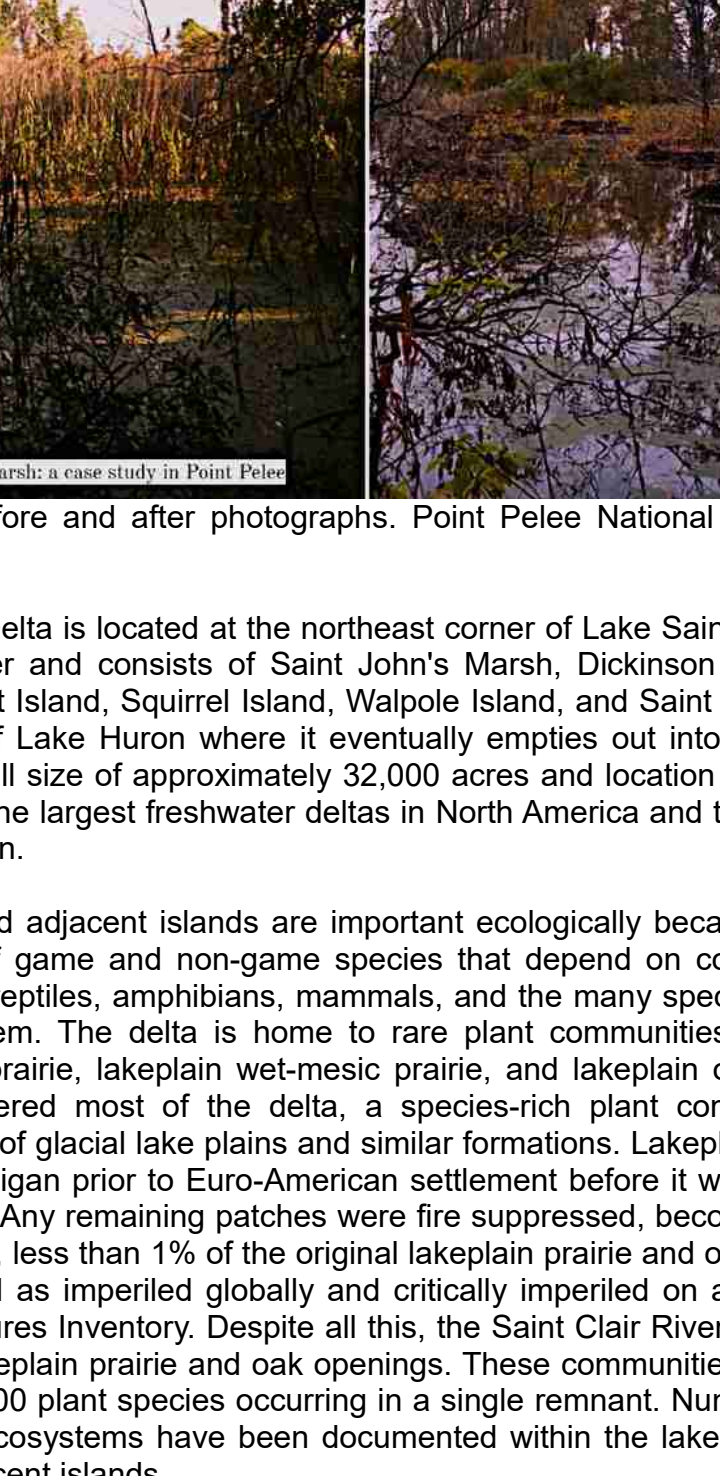
From the age of just 13, Teddy worked for the Michigan Nature Association on their Alice W. Moore Woods Sanctuary in Saint Clair, helping to control invasive weeds, most notably Glossy Buckthorn and Common Buckthorn. He didn't have experience controlling *Phragmites*, nor, he says, did he have the time or power to control it on such a large scale. So he started to reach out to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to understand why it seemed nothing was being done to control it on the Saint Clair River Delta. After much conversation with several MDNR biologists, he realized our delta was missing out on many opportunities to be restored and properly managed. So, he created a movement called *Make Our Delta Great Again* which aims to designate the Saint Clair River Delta as a Wetland of International Importance through the Ramsar Convention. Having our delta internationally recognized would bring much attention to our wetland issues and bring greater urgency to the need to restore and protect its ecological character. Teddy says that with the help of TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, we are working together to make this movement come to life and hopefully deliver renewed prosperity to the Saint Clair River Delta.

Among his many activities, Teddy is also an avid deer hunter, helping to control another invasive species that has grazed out much of the native vegetation from our forests. He also loves to collect shed deer antlers and has quite a collection.

Since our introduction in September, Teddy has already assisted the TLC with invasive weed control on our Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville and Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville. He's gotten a good introduction to native lakeplain prairie plants on our Loznak Sanctuary. Together, we have honed his *Make Our Delta Great Again* presentation and drafted a support letter. Teddy even wrote much of the baseline report for what we hope will soon be a new conservation easement. We look forward to working with Teddy for many years to come and hope he has found his place in the TLC.

Kris Heyworth, Program Assistant

Kris Heyworth, 62, of Davison, was suggested to us by her daughter, a friend of our helper, RoseAnn Shelter, who made our great looking TLC banner. Kris is currently working to identify new funding sources for the TLC.



Kris Heyworth

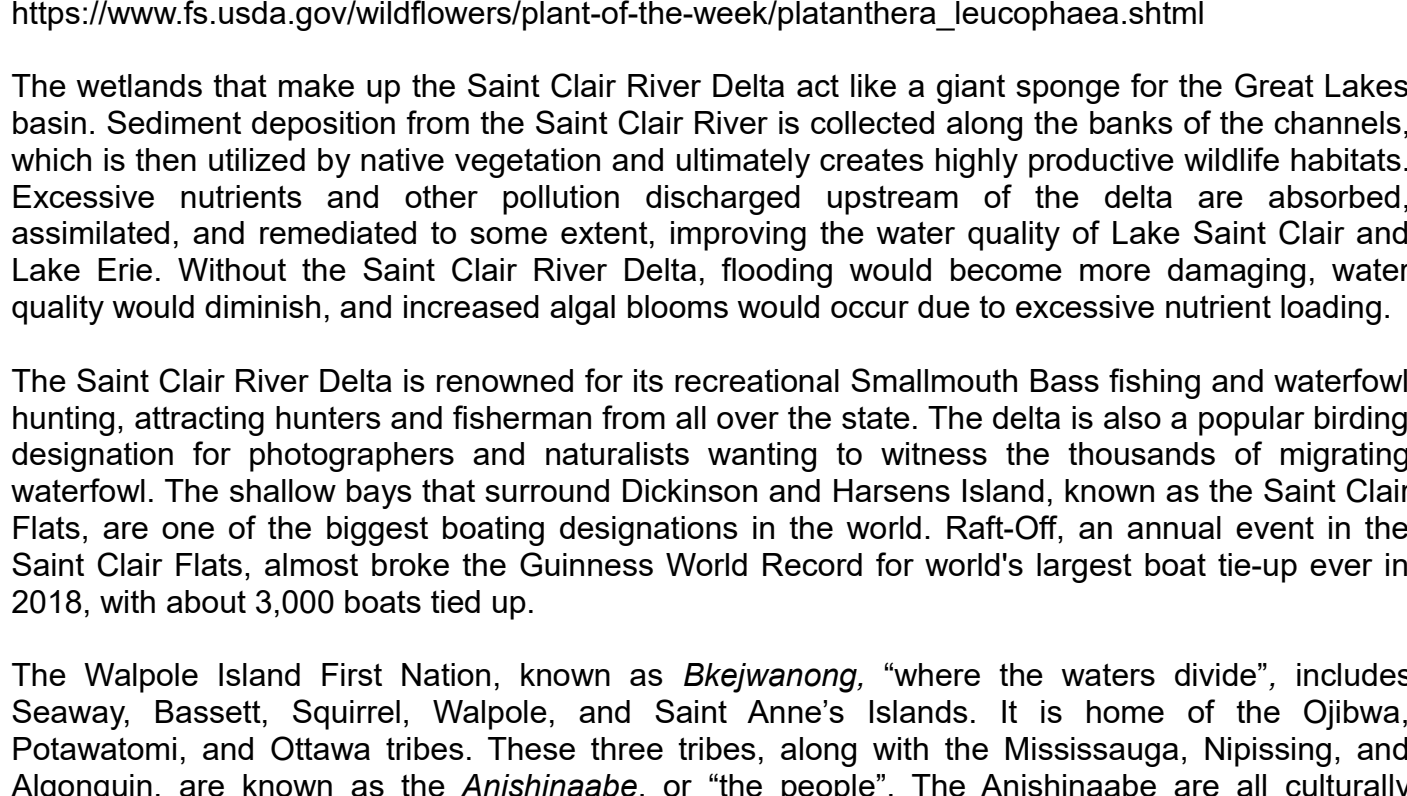
Kris has always loved nature and considers herself a country girl. She grew up in the Thumb, Township not far from our office in Marlette. After meeting her husband, they moved to Davison Township in Genesee County where she has lived for the past forty years. It is a little more suburban there, but owning five acres with wooded hills, with farmland and country just down the road, she feels right at home. Kris and her late husband raised eight children there. Five of her children are married now and she has 13 grandchildren. She says she is a Christ follower and that He has blessed her so much.

We hope that working with the TLC to protect creation can be part of that blessing for years to come.

Ramsar Designation For The Saint Clair River Delta
By Teddy Wiley, TLC Program and Stewardship Assistant

New TLC Program and Stewardship Assistant, Teddy Wiley, is heading an effort to nominate the Saint Clair River Delta for designation as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is one of the oldest modern global inter-governmental environmental agreements. It was negotiated in the 1960s by countries and non-governmental organizations concerned about the increasing loss and degradation of wetland habitat for migratory waterbirds. The treaty was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and became effective in 1975. A key provision of the treaty is to identify and place significant wetlands on a list of Wetlands of International Importance, also known as the Ramsar List. Criteria for listing include representative, rare or unique wetland types, and various aspects emphasizing the importance of biodiversity. The list includes an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits or services. There are now 2,400 Ramsar wetland sites across the world.

Designation of the Saint Clair River Delta as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance should provide additional funding opportunities and help motivate all stakeholders to better protect the delta's ecological character. More funding is desperately needed to control invasive Reed - *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*, among other invasive weeds, which has eliminated nearly all of the native vegetation and severely degraded wildlife habitat of vast areas of wetland along the Great Lakes. More complete control of invasive *Phragmites* would eventually lead to restoration of the Saint Clair River Delta ecosystem as a whole. There are currently only four Ramsar wetlands in our general region, including the Saint Clair National Wildlife Area on the eastern shore of Lake Saint Clair, Humbug Marsh in the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge along the west shore of the Detroit River, Point Pelee National Park on the north shore of Lake Erie, and Long Point National Wildlife Area also on the north shore of Lake Erie. As for designated Ramsar wetlands in general, the US has relatively very few compared to other parts of the world.



Map showing Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance in our region, minus Humbug Marsh along the Detroit River, and also the proposed Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar wetland. Map by Teddy Wiley, Google Maps.

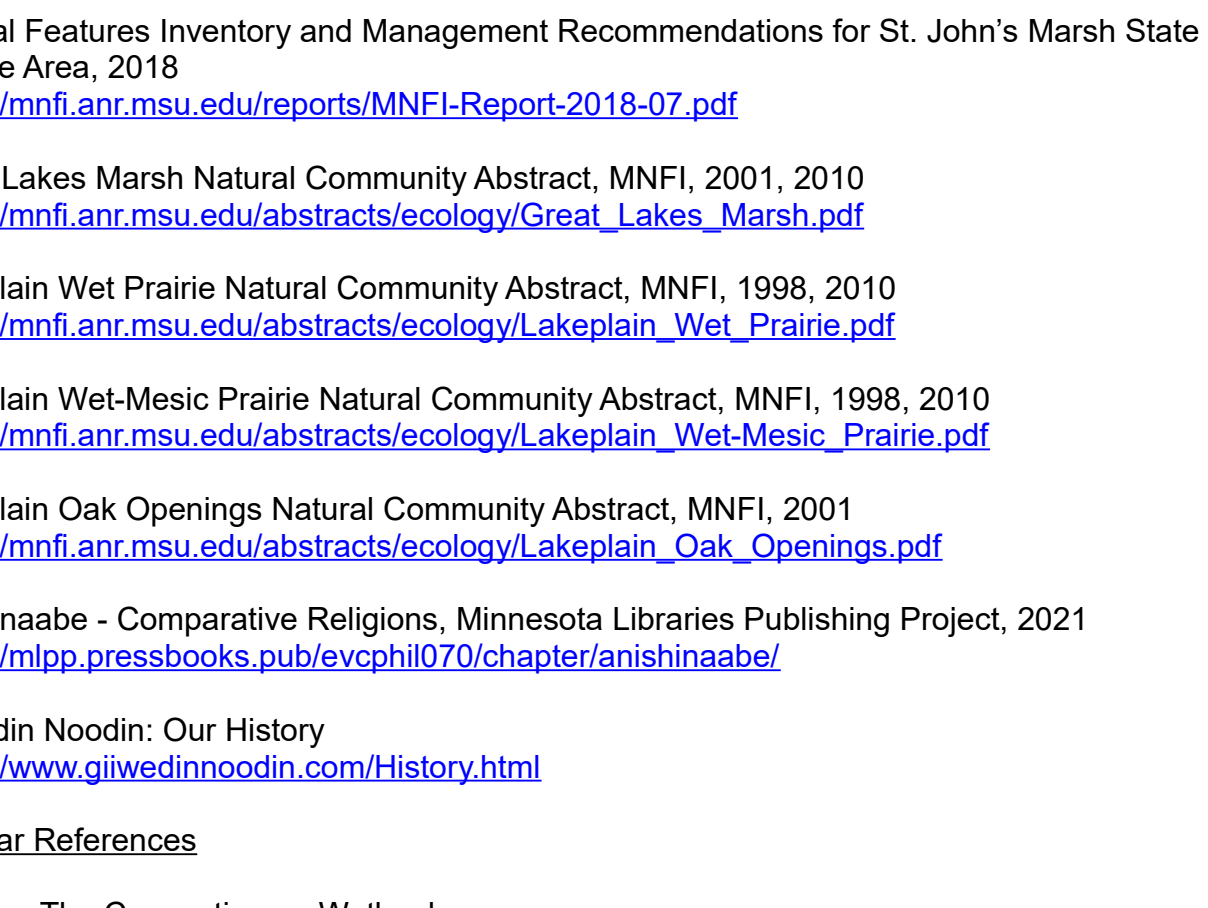


Phragmites control before and after Phragmites. Point Pelee National Park, Ontario, Canada. Parks Canada.

The Saint Clair River Delta is located at the northeast corner of Lake Saint Clair at the confluence of the Saint Clair River and consists of Saint John's Marsh, Dickinson Island, Harsens Island, Seaway Island, Bassett Island, Squirrel Island, Walpole Island, and Saint Anne's Island. The delta is fed by the waters of Lake Huron where it eventually empties out into the shallow Lake Saint Clair. The delta's overall size of approximately 32,000 acres and location between two freshwater lakes makes it one of the largest freshwater deltas in North America and the only major river delta in the Great Lakes basin.

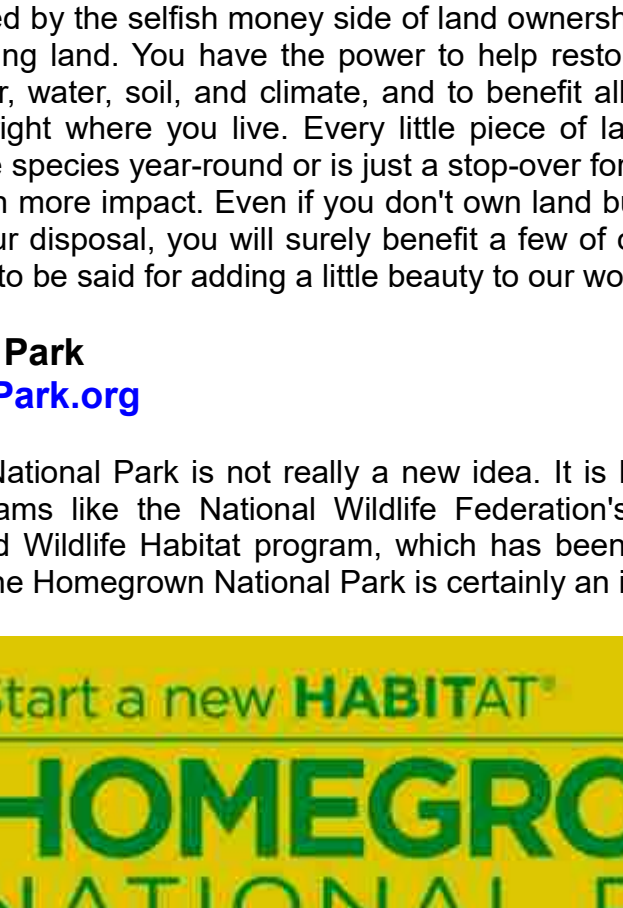
Saint John's Marsh and adjacent islands are important ecologically because they provide critical habitat for a myriad of game and non-game species that depend on coastal wetlands such as ducks, geese, swans, herons, amphibians, mammals, and the many species of invertebrates and plants that support them. The delta is home to rare plant communities including Great Lakes marsh, lakeplain wet prairie, lakeplain wet-mesic prairie, and lakeplain oak opening. Lakeplain prairie historically covered most of the delta, a species-rich plant community that occurs on seasonally wet ground of glacial lake plains and similar formations. Lakeplain prairie once covered 80% of southeast Michigan prior to Euro-American settlement before it was cleared, ditched, and drained for agriculture. Any remaining patches were fire suppressed, becoming severely degraded and fragmented. Today, less than 1% of the original lakeplain prairie and oak opening communities remain and are ranked as imperiled globally and critically imperiled on a statewide basis by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory. Despite all this, the Saint Clair River Delta still contains high quality remnants of lakeplain prairie and oak openings. These communities are extremely diverse, with sometimes over 200 plant species occurring in a single remnant. Numerous rare species that depend on lakeplain ecosystems have been documented within the lakeplain prairie within Saint John's Marsh and adjacent islands.

Rare animal species associated with the the Saint Clair River Delta include: Michigan Endangered King Rail - *Rallus elegans*; Michigan Threatened Black Tern - *Chlidonias niger*; Spotted Turtle - *Clemmys guttata*; Leatherpoper - *Fiximia reflexa*; Common Gallinule - *Gallinula galeata*; Least Bittern - *Icthyophaga exilis*; Eastern Fox Snake - *Pantherophis vulpinus*; Forster's Tern - *Aristida forsteri*; and Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo*; and Michigan Special Concern Three-Awmed Grass - *Botaurus lentiginosus*, Marsh Wren - *Cistothorus palustris*, Blanding's Turtle - *Emydoidea blandingii*, and Blazing Star Borer - *Papaipema beeriana*.



Michigan Endangered King Rail. American Bird Conservancy, <https://abcbirds.org/bird/king-rail/>

Rare plant species associated with the Saint Clair River Delta include: US Threatened and Michigan Endangered Eastern Prairie-Fringed Orchid - *Platanthera leucophaea*; Michigan Endangered Gattinger's Gerardia - *Agalinis gattingeri*, and Skinner's Gerardia - *Agalinis skinneriana*; Michigan Threatened Sullivant's Milkweed - *Asclepias sullivantii*, Small White Lady Slipper Orchid - *Cypripedium candidum*, Leiberg's Panic Grass - *Dichanthium leibergii*, and Short Fruited Rush - *Juncus brachycarpus*; and Michigan Special Concern Three-Awmed Grass - *Aristida longespica*, Gentian Leaved Saint John's Wort - *Hypericum gentianoides*, Cross-Leaved Milkwort - *Polygala cruciata*, and Tall Nut Rush - *Scleria triglomerata*.



US Threatened and Michigan Endangered Eastern Prairie-Fringed Orchid, US Forest Service, https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/platanthera_leucophaea.shtml

The wetlands that make up the Saint Clair River Delta act like a giant sponge for the Great Lakes basin. Sediment deposition from the Saint Clair River is collected along the banks of the channels, which is then utilized by native vegetation and ultimately creates highly productive wildlife habitats. Excessive nutrients and other pollution discharged upstream of the delta are absorbed, assimilated, and remediated to some extent, improving the water quality of Lake Saint Clair and Lake Erie. Without the Saint Clair River Delta, flooding would become more damaging, water quality would diminish, and increased algal blooms would occur due to excessive nutrient loading.

The Saint Clair River Delta is renowned for its recreational Smallmouth Bass fishing and waterfowl hunting, attracting hunters and fishermen all over the state. The delta is also a popular birding destination for photographers and naturalists wanting to witness the thousands of migrating waterfowl. The shallow bays that surround Dickinson and Harsens Island, known as the Saint Clair Flats, are one of the biggest boating designations in the world. Raft-Off, an annual event in the Saint Clair Flats, almost broke the Guinness World Record for world's largest boat tie-up ever in 2018, with about 3,000 boats tied up.

The Walpole Island First Nation, known as *Bkejwanong*, "where the waters divide", includes Seaway, Bassett, Squirrel, Walpole, and Saint Anne's Islands. It is home of the Ojibwa, Potawatomi, and Ottawa tribes. These three tribes, along with the Mississauga, are all culturally related, speaking one language called *Anishinaabe*, or "the people". The Anishinaabe people have always had a close connection to the land, animals, and water. In their culture, it is important to walk in harmony with the world, connected to all parts of the land, with no separation between sacred and secular. It's this reason why the people of Walpole Island have taken such good care of their land; making sure it is kept undamaged and productive for future generations to enjoy. Walpole Island's local economy is dependent on the bounty of the land. Hunting, fishing, and trapping is a multi-million dollar industry in their community. Sweet Grass - *Anthoxanthum hirtum*, a lakeplain prairie grass, is a sacred plant and is still used for smudging, basket making, and braiding. Northern Wild-rice - *Zizania palustris*, and the less common Michigan Threatened Southern Wild-rice - *Zizania aquatica*, occur in the Great Lakes marsh of the Saint Clair River Delta and are also sacred plants collected for seed consumption.



Northern Wild-rice beds during the high water of 2020 along Big Muskamoot Bay on Harsens Island. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Despite the significance of the Saint Clair River Delta and the countless benefits it provides, the delta's wetlands are still being lost at an alarming rate. Ever since Europeans began settling here, much of the surrounding wetlands have been drained and filled in to make way for agriculture and residential development. The remaining wetlands on the delta are extensively dominated by invasive Reed - *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*. Lakeplain prairie and Great Lakes marsh on Saint John's Marsh and adjacent islands are almost completely lost to invasive *Phragmites*. Lakeplain oak openings are being filled with invasive Japanese Barberry - *Berberis thunbergii*, Glossy Buckthorn - *Frangula alnus*, Common Buckthorn - *Rhamnus cathartica*, and other invasive weeds. The State has made little lasting progress in the fight against invasive *Phragmites* across the Saint Clair River Delta due to lack of funding, equipment, and staff. There does not appear to be a recent management plan that addresses the extensive *Phragmites* cover. We hope that with Ramsar designation, the Saint Clair River Delta can become great again through more recognition and funding opportunities.

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You've Got The Power
Save Nature Any Place! Sustain Native Animals & Plants!

Throughout 2024, we highlighted restoration of nature on private land, citizen efforts in their neighborhoods, and programs like Homegrown National Park, National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat, and the TLC Neighborhood registry. These programs are not complicated at all, and in one way, represent one of the truest expressions of private land ownership and democratic ideals. As a landowner, you are vested with a great deal of power and responsibility. While the world is distracted by the selfish money side of land ownership, there can be a quiet and benevolent aspect of owning land. You have the power to help restore nature, to support native species, to improve our air, water, soil, and climate, and to benefit all of humankind now and for generations to come, all right where you live. Every little piece of land matters now, whether it serves as habitat for native species year-round or is just a stop-over for transients. If you have a lot of land, you can have even more impact. Even if you own land but have a few flower pots or a small patch of dirt at your disposal, you will surely benefit a few of our beleaguered pollinators. Besides that, there is a lot to be said for adding a little beauty to our world.

Homegrown National Park
HomeGrownNationalPark.org

Homegrown National Park is a program co-founded by Dr. Doug Tallamy, Professor of Agriculture in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, and Michelle Handari, an entrepreneur and business development strategist. Launched in 2020, it is a massive cooperative conservation movement that seeks to engage and mobilize anyone with a flower pot, lawn, garden, woodland, ranch, farm, or campus to plant and preserve native species and remove invasive weeds, to support the native plants and animals that are essential for human survival. This grassroots call-to-action has the initial goal of adding 20 million acres of native plantings, representing only about half of the over 40 million acres of lawns on privately-owned properties in the United States. Yes, over 40 million acres of the United States is covered by lawn, relative biological deserts that cover about 2% of the lower 48 contiguous states. Actually, deserts are more diverse and ecologically valuable for the most part. A 2005 study sponsored by NASA determined that more land is devoted to lawns in the US than to any other single irrigated crop in the country. If successful, Homegrown National Park will regenerate biodiversity by restoring native habitats on millions of acres of private land, creating large interconnected ecological networks outside of parks and preserves. So far, over 26,000 participants have planted nearly 77,000 acres of native habitat in the US and 360 participants have planted about 870 acres in Canada. Ultimately, the target is that all privately held land will include native plantings.

Homegrown National Park really is very simple. Just create a native habitat area, which ideally, you commit to controlling invasive weeds in, register it on the Homegrown National Park web site, and map it. You can even register an area you restored or created previously, but the push is for new areas. It won't cost you anything but your labor and whatever plant stock and other materials you might choose to purchase. Better to propagate native plants for free through locally collected seed and rooted cuttings from natural areas near your property, and use scrap materials to build your own habitat structures. If you look closely at the Homegrown National Park map, you might see that a few personal properties of the TLC Executive Director are mapped in Fort Meigs and north of Brown City.

Dr. Doug Tallamy is a well known butterfly and moth expert, author of 106 research publications, and has taught insect-related courses for 41 years. One of his primary research goals is to better understand the many ways insects interact with plants and how such interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. His book, *Bringing Nature Home*, *The Living Landscape*, *Nature's Best Hope*, and *The Nature of Oaks*, His awards include recognition from The Garden Writer's Association, Audubon, The National Wildlife Federation, Western Carolina University, The

Garden Club of America, and The American Horticultural Association. Some of our members and readers may recall articles we featured last May or July about the negative impacts to native caterpillars from spraying *Bacillus thuringiensis* or Btk bacterium to control the invasive Spiny or Gypsy Moth. We relied in part on the research of Dr. Tallamy in determining potentially how many native caterpillar species could be killed in our region.

Michelle Afandari is the founder and CEO of MODA Licensing, a pioneer global licensing and marketing agency established in 1988. Afandari developed, executed, and managed innovative brand extension strategies that resulted in new businesses for corporate and not-for-profit clients including The New York Times, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Victoria and Albert Museum, Champion Athleticwear, LYCRA/DuPont, Tour de France, Ritz Hotel - Paris, Mack Trucks, Snap-on Tools, Meredith Corporation, America's VetDogs, Bushnell, The Henry Ford, UNIPAL International Corp, and UNICEF. In 2008, Afandari founded Retirement, a digital platform "about time" for baby boomers who "retire" rather than retire.

An unlikely partnership developed after Afandari heard Dr. Tallamy give a presentation. Thereafter, the two met virtually many times and joined forces to scale Tallamy's bottom-up call-to-action for planting native plants and restoring biodiversity. As quoted on the Homegrown National Park web site, Dr. Tallamy asked, "... what if each American landowner converted half of his or her yard to productive native plant communities? Even moderate success could collectively restore some semblance of ecosystem function to more than 20 million acres of what is now ecological wasteland." Afandari's goal was "... to make it as easy as possible, to have a great deal of fun in the process, and to celebrate the creation of new ecological networks."

As they state on the Homegrown National Park web site, "Our National Parks, no matter how grand in scale, are too small and separated from one another to preserve species to the levels needed. Thus, the concept for Homegrown National Park, a bottom-up call-to-action to restore habitat where we live and work, and to a lesser extent where we farm and graze, extending national parks to our yards and communities." The world is at a critical point, beginning to lose so many species from local ecosystems that their ability to produce the oxygen, clean water, flood control, pollination, pest control, carbon storage, and other ecosystem services that sustain us and nature in general, will become seriously compromised. As Dr. Tallamy says, "In the past, we have asked one thing of our gardens: that they be pretty. Now they have to support life, sequester carbon, feed pollinators, and manage water."

Homegrown National Park has the unique focus of attempting to reach those unaware of the biodiversity crisis, while also working and collaborating with aligned businesses, nonprofit organizations, and other entities with aligned missions. The program is intended to catalyze a collective effort of individual homeowners, property owners, land managers, farmers, and anyone with some soil to plant. An affront to all of the bad environmental news these days, Dr. Tallamy's message is a solution-based action - small efforts by many people. Together we can create new ecological networks that will enlarge populations of plants and animals and better enable them to sustain normal population fluctuations indefinitely. While not the perfect end-all solution, achieving the goals of the Homegrown National Park would be a tremendous accomplishment on behalf of nature.

To be a part of the Homegrown National Park, begin by creating an account at this link: <https://map.homegrownnationalpark.org/Account/Registrar>

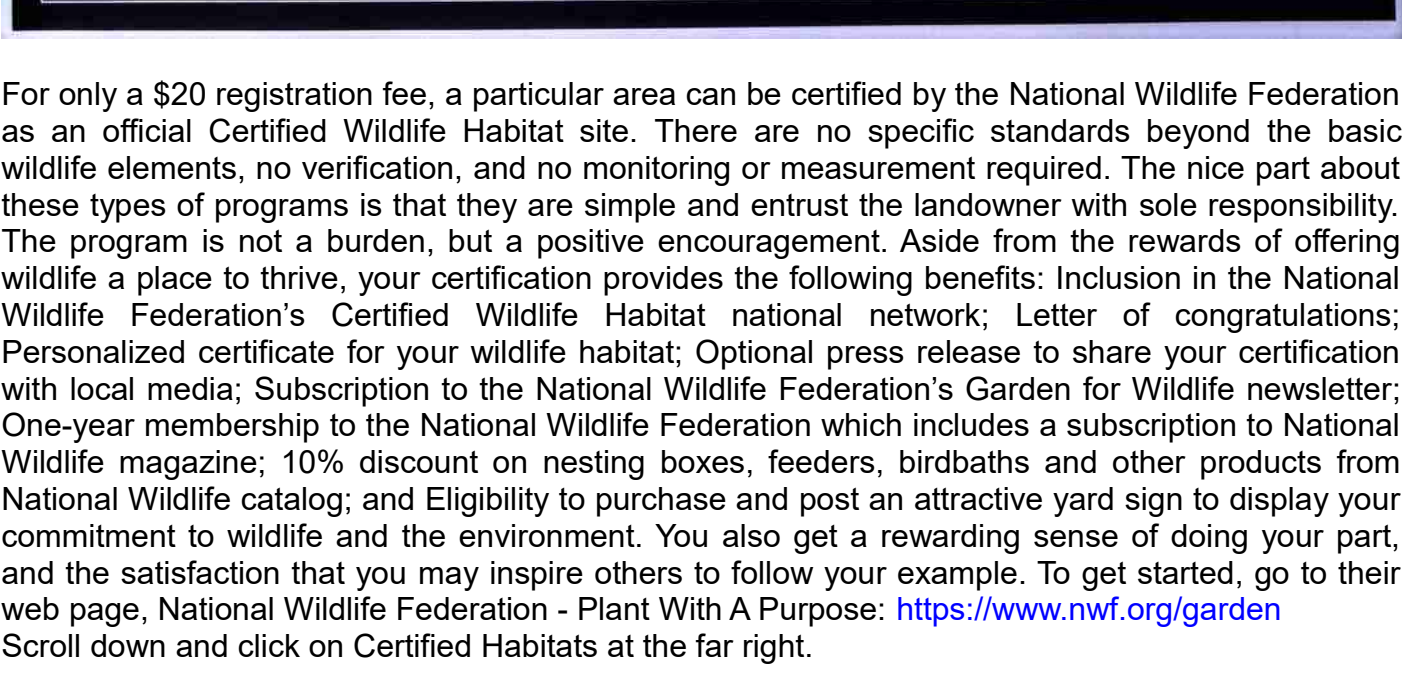
National Wildlife Federation



Most of our members and readers are likely familiar with the National Wildlife Federation, the largest nonprofit conservation organization in the United States, with over six million members and supporters. The mission of the National Wildlife Federation is to increase fish and wildlife populations, expand their capacity, protect and restore wildlife habitats, promote wildlife management, defend wildlife from impacts such as climate change and diseases, educate Americans about wildlife issues, inspire future generations of conservationists, support wildlife legislation, and advocate for hunting.

The National Wildlife Federation has an impressive history, established in 1936 as the General Wildlife Federation during the first ever North American Wildlife Conference, convened by US President Franklin Roosevelt. Over 1,000 people participated in the conference, representing every US state and parts of Canada and Mexico. Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, a political cartoonist and environmental activist, was appointed the first President of the General Wildlife Federation. To note a Michigan connection, Darling was born in Norwood, Michigan and lived there until he was 10 years old. In 1934, President Roosevelt appointed Darling as Chief of the US Bureau of Biological Survey, but he resigned from the position in 1935 out of frustration with the lack of interest in funding wildlife protection by the US Congress. During the 1936 North American Wildlife Conference, Darling criticized people who considered themselves conservationists for simply putting up a bird feeder and subscribing to an outdoors magazine. He said that true action was required and encouraged voting against political candidates who did nothing for the environment. So you see, political activism on behalf of our environment dates back at least 88 years, more like 150 years in the US, with origins dating back perhaps over 300 years in Europe.

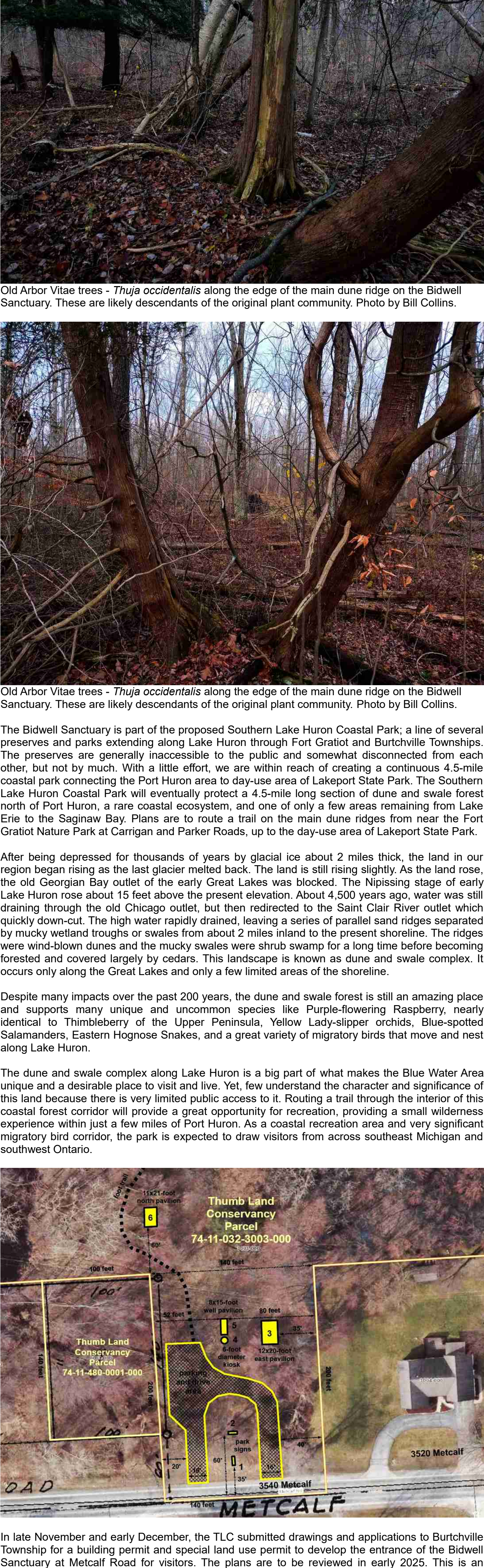
In 1938, the General Wildlife Federation was renamed the National Wildlife Federation. Action on a national level to protect wildlife has always been the major work of the National Wildlife Federation. In 1973, recognizing the potential for benefiting wildlife in general and for engaging members, the National Wildlife Federation started the Backyard Wildlife Habitat program, which encouraged residential landowners and communities to establish native plantings and wildlife habitat by providing food, water, cover, and places to raise young, the very basics of habitat requirements. Given Darling's earlier criticism of many so-called conservationists, it is kind of ironic that a big part of the National Wildlife Federation's later work became the publishing of a magazine and promotion of backyard wildlife habitat. However, Darling would likely have agreed that everyone can play a part by restoring native habitat wherever they are. His point was that we need to do more than put up a bird feeder and read a magazine.



Now known as the Certified Wildlife Habitat program, the specific goals of the program remain provision of food, water, cover, and places to raise young through the use of native plants and other features such as nest boxes and water gardens. The National Wildlife Federation has since added the use of ecologically sustainable practices to their criteria. According to the National Wildlife Federation web site, here is what your certified wildlife garden should include:

- Food - Native plants provide nectar, seeds, nuts, fruits, berries, foliage, pollen, and insects eaten by an exciting variety of wildlife. Feeders can supplement natural food sources.
- Water - All animals need water to survive and some need it for bathing or breeding as well.
- Cover - Wildlife need shelter from severe weather and places to hide from predators or stalk prey.
- Places to Raise Young - Wildlife need resources to reproduce and keep their species going. Some species have totally different habitat needs in their juvenile phase than as adults.
- Sustainable Practices - How you manage your garden can have an effect on the health of soil, air, water, and habitat for native wildlife as well as human community. Sustainable practices include eliminating pesticides and herbicides, conserving water, planting native species, and many more.

If your property already has all of these critical wildlife elements, you can go ahead and certify it. Any place where you can create a wildlife-friendly garden can be recognized as a Certified Wildlife Habitat. Your yard, a local park, a container garden, urban rooftop, a schoolyard, or a commercial landscape, regardless of size, can serve as important wildlife habitat. Certifying is as simple as providing the four habitat components: food, water, cover, and places to raise young, in addition to practicing sustainable gardening techniques.



For only a \$20 registration fee, a particular area can be certified by the National Wildlife Federation as an official Certified Wildlife Habitat site. There are no specific standards beyond the basic wildlife elements, no verification, and no monitoring or measurement required. The nice part about these types of programs is that they are simple and entrust the landowner with sole responsibility. The program is not a burden, but a positive encouragement. Aside from the rewards of offering wildlife a place to thrive, your certification provides the following benefits: Inclusion in the National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat national network; Letter of congratulations; Personalized certificate for your wildlife habitat; Optional press release to share your certification with local media; Subscription to the National Wildlife Federation's Garden for Wildlife newsletter; One-year membership to the National Wildlife Federation which includes a subscription to National Wildlife magazine; 10% discount on nesting boxes, feeders, birdbaths and other products from National Wildlife catalog; and Eligibility to purchase and post an attractive yard sign to display your commitment to wildlife and the environment. You also get a rewarding sense of doing your part, and the satisfaction that you may inspire others to follow you, for example, to get started. To go to their web page, National Wildlife Federation - Plant With A Purpose: <https://www.nwf.org/garden>

TLC Naturehood Registry

Like the National Wildlife Federation and Homegrown National Park, we have our own habitat or natural area registry; the TLC Naturehood program. The focus of our Naturehood certification is on recognizing natural areas restored using locally endemic seed and plant stock. We can also certify created natural habitats that do not necessarily represent the original native and endemic community, but which still benefit wildlife and the environment. We are also happy to provide you with advice on restoring, creating, and maintaining native habitats, and are also happy to connect you with information and resources. More information about our Naturehood program will soon be available on our web site. In the meantime, contact us by phone or email if you have any questions or seek certification.

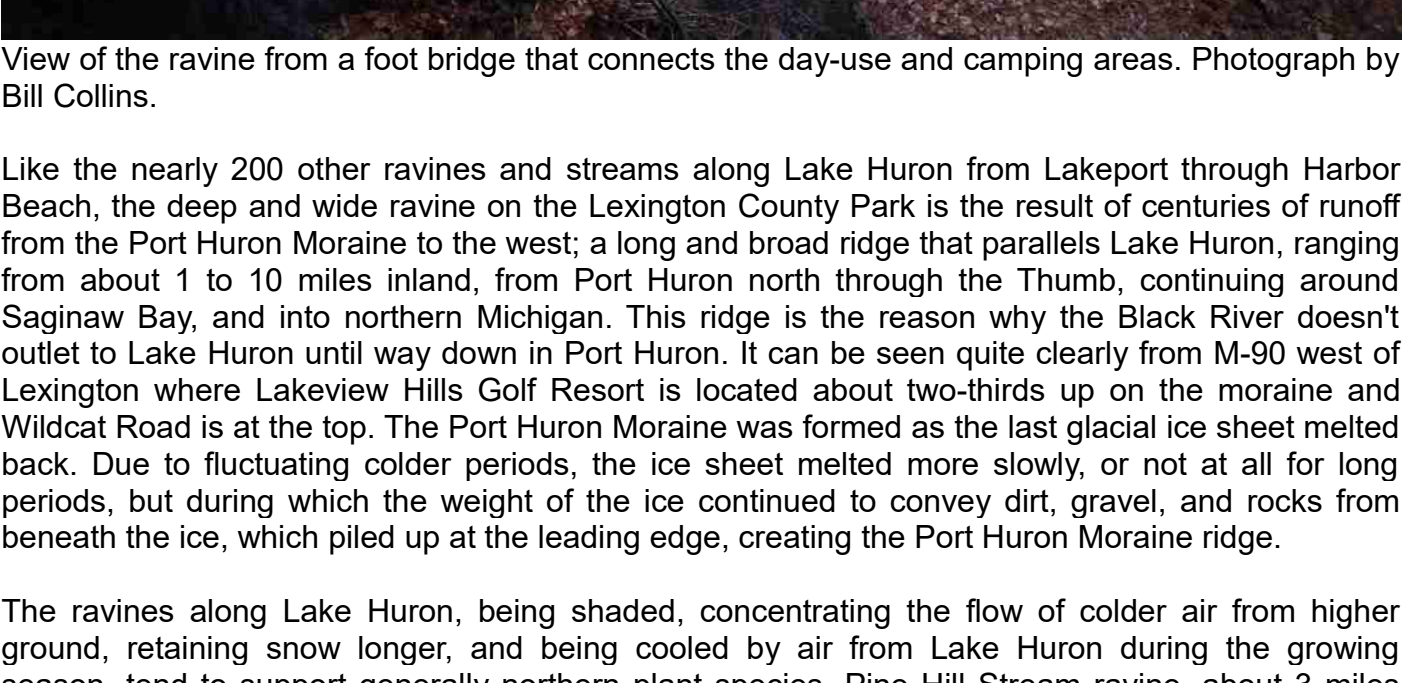
TLC Native Habitat Restoration Guide

See our March 2023 newsletter for an extensive guide on habitat restoration and creation for your yard or other land. What does it take to convert a lawn or other piece of ground into a native habitat. There are different ways; some difficult, others relatively easy, some that take a long time, and others that yield results fairly quickly. A major consideration is the level of weed control needed, and how much you can commit to. The methods described here are loosely organized according to the wildlife habitat elements as required by the National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat program, which are the basic elements of any habitat. The elements overlap to large extent. For example, food sources, cover, and places to raise young can all be provided through simply providing suitable vegetation or water or woody debris or some other aspect of a larger habitat. The methods presented in the habitat restoration guide are not intended to be exhaustive, although reading all of it may be exhausting, but are intended to give general guidance based on years of real-world experience in our region.

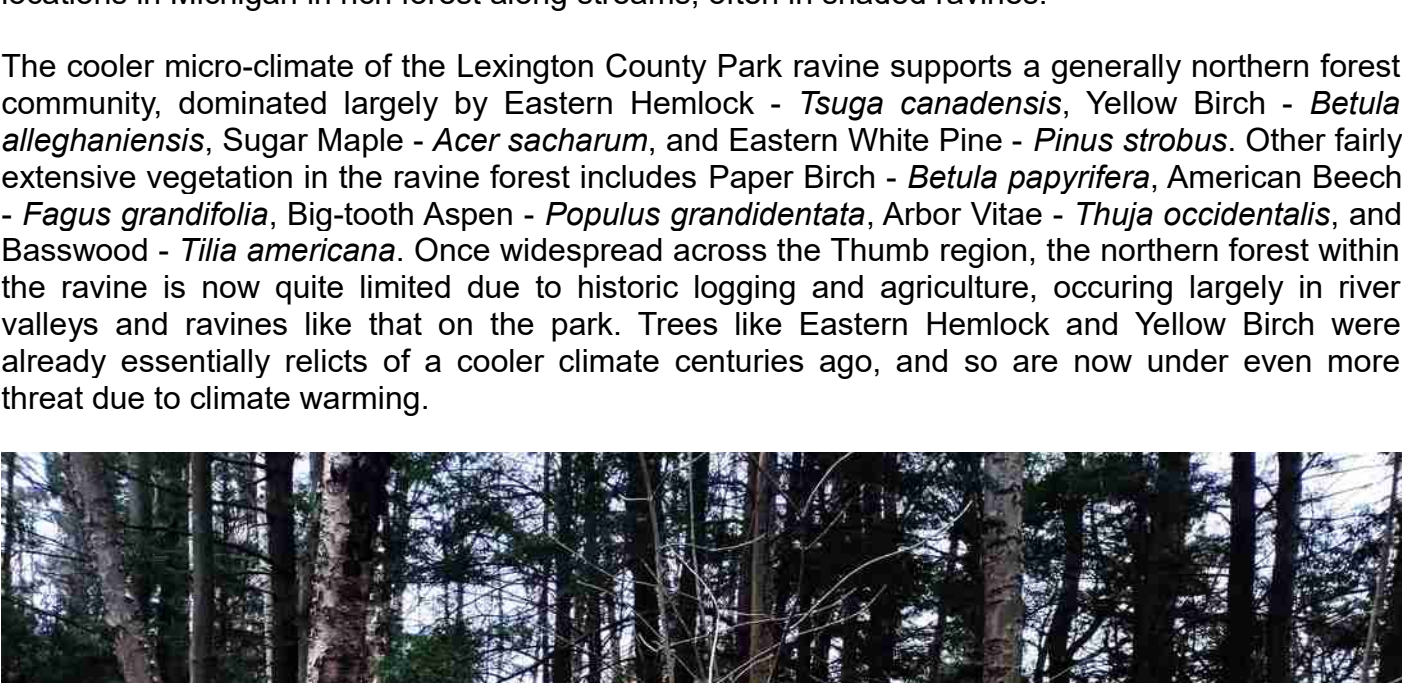
Bidwell Sanctuary Coastal Trail Development

Burchville Township, Saint Clair County
Chékhonésnik hitkwike lèkwaake -
Place among hemlock trees on sandy ground with sound of waves breaking –
Lenape

Through the work of our new Stewardship Assistants, Jason Sawyer and Teddy Wiley, the TLC resumed clearing and invasive weed removal on the coastal trail on the Bidwell Sanctuary in Burchville Township in the fall of 2024. The trail extends nearly the full half-mile length north of the property and we are now looking at a loop route back down the east side of the sanctuary.



Old Arbor Vitae trees - *Thuja occidentalis* along the edge of the main dune ridge on the Bidwell Sanctuary. These are likely descendants of the original plant community. Photo by Bill Collins.



Old Arbor Vitae trees - *Thuja occidentalis* along the edge of the main dune ridge on the Bidwell Sanctuary. These are likely descendants of the original plant community. Photo by Bill Collins.

The Bidwell Sanctuary is part of the proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park; a line of several preserves and parks extending along Lake Huron through Fort Gratiot and Burchville Townships. The preserves are generally inaccessible to the public and somewhat disconnected from each other, but not by much. With a little effort, we are within reach of creating a continuous 4.5-mile coastal park connecting the Port Huron area to day-use area of Lakesport State Park. The Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park will eventually protect a 4.5-mile long section of dune and swale forest north of Port Huron, a rare coastal ecosystem, and one of only a few areas remaining from Lake Erie to the Saginaw Bay. Plans are to route a trail on the main dune ridges from near the Fort Gratiot Nature Park at Carrigan and Parker Roads, up to the day-use area of Lakesport State Park.

After being depressed for thousands of years by glacial ice about 2 miles thick, the land in our region began rising as the last glacier melted back. The land is still rising slightly. As the land rose, the old Georgian Bay outlet of the early Great Lakes was blocked. The Nipissing stage of early Lake Huron rose about 15 feet above the present elevation. About 4,500 years ago, water was still draining through the old Chicago outlet, but then redirected to the Saint Clair River outlet which quickly down-cut. The high water rapidly drained, leaving a series of parallel sand ridges separated by mucky wetland troughs or swales from about 2 miles inland to the present shoreline. The ridges were wind-blown dunes and the mucky swales were shrub swamp for a long time before becoming forested and covered largely by cedars. This landscape is known as dune and swale complex. It occurs only along the Great Lakes and only a few limited areas of the shoreline.

Despite many impacts over the past 200 years, the dune and swale forest is still an amazing place and supports many unique and uncommon species like Purple-flowering Raspberry, nearly identical to Thimbleberry of the Upper Peninsula, Yellow Lady-slipper orchids, Blue-spotted Salamanders, Eastern Hognose Snake, and a great variety of migratory birds that move and nest along Lake Huron.

The dune and swale complex along Lake Huron is a big part of what makes the Blue Water Area unique and a desirable place to visit and live. Yet, few understand the character and significance of this land because there is very limited public access to it. Routing a trail through the interior of this coastal forest corridor will provide a great opportunity for recreation, providing a small wilderness experience within just a few miles of Port Huron. As a coastal recreation area and very significant migratory bird corridor, the park is expected to draw visitors from across southeast Michigan and southwest Ontario.



In late November and early December, the TLC submitted drawings and applications to Burchville Township for a building permit and special land use permit to develop the entrance of the Bidwell Sanctuary at Metcalf Road for visitors. The plans are to be reviewed in early 2025. This is an important step in developing not only the Bidwell Sanctuary for public use, but also the larger Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

The TLC again thanks major funders of the Bidwell Sanctuary acquisition and Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project, including The Carle Foundation, Consumers' Energy Foundation, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, Ducks Unlimited, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Community Foundation of Saint Clair County, Moore Family Foundation, Cargill Salt of Saint Clair, Cargill, Incorporated, the Bioregion Reparation Fund, SEMCO Energy Gas Company, and individual donors.

Lexington County Park Natural Features and Accessibility Plan Review

Lexington Township, Sanilac County

On November 16, the TLC was given a nice opportunity to explore the 27-acre Lexington County Park, located just over 3 miles north of the Village of Lexington on Lake Huron, to review the natural features and make comment on a proposed accessibility plan. TLC Executive Director Bill Collins was joined by TLC Member Connie Neese, her son Luke Wilhelm, and TLC Member John Foy in our natural features and biological survey during what turned out to be very pleasant weather and an unexpectedly merry expedition.

TLC Member Connie Neese and her son Luke Wilhelm exploring the ravine. Photograph by Bill Collins.

If you've never been to the Lexington County Park, you should plan a visit. The day-use portion of the park, accessed by the north drive, is apparently open year-round but the web site says it's open only from May 1 through October 31: <https://www.sanilaccountyparks.com/lexington-park/>. You might want to contact the park or County before going in November through April. The Lexington County Park is impressive not only because of its location on Lake Huron, with a substantial and generally secluded beach during lower lake levels, but also because of a large ravine and creek that runs through the middle of the park from M-25 to Lake Huron.

View of the ravine from a foot bridge that connects the day-use and camping areas. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Like the nearly 200 other ravines and streams along Lake Huron from Lakeport through Harbor Beach, the deep and wide ravine on the Lexington County Park is the result of centuries of runoff from the Port 1 to 10 Moraine to the west; a long and broad ridge that parallels Lake Huron, ranging from about 1 to 10 miles inland, from Port Huron north through the Thumb, continuing around Saginaw Bay, and into northern Michigan. This ridge is the reason why the Black River doesn't outlet to Lake Huron until way down in Port Huron. It can be seen quite clearly from M-30 west of Lexington where Lakeview Hills Golf Resort is located about two-thirds up on the moraine and Wildcat Road is at the top. The Port Huron Moraine was formed as the last glacial ice sheet melted back. Due to fluctuating colder periods, the ice sheet melted more slowly, or not at all for long periods, but during which the weight of the ice continued to convey dirt, gravel, and rocks from beneath the ice, which piled up at the leading edge, creating the Port Huron Moraine ridge.

The ravines along Lake Huron, being shaded, concentrating the flow of colder air from higher ground, retaining snow longer, and being cooled by air from Lake Huron during the growing season, tend to support generally northern plant species. Pine Hill Stream ravine, about 3 miles north, just north of Applegate Road, supports Striped Maple - *Acer pensylvanicum*, which is well south of its normal range of the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula, and also Michigan Special Concern Large Toothwort - *Cardamine maxima*, which is known from only a few locations in Michigan in rich forest along streams, often in shaded ravines.

The cooler micro-climate of the Lexington County Park ravine supports a generally northern forest community, dominated largely by Eastern Hemlock - *Tsuga canadensis*, Yellow Birch - *Betula alleghaniensis*, Sugar Maple - *Acer saccharum*, and Eastern White Pine - *Pinus strobus*. Other fairly extensive vegetation in the ravine forest includes Paper Birch - *Betula papyrifera*, American Beech - *Fagus grandifolia*, Big-tooth Aspen - *Populus grandidentata*, Arbor Vitae - *Thuja occidentalis*, and Basswood - *Tilia americana*. Once widespread across the Thumb region, the northern forest within the ravine is now quite limited due to historic logging and agriculture, occurring largely in river valleys and ravines like that on the park. Trees like Eastern Hemlock and Yellow Birch were already essentially relicts of a cooler climate centuries ago, and so are now under even more threat due to climate warming.

Eastern Hemlock, Eastern White Pine, and Paper Birch along the south side of the ravine. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Eastern Hemlock seedling in the ravine, showing sustained reproduction in the cool microclimate. Photograph by Bill Collins.

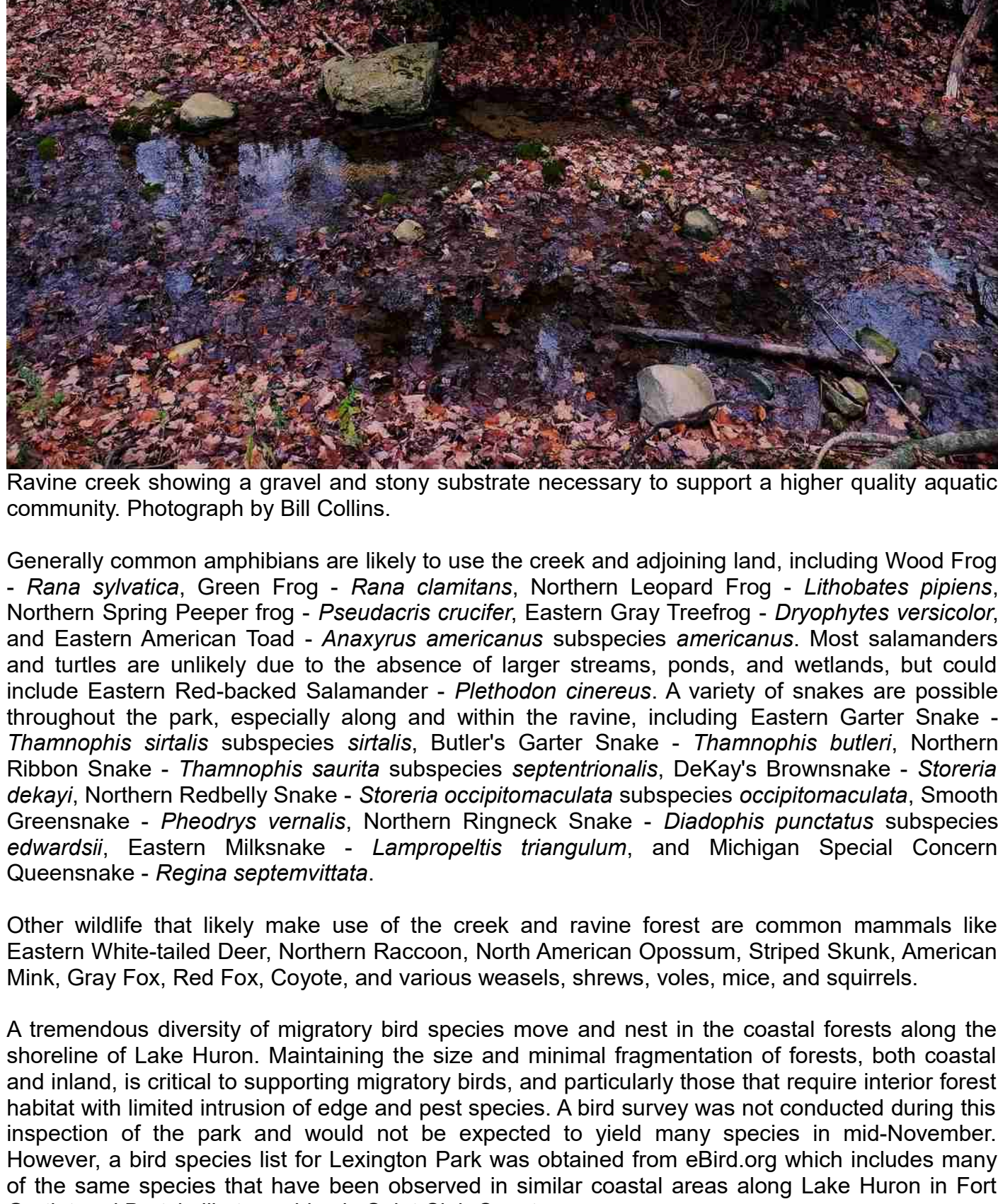
At least 67 plant species were identified during our approximately 3-hour inspection of the park. Several species observed were omitted from the list simply because they appeared to be common weeds. As the park was inspected in mid-November, native spring ephemeral plants like trout-lily and trillium were not observed, but are likely present, along with other plants that persist through the summer. Perhaps the rarest plant species found during this inspection was Purple-flowering Raspberry - *Rubus odoratus*, an eastern species on the western edge of its range in Michigan, originally recorded from only seven shoreline counties; three other county locations likely representing escapes from plantings. Here, it normally occurs on wooded dune ridges, especially in Fort Gratiot and Burchville townships in Saint Clair County, but we found a small clump growing down in the ravine, only about 10 feet above the creek. Another notable species found was Butternut - *Juglans cinerea*, a generally southern tree near the northern edge of its range in Michigan, that has been extensively eliminated across its former range by the Butternut Canker fungus. We found only one sapling that does not appear to be growing well, located roughly 50 feet west of the southwest corner of the day-use parking lot. Butternut has been found near Lake Huron along streams and ravine valleys in Burchville and Worth townships, and so may be one of the generally southern species that takes advantage of the extended growing season and slightly warmer winter temperatures near the lake. Other uncommon or rare species may be present but were not observed as our site inspection was conducted outside of the growing season and was not exhaustive.

TLC Member Connie Neese getting a closer look at a clump of Purple Flowering-raspberry. Photograph by Bill Collins.

All watercourses are important for their many water quality aspects, aquatic community, and wildlife values, particularly those that discharge to the Great Lakes. As with the nearly 200 other streams flowing off the Port Huron Moraine east to Lake Huron along the east side of the Thumb, the creek on the Lexington County Park is somewhat isolated from intensive agriculture, which is more characteristic of land west of the Black River. However, the headwaters of the creek flow through largely non-buffered crop fields.

An aquatic survey of the creek was not conducted as part of our review, but some small fish were

observed moving quickly in a few deeper sections. Based on general appearance, fish populations likely consist of fairly common species such as Common Creek Chub - *Semotilus atromaculatus*, Johnny Darter - *Etheostoma nigrum*, Central Mudminnow - *Umbra limi*, Brook Stickleback - *Culaea inconstans*, and possibly a few other common small fishes of small and intermittent streams. During spring high-water periods, the White Sucker - *Catostomus commersoni* and Northern Pike - *Esox lucius* may inhabit and breed in deeper portions of the creek, especially near the creek mouth at Lake Huron. Mussel populations are likely limited to small pea or fingernail clams - Sphaeriidae. Aquatic macro-invertebrate populations likely consist of common species of mayfly - Ephemeroptera, caddisfly - Trichoptera, stonefly - Plecoptera, dobsonfly - Megaloptera, alderfly - Megaloptera, damselfly - Zygoptera, dragonfly - Anisoptera, cranefly - Diptera, midge - Diptera, water strider - Hemiptera, beetle - Coleoptera, sowbug - Isopoda, scud - Amphipoda, crayfish - Decapoda, snails - Gastropoda, and other common organisms.



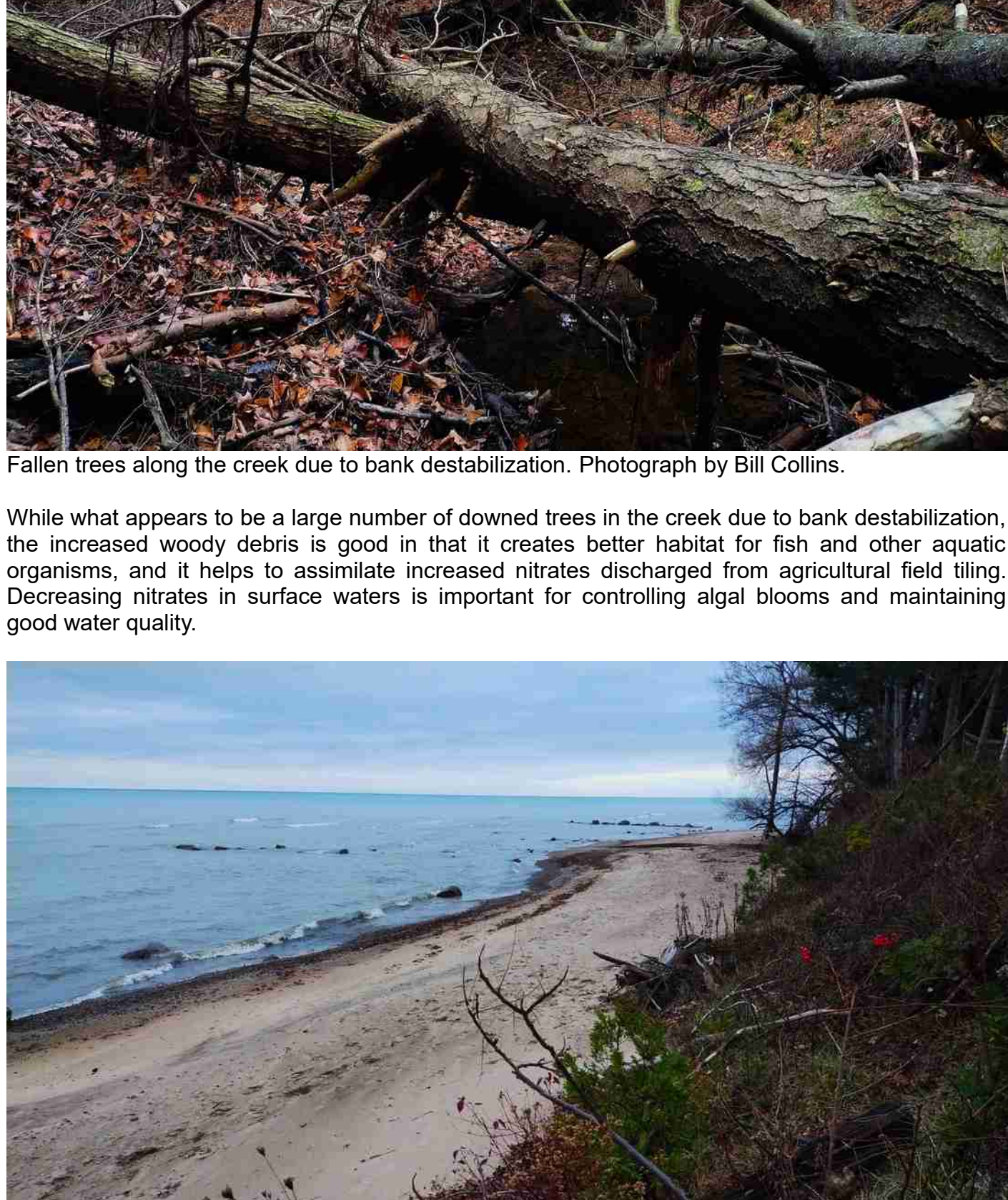
Ravine creek showing a gravel and stony substrate necessary to support a higher quality aquatic community. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Generally common amphibians are likely to use the creek and adjoining land, including Wood Frog - *Rana sylvatica*, Green Frog - *Rana clamitans*, Northern Leopard Frog - *Lithobates pipiens*, Northern Spring Peeper frog - *Pseudacris crucifer*, Eastern Gray Treefrog - *Dryophytes versicolor*, and Eastern American Toad - *Anaxyrus americanus* subspecies *americanus*. Most salamanders and turtles are unlikely due to the absence of larger streams, ponds, and wetlands, but could include Eastern Red-backed Salamander - *Plethodon cinereus*. A variety of snakes are possible throughout the park, especially along and within the ravine, including Eastern Garter Snake - *Thamnophis sirtalis* subspecies *sirtalis*, Butler's Garter Snake - *Thamnophis butleri*, Northern Ribbon Snake - *Thamnophis sirtalis* subspecies *septentrionalis*, DeKay's Brownsnake - *Storeria dekayi*, Northern Redbelly Snake - *Storeria occipitomaculata* subspecies *occipitomaculata*, Smooth Greensnake - *Phrynosoma vernalis*, Northern Ringneck Snake - *Diadophis punctatus* subspecies *edwardsii*, Eastern Milksnake - *Lampropeltis triangulum*, and Michigan Special Concern Queensnake - *Regina septemvittata*.

Other wildlife that likely make use of the creek and ravine forest are common mammals like Eastern White-tailed Deer, Northern Raccoon, North American Opossum, Striped Skunk, American Mink, Gray Fox, Red Fox, Coyote, and various weasels, shrews, voles, mice, and squirrels.

A tremendous diversity of migratory bird species move and nest in the coastal forests along the shoreline of Lake Huron. Maintaining the size and minimal fragmentation of forests, both coastal and inland, is critical to supporting migratory birds, and particularly those that require interior forest habitat with limited intrusion of edge and pest species. A bird survey was not conducted during this inspection of the park and would not be expected to yield many species in mid-November. However, a bird species list for Lexington Park was obtained from eBird.org which includes many of the same species that have been observed in similar coastal areas along Lake Huron in Fort Gratiot and Burtchville townships in Saint Clair County.

The Lake Huron shoreline, ravine, and creek are all great natural features at the park. The whole area, particularly the ravine, is sensitive in terms of native vegetation, potential erosion, and water quality. Perhaps the biggest factor in protection of the ravine has been its relative inaccessibility due to the steep slopes which serve as a natural barrier that will continue to provide relative protection for the area in the long term.



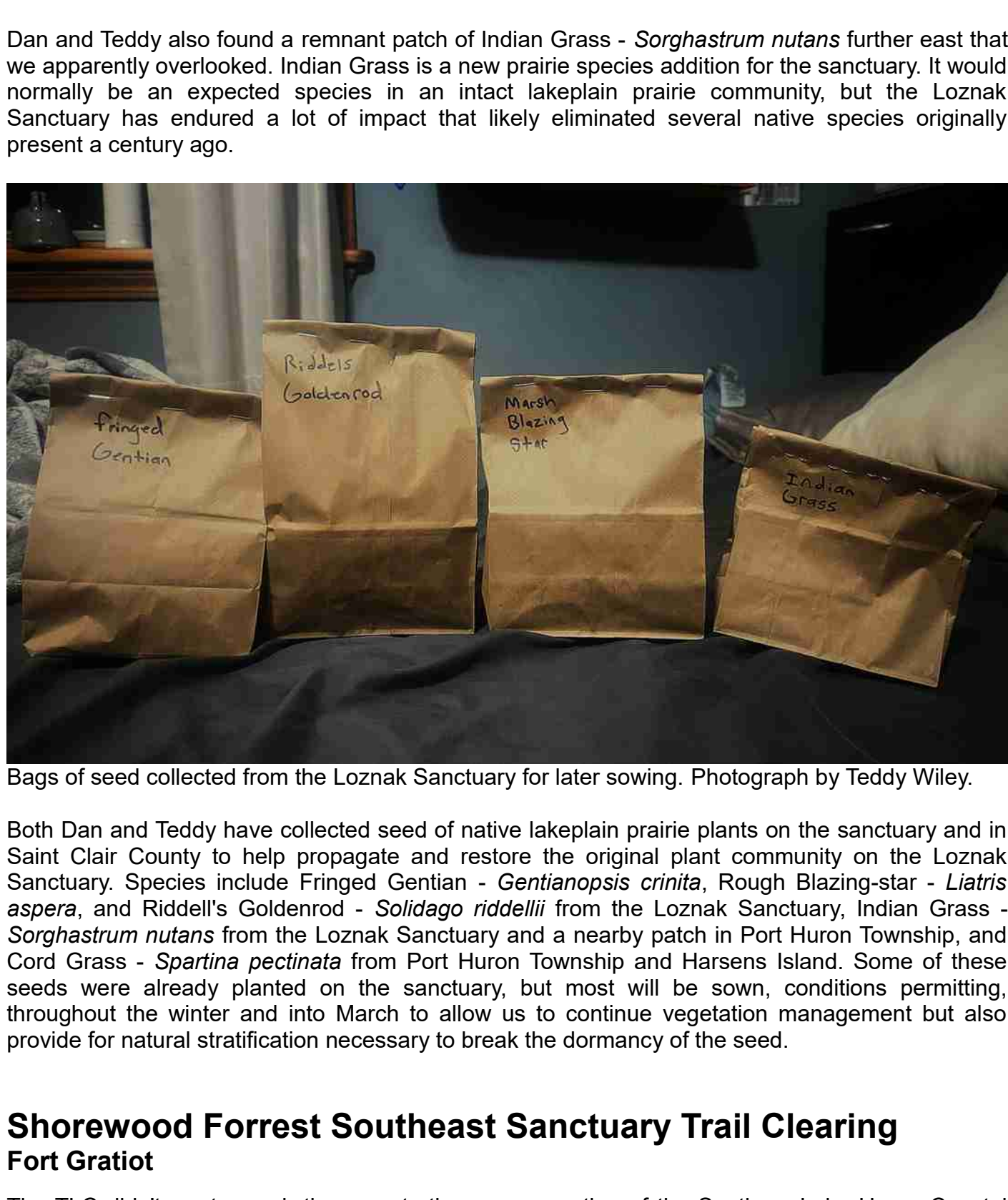
View upstream of ravine and creek from near the Lake Huron outlet. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Like many other streams in the Thumb region, the creek appears to have already been significantly destabilized by increased water flow as evidenced by highly eroded banks and many downed trees in the creek. Field tile drainage in the upper watershed is the likely cause, which increases and intensifies water flow. The ravine will become less stable with increased field tile drainage and more intense storms associated with climate warming. This has caused many similar streams to severely destabilize their banks through more erosion and down-cutting and is a particular problem for streams flowing off the relatively steep Port Huron Moraine. Water and land use management in the watershed is increasingly important to maintaining current water quality, which is typically already quite degraded throughout most of the Thumb region.



Fallen trees along the creek due to bank destabilization. Photograph by Bill Collins.

While what appears to be a large number of downed trees in the creek due to bank destabilization, the increased woody debris is good in that it creates better habitat for fish and other aquatic organisms, and it helps to assimilate increased nutrients discharged from agricultural field tilling. Decreasing nutrients in surface waters is important for controlling algal blooms and maintaining good water quality.



View southeast of the Lake Huron shoreline. Photograph by Bill Collins.

A major threat to the native quality and sustainability of the forest on the park is the occurrence of invasive weeds. These are extensive, especially across the upstream half of the ravine. Invasive shrubs are widespread, including Common Privet - *Ligustrum vulgare*, Tartarian Honeysuckle - *Lonicera tatarica*, Multiflora Rose - *Rosa multiflora*, and Japanese Barberry - *Berberis thunbergii*. Invasive trees noted in the ravine are Norway Maple - *Acer platanoides* and Black Locust - *Robinia pseudoacacia*. Invasive herbs include Canada Thistle - *Cirsium canadense*, Reed Canary Grass - *Phalaris arundinacea*, and Reed - *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*. I have observed extensive areas dominated by invasive Lily-of-the-valley - *Convallaria majalis* across the north ravine slope during my previous visits to the park. Of these, Common Privet, Multiflora Rose, Japanese Barberry, and Lily-of-the-valley are the biggest threats as they will eventually dominate the understory and exclude almost all other vegetation. Other invasive weeds such as Tartarian Honeysuckle, Canada Thistle, Reed Canary Grass, and Reed would largely be shaded out if the forest canopy is restored.

The TLC thanks the Sanilac County Parks and Recreation Commission for this great opportunity to explore the Lexington County Park and make comment on their park accessibility plans. The park truly is one of the gems of the Thumb coastline and with a little help, it will remain so for future generations.

Loznak Sanctuary Invasive Shrub Removal and Seed Collection

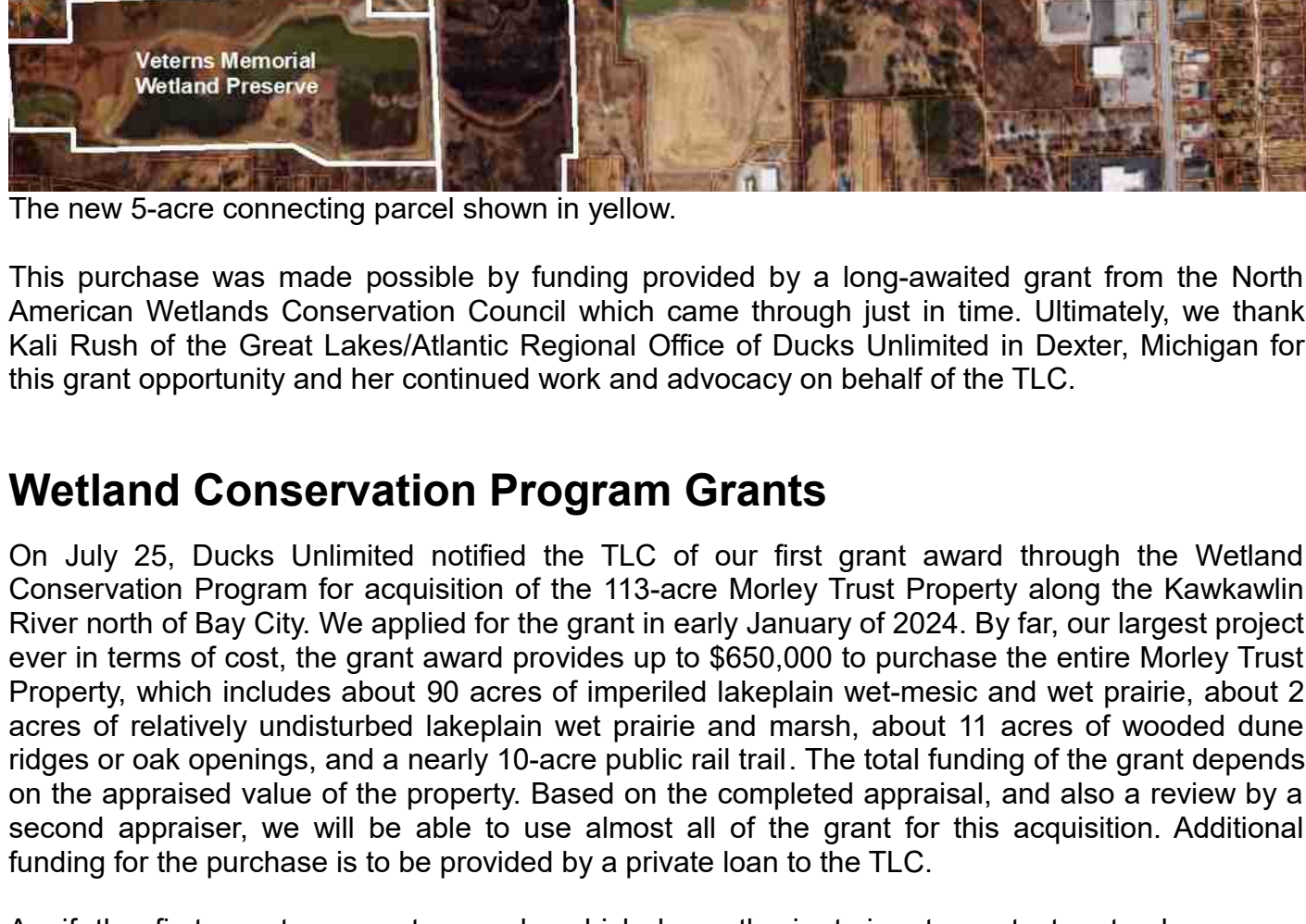
Marysville

Yānhdawa' yeh de yehnta' iyaen' - The Prairie is Near the River - Huron-Wendat

In the late fall and early winter, TLC Board Member Dan Rhein and TLC Stewardship Assistant Teddy Wiley cut and treated large areas of Glossy Buckthorn, Autumn-olive, and other invasive shrubs on the Loznak Sanctuary. This is gradually opening up the lakeplain prairie and adjoining woodland on the west side of the sanctuary to resemble more closely the original prairie and oak-dominated woodland, both fire-dependent plant communities. They have focused their work on two areas near the west side where they found a large patch of Fringed Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita*. More Fringed Gentian is always good.

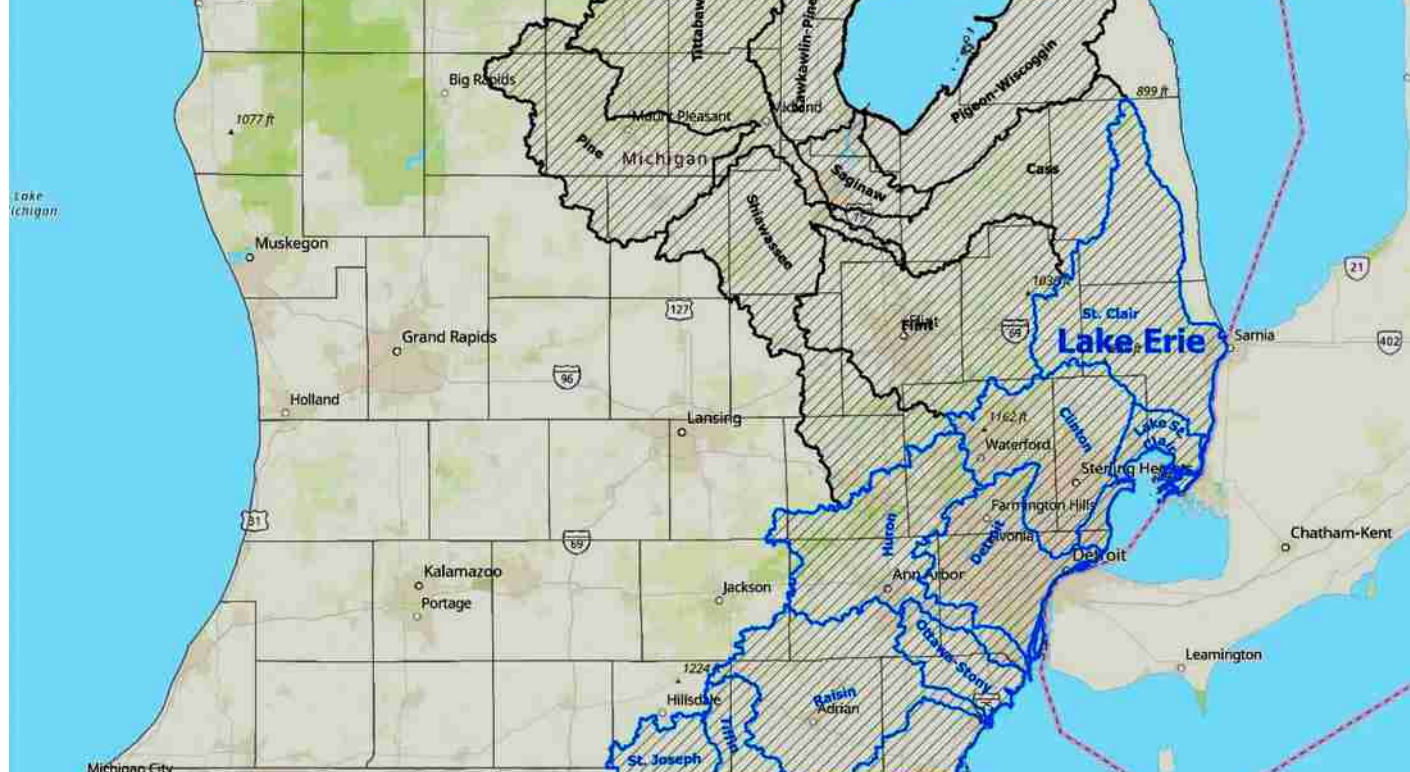


Cleared buckthorn and other invasive brush. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.



Paper Birch left in clearing area. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Dan and Teddy also found a remnant patch of Indian Grass - *Sorghastrum nutans* further east that we apparently overlooked. Indian Grass is a new prairie species addition for the sanctuary. It would normally be an expected species in the intact lakeplain prairie community, but the Loznak Sanctuary has endured a lot of impact that likely eliminated several native species originally present a century ago.



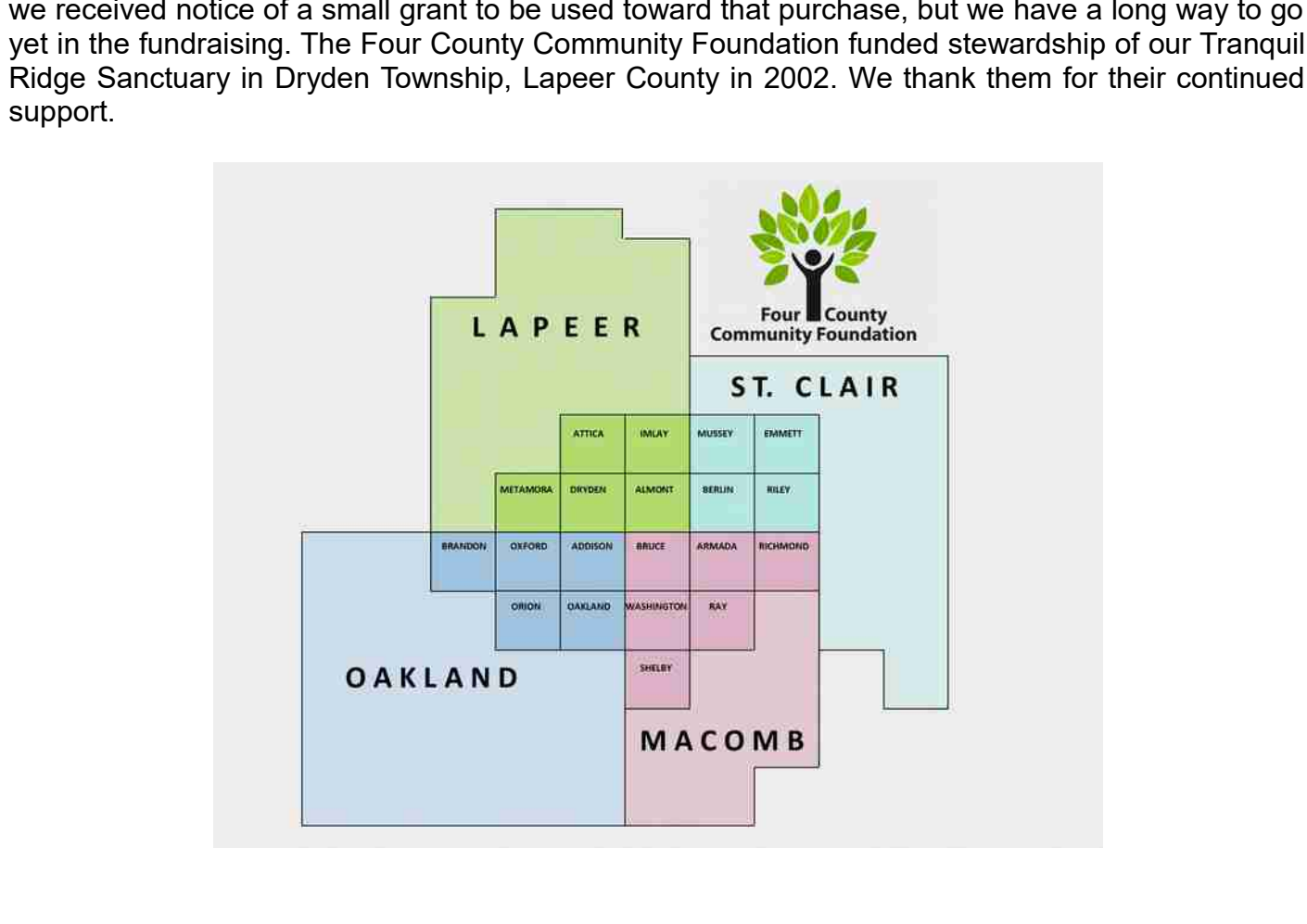
Bags of seed collected from the Loznak Sanctuary for later sowing. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Both Dan and Teddy have collected seed of native lakeplain prairie plants on the sanctuary and in Saint Clair County to help propagate and restore the original plant community on the Loznak Sanctuary. Species include Fringed Gentian - *Gentianopsis crinita*, Rough Blazing-star - *Liatris aspera*, and Ridgell's Goldenrod - *Solidago riddellii* from the Loznak Sanctuary, Indian Grass - *Sorghastrum nutans* from the Loznak Sanctuary and a nearby patch in Port Huron Township, and Cord Grass - *Spartina pectinata* from Port Huron Township and Sawsen Island. Some of these seeds were already planted on the sanctuary, but most will be sown, conditions permitting, throughout the winter and into March to allow us to continue vegetation management but also provide for natural stratification necessary to break the dormancy of the seed.

Shorewood Forest Southeast Sanctuary Trail Clearing

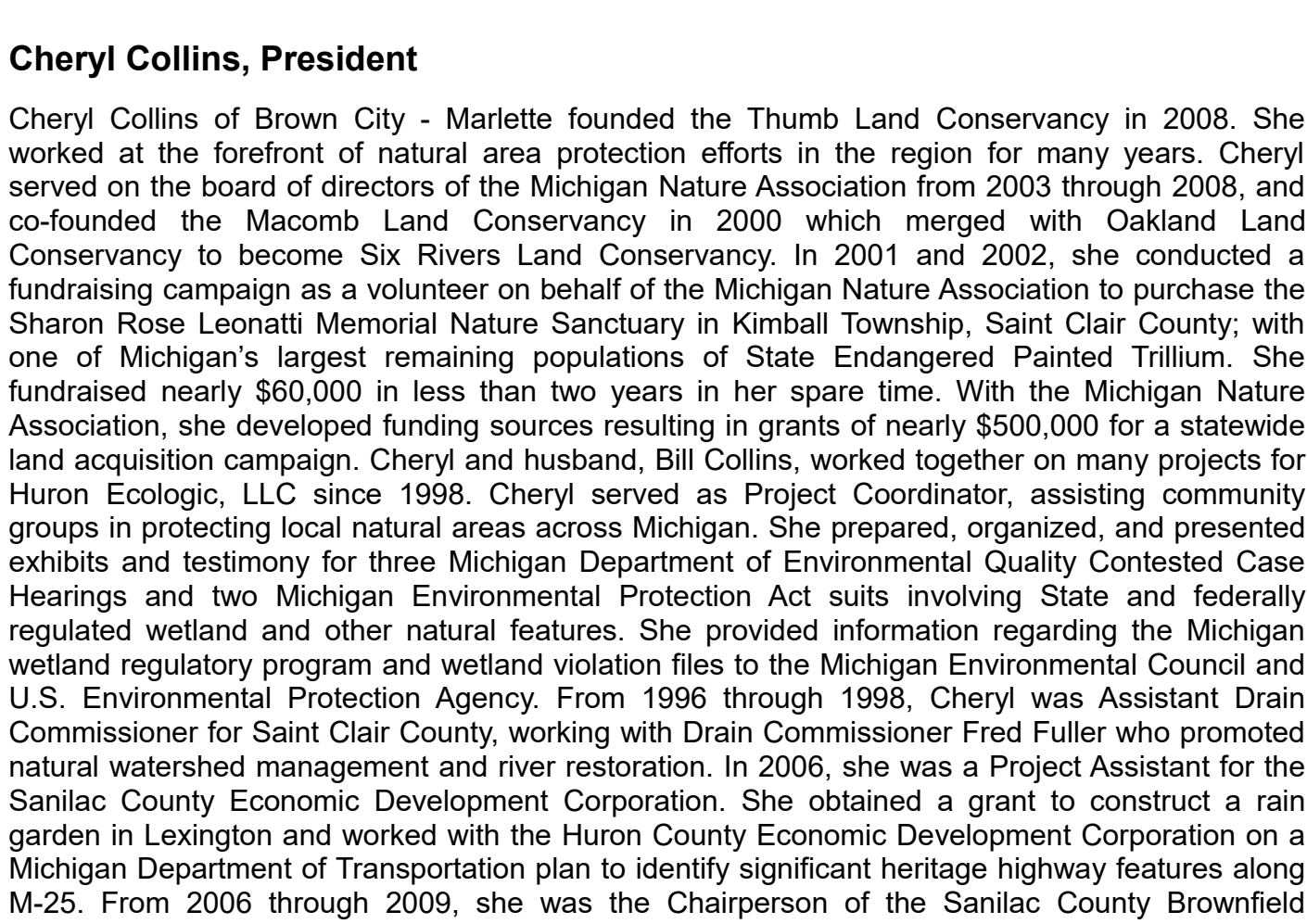
Fort Gratiot

The TLC didn't waste much time on starting a new section of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park trail on our new 80-acre Shorewood Forest acquisition. In late November and early December, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC Member Connie Neese, and TLC Stewardship Assistant Teddy Wiley started clearing the trail along a major dune ridge from Carrigan Road.



Start of the new trail on the Shorewood Forest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

We started the new trail entrance at Carrigan Road, about 1/4 mile north of the 40-acre pond on the Fort Gratiot Nature Park. The trail heads basically due north to the east edge of the dune ridge. From there, it will continue along the east edge of the ridge, similar to the trail on the Bidwell Sanctuary, providing a nice view of the adjoining wetland swale. This ridge continues northwest 1 mile through the middle of the Shorewood Forest preserves, allowing for a trail of the same length that will eventually connect with Brace Road.



Old Arbor Vitae trees, likely descendants of the original plant community, on the Shorewood Forest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

While working on the trail, Teddy took the opportunity to walk a half-mile up the ridge to the middle of the Shorewood Forest preserve area; the middle of Section 9. There, the dune and swale forest extends a half-mile north and south, about 3/4 mile east, and about 1/4 mile west. It is one of the most secluded locations of what will be the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. Mapping by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory shows that originally, much of the dune and swale forest consisted of cedar swamp. Most likely, Northern White-cedar, not really a cedar but generally a cypress, dominated the wetland swales. But with historic impacts to the ecosystem, not the least of which is the relentless grazing of the cedar seedlings by Eastern White-tailed Deer, Northern White-cedar, or Arbor Vitae, has all but disappeared. But on his walk to the interior, Teddy found several remnant Arbor Vitae trees along the dune ridge. Every one of these trees is precious because they are needed if we hope to restore the original plant community of the Shorewood Forest community.

New Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Connection

Fort Gratiot

While working on the new Shorewood Forest trail, a 5-acre parcel for sale on the south side of Carrigan Road came to our attention. Everything just fell together in terms of funding and owner response, making this the fastest purchased acquisition in TLC history. The significance of this 5 acres, beyond that it contains intact dune and swale forest, is that it provides a direct connection from the 40-acre pond on the Fort Gratiot Nature Park, right up to our new trail entrance to the Shorewood Forest Sanctuary on Carrigan Road. This is a critical connection for the Southern Lake Huron Coastal park as it allows for a continuous trail connection, except the Carrigan Road crossing, of nearly 2 miles, from the southern end of the Fort Gratiot Nature Park up to Brace Road on the north side of the Shorewood Forest preserves.

The new 5-acre connecting parcel shown in yellow.

This purchase was made possible by funding provided by a long-awaited grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council which came through just in time. Ultimately, we thank Kaili Rush of the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited in Dexter, Michigan for this grant opportunity and her continued work and advocacy on behalf of the TLC.

Wetland Conservation Program Grants

On July 25, Ducks Unlimited notified the TLC of our first grant award through the Wetland Conservation Program for acquisition of the 113-acre Morley Trust Property along the Kawkawlin River north of Bay City. We applied for the grant in early January of 2024. By far, our largest project ever in terms of cost, the grant award provides up to \$650,000 to purchase the entire Morley Trust Property, which includes about 90 acres of imperiled lakeplain wet-mesic and wet prairie, about 2 acres of relatively undisturbed lakeplain wet prairie and marsh, about 11 acres of wooded dune ridges or oak openings, and a nearly 10-acre public rail trail. The total funding of the grant depends on the appraised value of the property. Based on the completed appraisal, and also a review by a second appraiser, we will be able to use almost all of the grant for this acquisition. Additional funding for the purchase is to be provided by a private loan to the TLC.

As if the first grant was not enough, which honestly, was trying to protect natural areas, a conservancy can never have enough funding, the TLC was awarded a second grant from Ducks Unlimited through the Expanded Wetland Conservation Program on October 10. The TLC applied for this second round of Wetland Conservation Program funding in late August. The additional grant funding is designated for acquisition of an as yet to be identified property. All we can say is that, if successful, this will be a great addition to the protected public land of the Thumb.

The Wetland Conservation Program is being managed by the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited on behalf of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Wildlife Division in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Michigan DNR developed the Wetlands Conservation Program to guide expenditure for a portion these funds, and selected Ducks Unlimited through a competitive process to manage the program. Ducks Unlimited is a non-profit company that has preserved, enhanced, or restored 16 million acres of wetlands in North America since 1937.

Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie watersheds in Michigan. Source: Wetland Conservation Program request for grant applications.

The Wetland Conservation Program grants are designated for protection of wetlands in both the Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie watersheds, as part of a larger initiative to secure and improve the water quality of Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie. Fortunately for the TLC, most of our territory is located within one or the other watershed. The western basin of Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay experience frequent recurring harmful algal blooms which are primarily driven by excess phosphorus entering the lakes through runoff from rainfall and snowmelt. Harmful algal blooms can be toxic and cause severe illness, leading to closure of drinking water facilities, boating areas, fishing events, and beaches. Restoring wetlands on the landscape to catch the runoff and filter out phosphorus is one potential solution to this problem, and part of what is hoped to be accomplished through the Wetland Conservation Program.

DUCKS UNLIMITED

Source: <https://www.ducks.org/>

Our sincere gratitude to Kaili Rush and Matt Conrad of the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited in Dexter, Michigan for notifying the TLC of these grant opportunities. Our thanks also to the Wetland Conservation Program Steering Committee for selecting our projects for funding.

Four County Community Foundation Grant

In mid September the TLC applied for grant funding from the Four County Community Foundation based in Romeo to help fund acquisition of a new preserve in Lapeer County; over 40 acres of conifer swamp and shrub swamp complex at the headwaters of the Belle River. In early November, we received notice of a small grant to be used toward that purchase, but we have a long way to go yet in the fundraising. The Four County Community Foundation funded stewardship of our Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary in Dryden Township, Lapeer County in 2002. We thank them for their continued support.

Land Trust Alliance Grant

In early September, the TLC was given the opportunity to apply for a 2024 Midwest Ensuring Conservation Permanence Risk Management Grant from the Land Trust Alliance. In late November, we received notice of an award of \$2,000. This grant will be used exclusively for paying our part-time staff in addressing important conservancy issues that were discussed during our series of with the Land Trust Alliance in the summer and fall of 2024, including building our capacity to support administration and fund development; and to develop a fundraising and communications plan to increase general operating funds. We thank the Land Trust Alliance for their guidance and support.

TLC Board of Directors

Cheryl Collins, President

Cheryl Collins of Brown City - Marlette founded the Thumb Land Conservancy in 2008. She worked at the forefront of natural area protection efforts in the region for many years. Cheryl served on the board of directors of the Michigan Nature Association from 2003 through 2008, and co-founded the Macomb Land Conservancy in 2000 which merged with Oakland Land Conservancy to become Six Rivers Land Conservancy. In 2001 and 2002, she conducted a fundraising campaign as a volunteer on behalf of the Michigan Nature Association to purchase the Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary in Kimball Township, Saint Clair County; with one of Michigan's largest remaining populations of State Endangered Painted Trillium. She fundraised nearly \$60,000 in less than two years in her spare time. With the Michigan Nature Association, she developed funding sources resulting in grants of nearly \$500,000 for a statewide land acquisition campaign. Cheryl and husband, Bill Collins, worked together on many projects for Huron Ecologic, LLC since 1998. Cheryl served as Project Coordinator, assisting community groups in protecting local natural areas across Michigan. She prepared, organized, and presented exhibits and testimony for three Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Contested Case Hearings and two Michigan Environmental Protection Act suits involving State and federally regulated wetland and other natural features. She provided information regarding the Michigan wetland regulatory program and natural violation files to the Michigan Environmental Council and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. From 1996 through 1998, Cheryl was Assistant Drain Commissioner for Saint Clair County, working with Drain Commissioner Fred Fuller who promoted natural watershed management and river restoration. In 2006, she was a Project Assistant for the Sanilac County Economic Development Corporation. She obtained a grant to construct a rain garden in Lexington and worked with the Huron County Economic Development Corporation on a Michigan Department of Transportation plan to identify significant heritage highway features along M-25. From 2006 through 2009, she was the Chairperson of the Sanilac County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority. She ran for Sanilac County Drain Commissioner in 2008, receiving 38%

of the vote as a Democrat in a solidly Republican county. Cheryl continued working as a drain inspector until 2020, assisting with drain maintenance projects for the Saint Clair County Drain Commission.

Katherine "Kay" Cumbow

Kay Cumbow of Cottleville has been a Board Member since its founding in 2008. She is a long-time environmental advocate, active on local issues and also nuclear issues in the Great Lakes region. She was an active member of Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination, a statewide organization working to protect the health of our communities and the Great Lakes. Kay has an Associate of Arts degree from Kalamazoo Valley Community College and an Associate of Science degree from Mott Community College. She is a retired respiratory technician. Kay holds an Extra License for amateur radio through the Federal Communications Commission, is a Volunteer Examiner accredited through the American Radio Relay League, and is a member of the Thumb Amateur Radio Club in Michigan.

Dr. Scott Ferguson, Secretary

Doctor Scott Ferguson grew up near the TLC Dead End Woods Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot Township and joined the TLC board in 2010. Doctor Ferguson has been in full-time dental practice since 1988, the year he earned his Doctorate of Dental Surgery from the University of Detroit. He is a member of the Thumb District Dental Society, the Michigan Dental Association, the American Dental Association, and the Port Huron Study Club, part of a nationwide network of affiliates under the Seattle Study Club. Doctor Ferguson has completed advanced training through the Misch Institute for Implant Training and is a Fellow in the International Congress of Oral Implantology. A Port Huron native and active supporter of many local associations, Scott lives in North Street with his son, Gabriel and daughter, Maya.

Fred Fuller, Treasurer

Fred Fuller grew up in Yale, Michigan and has lived most of his life there, serving as Mayor of the City of Yale in 1990, 1991, and 1996. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from Albion College in English Literature and spent a semester in New York City working as an editorial assistant at The Paris Review literary magazine edited by George Plimpton. He has also traveled extensively throughout the United States and Canada. Having held a life-long interest in the cultural history of the Irish and British Isles, he wrote several magazine articles on that subject. He was employed as a Field Director with the Michigan Nature Association in 1992 and 1993, exploring potential new preserve lands and helping edit the MNA's sanctuary guidebook. Fred co-founded the Thumb Bioregional Alliance in 1993, an association of environmentalists and others concerned about ecology and the quality of life in the Thumb region. He also co-founded the Mill Creek Coalition, the Black River Watershed Group and the Friends of Beards Hills, to help preserve important ecosystems in the Thumb. Fred was elected as the Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner from 1997 through 2008. As Drain Commissioner, he opposed the proposed full-scale dredging of Mill Creek, a major tributary of the Black River, and he helped negotiate a compromise restoration of the creek. He enacted innovative storm water rules for Saint Clair County, initiated an illicit discharge elimination program on county drains, required wetland inspections of new development sites, and helped pioneer preservation of high-quality wetlands as mitigation for Michigan Department of Environmental Quality permits in Saint Clair County. From 2009 through 2020, Fred was employed as Water Resources Manager with Huron Consultants LLC of Port Huron and Lapeer, Michigan. In 2021, after obtaining a Certificate in Genealogical Research from Boston University, he started a company, Huron Genealogy Services LLC, to assist people searching for ancestors and creating family histories.

Daniel Rhein

Dan Rhein has been a Board Member since its founding in 2008. He has led stewardship efforts on the TLC Loznak Sanctuary and Bidwell Sanctuary since 2021. Dan grew up in China Township in Saint Clair County and is a naturalist, wildlife expert, and a self-taught botanist possessing thorough knowledge of many obscure plant species, especially grasses and shrubs. Dan graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Fisheries and Wildlife. While at MSU, he assisted with preserve stewardship for The Nature Conservancy of Michigan. For years, Dan has volunteered his time to provide nature education programs for the Blue Water Council Boy Scouts of America and local school children. Dan has long worked to promote natural areas in the Thumb, especially lakeplain prairie, wetlands, and aquatic habitats. He was a member of the Thumb Bioregional Alliance in the early 1990s, which advocated for the protection of land along the Black River near the Port Huron State Game Area, and the Minden Bog in Sanilac County. He has led several tours through the Minden Bog, being quite familiar with the unique bog vegetation. Dan taught an edible plants course for Willow Winds school of traditional skills and crafts near Mikado, Michigan. Dan is a very talented painter and has exhibited his work at Studio 1219 in Port Huron. He worked for many years as a drain inspector and project supervisor for the Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner. While employed by the Drain Commissioner, Dan specialized in natural stream restoration, location of illicit pollution discharges to county drains, rain garden maintenance, and invasive weed control along county drains and wetland mitigation preserves.

Blake Short

Blake Short of Port Huron is a naturalist and currently employed as an ecological consultant with GEI Consultants, Incorporated. He began working with the TLC as a Program Assistant in May of 2022, assisting in stewardship of the TLC Bidwell Sanctuary, Dead End Woods Sanctuary, Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary, North Street Station, and Deerfield Conservation Easement in Huron County. Blake grew up in the Lakeport area, actually right across from our Bidwell Sanctuary where he wandered as a kid. With family roots in West Virginia, he returned there in his early 20s, which got him very connected with the natural world. He returned to Michigan and attended Ferris State University where he earned a BS degree in Environmental Biology. While at Ferris State, he was Vice President and Project Manager of the Mycology Club, culturing various fungi, leading field trips, and collecting mushrooms in the nearby Manistee National Forest. Returning to Port Huron, he was a summer intern with the Friends of the Saint Clair River, working on science communications and stewardship. He was also employed full-time growing gourmet mushrooms for Give and Grow Mushrooms in Chesterfield Township in Macomb County, then as a wetland consultant with Huron Ecologic. In his spare time, Blake does a lot of mushroom collecting, especially in the Port Huron State Game Area. He grew up sailing and still takes a small boat out on Lake Huron. He is also a musician, playing guitar and mandolin, particularly Americana and Blue Grass.

Chris Walker

Chris Walker grew up on a small farm near Crosswell, where his parents instilled in him a near-reverent appreciation for the land and its natural inhabitants. Chris is currently an Assistant Professor in the Communication Department at North Dakota State University. He earned a Master of Fine Arts in Cinema and Photography from Southern Illinois University and a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Journalism from Central Michigan University. As a photography professor, he has fulfilled full-time teaching and research appointments at Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama; Southern Indiana University, Evansville; and Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore. He has worked for several newspapers, including the Toledo Blade, where he and two coworkers earned a finalist spot in the Pulitzerz, and has been published worldwide in numerous magazines, books, and journals. For 7 years, he was the Photography Columnist for Camping Life magazine. Chris is a naturalist and has a life-long interest in ecology, particularly through bird biology and stock nature photography. He was a Neotropical Migratory Research Technician for 2 years at Black Swamp Bird Observatory in Oak Harbor, Ohio. Chris is an artist and journalist with deep concerns for social anthropology and our ever-changing environment.

TLC Staff

William Collins, Executive Director

Bill Collins of Brown City - Marlette is a naturalist and botanist who grew up in the Port Huron area. He was a nature instructor at Silver Trails Scout Reservation summer camps from 1978 through 1986. He has an Associate of Science degree from Saint Clair County Community College and graduated from Michigan State University in 1987 with a dual Bachelor of Science degree in Botany and Natural Resources Development while also following the engineering program. From 1984 through 1986 he was a Program Assistant with the Michigan Chapter of The Nature Conservancy in East Lansing, and later worked on various contract projects for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Division. He is a Life Member of the Michigan Nature Association and explored natural areas for MNA in 1988 through 1990. Bill worked as a wetland consultant and ecologist since 1990, engineering 8 years as a botanist and project manager with SSOE, Inc., a large architectural and engineering firm in Flint and Troy, Michigan, and from 1998 through 2024 with his own consulting firm, Huron Ecologic, LLC. As a consultant, he encouraged and helped local governments and individuals preserve high quality natural areas. Bill and his wife, Cheryl, have been very active in promoting the protection of natural areas and rare species throughout the region, including Michigan Endangered Painted Trillium, a rare woodland wildflower now known only from Saint Clair County in all of Michigan.

Teddy Wiley, Program and Stewardship Assistant

Teddy Wiley started working with the TLC in the fall of 2024 on stewardship of our Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville, removing invasive weeds, and collecting and planting native prairie plant seeds, and also on our Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville Township, clearing new sections of the coastal trail and removing invasive weeds. Teddy also helped us draft a baseline report for a conservation easement, among other preserve and program-related work. He is impressively self-educated in ecology, regional natural communities, and native species. Before coming to the TLC, he started an effort to nominate the Saint Clair River Delta and adjacent wetlands as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. This designation should help provide new funding opportunities to control invasive Reed - *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*, among other invasive weeds, which has eliminated native vegetation and degraded wildlife habitat across vast areas of the Saint Clair River Delta and the Great Lakes region. The TLC fully supports this effort and welcomes the opportunity to work with Teddy on this project.

Since he was a child, Teddy has been fascinated with the natural world. From the age of 5, he sought out wetland areas to catch and release snapping turtles and other small reptiles and amphibians. He says it was snapping turtles that introduced him to wetlands and the many issues they currently face. From the age of just 13, Teddy worked for the Michigan Nature Association on their Alice W. Moore Woods Sanctuary in Saint Clair, helping to control invasive weeds. Among his other activities, Teddy is also an avid deer hunter and collects shed deer antlers. We look forward to working with Teddy for many years to come and hope he has found his place in the TLC.

Jason Sawyer, Stewardship Assistant

Jason also started working with the TLC in the fall of 2024 on stewardship of our Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville Township, clearing new sections of the coastal trail, removing invasive weeds, and cleaning up some old junk near the trail entrance. He's done great work and is a big help to the TLC. Jason says that the principles and efforts of the TLC align perfectly with his love of our precious natural land and his desire to preserve our wilderness for future generations. Likewise, the TLC enjoys working with Jason and is impressed with his enthusiasm and his ability to take charge with little guidance.

Jason grew up in and around the lakes region of Oakland County. He spent most of his childhood exploring the lakes, rivers, and parks by canoe or bicycle. He often ventured to northern Michigan with family and friends for winter recreation and warm weather exploration, which solidified his desire to surround himself with nature and wildlife. His desire to be closer to wilderness took him north to Cheboygan, Michigan where his ancestors emigrated from Sweden and where he explored the wilderness, especially the extensive trail networks by mountain bike, snowmobile, and other off-road vehicles. He is a skilled kayak enthusiast and has enjoyed exploring Cheboygan State Park, the Au Sable River, the Sturgeon River, and Duncan Bay.

Jason and his wife created an on-line retail business, Guinea Pig Market, selling hand-made products for pet guinea pigs and other small animal bedding products, which they still operate. Upon moving to Mussey Township in Saint Clair County, stray cats in the area motivated them to form the non-profit cat rescue and outreach group Mystery's Haven. They also work with other cat and dog rescue organizations in the region, unloading freight and distributing goods to over one hundred approved groups in Michigan and Ohio.

Kris Heyworth, Program Assistant

Kris Heyworth of Davison also started working with the TLC in the fall of 2024 to identify new funding sources for land acquisition and other projects. She began by contacting various foundations to potentially fund two of our major acquisition efforts in 2024.

Kris has always loved nature and considers herself a country girl. She grew up in the Thumb, not far from our office in Marlette. After meeting her husband, they moved to Davison Township in Genesee County where she has lived for the past forty years on 5 acres with wooded hills, and farmland and country just down the road. She says she is a Chris follower and that He has blessed her so much. We hope that working with the TLC to protect creation can be part of that blessing for years to come.

TLC Service Providers

TLC Legal Counsel

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511 Fort Street, Suite 402
Port Huron, Michigan 48060
810-967-3970
LozenLaw.com

TLC Financial Institution

Tri-County Bank
4190 Main Street
Brown City, Michigan 48416
810-346-2745
Tri-CountyBank.bank

TLC Liability Insurance

Conserv-A-Nation Insurance Program
Underwritten by Chubb Group of Insurance Companies
Alliant Insurance Services, Inc.
Franeys Muha Commercial Group
4530 Walney Road, Suite 200
Chantilly, Virginia 20151
703-397-0977
AlliantInsurance.com

TLC Accountant

Cathy Rovano
5626 Ortmann Drive
Sterling Heights, Michigan 48314

TLC Web Site Host - ThumbLand.org

Jeff Ronan
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810-334-4119
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LochanDelT.com

TLC Corporation

TLC Web Site

ThumbLand.org

TLC Contacts

Thumb Land Conservancy
4975 Maple Valley Road
Marlette, Michigan 48453
810-346-2584
mail@ThumbLand.org

TLC Incorporation Documents

IRS Employer Identification Number: 41-2247569
IRS Employer Identification Number Assigned: 2007 August 13
Michigan Corporation Identification Number: 70398K
Michigan Articles Of Incorporation Filed: 2008 October 29
Michigan Articles Of Incorporation Effective Date Of Approval: 2008 October 29
IRS Effective Date Of Tax Exemption: 2008 October 29
IRS 501(c)(3) Tax Exempt Status Confirmed: 2009 February 26

Michigan Corporate Entity Documents:
https://cofs.lara.state.mi.us/CorpWeb/CorpSearch/CorpSummary.aspx?ID=800918673&SEARCH_TYPE=1

IRS Search for Charities, Online Version of Publication 78:
<https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/pub78Search.do?ein=41-2247569&names=&city=&state=All.&county=US&deductibility=all&dispatchMethod=searchCharities&submitName=Search>

TLC Memberships and Affiliations

Land Trust Alliance
1250 H Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005
202-638-4725
LandTrustAlliance.org

Clyde Historical Society
7293 Beard Road
Clyde, Michigan 48049
810-824-0726
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481890455361159/about/>

Blue Water Indigenous Alliance
8749 Lakeshore Road
Burtchville, Michigan 48059
248-506-7172

TLC Tax Statements

Annual tax statements of the Thumb Land Conservancy are available upon request and at the following IRS web site: <https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/>

2023 IRS Tax Statement Summary		
Total Revenue		207,459.56
Total Expenses		-188,738.20
Net Income		18,721.36
Revenue		
General Contributions		2149.02
Huron County Community Foundation Stewardship Grant		900.00
Croissant Property Sale		101,088.88
Shorewood Forrest Purchase Grants		101,990.00
Anderson & Ellis Conservation Easements		2,000.00
Total Revenue		208,127.90
Expenses		
Shorewood Forrest 80-Acre Purchase		-84,305
Projects - Appraisals, Permits, Legal, etc.		-8,655
Staff Pay - Stewardship, Projects		-4,935
Morley Property Acquisition Escrow		-2,000
Preserve Stewardship & Maintenance		-1,950
Local Tax Assessments		-1,850
Liability Insurance		-1,048
Special Events - Thumb Heritage Festival		-805
Total Expenses		-105,548
Net Income		130,169
In 2023, 91% of TLC revenue was used for preserve acquisition. 1% of TLC revenue was used for preserve stewardship and payment of local tax assessments. One volunteer was paid only for preserve stewardship work in 2022. Less than 1% of TLC revenue was used for administrative costs including liability insurance and general office expense. 5% of TLC revenue was retained as part of a preserve stewardship endowment fund. 5% of TLC revenue was applied to the general fund, which is used primarily to pay local tax assessments and general administrative costs.		

2024 Projected IRS Tax Statement Summary		
Total Revenue		236,167
Total Expenses		-105,548
Net Income		130,619
Revenue		
Consumers Energy Foundation Grant		100,000
NAWCA Grant for SLHCP		64,920
Dottie Craig Trust		64,693
General Contributions		4,314
Land Trust Alliance Grant		2,000
Special Events - Thumb Heritage Festival		240
Total Revenue		236,167
Expenses		
Shorewood Forrest 80-Acre Purchase		-84,305
Projects - Appraisals, Permits, Legal, etc.		-8,655
Staff Pay - Stewardship, Projects		-4,935
Morley Property Acquisition Escrow		-2,000
Preserve Stewardship & Maintenance		-1,950
Local Tax Assessments		-1,850
Liability Insurance		-1,048
Special Events - Thumb Heritage Festival		-805
Total Expenses		-105,548
Net Income		130,169
In 2024, 40% of TLC revenue was used for new preserve acquisition. An additional 34% is designated for land acquisition in 2025. About 3% of TLC revenue was used for preserve stewardship, 2% to pay five workers, primarily for preserve stewardship, 1% to pay local tax assessments, less than 1% for special events, mainly the 2024 Thumb Heritage Festival, and less than 1% to pay for administrative costs, including liability insurance, legal counsel, and small miscellaneous costs. About 18% of TLC revenue was retained for future preserve stewardship, worker pay, and project expenses in 2025.		

TLC Properties

Dead End Woods Sanctuary Makadewagimigweyainniwak - Black River Tribal People - Annishinaabemowin 17.6 Acres, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County Acquired 2008 December 30

Swamp forest in May on the Dead End Woods Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

The Dead End Woods, located at the dead end of Wilson Drive, was preserved as mitigation for State-permitted wetland impacts associated with a County drain project. The Sanctuary is part of a highly diverse southern swamp and mesic upland forest community on Wainola-Deford fine sands deposited on the glacial lakeplain. The swamp is dominated by Silver Maple and Red Maple hybrids, Green Ash (large trees now dead due to the Emerald Ash Borer), American Hornbeam, Spicebush, Sensitive Fern, Royal Fern, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and Marsh-marigold. The upland is dominated by Red Maple, Red Oak, Sassafras, Black Cherry, Witch-hazel, Mayapple, Wild Geranium, and Yellow Trout-lily. At 44.5, the Floristic Quality Index of the Dead End Woods is very high, indicating a natural area of statewide significance. Higher quality or interesting plant species include Maidenhair Fern, Spikenard, Richweed, American Hazelnut, Black Ash, Butternut, Spicebush, Tuliptree, Cardinal Flower, Indian Pipe, Black Gum, Sycamore, Christmas Fern, Broad-leaved Goldenrod, Foamflower, and Eastern Hemlock. Uncommon animal species observed on the Dead End Woods Sanctuary include Flying Squirrels, Barred Owls, Pileated Woodpeckers, Wood Ducks, Spring Peeper frogs, Wood Frogs, and Red-backed Salamanders. Aquatic macroinvertebrates historically observed in the wetter portions of the swamp, or vernal pools, include caddisfly larvae, fairy shrimp, crayfish, pond snails, clam shrimp, water spiders, and various protozoa, all generally indicating high water quality.

Gerrits Sanctuary Wabisiwisibwinniwak - Swan Creek Tribal People - Annishinaabemowin 38.5 Acres, Ira Township, Saint Clair County Acquired 2009 July 16

Black Cherry, American Beech, and Sugar Maple on the Gerrits Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

The Gerrits Sanctuary was a generous donation from Lois Gerrits, wife of the late Dr. James F. Gerrits. The parcel was formerly part of the Gerrits family farm. The forest on the Gerrits Sanctuary is an impressive mix of southern swamp and mesic upland containing plant populations relict from centuries ago. Dominant vegetation in the extensive wetlands includes Silver Maple, Green Ash (all large trees dead due to the Emerald Ash Borer), Eastern Cottonwood, American Elm, Cinnamon Fern, and various sedges. The upland forest is a mature and species-rich southern forest community of American Beech, Sugar Maple, Red Oak, White Oak, Black Cherry, American Basswood, Tuliptree, Yellow Birch, Mayapple, White Trillium, Wild Geranium, Canada Mayflower, Spinulose Woodfern, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Solomon's-seal, Yellow Trout-lily, and Spring Beauty among many other forest herbs. Along the southwestern boundary of the sanctuary, the vegetation on moist sand tip-up mounds is distinctly northern with clubmosses, Wild Sarsaparilla, Starflower, and Goldthread. Some areas look surprisingly like habitat for Michigan Endangered Painted Trillium - *Trillium undulatum*, currently known only from the Port Huron area.

The Gerrits Sanctuary is part of one of the largest and least fragmented forest tracts remaining along the Great Lakes coastline from Ohio north through the Algona area. The larger forest is nearly 300 acres, of which the Gerrits Sanctuary includes only about 20 acres of that forest, or about 7% of it. At the southern limit of the forest along M-29, it is within 1,000 feet of Anchor Bay. Near-shore natural areas are critical for migratory birds and insects that move along the Great Lakes. The Gerrits Sanctuary provides habitat both for migratory woodland birds and for migratory insects, like butterflies, in the old-field on the north half of the preserve.

Peltier Sanctuary Ke'Ya Makocce - Turtle Land - Lakota 11.5 Acres, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County Acquired 2010 June 28



Swamp forest in a wetland swale on the Peltier Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

The Peltier Sanctuary was donated to the TLC by Ray and Nancy Peltier. The parcel was preserved as mitigation for State-permitted wetland impacts associated with expansion of the office of Hamzavi Dermatology in Fort Gratiot. The Peltier Sanctuary is a small part of a much larger and ecologically unique dune and swale complex formed about 4,500 years ago along portions of the early Great Lakes shoreline as water levels dropped, rose again, and then dropped to modern levels after the last glacial period. Upland sand ridges on the Sanctuary are covered largely by Black Cherry, Big-tooth Aspen, and American Basswood, with scattered Black Oak and a few Arbor Vitae. The lower ridge bases are lined with Paper Birch and covered by an unusual concentration of Alternate-leaved Dogwood. The mucky wetland swales between the ridges are covered by Silver Maple, Green Ash and Black Ash, the larger ash trees now all dead due to the Emerald Ash Borer. Eastern Cottonwood, and American Elm. Unique or rare plant species on the Peltier Sanctuary include Purple-flowering Raspberry, the Lower Peninsula's equivalent of the Upper Peninsula's Thimbleberry, Yellow Lady-slipper orchids, and a variety of other species associated with sand and mucky sand soils. Unique animals species include the Eastern Hognose Snake, Blue-spotted Salamander, and an abundance of migratory birds, particularly warblers, that move and nest along Lake Huron.

North Street Station

5220 North Road, North Street, Michigan
0.5 Acre, Clyde Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2016 August 02



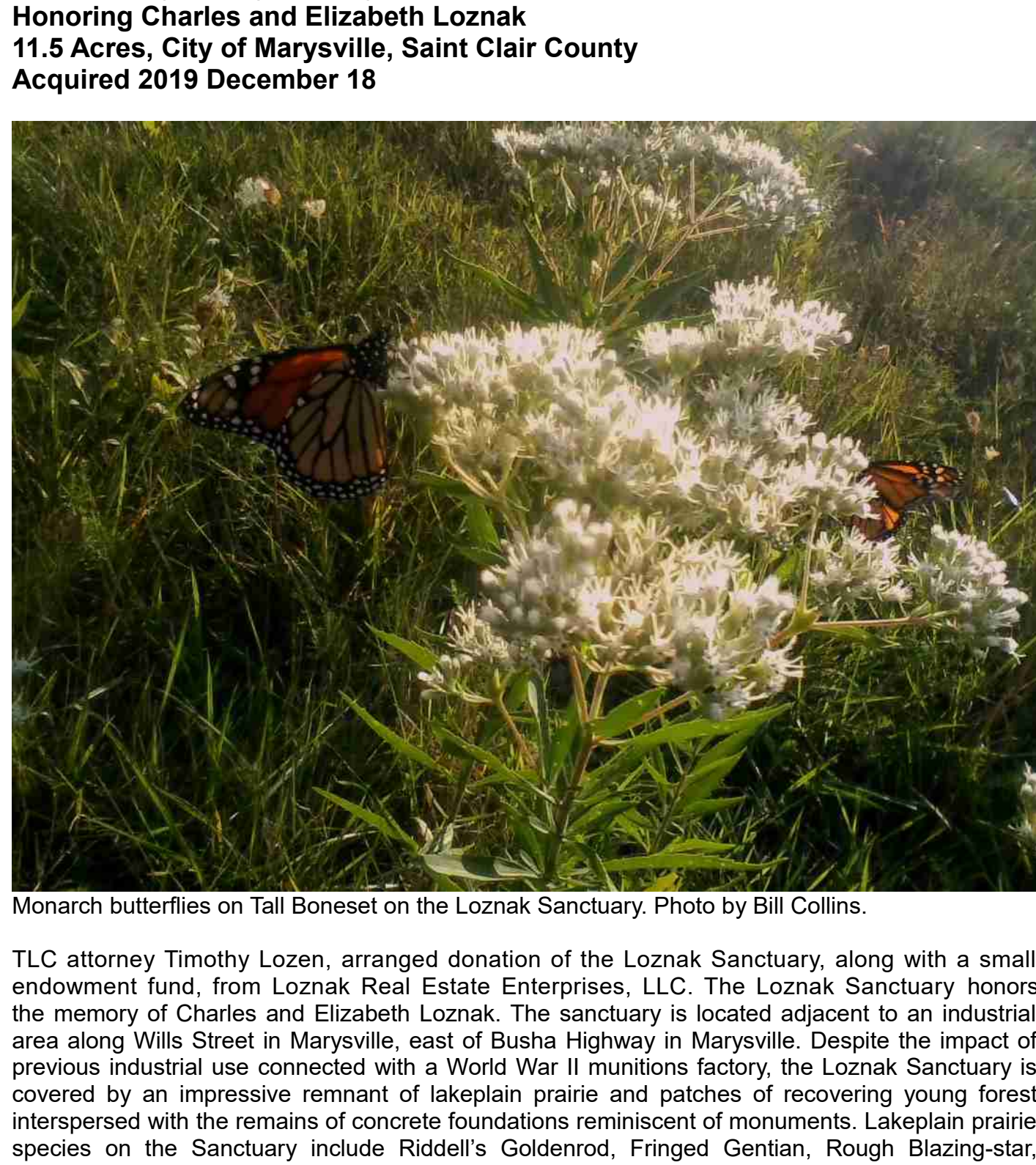
The North Street Station where passengers once boarded trains. Photo by Bill Collins.

The TLC purchased the old North Street general store, post office, and rail station through the Saint Clair County tax auction. This historic structure would have otherwise been demolished. The North Street station is one of only two remaining stations between Port Huron and Crosswell along the old Port Huron and Northwestern Railway which opened in 1870. The main line ran from Port Huron to Saginaw, with branches to Sandusky, Port Hope, and Port Austin. The line became part of the Pere Marquette Railroad in 1889. The main structure on the North Street site probably dates back to at least 1889, but was later partially modified in the mid 1940's to serve as a residence.

The TLC is partnering with the Clyde Historical Society to protect the structure and fundraise for restoration. We are currently restoring the exterior and plan to install signs describing the history of the site. Eventually, we would like to restore the interior, display related historical artifacts, and open it for meetings and public events.

Bertha's Haven Sanctuary

Mindimooyenh - An Elder Woman of Great Respect - Annishinaabemowin
0.62 Acre, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2019 September 27



TLC field trip group in October 2020 at Bertha's Haven Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

The Michigan Nature Association donated this small preserve to the TLC, formerly known as the Galbraith Plant Preserve, which is located only about 150 feet north of our Peltier Sanctuary. It is a tiny part of the same dune and swale forest that extends across the Peltier Sanctuary and for several miles north and south along Lake Huron. Michigan Nature Association founder, Bertha Daubendiek, established this preserve back in 1972 as a place to transplant native wildflowers from the adjacent Detroit Water Board property before the Lake Huron water intake facility was constructed. The TLC renamed the preserve in honor of Bertha Daubendiek, to "Bertha's Haven", borrowing part of an older name for the preserve.

Loznak Sanctuary

Hónhdawá'yeh de yenhta'iyaaen' - The Prairie is Near the River - Huron-Wendat
Honoring Charles and Elizabeth Loznak
11.5 Acres, City of Marysville, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2019 December 18



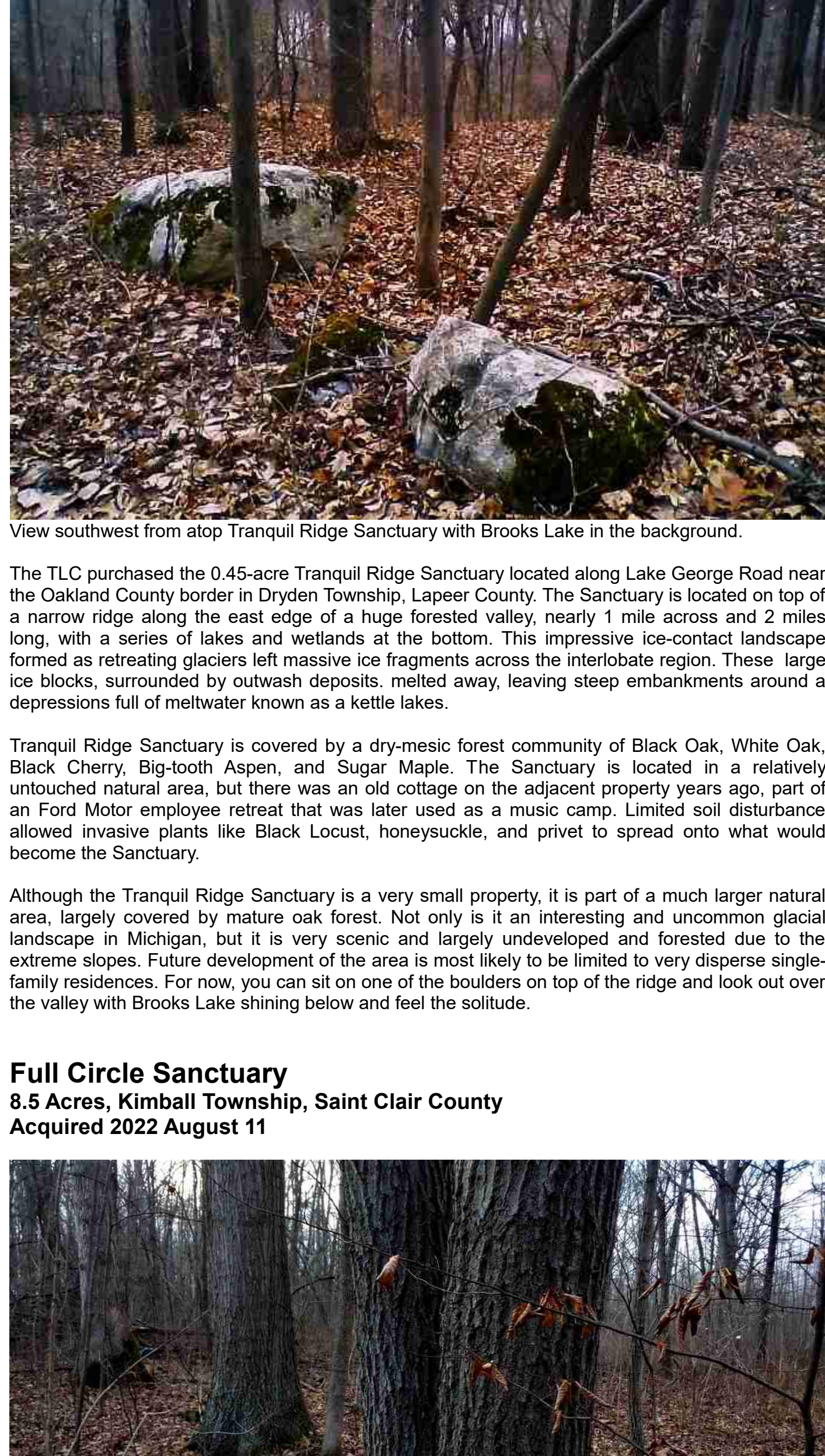
Monarch butterflies on Tall Boneset on the Loznak Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

TLC attorney Timothy Lozen, arranged donation of the Loznak Sanctuary, along with a small endowment fund, from Loznak Real Estate Enterprises, LLC. The Loznak Sanctuary honors the memory of Charles and Elizabeth Loznak. The sanctuary is located adjacent to an industrial area along Wills Street in Marysville, east of Busha Highway in Marysville. Despite the impact of previous industrial use connected with a World War II munitions factory, the Loznak Sanctuary is covered by an impressive remnant of lakeplain prairie and patches of recovering young forest interspersed with the remains of concrete foundations reminiscent of monuments. Lakeplain prairie species on the Sanctuary include Riddell's Goldenrod, Fringed Gentian, Rough Blazing-star, Mountain-mint, Showy Goldenrod, Foxglove Beard-tongue, Nodding Ladies'-tresses, Yellow Lady-slipper orchid, Switch Grass, Three-awned Grass, and Catgrass. A unique plant species on the Loznak Sanctuary is Tall Boneset, a relatively recent arrival from the Lake Huron water intake facility, but uncommon and not recorded anywhere closer than Monroe County. It is apparently not native to the region, but it is not invasive and it attracts a lot of Monarch butterflies.

The Loznak Sanctuary is adjacent to the old Port Huron and Detroit Railroad line with an old rail spur running through the middle of the sanctuary. It is also adjacent to approximately 26 acres of unusual ridge and swale forest with an interesting alluvial origin along the Saint Clair River dating back almost 5,000 years ago. Historic aerial photographs and mapping show that, other than limited use of the property as part of a munitions factory, beginning and ending with World War II, the land appears to have been generally undisturbed. A 1937 aerial photograph shows the Loznak Sanctuary and vicinity was completely vacant and part of a large swath of mostly open land along the Saint Clair River which may have been farmed briefly, but more likely grazed. Similar lakeplain prairie habitat in the Marysville area, where land use was not so intensive, serves as a refuge for plants remnant of original populations that existed prior to Euro-American settlement. Michigan Threatened Sakavani's Milkweed - *Asclepias sullivantii*, a rare lakeplain prairie plant found in only 8 southeast counties in Michigan, is known from several nearby locations in the Marysville area.

Bidwell Sanctuary

Chékhónésink hitkwike schind lékuwake - A Place Among Hemlock Trees on Sandy Ground Where There is Sound of Waves Breaking - Lenape
42.1 Acres, Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2020 July 17



View northeast from under an Eastern Hemlock tree on the main dune ridge with a large wetland view in the background. Photo by Bill Collins.

The Bidwell Sanctuary is one of the best examples of dune and swale forest remaining along the eastern shoreline of the Thumb. Acquisition of the Bidwell Sanctuary was a major preservation accomplishment for the TLC on behalf of the Blue Water Area. Major project funders included The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, the Consumers Energy Foundation, Cargill, Inc. and Cargill Salt of Saint Clair, the Community Foundation of St. Clair County, the Franklin H. and Nancy S. Moore Donor Advised Fund of the Community Foundation of St. Clair County, and SEMCO Energy Gas Company of Port Huron.

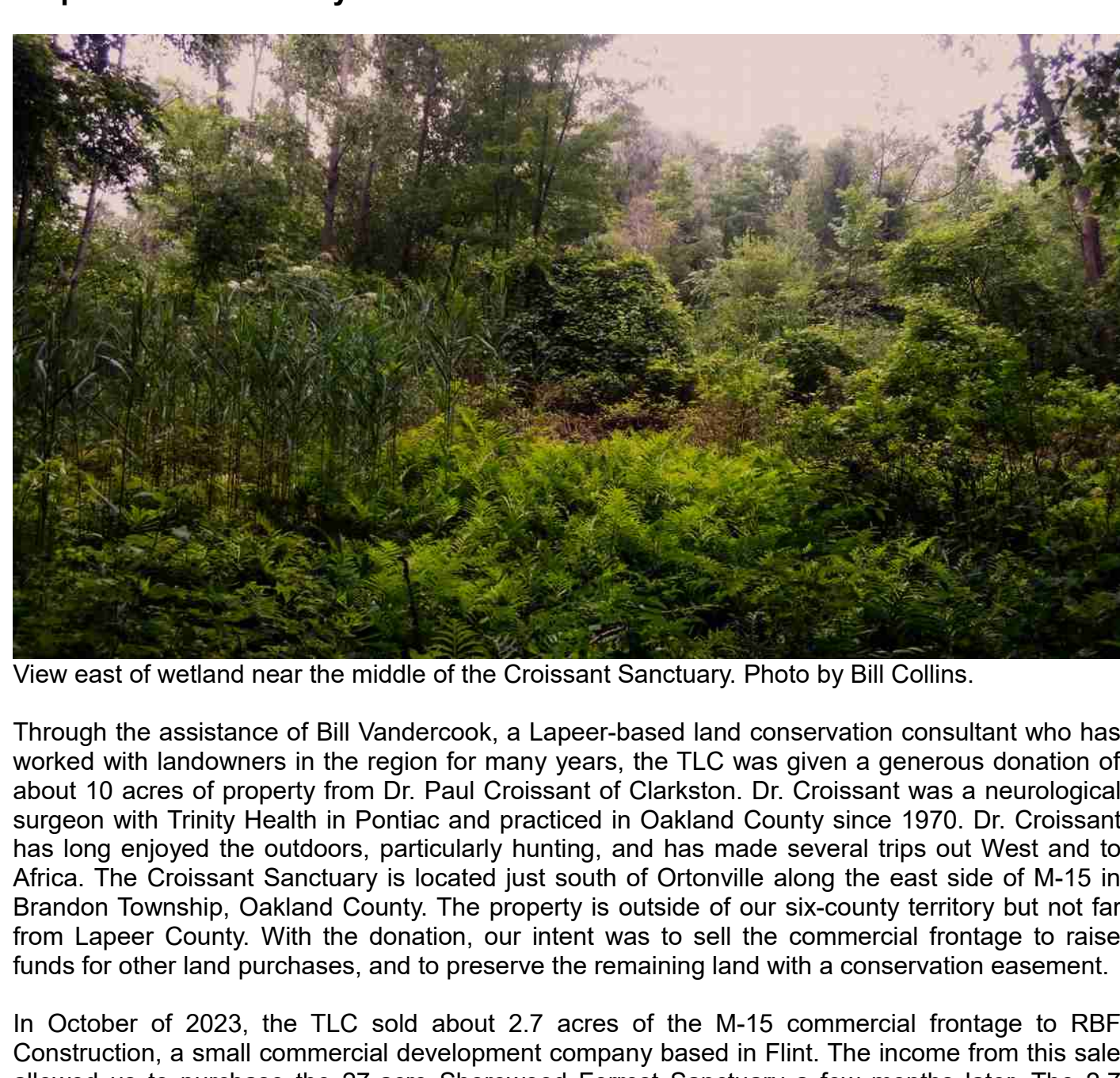
The Bidwell Sanctuary is an important part of the proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park, a band of several preserves and parks extending along Lake Huron through Fort Gratiot and Burtchville Townships. The preserves are generally inaccessible to the public and somewhat disconnected from each other, but not by much. The TLC is within reach of creating a continuous 4.5-mile coastal park and trail connecting the Port Huron area to the day-use area of Lakeport State Park. The Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park would encompass most of the remaining dune and swale forest from Lake Erie to the tip of the Thumb. Once connected, the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park is likely to become a regional destination for bicyclists, birders, naturalists, and other visitors.

The dune and swale forest complex is a very unique formation of parallel sand ridges and muck wetlands that formed about 4,500 years ago as the high water of the early Great Lakes quickly receded. After being depressed for thousands of years by glacial ice about 2 miles thick, the land in our region began rising as the last glacier melted back. The land is still rising slightly. As the land rose, the old Georgian Bay outlet of the early Great Lakes was blocked. The Nipissing stage of early Lake Huron rose about 15 feet above the present elevation. Great Lakes water was still draining through the old Chicago outlet, but then redirected to the Saint Clair River outlet which quickly down-cut. The high water rapidly drained, leaving a series of parallel sand ridges separated by mucky wetland troughs or swales from about 2 miles inland to the present shoreline. The ridges were wind-blown dunes and the mucky swales were shrub swamp for a long time before becoming forested and covered largely by cedars.

The dune and swale forest complex provides critical shoreline habitat for uncommon and rare plant and animal species found in few other parts of Michigan, such as Purple-flowering Raspberry, almost identical to Thimbleberry of the Upper Peninsula, Yellow Lady-slipper orchid, Pink Lady-slipper orchid, Eastern Hognose Snake, and Blue-spotted Salamander, as well as a great abundance of migratory birds that move and nest along Lake Huron.

Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary

0.45 Acre, Dryden Township, Lapeer County
Acquired 2021 April 09



View southwest from atop Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary with Brooks Lake in the background.

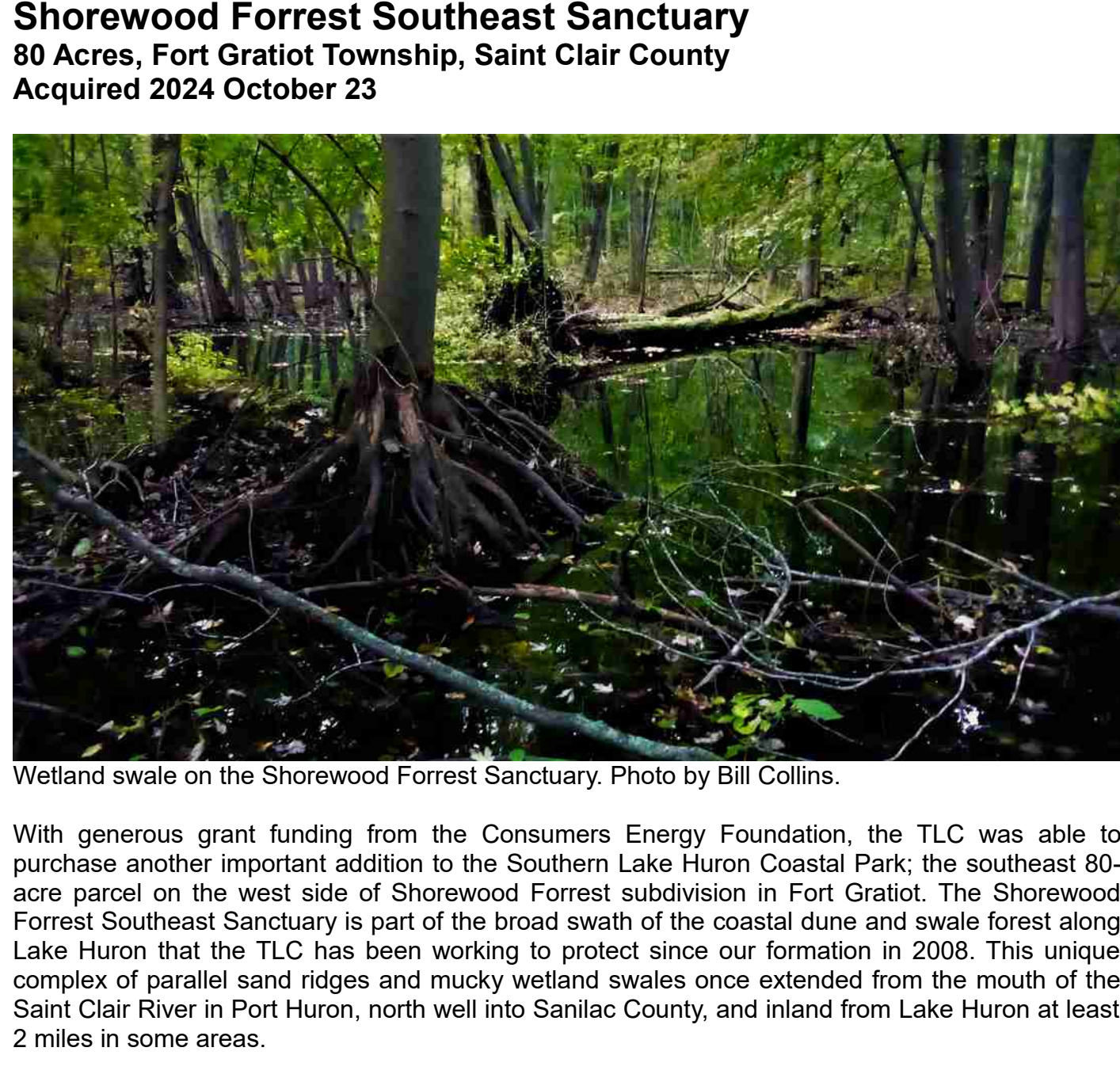
The TLC purchased the 0.45-acre Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary located along Lake George Road near the Oakland County border in Dryden Township, Lapeer County. The Sanctuary is located on top of a narrow ridge along the east edge of a huge forested valley, nearly 1 mile across and 2 miles long, with a series of lakes and wetlands at the bottom. This impressive ice-contact landscape formed as retreating glaciers left massive ice fragments across the interlobate region. These large ice blocks, surrounded by outwash deposits, melted away, leaving steep embankments around a depressions full of meltwater known as a kettle lakes.

Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary is covered by a dry-mesic forest community of Black Oak, White Oak, Black Cherry, Big-tooth Aspen, and Sugar Maple. The Sanctuary is located in a relatively untouched natural area, but there was an old cottage on the adjacent property years ago, part of an Ford Motor employee retreat that was later used as a music camp. Limited soil disturbance allowed invasive plants like Black Locust, honeysuckle, and privet to spread onto what would become the Sanctuary.

Although the Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary is a very small property, it is part of a much larger natural area, largely covered by mature oak forest. Not only is it an interesting and uncommon glacial landscape in Michigan, but it is very scenic and largely undeveloped and forested due to the extreme slopes. Future development of the area is most likely to be limited to very dense single-family residences. For now, you can sit on one of the boulders on top of the ridge and look out over the valley with Brooks Lake shining below and feel the solitude.

Full Circle Sanctuary

8.5 Acres, Kimball Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2022 August 11



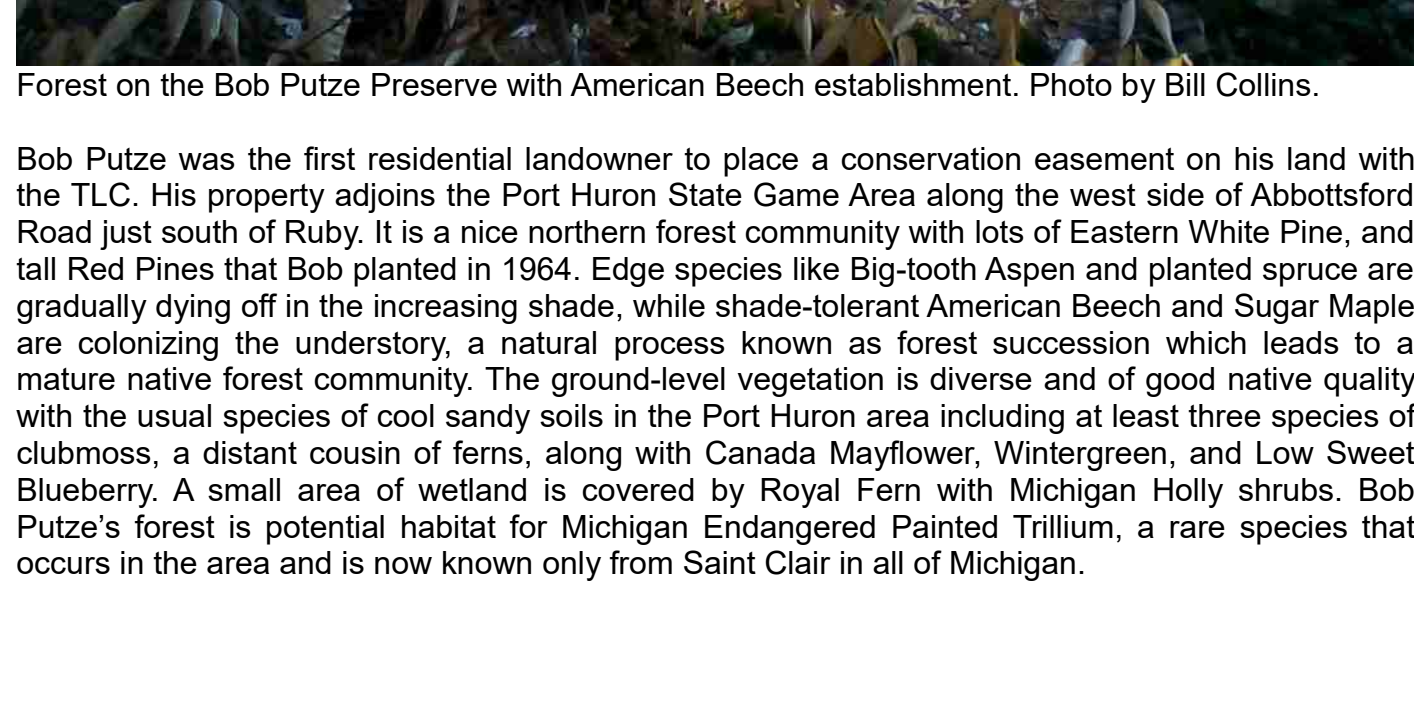
Black Oak, Red Oak, and White Oak on the Full Circle Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

The TLC purchased the Full Circle Sanctuary in the 2022 State land auction. The Sanctuary was formerly part of the Port Huron State Game Area and is covered by an extensive swamp forest interspersed with low upland sand ridges covered by oaks. It is also located in an area of well-documented Painted Trillium occurrence, a Michigan Endangered wildflower that is now recorded only from Saint Clair County in all of Michigan.

The TLC named the Sanctuary in honor of the Full Circle EcoHouse of Prayer in Port Huron and the continuing work of Sisters Veronica Blake and Concepción González, well-known members of the Blue Water area environmental community. Sister Veronica and Sister Concepción are members of the United States Region of the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix, an international religious congregation. Since its founding in France in 1857, the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix have been dedicated to repairing fractured relationships among humans and with God. In the second half of the 20th century, global environmental crises caused them to also focus on the need for humans to repair their relationship to the Earth.

Charles Dodge Sanctuary

2.78 Acres, Clyde Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2022 August 11



Marginal swamp forest with tip-up mounds on the Charles Dodge Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

The TLC purchased the Charles Dodge Sanctuary in the 2022 State land auction. The Sanctuary was formerly part of the Port Huron State Game Area and is covered by an extensive swamp forest interspersed with low upland sand ridges covered by a northern forest community of Red Maple, Paper Birch, and Eastern White Pine. The Sanctuary is located in an area of well-documented Painted Trillium occurrence, a Michigan Endangered wildflower that is now recorded only from Saint Clair County in all of Michigan. Although this preserve is just a very small piece of the Black River valley, the TLC thought it appropriate to honor Port Huron botanist Charles K. Dodge, who over a century ago, advocated for protection of the valley as a nature reserve. Maybe this small preserve will lead to a bigger preserve but every piece of nature is now important.

Charles Keene Dodge served as City Attorney of Port Huron, and later, as a Circuit Court Commissioner and City Controller. In 1893, Dodge was appointed Deputy Collector of the United States Customs Office in Port Huron, and largely retired from legal practice, which afforded him much more time to pursue his true interest of botany. He eventually collected about 40,000 plant specimens, now held by the University of Michigan Herbarium. Among many works in his lifetime, in 1900, Dodge published *Flora of St. Clair County, Michigan and the Western Part of Lambert County, Ontario*. In 1911, Dodge wrote the *Flora of the County section of History of St. Clair County* by William Jenks, and took this opportunity to lament the loss of native habitat in the area even then. In the same publication, Dodge proposed the creation of a large "... public reservation of 3,000 or 4,000 acres in one piece for St. Clair county" to preserve native flora and fauna of the region. He wrote, "The very best place for such a proposed reservation in this county is in the township of Clyde where Mill creek joins Black river". This is the present location of the Port Huron State Game Area.

Croissant Sanctuary

7 Acres, Brandon Township, Oakland County
Acquired 2023 February 22

View east of wetland near the middle of the Croissant Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

Through the assistance of Bill Vandercook, a Lapeer-based land conservation consultant who has worked with landowners in the region for many years, the TLC was given a generous donation of about 10 acres of property from Dr. Paul Croissant in Oakland County. Dr. Croissant was a neurological surgeon with Trinity Health in Pontiac and practiced in Clarkston. Dr. Croissant was long enjoyed the outdoors, particularly hunting, and has made several trips out West and to Africa. The Croissant Sanctuary is located just south of Ortonville along the east side of M-15 in Brandon Township, Oakland County. The property is outside of our six-county territory but not far from Lapeer County. With the donation, our intent was to sell the commercial frontage to raise funds for other land purchases, and to preserve the remaining land with a conservation easement.

In October of 2023, the TLC sold about 2.7 acres of the M-15 commercial frontage to RBF Construction, a small commercial development company based in Flint. The income from this sale allowed us to purchase the 27-acre Shorewood Forest Sanctuary a few months later. The 2.7 acres of M-15 frontage is covered by highly degraded woodland dominated by invasive Black Locust trees and Box-elder. The traffic on M-15 further diminishes the potential habitat quality. We were fortunate to have been acquainted with RBF Construction from wetland protection work in the area. If there is any question as to their connection with nature, consider that RBF stands for "Rafter Be Fishing".

The eastern two-thirds of the property, just over 7 acres, is preserved as the Croissant Sanctuary. It contains some natural wetland, but most of the area was excavated out decades ago for sand and is now covered largely by weedy vegetation including Eastern Cottonwood, Box-elder, and invasive Reed - Phragmites. Although it is a low quality plant community, it is a natural area none-the-less, and is somewhat buffered from M-15 traffic by distance and its location down in a small valley. Being surrounded by many residents along the north and east sides, the Croissant Sanctuary should eventually serve as a nice little preserve for the neighborhood.

Shorewood Forest Northeast Sanctuary

27 Acres, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2023 November 15

Wetland swale on the Shorewood Forest Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

With generous grant funding from The Carls Foundation and income from the sale of the M-15 commercial frontage of the Croissant property donation south of Ortonville, the TLC was able to purchase another important addition to the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park; a 27-acre parcel on the west side of Shorewood Forest subdivision in Fort Gratiot. The Shorewood Forest Sanctuary is part of the broad swath of the coastal dune and swale forest along Lake Huron that the TLC has been working to protect since our formation in 2008. This unique complex of parallel sand ridges and mucky wetland swales once extended from the mouth of the Saint Clair River in Port Huron, north well into Sanilac County, and inland from Lake Huron at least 2 miles in some areas.

The Shorewood Forest Sanctuary was important to acquire in part because it allows the only likely trail connection between the two adjacent 80-acre Shorewood Forest parcels. About half of these two 80-acre parcels was preserved by Saint Clair County as mitigation for permitted impacts to State-regulated wetland. With this acquisition, the TLC has begun planning a 1-mile section of an unpaved wilderness-like coastal trail from near the Fort Gratiot Nature Park south of Carrigan Road, north through one of the largest forest tracts in the area. This alone will be a significant public asset. Once connected with the larger Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park, the trail and natural area should be an attraction of regional significance for hikers, birders, and others seeking a memorable outdoor recreation experience.

Shorewood Forest Southeast Sanctuary

80 Acres, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2024 October 23

Wetland swale on the Shorewood Forest Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

With generous grant funding from the Consumers Energy Foundation, the TLC was able to purchase another important addition to the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park; the southeast 80-acre parcel on the west side of Shorewood Forest subdivision in Fort Gratiot. The Shorewood Forest Southeast Sanctuary is part of the broad swath of the coastal dune and swale forest along Lake Huron that the TLC has been working to protect since our formation in 2008. This unique complex of parallel sand ridges and mucky wetland swales once extended from the mouth of the Saint Clair River in Port Huron, north well into Sanilac County, and inland from Lake Huron at least 2 miles in some areas.

The Shorewood Forest Southeast Sanctuary was important to acquire because it such a large part of the intact dune and swale forest, and because it was unlikely the Saint Clair County would be able to preserve more of it in the near future as mitigation for permitted impacts to State-regulated wetland. With this acquisition, the TLC has begun clearing a 1-mile section of an unpaved wilderness-like coastal trail from Carrigan Road, north through one of the largest forest tracts in the area. This alone will be a significant public asset. Once connected with the larger Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park, the trail and natural area should be an attraction of regional significance for hikers, birders, and others seeking a memorable outdoor recreation experience.

TLC Conservation Easements

Bob Putze Preserve

7.8 Acres, Clyde Township, Saint Clair County
Established 2017 March 17

Forest on the Bob Putze Preserve with American Beech establishment. Photo by Bill Collins.

Bob Putze was the first residential landowner to place a conservation easement on his land with the TLC. His property adjoins the Port Huron State Game Area along the west side of Abbottsford Road just south of Ruby. It is a nice northern forest community with lots of Eastern White Pine, and tall Red Pines that Bob planted in 1964. Edge species like Big-tooth Aspen and planted spruce are gradually dying off in the increasing shade, while shade-tolerant American Beech and Sugar Maple are colonizing the understory, a natural process known as forest succession which leads to a mature native forest community. The ground-level vegetation is diverse and of good native quality with the usual species of cool sandy soils in the Port Huron area including at least three species of clubmoss, a distant cousin of ferns, along with Canada Mayflower, Wintergreen, and Low Sweet Blueberry. A small area of wetland is covered by Royal Fern with Michigan Holly shrubs. Bob Putze's forest is potential habitat for Michigan Endangered Painted Trillium, a rare species that occurs in the area and is now known only from Saint Clair in all of Michigan.

The Bob Putze Preserve is characteristic of the drier and more northerly forest remaining in the region. In the Port Huron area, northern forest complex is a second-growth woodland complex of mesic to dry-mesic northern forest, dry-mesic southern forest, hardwood-conifer swamp, and southern hardwood swamp on sandy soils extending across large parts of Kimball, Clyde, and Port Huron Townships. The vegetation of this complex is a unique blend of northern and southern flora, skewed largely toward northern species. This generally northern community complex covers a broad and flat landscape of coarse to fine sands deposited across the glacial lakeplain, the dominant cover being swamp forest. Smaller upland sand ridges are typically scattered throughout the complex, deposited in glacial drainageways or as glacial lake beaches and inland dunes.

Bob Putze is a very conscientious and reverent man who loves God's creation and cares for every animal that ventures onto his land. Bob feeds them all, including deer, turkeys, rabbits, raccoons, opossums, and stray cats. Even Pileated Woodpeckers come to his suet feeder, and Flying Squirrels live in a nest box by his driveway. Bob has always felt a spiritual connection to his land. For years, he wanted to ensure that the woods would remain natural and undeveloped. The TLC conservation easement provides the legal basis for that protection in perpetuity.

Because of the value of the TLC conservation easement, Bob Putze could claim a significant federal income tax deduction over 15 years, the property taxes will not be uncapped upon sale, and he could claim a local property tax reduction.

Koester Preserve

79.4 Acres, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

Established 2020 April 04



Red Maple, Red Oak, and American Beech sapling on the Koester Preserve. Photo by Bill Collins.

Darrin and Kim Koester were the second landowners to protect their land with a TLC conservation easement on 79.4 acres of their 84.6-acre parcel. The Koester conservation easement protects one of the larger forest tracts remaining in Fort Gratiot Township and significantly reduced the property taxes on this large parcel. The Koester Preserve includes a large area of relatively mature, non-fragmented southern swamp and hardwood-conifer forest complex on seasonally inundated to moist sands with scattered upland knolls. Wetland vegetation includes Silver Maple, Green Ash, American Elm, Eastern Cottonwood, Bur Oak, Swamp White Oak, American Hornbeam, Spicebush, Dwarf Raspberry, Spotted Touch-me-not, False Nettle, Clearweed, Marsh-marigold, Sensitive Fern, Royal Fern, Spinulose Woodfern, Fowl Manna Grass, Lake Sedge, and Tussock Sedge. Upland vegetation includes Red Oak, Black Oak, White Oak, American Beech, Basswood, Sugar Maple, Red Maple, Tulip Tree, Sassafras, Serviceberry, Witch-hazel, Jack-in-the-pulpit, White Avens, Solomon-seal, Wild Geranium, and Yellow trout-lily. Many of the native forest plant species are typically of a more northern distribution in Michigan, including Paper Birch, Eastern White Pine, Eastern Hemlock, Speckled Alder, Black Chokeberry, Meadowsweet, Low Sweet Blueberry, Dwarf Raspberry, Wintergreen, Goldthread, Canada Mayflower, Wild Sarsaparilla, Foamflower, Wood Anemone, Bracken Fern, Royal Fern, Northern Lady Fern, Ground-pine, and Ground-cedar. Likewise, there are species that are typically more southern, including Black Oak, Sassafras, Tulip Tree, and Spicebush. This sort of southern-meets-northern forest is characteristic of the Blue Water Area, a transitional vegetative region where nearby Lake Huron maintains cooler summers and warmer winters.

The Koesters developed their residence on the north end of the parcel which was cleared decades ago and covered by planted pines along with very common or weedy species such as Apple, Black Cherry, hawthorn, Gray Dogwood, Autumn-olive, Common Buckthorn, Tartarian Honeysuckle, Common Blackberry, Late Goldenrod, Panicked Aster, and grasses. Portions of this area have so many apple trees, it appears there may have once been a small orchard here. The TLC assisted the Koesters in avoiding regulated wetland impacts, identifying invasive shrubs such as buckthorn and honeysuckle, and advised them on invasive weed control methods.

In addition to receiving a substantial local property tax reduction, because of the value of the TLC conservation easement, the Koesters could take a significant federal income tax deduction over 15 years and the property taxes will not be uncapped upon sale.

Anderson Preserve

24.9 Acres, Bloomfield Township, Huron County

Established 2023 December 28



View south of the lake and surrounding forest on the Anderson Preserve. Photo by Bill Collins.

Michael and Gail Anderson have protected 24.9 acres of their 40-acre parcel for passive recreation and low-intensity land-use such as hunting, firewood cutting, and limited forest management. Most of the conservation easement site is forested, a complex of mid-successional second-growth mesic to wet-mesic northern forest on sand ridges and southern hardwood swamp on wetland swales. The Anderson Preserve includes about 7% of the remaining forest in the section, which is part of a broadly agricultural landscape in Huron County. The mesic and wet-mesic northern upland forest includes Red Maple, Red x Silver Maple hybrids, Paper Birch, Black Cherry, Bigtooth Aspen, Basswood, Sugar Maple, Bur Oak, American Hornbeam, Ironwood, Juneberry, Choke Cherry, Dwarf Raspberry, Bracken Fern, and Wild Geranium. The southern hardwood swamp wetland forest includes Silver Maple, Red Maple, Red x Silver Maple hybrids, Green Ash, Eastern Cottonwood, Bur Oak, Swamp White Oak, Silky Dogwood, Dwarf Raspberry, False Nettle, Clearweed, Sensitive Fern, Spinulose Woodfern, and Tussock Sedge. Scattered shrub thickets under canopy openings and along the forest edges are dominated by Silky Dogwood, Gray Dogwood, Riverbank Grape, Sensitive Fern, Late Goldenrod, and Tussock Sedge. Minor inclusions of shrub swamp, wet meadow, and upland old-field are scattered throughout the forest and along the edges. Approximately 4.6 acres of the Anderson Preserve is part of a roughly 7.5-acre lake excavated in a sand ridge. Roughly half of the Anderson Preserve consists of State-regulated wetland which is connected to a creek that flows into Lake Huron north of the village of Port Hope.

Because of the value of the TLC conservation easement, the Andersons are able to take a significant federal income tax deduction over 15 years, the property taxes will not be uncapped upon sale, and they may be able to claim a local property tax reduction.

Ellis Preserve

34.4 Acres, Bloomfield Township, Huron County

Established 2023 December 28



Mid-successional upland forest on the Ellis Preserve. Photo by Bill Collins.

Andy and Natalie Ellis, in partnership with adjacent landowners Michael and Gail Anderson, have protected 34.4 acres of their 42.5-acre parcel for passive recreation and low-intensity land-use such as hunting, firewood cutting, and limited forest management. Most of the conservation easement site is forested, a complex of mid-successional second-growth mesic to wet-mesic northern forest on sand ridges and southern hardwood swamp on wetland swales. The Ellis Preserve includes about 7% of the remaining forest in the section, which is part of a broadly agricultural landscape in Huron County. The mesic and wet-mesic northern upland forest includes Red Maple, Red x Silver Maple hybrids, Paper Birch, Black Cherry, Bigtooth Aspen, Basswood, Sugar Maple, Bur Oak, American Hornbeam, Ironwood, Juneberry, Choke Cherry, Dwarf Raspberry, Bracken Fern, and Wild Geranium. The southern hardwood swamp wetland forest includes Silver Maple, Red Maple, Red x Silver Maple hybrids, Green Ash, Eastern Cottonwood, Bur Oak, Swamp White Oak, Silky Dogwood, Dwarf Raspberry, False Nettle, Clearweed, Sensitive Fern, Spinulose Woodfern, and Tussock Sedge. Scattered shrub thickets under canopy openings and along the forest edges are dominated by Silky Dogwood, Gray Dogwood, Riverbank Grape, Sensitive Fern, Late Goldenrod, and Tussock Sedge. Minor inclusions of shrub swamp, wet meadow, and upland old-field are scattered throughout the forest and along the edges. Old-field covers the west end of the Ellis Preserve, dominated largely by Wild Carrot, Late Goldenrod, and unidentified grasses with scattered Big Bluestem Grass. Roughly half of the Ellis Preserve consists of State-regulated wetland which is connected to a creek that flows into Lake Huron north of the village of Port Hope.

Because of the value of the TLC conservation easement, the Ellises are able to take a significant federal income tax deduction over 15 years, the property taxes will not be uncapped upon sale, and they may be able to claim a local property tax reduction.

TLC Mission

TLC Territory

The Thumb Land Conservancy is working to preserve natural areas in the Thumb region of Michigan, a post-glacial landscape where northern forest blends with central hardwoods, bordered by Lake Huron, the Saginaw Bay, the Saint Clair River, and Lake Saint Clair. The mission territory of the TLC is Saint Clair, Sanilac, Huron, Tuscola, Lapeer, and Macomb Counties, but we can also work in adjacent areas as opportunities arise. The TLC will seek to work with local partners where our service territory overlaps that of other conservancies and similar organizations.

TLC Purpose and History

The Thumb Land Conservancy was formed in 2008 to provide an organization dedicated to filling the gap of nature preservation in Michigan's Thumb. Although much attention has been given to a few areas on and near the Great Lakes, great natural areas in the interior of the Thumb have been largely neglected. In recent years, we are happy to see that some new lands have been preserved, but so much remains unprotected.

There is a common misconception that little is worth saving north of Detroit because of urban development and agriculture. While much of the landscape has been drastically altered, many high quality natural areas remain. A few places resemble conditions that existed before Euro-American settlement about 200 years ago.

The extensive destruction of natural areas in the Thumb makes preservation even more critical. Small, degraded fragments can be restored and expanded, and often serve as isolated havens for rare plant species that have been quietly holding their own for centuries. We believe all natural landscapes are important locally because they reflect a unique combination of history and features particular to that location. Many benefits of nature are obtained and enjoyed only locally. We believe it is especially important for children to have natural areas nearby where they can play, grow, and learn.

We have not forgotten what it's like to see a treasured woods in a neighborhood cut down, or wetlands carved up for more development. The TLC wants to work with any concerned individual before these places are lost.

The TLC is carrying on a legacy in the Thumb. In 1952, Macomb and Saint Clair Counties were the birthplace of what became the Michigan Nature Association, the first statewide land preservation group in Michigan. The MNA was led for many years by the late Bertha Daubendiek of Kenoskee Township in Saint Clair County, and is one of a very few organizations that has protected land in the interior of the Thumb, with 18 sanctuaries here. Most of our board members personally knew MNA co-founder Bertha Daubendiek. Some are MNA members and did volunteer work for MNA. TLC President, Cheryl Collins, served on the MNA board from 2003 through 2008.

TLC board members have been involved with environmental issues and natural area protection in the Thumb for many years. From 1989 through 2006, as members of the Mill Creek Coalition, we helped protect the Mill Creek, a major tributary of the Black River, from an 18-mile dredging and channelization project. In the 1990s, as members of the Thumb Bioregional Alliance, we opposed a sprawling 800-acre golf course, condominium, and commercial development on the Wingford Estate along the Black River in the heart of the Port Huron State Game Area, and supported the State of Michigan in protecting the Minden Bog, the upper headwaters of the Black River in Sanilac County, from an expansion of peat mining. Most of the TLC board members were involved in the Painted Trillium Tours in Saint Clair County from 2001 through 2004 and worked to acquire the MNA Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary in Kimball Township. Bill and Cheryl Collins co-founded the Macomb Land Conservancy in 2000, which merged with the Oakland Land Conservancy to become Six Rivers Land Conservancy. In the 1990s through early 2000s, Bill and Cheryl monitored one of the last populations of Michigan Threatened Pitcher's Thistle in the Thumb. From 1998 through 2023, as Huron Ecologic, Bill and Cheryl worked with several citizen groups to defend natural areas across southern Michigan through State and federal environmental regulations.

Sometimes, land that we fought to protect in the Thumb became available for acquisition, but there were no regional conservancies or organizations interested in pursuing most of these very worthy projects. Finally in late 2007, with the potential of a land donation approaching, we decided it was time to form the Thumb Land Conservancy. Articles of Incorporation were filed with Michigan in October 2008 and the IRS confirmed the tax exempt status of the TLC in February 2009. Since December of 2008, the TLC has acquired 12 preserves totaling 168 acres and 4 conservation easements totaling 147 acres.