

Thumb Land Conservancy 2025 Annual Report



The new TLC Morley Sanctuary and vicinity along the Kawkawlin River and Saginaw Bay in Bangor Township, Bay County.



Thumb Land Conservancy

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Our biggest accomplishments in 2025 were the acquisition of three new preserves, including the 5-acre Cunningham Connector Sanctuary and the 31.62-acre Touma Family Sanctuary, both consisting of dune and swale complex within our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project area in Fort Gratiot, and the 113-acre Morley Sanctuary in Bangor Township north of Bay City, consisting of about 95 acres of critically imperiled lakeplain prairie along the Kawkawlin River and Saginaw Bay.

The TLC was awarded two major grants in 2025. The Carls Foundation awarded a match of grant of \$100,000 to increase our capacity to hire and retain stewardship and fundraising staff for the next 4 or 5 years. If successful, the TLC will raise a total of \$200,000 by June of 2027. The Bay Area Community Foundation awarded the TLC a grant of \$20,000 to plan and develop nature park facilities on the Morley Sanctuary. This was one of the biggest grants given in their history.

For the first time in our history, the TLC contracted with a professional development director. With the help of Nicky Marcot of Rhizome Services, the TLC has transformed its e-mail newsletter, created new fundraising materials, inquired or applied to new potential funders, and is in the process of completely revitalizing our web site. We are also increasing our presence on social media.

The TLC has significantly increased preserve stewardship in 2025 with the help of new contract staff like Program & Stewardship Assistant Teddy Wiley, Stewardship Assistant Jake Defrain, Stewardship Assistant Jason Sawyer, TLC Member & Volunteer Connie Neese, TLC Member & Contractor Darrin Koester, and TLC Board Member Dan Rhein. The TLC is growing as a sustainable force for natural area protection in the Thumb.

William Collins

William Collins

Executive Director, Thumb Land Conservancy

Thumb Land Conservancy 2025 Annual Report

2025 Year-In-Review

January

- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition.
- Cut invasive shrubs on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Cut invasive shrubs and cleared the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park trail.
- Revised and updated the Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar presentation.
- Acquired the 5-acre Cunningham Connector Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot Township.
- Published the first issue of *The Thumb Naturalist*.
- Co-founded the Blue Water Camp Council.

February

- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition.
- Prepared for and attended Burtchville Township Planning Commission meeting regarding building permit and rezoning for the Bidwell Sanctuary entrance.
- Cut invasive shrubs on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Revised and updated the Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar presentation.
- Cut invasive shrubs and cleared the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park trail.
- Removed and controlled invasive weeds on the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary.
- Co-founded the Blue Water Camp Council.
- Acquired the 113-acre Morley Sanctuary in Bangor Township, Bay County.
- Prepared purchase offer for Silver Trails Scout Camp property west of Jeddo.

March

- Prepared and submitted purchase offer for Silver Trails Scout Camp property.
- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition.
- Planted locally collected native plants on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Cut invasive shrubs and cleared the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park trail.
- Removed and controlled invasive weeds on the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary.
- Met with Michigan conservancies to discuss ongoing issues.
- Met with the Friends of St. Clair River to discuss organizational cooperation.
- Completed and submitted rezoning application for the Burtchville Township Planning Commission regarding the Bidwell Sanctuary entrance.

April

- Discussions with real estate agent regarding Silver Trails Scout Camp offer.
- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition.
- Cut invasive shrubs and cleared the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park trail.
- Removed invasive weeds and cleared trail on the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary.
- Assisted Ducks Unlimited with elevation survey of the Morley Sanctuary for wetland restoration plan.

May

- Discussions with real estate agent regarding Silver Trails Scout Camp offer.
- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition and TLC staff capacity.
- Cut invasive shrubs, cleared trail, and surveyed native species on the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary Southeast.
- Continued annual removal of Garlic Mustard and other invasive weeds on the Dead End Woods Sanctuary.
- TLC awarded grant from the Bay Area Community Foundation for planning and development of nature park facilities at the Morley Sanctuary.
- Continued lakeplain prairie restoration on the Loznak Sanctuary.
- Coordinated with TLC accountant to prepare and submit TLC tax return.

June

- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition and TLC staff capacity.
- Prepared for and attended Burtchville Township Planning Commission meeting regarding rezoning for the Bidwell Sanctuary entrance.
- TLC awarded \$100,000 capacity match grant from The Carls Foundation.
- Cut invasive shrubs, removed invasive weeds, cleared trail, and surveyed native plant species on the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary Southeast.
- Continued annual removal of Garlic Mustard and other invasive weeds in the Port Huron State Game Area.
- TLC joined the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, a group of several environmental organizations working to protect 440 acres of Sibley Prairie south of Detroit.

July

- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition.
- Meetings with Save Sibley Prairie Coalition.

August

- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition.
- Collected native plant seed to establish new populations on TLC sanctuaries.
- TLC contracted with Nicky Marcot of Rhizome Services as a development director.
- Coordinated TLC fundraising with TLC development director.
- Meetings with Save Sibley Prairie Coalition.
- Met with Touma family and friends on Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary.

September

- Made new inquiries and grant applications for land acquisition.
- Collected seed cones and cuttings from the lone Tamarack on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary.
- Coordinated TLC fundraising with TLC contract Development Director.
- Collected native plant seed to establish new populations on TLC sanctuaries.
- Meetings with Save Sibley Prairie Coalition.
- Prepared media contact list for the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition.
- Presented history of Port Huron botanist Charles K. Dodge and wife Millie at their grave site for the annual Saint Clair County Genealogy & History Society Lakeside Cemetery Tour.

October

- Made cuttings from Tamarack on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary.
- Coordinated TLC fundraising with TLC contract Development Director.
- Met with Bangor Township officials to discuss cooperative development of a nature park on the Morley Sanctuary and adjacent Township park land.
- Drafted and issued a Special Fundraising Edition of *The Thumb Naturalist*.
- Acquired the 31.62-acre Touma Family Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County.
- Coordination with Burtchville Township on the Bidwell Sanctuary entrance.
- Meetings with Save Sibley Prairie Coalition.
- Coordination with WRCJ 90.9 FM on Sibley Prairie radio spot.

November

- Made cuttings from Tamarack on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary.
- Coordinated TLC fundraising, materials, and a large grant application with TLC contract Development Director.
- Received donation of utility poles from the Lineworker Program of Lansing Community College for park structures in the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. Poles were hauled free-of-charge by Xtreme Powerline Construction of Port Huron.
- Coordination with Burtchville Township on the Bidwell Sanctuary entrance.
- Drafted TLC web site revisions.
- Drafted public comment regarding proposed development in the Sibley Prairie area.
- Coordination on planned Huron County land acquisition

December

- Coordinated TLC fundraising and materials with TLC contract Development Director.
- Drafted public comment regarding proposed development in the Sibley Prairie area.
- Drafted TLC web site revisions.
- Drafted conservation easement and baseline assessment for Croissant Sanctuary.
- Coordination with Presbyterian Villages of Michigan on Lake Huron Woods wetland mitigation documents.
- Reviewed donor agreement for planned Huron County land acquisition.
- Coordinated planned property acquisitions in the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

2025 TLC Supporters

- Jayne Ballentine, Loveland, Colorado
Connie Bates, Bloomfield
The Carls Foundation, Bloomfield Hills
Pete and Angelene Catlos, Fort Gratiot
William and Cheryl Collins, Marlette
Dorothy Craig, Fort Gratiot
Kay Cumbow, Cottrellville
Mark Davidson, Lozen Davidson and Kovar, P.C., Port Huron
Carrie Dollar, Detroit
Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited, Dexter
Richard Duthler, R.A. Duthler Land Surveyor, Imlay City
Dr. Scott Ferguson, Clyde
John Fodi, Marysville
Four County Community Foundation, Romeo
Jim Frank, Burtchville
Fred Fuller, Yale
Jeffrey Ganley, Macomb
John Hartranft, Linden
Roy Hopkins, Casco
Patti Kopacz, Michigan
Dave Ladensack, Summit Realty, Lakeport
Sam Lazar, Flint
Sally Lorimer, Evanston, Illinois
Timothy Lozen, Lozen Davidson and Kovar, P.C., Port Huron
Nicky Marcot, Detroit
Jack McLiver, Lake Huron Lawns, Lakeport
Catherine Mellado, Sterling Heights
Christine Powell and Bern Smith, Washington, D.C.
Judy Radar, Tucson, Arizona
Dan and Wendy Rhein, Port Huron
Jeff Ronan, LochanDe IT Services, Port Huron
Blake Short, Port Huron
Jack Smiley, Superior Township
Peggy Thorp and Jerry Orlowski, Lakeport
Elizabeth "Bess" Touma, Washington, D.C.
Chris Walker, Fargo, North Dakota

2025 TLC Project Contributors

5-Acre Cunningham Connector Sanctuary Acquisition Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

- North American Wetlands Conservation Council
Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited, Dexter
Dave Ladensack, Summit Realty, Lakeport

113-Acre Morley Sanctuary Acquisition Bangor Township, Bay County

- North American Wetlands Conservation Council
Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited, Dexter
Bay Area Community Foundation, Bay City
William and Cheryl Collins, Marlette
Dave Ladensack, Summit Realty, Lakeport

31.62-Acre Touma Family Sanctuary Acquisition Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

- Christine Powell and Bern Smith, Washington, D.C.
Elizabeth "Bess" Touma, Washington, D.C.
William and Cheryl Collins, Marlette
Dave Ladensack, Summit Realty, Lakeport
Timothy Lozen and Mark Davidson, Lozen Davidson and Kovar, P.C., Port Huron

Loznak Sanctuary City of Marysville, Saint Clair County

- Dan and Wendy Rhein, Port Huron

The Carls Foundation Capacity Match Grant

- Pete and Angelene Catlos, Fort Gratiot
William and Cheryl Collins, Marlette
Mark Davidson, Lozen Davidson and Kovar, P.C., Port Huron
Carrie Dollar, Detroit
Jim Frank, Burtchville
Jeffrey Ganley, Macomb
Roy Hopkins, Casco
Patti Kopacz, Michigan
Christine Powell and Bern Smith, Washington, D.C.
Judy Radar, Tucson, Arizona
Jeff Ronan, LochanDe IT Services, Port Huron
Elizabeth "Bess" Touma, Washington, D.C.

Loznak Sanctuary

Yānhdawā' yeh de yehnta' iyaen' - *The Prairie is Near the River* - Huron-Wendat City of Marysville

TLC Board Member Dan Rhein and TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley continued working on our 11.5-acre Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville through most of the winter. Work was focused on cutting and herbicide treatment of invasive Glossy Buckthorn, Common Buckthorn, and Autumn-olive. 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 focused their work on two areas near the west side where they found a large patches of Fringed Gentian. Dan also constructed multiple low foot bridges across a few shallow ditches using concrete debris and railroad ties from the site.



Loznak Sanctuary sign and surrounding prairie. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Teddy and Dan collected native lakeplain prairie seed last fall. They found a remnant patch of Indian Grass, a new prairie species addition for the Loznak Sanctuary. They also collected Fringed Gentian, Rough Blazing-star, and Riddell's Goldenrod from the sanctuary, Indian Grass from a nearby patch in Port Huron Township, and Cord Grass from Port Huron Township and Harsens Island.

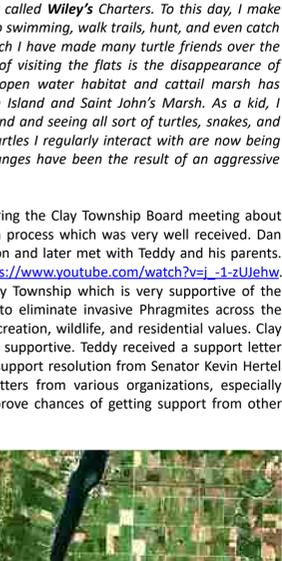
Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar Designation

In late 2024 and early 2025, with the help of TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley presentation is updated his Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar presentation several times. The revision is well-honed and polished now, with both Microsoft PowerPoint and PDF versions. To view the latest Make Our Delta Great Again presentation, click on the following Google Drive link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/140KTH-DZHCsDx8rslVBhD987cxIHbnt/view>

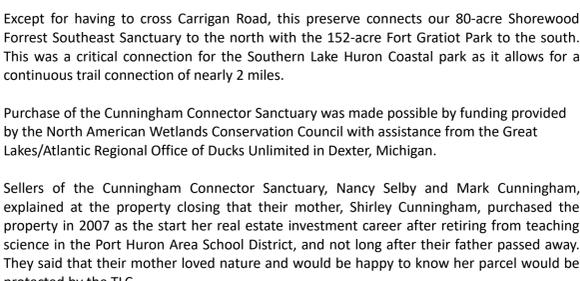
A Delta Under Siege

Since the late 1980s the Saint Clair River Delta has been under siege from an invasive wetland reed called *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis*, among other invasive weeds. The once large remnants of lakeplain wet/mesic prairie on Dickinson Island and Saint John's Marsh, a statewide and globally imperiled wetland plant community, are functionally gone. Lakeplain oak openings, another statewide and globally imperiled wetland/forest community, is under attack from invasive shrubs like Japanese Barberry, Glossy Buckthorn, Common Buckthorn, and other invasive weeds. Much of the Great Lakes marsh that makes up the majority of the habitat in the Delta is completely taken over by invasive *Phragmites*. The Michigan DNR has implemented several large projects in the past to control these large colonies of invasive *Phragmites*, using a mix of aerial and ground application of herbicides. These projects did prove to be successful. The problem was the projects were funded for short periods, allowing treated areas to be reclaimed just a couple of years later. Walpole Island First Nation was able to keep their upland prairie and oak openings in relatively good condition which continue to be the best remaining examples of their community type. The same cannot be said about the wetter habitats like Great Lakes marsh. The following aerial photographs highlight just how much invasive *Phragmites* has taken over the Saint Clair River Delta.



*Hello and welcome! My name is Theodore Wiley. For most of my life, I have called the Saint Clair River Delta my home. I was born in Allegan and lived in a small home on Summer Street for about two years until moving to Marysville. Throughout my childhood, my parents made sure to take me down to the Flats as much as possible to go swimming, trail walking, and catch turtles and frogs. If we weren't doing that, we were at my grandfather's house on Jefferson Avenue and going out on their boat. Before my grandfather passed away in 2017, he operated a successful fishing charter called Wiley's Charters. To this day, I make sure to visit the Flats every summer to either go swimming, walk trails, hunt, and even catch and release Snapping Turtles. Speaking of which I have made many turtle friends over the years. One thing I've noticed over the years of visiting the flats is the disappearance of habitat. A once lushful Delta, teeming with open water habitat and cattail marsh has disappeared. I can barely recognize Dickinson Island and Saint John's Marsh. As a kid, I specifically remember going to Strawberry Island and seeing all sort of turtles, snakes, and frogs. Today, it has been swallowed up. The turtles I regularly interact with are now being pushed out to deeper waters. All of these changes have been the result of an aggressive wetland grass, *Phragmites*. NEXT SLIDE:*

On January 27, Teddy gave a presentation during the Clay Township Board meeting about the Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar designation process which was very well received. Dan Rhein and Bill Collins attended the presentation and later met with Teddy and his parents. Here is a link to the presentation video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-1-zUJehw>. Teddy has had subsequent meetings with Clay Township which is very supportive of the Ramsar effort, especially because they want to eliminate invasive *Phragmites* across the delta and other shoreline areas to improve recreation, wildlife, and residential values. Clay Township Treasurer Jerry Galka, is particularly supportive. Teddy received a support letter from Clay Township and worked on getting a support resolution from Senator Kevin Hertel of Macomb County. Next will be support letters from various organizations, especially hunting and fishing groups, which should improve chances of getting support from other political representatives and agencies.



The Cunningham Connector Sanctuary shown in yellow.

Except for having to cross Carrigan Road, this preserve connects our 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary to the north with the 152-acre Fort Gratiot Park to the south. This was a critical connection for the Southern Lake Huron Coastal park as it allows for a continuous trail connection of nearly 2 miles.

Purchase of the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary was made possible by funding provided by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council with assistance from the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited in Dexter, Michigan.

Sellers of the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary, Nancy Selby and Mark Cunningham, explained at the property closing that their mother, Shirley Cunningham, purchased the property in 2007 as the start her real estate investment career after retiring from teaching science in the Port Huron Area School District, and not long after their father passed away. They said that their mother loved nature and would be happy to know her parcel would be protected by the TLC.

The Thumb Naturalist Volume One, 2025 January 25

With a new year, the Thumb Land Conservancy News got a new name in January of 2025, and a slightly new focus - *The Thumb Naturalist*. The Thumb Land Conservancy dates back to 2008 officially, but 5 years prior to that, the first issue of *The Thumb Naturalist* was drafted in January of 2003. It was intended to be a publication dedicated to nature of the Thumb region, but at that time, there wasn't much of a mailing list to send it to, so it was never finished.

To post to the Ecological R and S feed, you will first need to establish a Bluesky account at [Bsky.app](https://bsky.app). Once logged-in, see www.bsky.app/profile/j-fody.social/post/3lj3ly4p4x22k for more information about the feed and how to post to it.

Cunningham Connector Sanctuary Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

On 2025 January 10, the TLC acquired the 5-acre Cunningham Connector Sanctuary on the south side of Carrigan Road in Fort Gratiot Township. The south end of the preserve still contains intact dune and swale forest, extending south to the 40-acre pond on the Fort Gratiot Nature Park. The north end of the preserve had a residence years ago which was demolished, and so was heavily impacted and of very low vegetative quality, now largely covered by invasive Reed or *Phragmites*.

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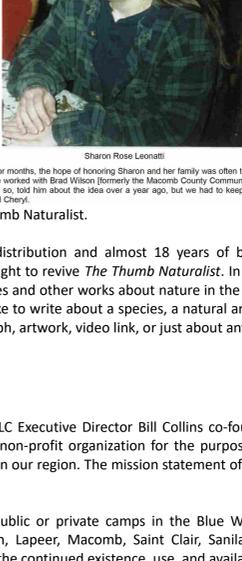
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Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary
Kimball Township, Saint Clair County, Michigan

What started simply as an effort by concerned naturalists to protect a rare woodland wildflower near Port Huron, Michigan, has become a tribute to a dedicated Clean Water Action activist, Sharon Rose Leonatti. Cheryl and Bill Collins have been working for over a year with the Michigan Nature Association and Blue Water Audubon Society to purchase a small 3-acre tract of forest containing one of only six remaining colonies of Painted Trillium, a Michigan Endangered species, in all of Michigan. All six locations are in Saint Clair County. The distribution of Painted Trillium is extremely limited by unique habitat requirements, and by habitat destruction resulting from development. In Saint Clair County, Painted Trillium grows only in cool, acidic sands in mature northern forest communities of Red Maple, Paper Birch, Eastern Hemlock, and Eastern White Pine. Not only is this new preserve land important for Painted Trillium, but for other uncommon woodland species that depend on the forest. This past November, the Michigan Nature Association executive board, the eventual landowner, voted unanimously to name the new preserve in Sharon's honor: the Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary.

On November 28, 2001, Sharon, 28, was working door-to-door for CWA in Port Huron Township in Saint Clair County, when she was hit and killed by a car. News of Sharon's tragic death traveled quickly through environmental circles, reaching Bill and Cheryl Collins of Rochester Hills the next day. "Actually, my daughter read about it in the local paper, and called us the next morning, thinking that we probably knew Sharon because of our environmental work in the area. Unfortunately, we did not have the privilege of knowing her," said Cheryl Collins. Despite not knowing Sharon, Leonatti, the Collins' were saddened by the loss of a fellow laborer for the natural environment. "I was particularly troubled by Sharon's death because here was someone working on the front lines, going nowhere for probably with little recognition, and for a cause that many people do not appreciate," said Bill Collins. "Then it struck me while working in the yard a few days later, Cheryl and I were working on the Painted Trillium preserve, less than 1 mile from where Sharon died. Here was a great opportunity to recognize Sharon's life and work by naming the preserve in her honor." Bill and Cheryl added that when purchase negotiations with the landowner were going nowhere for months, the hope of honoring Sharon and her family was often the only thing that kept them going. "We have worked with Brad Wilson (formerly the Macomb County Community Organizer for the Clean Water Fund) and so, told him about the idea over a year ago, but we had to keep it quiet until the purchase was finalized," said Cheryl.



Sharon Rose Leonatti

Excerpt from the first issue of The Thumb Naturalist.

In 2025, with a fairly large e-mail distribution and almost 18 years of building greater interest in the Thumb, the time was right to revive *The Thumb Naturalist*. In addition to TLC news, we hope to include more articles and other works about nature in the region. Anyone can contribute, whether you would like to write about a species, a natural area, or submit a story, a poem, an opinion, a photograph, artwork, video link, or just about anything.

Blue Water Camp Council

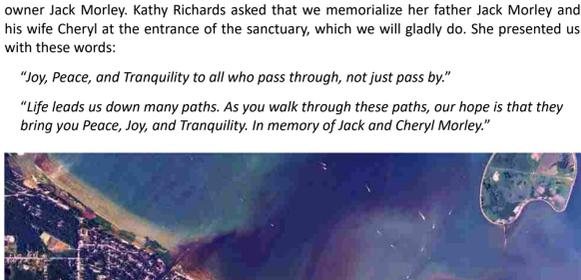
In late January and early February, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins co-founded the Blue Water Camp Council (BWCC), a new non-profit organization for the purpose of protecting and supporting organizational camps in our region. The mission statement of the BWCC is as follows:

"To promote, protect, and acquire public or private camps in the Blue Water or Thumb regions of Michigan, including Huron, Lapeer, Macomb, Saint Clair, Sanilac, and Tuscola counties, for the purpose of ensuring the continued existence, use, and availability of camps, particularly those for organizations and youth".

The BWCC Board of Directors is a core group of scouters from the former Blue Water Council, Boy Scouts of America, including:

- Carla (Hardie) Petrossi, President
- Jim Gilbert, Treasurer, BSA Troop 178 Port Huron
- William Collins, Secretary, BSA Troop 169 Fort Gratiot
- Greg Ball, BSA Troop 106 Fort Gratiot
- Terry Hay, BSA Troop 168 Port Huron
- Sara Leroy, BSA Troop 294 Saint Clair, Trail Life MI-1613, American Heritage Girls MI-13312
- Bob Wiley, BSA Troop 168 Port Huron

The BWCC held its first board meeting on February 12 through 14 by e-mail, during which articles of incorporation and bylaws were approved. These were submitted to the State of Michigan and US Internal Revenue Service on February 18. The BWCC received State endorsement on February 25 and IRS tax-exemption approval as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation approval on March 5. This was much quicker turn-around on approvals than when the TLC filed in 2007.



The main gate at the former Silver Trails Scout Reservation.

Of course, the BWCC is concerned about the fate of Silver Trails, the former scout camp west of Jeddco; a magnificent forested natural area along the Black River and slopes of the Silver Creek valley. Established in 1945, the camp served thousands of scouts, youth, and their families across Saint Clair and Sanilac counties and beyond until it was sold in 2020. But there are other camps in the region that need help and may be at risk of closing in the future. Some readers may recall the sale of the 24-acre Girls Catholic Youth Organization near Forester back in 2022. It was a shame to lose not only another youth organization camp, but one with over a 1,000 feet of beach on Lake Huron. Camp Cavell near Lexington was nearly lost before a few individuals formed the Camp Cavell Conservancy and bought it from the WYCA of Detroit in 2013. There are several other organizational camps in our region, primarily for youth and churches, all subject to the strains of program, maintenance, and liability costs in addition to the risk of declining membership. It is our hope that the BWCC will eventually build a coalition of organizations and members dedicated to our common goal, with the experience and capacity to support and protect camps in our region for future generations.

113-Acre Morley Sanctuary Acquisition
Bangor Township, Bay County

On February 26, the TLC purchased our new 113-acre Morley Sanctuary in Bangor Township, Bay County on the north side of Bay City. The closing took place at Superior Title Agency in Bay City. Representing the TLC were Executive Director Bill Collins, President Cheryl Collins, Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, and TLC Land Agent Dave Ladensack. Representing the sellers were Kathy Richards and Sean Mika, daughter and son of previous owner Jack Morley. Kathy Richards asked that we memorialize her father Jack Morley and his wife Cheryl at the entrance of the sanctuary, which we will gladly do. She presented us with these words:

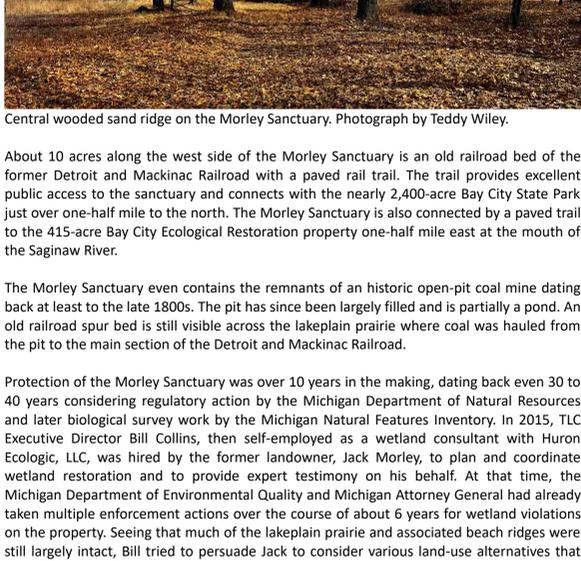
"Joy, Peace, and Tranquility to all who pass through, not just pass by."

"Life leads us down many paths. As you walk through these paths, our hope is that they bring you Peace, Joy, and Tranquility. In memory of Jack and Cheryl Morley."

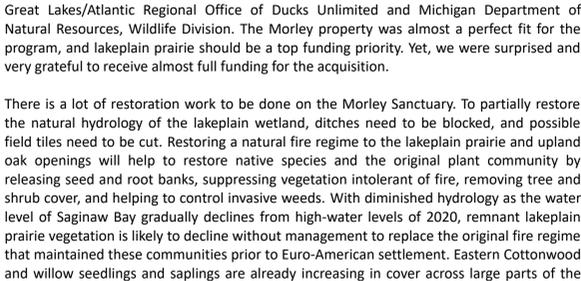


The TLC Morley Sanctuary in yellow along the south side of the Kawkawlin River, near its outlet to Saginaw Bay. The Saginaw River mouth is about 1.5 mile east. Google Earth 2011 photograph.

While slightly outside of the core TLC mission territory, the Morley Sanctuary is a very worthy project that called for action. The Morley Sanctuary consists of about 95 acres of imperiled lakeplain prairie along the south side of the Kawkawlin River, only a half-mile west of Saginaw Bay; one of the larger intact occurrences of a species-rich grass-dominated plant community on generally sandy soils near the Great Lakes shoreline, maintained by seasonal flooding, cyclical variations in Great Lakes water levels, and fire during dry periods, and providing habitat for many rare species like Prairie White-fringed Orchid, Sullivant's Milkweed, and Tall Green Milkweed. In Lower Michigan, lakeplain prairie was historically limited to shoreline counties of the southeast Lower Peninsula, now with less than 1% remaining across its range. Much of the original lakeplain prairie occurred along the Saginaw Bay, and in the heavily developed Bay City area, long since eliminated by farming, drainage, and development.

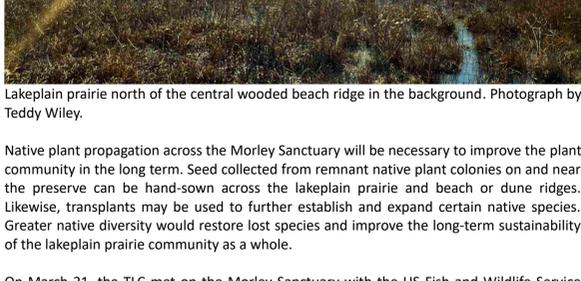


TLC Morley Sanctuary natural community and feature map. 2024 photograph. Fetch GIS Bay County: <https://app.fetchgis.com/bay>



Lakeplain prairie south of the central wooded beach or dune ridge. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

About 8 acres of the sanctuary consists of wooded beach or dune ridges covered by large Black Oak, possibly with Hill's Oak hybrids, and a few White Oak, most appearing to be around 100 years old. A long, winding sand ridge with scattered oaks extending through the middle of the Morley Sanctuary is particularly scenic; a wild and windy peninsula with a great view of the adjoining prairie to the north, south, and east.



Central wooded sand ridge on the Morley Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

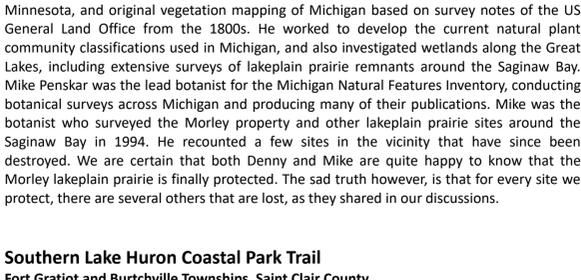
About 10 acres along the west side of the Morley Sanctuary is an old railroad bed of the former Detroit and Mackinac Railroad with a paved rail trail. The trail provides excellent public access to the sanctuary and connects with the nearly 2,400-acre Bay City State Park just over one-half mile to the north. The Morley Sanctuary is also connected by a paved trail to the 415-acre Bay City Ecological Restoration property one-half mile east at the mouth of the Saginaw River.

The Morley Sanctuary even contains the remnants of an historic open-pit coal mine dating back at least to the late 1800s. The pit has since been largely filled and is partially a pond. An old railroad spur bed is still visible across the lakeplain prairie where coal was hauled from the pit to the main section of the Detroit and Mackinac Railroad.

Protection of the Morley Sanctuary was over 10 years in the making, dating back even 30 to 40 years considering regulatory action by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and later biological survey work by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory. In 2015, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, then self-employed as a wetland consultant with Huron Ecologic, LLC, was hired by the former landowner, Jack Morley, to plan and coordinate wetland restoration and to provide expert testimony on his behalf. At that time, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and Michigan Attorney General had already taken multiple enforcement actions over the course of about 6 years for wetland violations on the property. Seeing that much of the lakeplain prairie and associated beach ridges were still largely intact, Bill tried to persuade Jack to consider various land-use alternatives that would protect the natural community while providing an income and a public benefit.

Five years passed, Jack passed away in 2020, and his property was offered for sale a few years later. Bill kept trying to find a way to permanently protect the lakeplain prairie on Jack's property. In 2024, the TLC applied for a Wetland Conservation Program grant from the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited and Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division. The Morley property was almost a perfect fit for the program, and lakeplain prairie should be a top funding priority. Yet, we were surprised and very grateful to receive almost full funding for the acquisition.

There is a lot of restoration work to be done on the Morley Sanctuary. To partially restore the natural hydrology of the lakeplain wetland, ditches need to be blocked, and possible field tiles need to be cut. Restoring a natural fire regime to the lakeplain prairie and upland oak openings will help to restore native species and the original plant community by releasing seed and root banks, suppressing vegetation intolerant of fire, removing tree and shrub cover, and helping to control invasive weeds. With diminished hydrology as the water level of Saginaw Bay gradually declines from high-water levels of 2020, remnant lakeplain prairie vegetation is likely to decline without management to replace the original fire regime that maintained these communities prior to Euro-American settlement. Eastern Cattailwood and white seedlings and saplings are already increasing in cover across large portions of the lakeplain prairie on the Morley Sanctuary. Fire would eliminate most of these.



Lakeplain prairie north of the central wooded beach ridge in the background. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Native plant propagation across the Morley Sanctuary will be necessary to improve the plant community in the long term. Seed collected from remnant native colonies on and near the preserve can be hand-sown across the lakeplain prairie and beach or dune ridges. Likewise, transplants may be used to further establish and expand certain native species. Greater native diversity would restore lost species and improve the long-term sustainability of the lakeplain prairie community as a whole.

On March 21, the TLC met on the Morley Sanctuary with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Ducks Unlimited (DU) to plan wetland restoration using the grant funds provided by our DU Wetland Conservation Program grant. Present were Jim Hazelman, State Coordinator of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program of the USFWS, DU Tri-State Biologist Colleen Gleason, DU Regional Biologist Kali Rush, DU Biologist Matt Conrad, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC President Cheryl Collins, TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, and prospective new TLC stewardship worker Sam Lazar. Initial restoration activities will consist primarily of ditch blocking and possible field tile cutting.



March 21 on the Morley Sanctuary with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited. Left to right: Jim Hazelman USFWS, Teddy Wiley TLC, Bill Collins TLC, Kali Rush DU, Matt Conrad DU, Colleen Gleason DU, and Cheryl Collins TLC. Photograph by Sam Lazar.

Acquisition of the 113-acre Morley Sanctuary was made possible by a grant from the Ducks Unlimited / Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wetland Conservation Program, 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.

The Wetland Conservation Program grants were designated for protection of wetlands in 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. The western basin of Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay experience frequent recurring algal blooms, 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.

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

Thanks also to Denny Albert and Mike Penskar, former staffers of the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, for their support letters, which surely helped in obtaining the grant for the Morley Sanctuary acquisition. For anyone working to protect natural areas in Michigan over the past few decades, surely they are familiar names. Denny, among other projects, was the lead ecologist that produced ecoregional mapping of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, and original vegetation mapping of Michigan based on survey notes of the US General Land Office from the 1800s. He worked to develop the current natural plant community classifications used in Michigan, and also investigated wetlands along the Great Lakes, including extensive surveys of lakeplain prairie remnants around the Saginaw Bay. Mike Penskar was the lead botanist for the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, conducting botanical surveys across Michigan and producing many of their publications. Mike was the botanist who surveyed the Morley property and other lakeplain prairie sites around the Saginaw Bay in 1994. He recounted a few sites in the vicinity that have since been destroyed. We are certain that both Denny and Mike are quite happy to know that the Morley lakeplain prairie is finally protected. The sad truth however, is that for every site we protect, there are several others that are lost, as they shared in our discussions.

Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Trail
Fort Gratiot and Burtchville Townships, Saint Clair County

The TLC made progress on the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park through the winter. We've been working on three of our preserves, including our 42-acre Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville Township, our 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot Township, and our latest addition, the 5-acre Cunningham Connector Sanctuary along Carrigan Road which connects the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary with the Fort Gratiot Nature Park to the south.

Bidwell Sanctuary
Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County

Chèkhòhònsik hitkwike schind lèkuwàke - Place among hemlock trees on sandy ground with sound of waves breaking – Lenape

On the Bidwell Sanctuary, TLC Stewardship Assistant Jason Sawyer, continued clearing the coastal trail at the north end of the preserve, nearly a half-mile north of the entrance at Metcalf Road. It was very encouraging to find old Arbor Vitae or Northern White-cedar trees up in the north end, along with more Eastern Hemlock, both species descended from the original forest community that covered the dune and swale complex. These are good indicators that colonies of other native plant species may be remnant in the same area, but we won't know until later in the growing season.

Development of the Metcalf Road entrance of the Bidwell Sanctuary turned into a much longer and involved project than we anticipated. In late November and early December, the TLC submitted drawings and applications to Burtchville Township for a building permit and special land use permit. The plans were reviewed and then it was determined that the parcels needed to be rezoned to allow public use and facilities. The Burtchville Planning Commission held a public hearing on February 4, originally for the special land use request, but also for the rezoning. TLC Executive Director Bill Collins gave a presentation at the hearing, during which there were only a few questions from neighboring landowners.

The TLC again thanks all funders of the Bidwell Sanctuary, including The Carls Foundation, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Consumers Energy Foundation, Cargill, Inc. and Cargill Salt of Saint Clair, Community Foundation of St. Clair County, Franklin H. and Nancy S. Moore Donor Advised Fund, Bioregion Reparation Fund, SEMCO Energy Gas Company, and many individual donors.

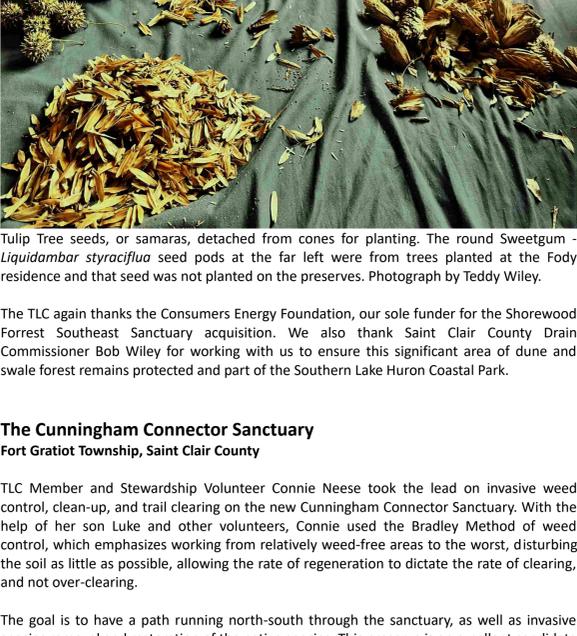
Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary
Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

In late November and early December, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC Member Connie Neese, and TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley started clearing the coastal trail along a major dune ridge from Carrigan Road on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Good progress was made on continuing the trail north through the preserve and on removal of invasive shrubs like Tartarian Honeysuckle and Common Privet.

As on the Bidwell Sanctuary, it was very encouraging to find old Arbor Vitae or Northern White-cedar trees along the base of the sand ridge to the north, descended from the original forest community that covered the dune and swale complex, and a good indicator of other native plant species that may be remnant. This small grove of Arbor Vitae has since been named, well, "The Grove".

Arbor Vitae or Northern White-cedar or Thuja at The Grove. Photograph by Bill Collins.

In mid-March, Teddy planted Black Oak, Red Oak, and Tulip Tree seeds on the dune ridge where the coastal trail is routed to help restore the native forest community. These were collected last fall by Bill Collins from Lakeside Cemetery and Mount Hope Catholic Cemetery in Port Huron, and from his parents' residence in Fort Gratiot. Oaks will require several decades to reach the sub-canopy level, if ever. Tulip Tree is relatively fast-growing and capable of filling canopy gaps in only a few decades. Tulip Tree and Black Oak are also generally southern species, approaching the northern limits of their natural range in our region. Establishment of these southern species should help prepare for climate warming.



Tulip Tree seeds, or samaras, detached from cones for planting. The round Sweetgum - *Liquidambar styraciflua* seed pods at the far left were from trees planted at the Fody residence and that seed was not planted on the preserves. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

The TLC again thanks the Consumers Energy Foundation, our sole funder of the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary acquisition. We also thank Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner Bob Wiley for working with us to ensure this significant area of dune and swale forest remains protected and part of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

The Cunningham Connector Sanctuary

Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

TLC Member and Stewardship Volunteer Connie Neese took the lead on invasive weed control, clean-up, and trail clearing on the new Cunningham Connector Sanctuary. With the help of her son Luke and other volunteers, Connie used the Bradley Method of weed control, which emphasizes working from relatively weed-free areas to the worst, disturbing the soil as little as possible, allowing the rate of regeneration to dictate the rate of clearing, and not over-clearing.

The goal is to have a path running north-south through the sanctuary, as well as invasive species removal and restoration of the native species. This preserve is an excellent candidate for the Bradley Method of Regeneration, which strives to avoid the cycle of over clearing that ends up creating perfect places for invasive species to take hold. Native plants can reclaim the land if we give them a chance by methodically removing invasives.

Connie recruited the Saint Clair County Trailblazers and others to work on the preserve. TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley also worked on the sanctuary cutting invasive shrubs and planting locally-collected Red Oak acorns and Tulip Tree seeds.



The north end of the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary in November 2024.

The Bradley Method of Regeneration, developed in Australia by sisters Joan and Eileen Bradley, is a holistic approach to land restoration and regeneration. It focuses on using nature itself to revive degraded lands by methodically removing the pressures of exotic plants in close proximity of native plants allowing the native species to reestablish dominance of the area.

Principles of the Bradley Method

- Always work from good to bad areas.
- Disturb the soil as little as possible and restore it to its natural condition.
- Allow the rate of regeneration to dictate the rate of clearing.
- Do not over-clear.

Travis Jodway, Connie Neese, Teddy Wiley, and Luke Wilhelm worked over the winter to knock over the dormant Phragmites in the northern portion of the preserve to be able to find and identify areas that still have native plants. As we entered what looked like a solid wall of Phragmites, we were delighted to find good areas of goldenrod, willow, dogwood, and box-elder amongst invasive Phragmites in the northwestern to north-central section of the preserve. The worst areas of Phragmites are in the northeastern portion of the preserve, and a smaller area along the west property line.



Flattened Phragmites on the north end of the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary. Photograph by Connie Neese.

For more information about the Bradley Method of Regeneration, see the following references:

[The Bradley Method](#)
[Joan and Eileen Bradley](#)

Michigan Conservancy Meeting

On March 14, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins and TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley participated in a Zoom video meeting of Michigan conservancies to discuss several issues that regularly impede our work. The latest meeting was a continuation of meetings and discussions held in 2024 and was hosted by Jared Harmon, Executive Director of the Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy (Clinton, Eaton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Ionia, and Shiawassee counties). Participating were the following Michigan land conservancies and organizations:

- Blue Heron Headwaters Land Conservancy (Oakland, Livingston, and Genesee counties)
- Cadillac Area Land Conservancy (Missaukee, Osceola, Wexford, Lake and Mason counties)
- Grosse Isle Nature and Land Conservancy (Grosse Isle)
- Headwaters Land Conservancy (Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Crawford, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle, and Roscommon counties)
- Heart of the Lakes (Michigan association of conservancies and similar organizations)
- Land Conservancy of West Michigan (Allegan, Kent, Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Ottawa)
- Legacy Land Conservancy (Washtenaw, Jackson, and Lenawee counties)
- Little Forks Land Conservancy (Bay, Clare, Isabella, Gladwin, Midland counties)
- Livingston Land Conservancy (Greater Livingston County)
- Michigan Land Conservancy (Michigan)
- Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, Saint Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties)
- Upper Peninsula Land Conservancy (Alger, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Iron, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Ontonagon, and Schoolcraft counties)

Topics of discussion included:

1. Need for guaranteed property tax exemption for public preserves;
2. Need for guaranteed property tax incentives for landowners with conservation easements;
3. Liability of conservancies for county drain and special assessments, paying for negative benefits;
4. Inability of conservancies to hold their own conservation easements, Merger Doctrine fix;
5. Need for exemptions from weed and grass ordinances;
6. Need for exemptions from prescribed burning ordinances;
7. Lack of Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant funding access for conservancies;
8. Emerging solar panel issues for conservation easements and preserves.

In general, land conservancy directors shared their experiences and a few suggestions, but there were no great conclusions or obvious solutions. Heart of the Lakes, which represents Michigan conservancies, was mostly negative about making any progress, particularly with current political conditions. Some of us will continue to work on these issues.

Friends of the St. Clair River Meeting

On March 18, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins and TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley participated in a Zoom video meeting with the Friends of St. Clair River to discuss how our two organizations might work together on a regular basis and on special projects. We decided to have this meeting a few months ago, after both the TLC and FSCR had trouble with the City of Marysville last summer regarding their weed and grass ordinance.

The TLC and FSCR agreed to start sharing information in our respective newsletters, especially volunteer stewardship opportunities. This could greatly increase participation in our annual May and June Garlic Mustard removal efforts and also promote more educational opportunities for TLC members. Regarding special projects, we focused on the Saint Clair River Delta Ramsar designation or Make Our Delta Great Again initiative. We also proposed a possible new restoration project at the mouth of the Bunce Creek in Marysville. This project has huge challenges but would be high-profile, gaining attention for both the TLC and FSCR, and fits into Saint Clair River Area of Concern goals.

Loznak Sanctuary

Yānhdawā' yeh de yenhta' iyaen' - The Prairie is Near the River - Huron-Wendat City of Marysville

TLC Board Member Dan Rhein and TLC Program & Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley continued their work on the Loznak Sanctuary through the spring. In addition to the locally collected native seed he planted in March, Teddy transplanted a bunch of Cord Grass rhizomes from Port Huron Township. Cord Grass will make a durable addition to the native prairie community.

A nice surprise in May was that Teddy found a bunch of Yellow Lady-slipper orchids in an area he cleared of invasive buckthorn back in the fall and winter. Yellow Lady-slipper can potentially be found in a variety of habitats, but in Saint Clair County, it seems to be largely limited to remnant lakeplain prairie and the dune and swale forest along Lake Huron.



Yellow Lady-slipper orchids. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

TLC Board Member Blake Short started a botanical inventory of the Loznak Sanctuary in June, adding to the already impressive list of native species. So far, Blake has found 45 native plant species on the preserve, but he's just getting started. Among these are nine *Carex* sedge species, one of which, *Carex tetanica*, has a coefficient of conservatism, or C value, of 9. These coefficients, ranging from 0 to 10, have been assigned to most plant species in Michigan and represent an estimated probability that a species would occur in a plant community relatively unaltered from what is thought to have existed prior to major human disruption, or in other words, prior to Euro-American settlement. Generally, the lower the C value, the less a plant species is considered to be associated with remnant plant communities, and the higher the C value, the more a plant species is restricted to largely unaltered remnant plant communities. So, a C value of 9 is indicative of a plant species that likely has been present for centuries.



Butterfly Milkweed. Photograph by Blake Short.

Blake, and later Teddy, found several new Butterfly Milkweed plants which is good to know they are hanging on and expanding, as we found only a few there last year. Butterfly Milkweed has a coefficient of conservatism of 5, right in the middle of the scale, as they do get around and take advantage of disturbed sandy soils, but are really not a weed and far from common.

Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary

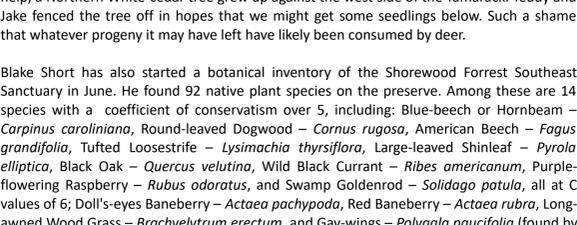
Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

Since last December, TLC Member Connie Neese has led the invasive shrub removal and trail clearing on our new 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary and the 5-acre Cunningham Connector Sanctuary. Thanks to Connie, new TLC Stewardship Assistant Jake Defrain, TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, Lisa Powell and Jeanie of the Trailblazers group, Erica Harmon, Michael Jefferson, Travis Jodway, TLC Stewardship Assistant Jason Sawyer, and TLC Volunteer Luke Wilhelm, the coastal trail now extends a full mile on a large dune ridge from Carrigan Road through the Shorewood Southeast Sanctuary and the adjoining 80-acre northwest Shorewood Forrest parcel still owned by the Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner, to an east-west trail that connects to Parker Road near the intersection of Brace Road.



TLC Volunteer Connie Neese and Stewardship Assistant Jake Defrain. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Important discoveries were made on the Shorewood Southeast Sanctuary in the spring. The work crew found several Yellow Lady-slipper orchids, in late May and early June. Blake Short explored in early June and found at least one Yellow Lady-slipper that appears to be closer to variety *pubescens* with green lateral petals (twisted), as opposed to the purplish petals of variety *makasin*. Yellow Lady-slipper orchids are characteristic of the dune and swale forest in Saint Clair County, so it was good to see that several still survive on the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary. Deer take a heavy toll on orchids as they often nip off the leaves and flowers.



Yellow Lady-slipper orchid - *Cypripedium parviflorum*, variety *pubescens*. Photograph by Blake Short.

Earlier in the spring, the crew encountered a grove of about 25 to 30 mature Northern White-cedar or Arbor Vitae in a lower spot of approximately 100 feet long by 70 feet wide. This area was named "The Grove" by Connie and her crew. These trees are undoubtedly descended from the original plant community of the dune and swale complex, much of it mapped by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory as cedar swamp prior to Euro-American settlement.



The Grove. Photograph by Bill Collins.

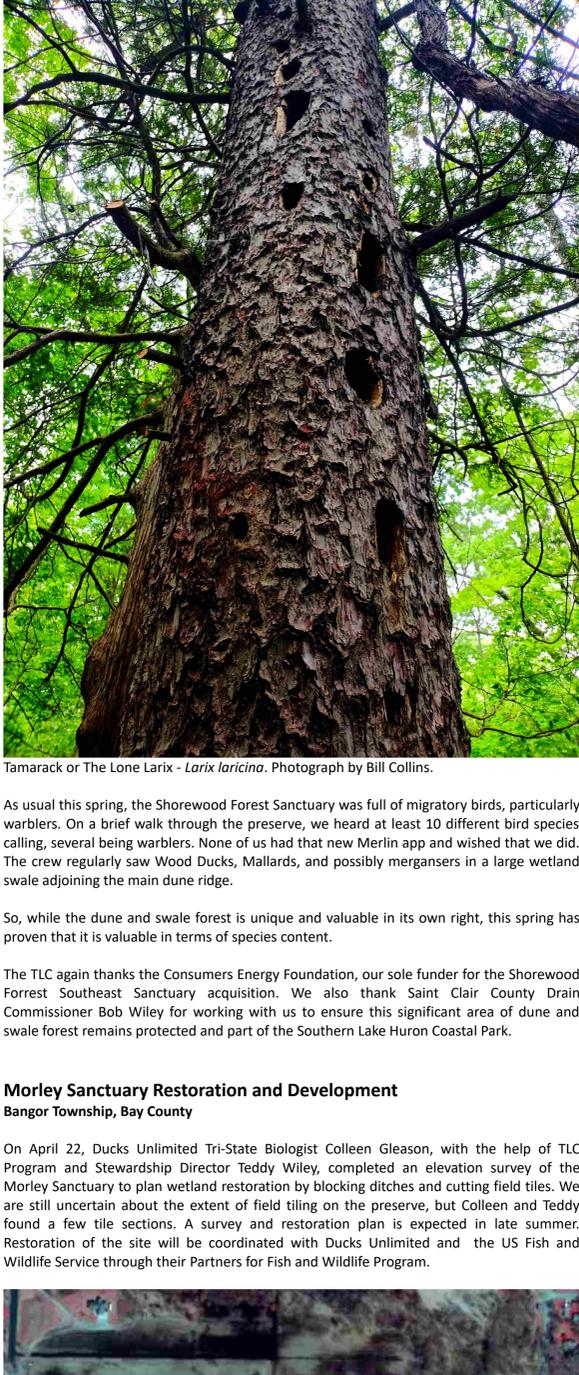
While cutting invasive shrubs in early May, Teddy caught the flash of yellow on a turtle in the adjacent swale, which is still full of water in late June. In true form, he jumped in the water and caught a Blanding's Turtle, a Michigan Special Concern species. While Blanding's Turtle is widespread in Michigan, the number of recorded occurrences is somewhat low. Given the many threats to turtles, amphibians, and other wetland-dependent wildlife, they are due formal legal protective status. Blanding's Turtle is an exciting find for the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary, indicating there are likely more.

Michigan Special Concern Blanding's Turtle. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

As if a Cedar Grove wasn't enough, TLC Board Member Blake Short found an approximately 12-inch diameter Tamarack (or Larch) - *Larix laricina* along the same ridge bottom as The Grove. The tree was in rough shape, with several holes drilled out by a Pileated Woodpecker or two, and what may be pest damage, possibly due to Eastern Larch Beetle or Larch Sawfly. There is also no doubt that this Tamarack tree is descended from the original plant community of the dune and swale complex. As if sensing this true senior citizen needed help, a Northern White-cedar tree grew up against the west side of the Tamarack. Teddy and Jake fenced the tree off in hopes that we might get some seedlings below. Such a shame that whatever progeny it may have left have likely been consumed by deer.

Blake Short has also started a botanical inventory of the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in June. He found 92 native plant species on the preserve. Among these are 14 species with a coefficient of conservatism over 5, including: Blue-beech or Hornbeam - *Carpinus caroliniana*, Round-leaved Dogwood - *Cornus rugosa*, American Beech - *Fagus grandifolia*, Tufted Loosestrife - *Lysimachia thyrsiflora*, Large-leaved Shinleaf - *Pyrola elliptica*, Black Oak - *Quercus velutina*, Wild Black Currant - *Ribes americanum*, Purple-flowering Raspberry - *Rubus odoratus*, and Swamp Goldenrod - *Solidago patula*, all at C values of 6; Doll's-eyes Baneberry - *Actaea pachypoda*, Red Baneberry - *Actaea rubra*, Long-awned Wood Grass - *Brachyelytrum erectum*, and Gay-wings - *Polygala paucifolia* (found by Teddy first), all at C values of 7; Alder-leaved Buckthorn - *Rhamnus alnifolia* at a C value of 8 and quite a surprise as this is certainly a left-over from the former cedar swamp and early open swales; and Wood-betony - *Pedicularis canadensis* at a C value of 10, another surprise as it doesn't get any better than a 10 in regards to native plant species. Actually, Teddy was the first to find a large patch of Wood-betony on Shorewood. It is a fairly widespread woodland herb in Michigan, typical of dry forest openings but sometimes found along forest edges extending into fields. With a C value of 10, no doubt that this Wood-betony patch is descended from the original vegetation of the dune and swale complex.

Wood-betony with a Black Swallowtail butterfly. Photograph by Blake Short.



Tamarack or The Lone Larix - *Larix laricina*. Photograph by Bill Collins.

As usual this spring, the Shorewood Forest Sanctuary was full of migratory birds, particularly warblers. On a brief walk through the preserve, we heard at least 10 different bird species calling, several being warblers. None of us had that new Merlin app and wished that we did. The crew regularly saw Wood Ducks, Mallards, and possibly mergansers in a large wetland swale adjoining the main dune ridge.

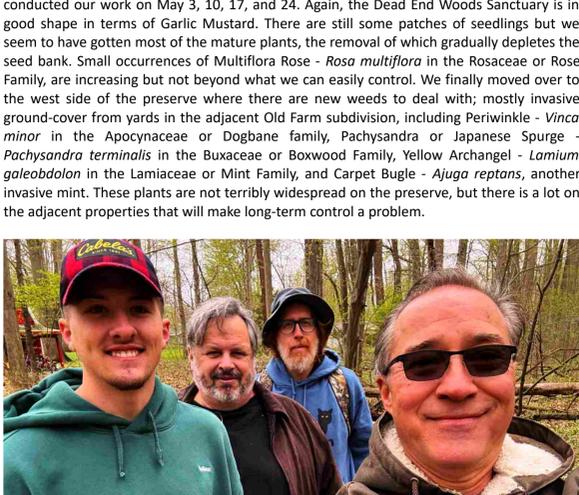
So, while the dune and swale forest is unique and valuable in its own right, this spring has proven that it is valuable in terms of species content.

The TLC again thanks the Consumers Energy Foundation, our sole funder for the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary acquisition. We also thank Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner Bob Wiley for working with us to ensure this significant area of dune and swale forest remains protected and part of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

Morley Sanctuary Restoration and Development

Bangor Township, Bay County

On April 22, Ducks Unlimited Tri-State Biologist Colleen Gleason, with the help of TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, completed an elevation survey of the Morley Sanctuary to plan wetland restoration by blocking ditches and cutting field tiles. We are still uncertain about the extent of field tiling on the preserve, but Colleen and Teddy found a few tile sections. A survey and restoration plan is expected in late summer. Restoration of the site will be coordinated with Ducks Unlimited and the US Fish and Wildlife Service through their Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.



2025 aerial photo of the Morley Sanctuary and vicinity. Bay Fetch GIS: app.fetchgis.com/bay

The Morley Sanctuary consists of about 95 acres of imperiled lakeplain prairie along the south side of the Kawkawlin River, only a half-mile west of Saginaw Bay; one of the larger intact occurrences of lakeplain prairie that remained unprotected in the Bay City area. Lakeplain prairie is a species-rich grass-dominated plant community on generally sandy soils near the Great Lakes shoreline, maintained by seasonal flooding, cyclical variations in Great Lakes water levels, and fire during dry periods, and providing habitat for many rare species like Prairie Fringed Orchid, Sullivant's Milkweed, and Tall Green Milkweed. In Michigan, lakeplain prairie was historically limited to shoreline counties of the southeast Lower Peninsula, now with less than 1% remaining across its range. Much of the original lakeplain prairie occurred along the Saginaw Bay, and in the heavily developed Bay City area, long since eliminated by farming, drainage, and development.

Annual Garlic Mustard Removal

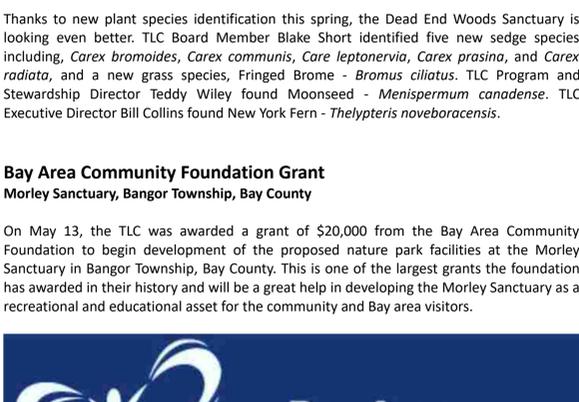
Dead End Woods Sanctuary

Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

Our annual Garlic Mustard and other invasive weed removal work went well this spring. Garlic Mustard - *Alliaria petiolata*, in the Brassicaceae or Mustard Family, is a very tasty and nutritious plant, originally brought to North America from Europe as a culinary herb. We conducted our work on May 3, 10, 17, and 24. Again, the Dead End Woods Sanctuary is in good shape in terms of Garlic Mustard. There are still some patches of seedlings but we seem to have gotten most of the mature plants, the removal of which gradually depletes the seed bank. Small occurrences of Multiflora Rose - *Rosa multiflora* in the Rosaceae or Rose Family, are increasing but not beyond what we can easily control. We finally moved over to the west side of the preserve where there are new weeds to deal with; mostly invasive ground-cover from yards in the adjacent Old Farm subdivision, including Periwinkle - *Vinca minor* in the Apocynaceae or Dogbane family, Pachysandra or Japanese Spurge - *Pachysandra terminalis* in the Buxaceae or Boxwood Family, Yellow Archangel - *Lamium galeobdolon* in the Lamiaceae or Mint Family, and Carpet Bugle - *Ajuga reptans*, another invasive mint. These plants are not terribly widespread on the preserve, but there is a lot on the adjacent properties that will make long-term control a problem.



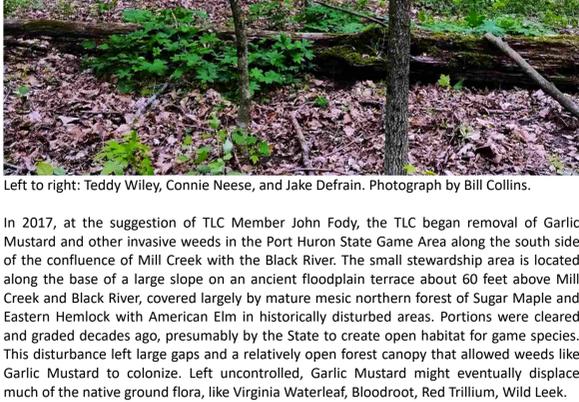
Dead End Woods Crew 1. Left to right: TLC Program & Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC Stewardship Assistant Jason Sawyer, and TLC Board Member Scott Ferguson. Photograph by Scott Ferguson.



Dead End Woods Crew 2. Left to right: TLC Program & Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, TLC Member Michael Ball, TLC Member Connie Neese, TLC Member Amy Jean Ball, TLC Member Lynne Ball, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, and TLC Member Blandine Bebey. TLC Stewardship Assistant Sam Lazar was still working. Photograph by Connie Neese's camera.

Thank you to TLC Board Member Scott Ferguson, TLC Board Member Blake Short, TLC Program & Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, TLC Stewardship Assistant Jason Sawyer, TLC Stewardship Assistant Sam Lazar and Emily, TLC Member Connie Neese, and Very Special guests Lynne Ball, Michael Ball, Amy Jean Ball, and Blandine Bebey.

The Dead End Woods Sanctuary is one of the most floristically diverse forests in Saint Clair County. In addition to the pulpit - *Arisaema triphyllum*, Marsh-marigold - *Caltha palustris*, Yellow Trout-lily - *Erythronium americanum*, Wild Geranium - *Geranium maculatum*, May Apple - *Podophyllum peltatum*, Christmas Fern - *Polystichum acrostichoides*, Skunk-cabbage - *Symplocarpus foetidus*, and Red Trillium - *Trillium erectum* there are several less common species such as Red Baneberry - *Actaea rubra*, Maidenhair Fern - *Adiantum pedatum*, Wild Leek - *Allium tricoccum*, Wild Sarsaparilla - *Aralia nudicaulis*, Spikenard - *Aralia racemosa*, Richweed - *Collinsonia canadensis*, Hazelnut - *Corylus americana*, Squirrel-corn - *Dicentra canadensis*, Spicebush - *Lindera benzoin*, Cardinal Flower - *Lobelia cardinalis*, Black Gum - *Nyssa sylvatica*, Round-leaved Poryla - *Pyrrola americana*, Bluestem Goldenrod - *Solidago caesia*, Zigzag Goldenrod - *Solidago flexicaulis*, and Foamflower - *Tiarella cordifolia*. The woods is also one of the few isolated havens where Eastern Hemlock - *Tsuga canadensis* is barely regenerating, a relict of a cooler climate.



Dead End Woods Crew 4. Left to right: TLC Program & Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, TLC Stewardship Assistant Sam Lazar, and TLC Member Emily Sekelsky. TLC Board Member Blake Short left shortly before. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Thanks to new plant species identification this spring, the Dead End Woods Sanctuary is looking even better. TLC Board Member Blake Short identified five new sedge species including, *Carex bromoides*, *Carex communis*, *Care leptoneuria*, *Carex prasina*, and *Carex radiata*, and a new grass species, Fringed Brome - *Bromus ciliatus*. TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley found Moonseed - *Menispermum canadense*. TLC Executive Director Bill Collins found New York Fern - *Thelypteris noveboracensis*.

Bay Area Community Foundation Grant

Morley Sanctuary, Bangor Township, Bay County

On May 13, the TLC was awarded a grant of \$20,000 from the Bay Area Community Foundation to begin development of the proposed nature park facilities at the Morley Sanctuary in Bangor Township, Bay County. This is one of the largest grants the Morley Sanctuary has awarded in their history and will be a great help in developing the Morley Sanctuary as a recreational and educational asset for the community and Bay area visitors.



The Bay Area Community Foundation is a nonprofit organization created by and for the people of the Saginaw Bay Area. Since 1982, the BACF has made charitable gifts to support arts and culture, community initiatives, education and youth, environment, health and wellness, human services, and recreation in the Bay Area. The BACF manages a permanent endowment and awards grants to address the community's most pressing needs and promising opportunities.

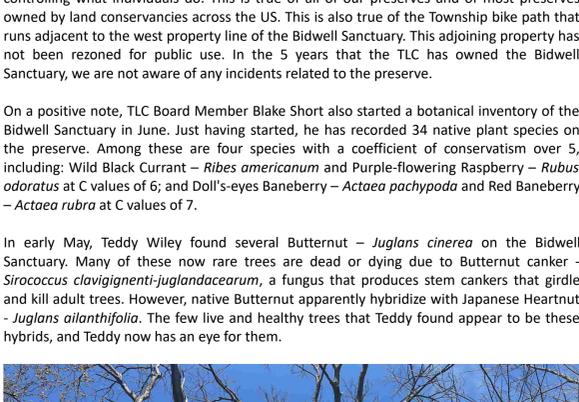
As with every grant and donation, the TLC is honored that the Morley Sanctuary project was considered one of the many promising opportunities of the Bay Area. The TLC sincerely thanks the Board of Trustees of the Bay Area Community Foundation, and particularly Program Officer Madi Syring for guiding us through the grant application process.

Annual Garlic Mustard Removal

Port Huron State Game Area

Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

On May 31, we returned to our old Garlic Mustard control area in the Port Huron State Game Area near Ruby in Clyde Township. After four years of absence, it looked pretty good, mostly lacking mature flowering Garlic Mustard, but still with a lot of seedlings, especially along the outer edges. But not bad for not working on it for a while. This was again a nice opportunity to enjoy the beautiful, secluded forest of the Black River valley while improving the habitat for native woodland flora. Thank you to TLC Program & Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, TLC Stewardship Assistant Jake Defrain, and TLC Member Connie Neese.



Left to right: Teddy Wiley, Connie Neese, and Jake Defrain. Photograph by Bill Collins.

In 2017, at the suggestion of TLC Member John Fody, the TLC began removal of Garlic Mustard and other invasive weeds in the Port Huron State Game Area along the south side of the confluence of Mill Creek with the Black River. The small stewardship area is located along the base of a large slope on an ancient floodplain terrace about 60 feet above Mill Creek and Black River, covered largely by mature mesic northern forest of Sugar Maple and Eastern Hemlock with American Elm in historically disturbed areas. Portions were cleared and Eastern Hemlock was presumably by the State to create open habitats for game species. This disturbance left large gaps and a relatively open forest canopy that allowed weeds like Garlic Mustard to colonize. Left uncontrolled, Garlic Mustard might eventually displace much of the native ground flora, like Virginia Waterleaf, Bloodroot, Red Trillium, Wild Leek.



Jake holding a Wood Frog. One thing has become clear. With the addition of Jake Defrain, we have two resident herpetologists: Jake and Teddy. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Since 2017, our stewardship area has expanded from about 1 acre to over 3 acres in 2025. Despite a lapse in stewardship in 2021 through 2024, our previous work areas remained largely free of Garlic Mustard. As we have moved south, nearing the Black River again as it bends around the east and south of our stewardship area, it appears that we might have entered the original source colony of much of the Garlic Mustard in this area, as the density increases significantly. We have a lot of work ahead of us if we hope to knock out Garlic Mustard in this beautiful part of the Port Huron State Game Area.

Annual Garlic Mustard Removal

Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary

Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

On June 7, rather than return to the Port Huron State Game Area, which would probably benefit from fire to remove the Garlic Mustard seedlings and seed bank, we decided to work on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot. Thank you to TLC Board Member Blake Short and TLC Stewardship Assistant Sam Lazar.

Bidwell Sanctuary Entrance

Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County

Chêkhòhònsink hitkwike hindok lèkuwaky - *Place among hemlock trees on sandy ground with sound of waves breaking* – Lenape

On June 10, the Burtchville Township Planning Commission denied our request for rezoning of the Bidwell Sanctuary they said was necessary to develop the Metcalf Road entrance of the Bidwell Sanctuary. The uncertainty further delayed the construction of an information kiosk and small pavilion for which the TLC received a grant of \$4,500 in early 2022 from the Bioregion Reparation Fund of the Community Foundation of St. Clair County. The funding originated from the Full Circle EcoHouse of Prayer in Port Huron.

In late November of last year, the TLC submitted drawings and applications to Burtchville Township for a building permit, followed by a special land use permit application in December for which we paid \$653. A public hearing was scheduled for February 4, but on the day of the hearing, the Burtchville Planning Commission Chairman informed us that they would need to deny the special use due to the need for rezoning, which he claimed was necessary for public use of the property. Although they would deny, he said that the hearing that evening would count as the required rezoning hearing. We attended and made a short presentation at the hearing, during which there were only a few questions from neighboring landowners and no significant opposition. The special land use request was denied as expected, and then we waited for further instruction from the Township that was not forthcoming. After inquiry several weeks later, we submitted an application for rezoning on April 1. Two Planning Commission meetings passed with no action as our application was not forwarded to the Burtchville Zoning Administrator.

We were then informed that another public hearing and public notice was required for the rezoning, contrary to what we were told previously. The Township wanted to charge us another \$500 application fee plus another public notice fee, but we refused as we felt that the TLC had been misguidedly by the Township from the start. Apparently the Township relented as we were not charged again, but we do know that an anonymous donor covered the second public notice fee.

Finally, our rezoning request was put on the agenda for the June 10 Planning Commission meeting. But again, on June 5 the Planning Commission Chairman called us to ask questions that were answered in our rezoning application, as though he hadn't read it. There was even a hint that he would require an engineered site plan. The conversation was abruptly ended as it was clear by this point that he seemed to be looking for reasons to deny our request, as we had concluded a few months previous. TLC Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley attended the Planning Commission meeting on our behalf. He made a short presentation about our plans and about the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park in general. This time, there was a lot of opposition expressed, but mostly for lack of understanding, and it seemed, because of the atmosphere that the Planning Commission created. Some of the concerns were security of the entrance, potential trespass on neighboring properties, and visual screening of the entrance from the neighbor's house. We are concerned about these issues as well. However, not approving the rezoning request will not make these issues go away. We felt that an element in the Township thought they could use the rezoning to discourage the TLC and perhaps, make the preserve go away.

The public is free to access the Bidwell Sanctuary at any time and we have no way of controlling what individuals do. This is true of all of our preserves and of most preserves owned by land conservancies across the US. This is also true of the Township bike path that runs adjacent to the west property line of the Bidwell Sanctuary. This adjoining property has not been rezoned for public use. In the 5 years that the TLC has owned the Bidwell Sanctuary, we are not aware of any incidents related to the preserve.

On a positive note, TLC Board Member Blake Short also started a botanical inventory of the Bidwell Sanctuary in June. Just having started, he has recorded 34 native plant species on the preserve. Among these are four species with a coefficient of conservatism over 5, including: Wild Black Currant – *Ribes americanum* and Purple-flowering Raspberry – *Rubus odoratus* at C values of 6; and Doll's-eyes Baneberry – *Actaea pachypoda* and Red Baneberry – *Actaea rubra* at C values of 7.

In early May, Teddy Wiley found several Butternut – *Juglans cinerea* on the Bidwell Sanctuary. Many of these now rare trees are dead or dying due to Butternut canker - *Sirococcus clavigignenti-juglandacearum*, a fungus that produces stem cankers that girdle and kill adult trees. However, native Butternut apparently hybridize with Japanese Hirtle nut - *Juglans ailanthifolia*. The few live and healthy trees that Teddy found appear to be these hybrids, and Teddy now has an eye for them.

Butternut trees along the west side of the Bidwell Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Butternut twig and leaf scar. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Butternut have been found at other locations near the shoreline of Lake Huron from Burtchville through Lakeport and Lexington, especially in the dune and swale complex and along large stream floodplains. Why there are relatively so many in that area, and how they hybridized with Japanese Hirtle nut are mysteries, for which Teddy has some ideas. It will be interesting to learn more about our Butternut enclave, but as with so many other apparently relict populations, we may have very little time remaining to observe them.

The Carls Foundation Capacity Match Grant

On June 20, the TLC was awarded a capacity match grant of \$100,000 from The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills to help fund TLC worker pay. We won't get any of the money until we raise at least \$50,000 by this June. We then have until June of 2027 to raise an additional \$50,000. For every dollar donated by TLC supporters in our region, The Carls Foundation will donate another dollar, up to \$100,000. If we are successful, the TLC will have raised a total of \$200,000 by June of 2027, which will help ensure that we are able to continue paying our workers for several years.

THE CARLS FOUNDATION

Attracting this generous match grant from The Carls Foundation reflects how far the TLC has come from our founding in 2008. We have proven that we can take on major land acquisitions and steward them. But in the past few years, the TLC has greatly increased its preserve acreage, and also our preserve range, from Bay City to New Baltimore, Burtchville to Ortonville, and a few places between. We also have very ambitious goals for future land protection, public outdoor recreation, and education. For the past 2 years, we have been able to support a small but dedicated team thanks in no small part to various sustainers.

As a reminder, due to funding limitations, we did not pay anyone from our founding in 2008 until 2024, except for limited contract work. The TLC Executive Director is not paid and no one receives a salary. With a substantial donation in 2024 from the estate of Dottie Craig, our senior Board Member who passed away in late 2023, we began paying a small group of workers at \$20 per hour. Among our newest workers are Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, Stewardship Assistant Jason Sawyer, and Stewardship Assistant Jake Deffrain. Others have included RoseAnn Shetter, Kris Heyworth, and Sam Lazar. Their work has increased our capacity and resulted in great progress in stewarding our preserves. But of course, our thanks also goes out to our Super Volunteer Connie Neese and her crew for their work on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast and Cunningham Connector sanctuaries, and also TLC Board Member Dan Rhein for all of his hard work on the Loznak and Bidwell sanctuaries.

A huge thank you once again to The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and especially Executive Director Elizabeth Stieg, for this TLC capacity match grant. The Carls Foundation shares our vision for the Thumb, a generally neglected region in terms of natural area protection.

William and Marie Carls established the Carls Foundation in 1961 to fund children's health and welfare. The Foundation added the preservation of natural areas in Michigan through land conservancies in 1995. Bill Carls immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1924 at the age of 21. With his training and experience in European apprentice programs, he was readily employed with major industrial companies in Detroit. In 1945, Bill Carls started Numatics, Inc. in his garage. The company was headquartered in Highland, Michigan and became a leading worldwide manufacturer of industrial air valves. They had a plant in Sandusky, Michigan for many years.

The Carls Foundation has funded many land preservation projects throughout Michigan and in our region where few other foundations have. In 2020, they funded much of our purchase of the Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville, and in 2023, purchase of the Shorewood Forrest Northeast Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot. Years ago, The Carls Foundation funded acquisition of the Michigan Nature Association's Sharon Rose Leonatti Memorial Nature Sanctuary in Kimball Township near Wadhams, with a large population of Michigan Endangered Painted Trillium. They have also funded the Six Rivers Land Conservancy in their efforts to acquire large parts of Anchor Bay Woods in New Baltimore adjacent to the TLC Gerrits Sanctuary in Ira Township.

Teddy's Excellent Adventures

With Bill On The Phone

TLC Program & Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley

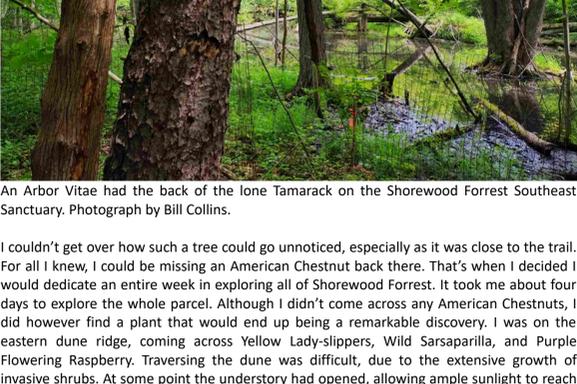
For the last couple of months, my life has been filled with endless adventures and discoveries. As Summer slowly creeps in, I have been keeping myself busy with transplanting, Garlic Mustard pulls, rare plant finds, and wetland scouting. One of my first projects this spring was transplanting in Loznak Sanctuary. After compiling a plant list for this preserve, I noticed the prairie was lacking some key species found in other lakeplain prairies like St. John's Marsh. The two plants I've decided to focus on transplanting were Tussock Sedge (*Carex stricta*) and Prairie Cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*). I collected four Tussock Sedge hummocks, planting them in the wettest areas of Loznak Sanctuary. I then made my way to an endemic population of Prairie Cordgrass in Marysville, collecting a 10-gallon buckets-worth of its rhizomes. They were planted in areas of the prairie where vegetation was sparse. After several visits this growing season, both plants seemed to be doing well. It was during these visits that I discovered something remarkable. Yellow Lady Slipper Orchid had started to return to areas recently cleared of invasive buckthorn. The fruits of my labor are finally paying off!



Prairie Cordgrass rhizomes in a bucket, ready for planting. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

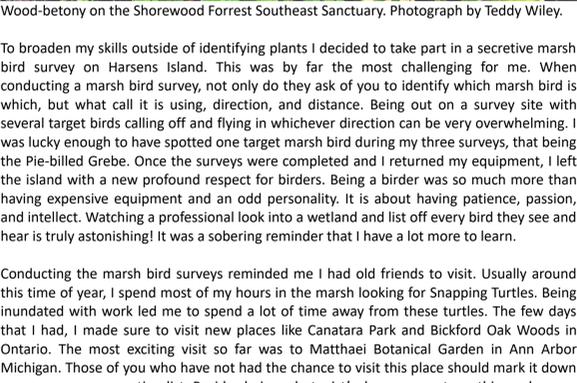
Speaking of prairies, I was able to bring this work home with me. Literally. My parents for the longest time wanted to establish a nice garden in front of our house. It wasn't until this spring that we started to put some work into it. Thankfully, I was able to persuade my parents to turn this garden into a mini prairie sanctuary. Unfortunately, they were very particular about what native plants would make their home here. For example, they wanted grass that didn't spread and had a beautiful display of colors during autumn. After much discussion, we ended up choosing Little Bluestem - *Schizachyrium scoparium*. Its non-rhizomatous nature and red-bronze fall color made it the perfect choice. Luckily, the Road Commission made it its priority to plant this sucker on every roadside in the county. I found a large population between Michigan and Griswold roads, transplanting a total of 21 bunches. So far, they seem to be growing well but may never grow to their true height due to the heavy clay on our property. Once they are established, other plants will be introduced to the garden like Butterfly Milkweed, Culver's-root, and Blazing-star.

Since joining the Thumb Land Conservancy, I have become further aware of the natural environment that surrounds me. Visiting landscapes like lakeplain prairie in the past, I would only take notice of the abundant Canada Bluejoint and Tussock Sedge. To the untrained eye, the prairie lacked its iconic biodiversity. Walking in that same prairie today, I felt as if I were a city slicker finally viewing an unpolluted night sky for the first time. This experience emboldened me to take up an effort to find rare plants in our preserves and the surrounding Blue Water Area. This led me to find Emerald Ash Borer-resistant ash trees, hybrid Butternut trees, and Hill's Oak. My ultimate plan is to collect seeds from these incredible trees and propagate them in our preserves to hopefully increase their overall biodiversity and climate resilience.



Teddy with a healthy ash tree on the Bidwell Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

You would think I wouldn't be able to miss any sort of plant. Well, some plants can still slip through the cracks. Blake Short decided one day to visit the Shorewood Forrest Preserve and walk the trail Connie and Jake had been working on. During his excursion he found a large Tamarack tree. The tree wasn't found in some isolated area of the preserve, but right next to the trail. I, Connie, and Jake walked this trail countless times, passing the Tamarack each time without notice. What made this discovery interesting is this Tamarack was most likely left over from the pre-settlement vegetation. Before Europeans had settled across the Blue Water Area, the wetland swales of Shorewood Forrest were dominated by Tamarack and Northern White-cedar. To house and feed an ever-growing European population and industry, many of the Tamarack and White-cedar were logged. Due to the trees' low regeneration rate, the swales transformed into a maple dominated swamp, known as southern hardwood swamp. Although small patches of White-cedar exist in Shorewood Forrest today, it was to our knowledge that the remaining Tamarack had all disappeared. Unlike the cedars, this Tamarack was in very rough shape. The combination of age, shaded understory, and a warmer climate has put this tree on its last limb (pun intended). With the help of Bill and Jake, we were able to put a tall fence around the tree to reduce deer browsing. Our next plan of action may be to apply fertilizer, to hopefully keep this tree alive enough to produce seed.



An Arbor Vitae had the back of the lone Tamarack on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Bill Collins.

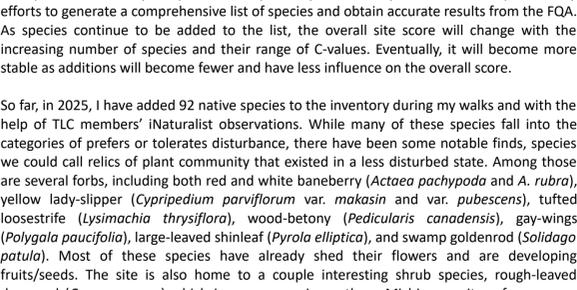
I couldn't get over how such a tree could go unnoticed, especially as it was close to the trail. For all I knew, I could be missing an American Chestnut back there. That's when I decided I would dedicate an entire week in exploring all of Shorewood Forrest. It took me about four days to explore the whole parcel. Although I didn't come across any American Chestnuts, I did however find a plant that would end up being a remarkable discovery. I was on the eastern dune ridge, coming across Yellow Lady-slippers, Wild Sarsaparilla, and Purple Flowering Raspberry. Traversing the dune was difficult, due to the extensive growth of invasive shrubs. At some point the understory had opened, allowing ample sunlight to reach the forest floor. A strange plant was taking advantage of this opportunity and seemed to establish itself quite well. Looking at it closely, it looked like something straight from Europe. I took a couple of photos to identify this strange looking flower. Using my iNaturalist app, I identified the plant as Canadian Lousewort or Wood-betony. I concluded this was a non-native plant with a North American name, like the non-native Canada Thistle. After about a week, I had forgotten about the discovery. It wasn't until Bill Collins had called asking me to collect seeds from a rare plant. Turns out, the rare plant he had sent me to find was none other than the Canadian Lousewort. Unlike most native plants, Canadian Lousewort scores a coefficient of conservatism (C value) of 10. When conducting a Floristic Quality Assessment, plants are given a C value rating ranging from 0 to 10. Species that score a high C value are highly selective, typically found in undisturbed, high quality natural communities, and are sensitive to habitat changes. Already having a near-complete plant list of Shorewood Forrest, this tiny little flower is the highest scoring plant within the whole preserve!



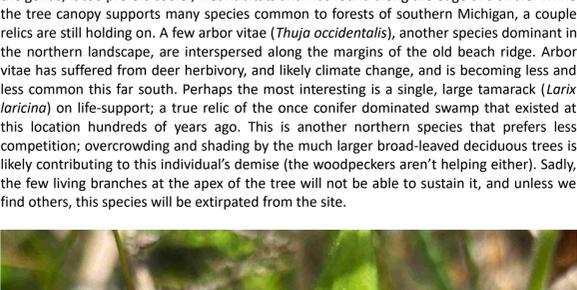
Wood-betony on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

To broaden my skills outside of identifying plants I decided to take part in a secretive marsh bird survey on Harsens Island. This was by far the most challenging for me. When conducting a marsh bird survey, not only do they ask of you to identify which marsh bird is which, but what call it is using, direction, and distance. Being out on a survey site with several target birds calling off and flying in whichever direction can be very overwhelming. I was lucky enough to have spotted one target marsh bird during my three surveys, that being the Pie-billed Grebe. One of the surveys were completed and I returned my equipment, I left the island with a new profound respect for birders. Being a birder was so much more than having expensive equipment and an odd personality. It is about having patience, passion, and intellect. Watching a professional look into a wetland and list off every bird they see and hear is truly astonishing! It was a sobering reminder that I have a lot more to learn.

Conducting the marsh bird surveys reminded me I had old friends to visit. Usually around this time of year, I spend most of my hours in the marsh looking for Snapping Turtles. Being inundated with work led me to spend a lot of time away from these turtles. The few days that I had, I made sure to visit new places like Canatara Park and Bickford Oak Woods in Ontario. The most exciting visit so far was to Matthaei Botanical Garden in Ann Arbor Michigan. Those of you who have not had the chance to visit this place should mark it down on your summer vacation list. Besides being a botanist's dream come true, this garden was home to the biggest snappers I've ever seen. It was also the first time I had a crowd watching me work my magic. There wasn't much wetland to explore, since the largest pond was no more than 2 1/2 acres in size. My first catch was relatively easy, the snapper being of average size and demeanor. My second catch was where it got interesting. After walking around a bit, my brother had spotted a particular looking log sticking out of water. Bringing my attention to it, I reached for my red camera to zoom in to get a closer look. My brother balked at the idea that this log was the head of a snapper. He believed it was too big to belong to a turtle. As the camera focused, the screen revealed the log was indeed the head of a snapper! A group of children with their parents gathered behind us, curious about the discovery we had just made. This was the moment to finally show people what I can do. I asked the crowd if they wanted to see something cool. They answered with a resounding yes! Making my way towards the turtle, its head quickly dove under the water. With quick thinking I dove in headfirst, getting a firm grip on its tail. As I lifted the giant turtle out of water, holding it under the rear and center of its plastron or belly like a small dog, the crowd went wild! The children were screaming in excitement and fear; the parents' jaws on the floor. I've had countless exciting moments out in the marsh, but this one topped it all. Not by the size of the turtle but by being able to showcase my skills to those so curious about the world. I have no doubt in my mind that someone was inspired that day. It even inspired me to keep fighting for our wetlands and their inhabitants. Because we need them as much as they need us.



"Bill". Photograph by Teddy Wiley.



"Conquest". Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Botanizing With Blake

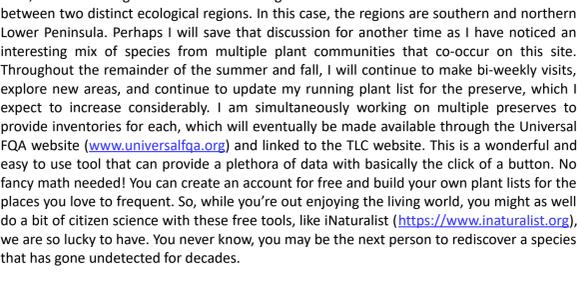
TLC Board Member Blake Short

Over the spring and early summer, I have been exploring the Shorewood Forest Southeast Sanctuary, 80 acres of wooded dune and swale forest in Fort Gratiot Township. While enjoying the trail (of course meandering away), I have been compiling an inventory of plant species encountered while observing the change from our beloved spring ephemerals into the early-summer blooming understory species that prefer more dappled light. The list of species I'm collecting will eventually be the floristic inventory of the sanctuary: all the plants that exist in this defined area. Aside from an obsession with plants and a curiosity to know what is growing out there, I'm essentially collecting this as a snapshot of the sanctuary's flora, much like a photograph captures a moment. While this is a rather enjoyable task, it provides important data that can be used in many ways such as determining forest quality and management practices, prioritizing areas for land conservation, and documenting Michigan's natural heritage.

I intend to use this information to conduct a Floristic Quality Assessment, or FQA, a method that manipulates data with algebra to measure the ecological integrity of a natural area based on its plant species composition. Fair warning, I'm about to go down a bit of a rabbit hole. The core of the FQA is identifying all the plant species in a defined area, usually a specific habitat or plant community, and obtaining each species' coefficient of conservatism (C-value), or just "C" as it is commonly referred to by plant enthusiasts. Fortunately, people much smarter than I have already assigned a numerical value between 0 and 10 for each plant species that is native to Michigan according to its tolerance for disturbance. These values and additional information are readily available on Michigan Flora online (<https://www.universalfqa.org>). Species that prefer disturbance are assigned a C-value between 0 and 3, those that tolerate it between 4 and 6, and those that are generally intolerant between 7 and 10. Disturbance can be natural, such as beaver flooding, fire, storms, disease, etc., but typically we associate it with anthropogenic activities like deforestation, removing hydrology, development, and so on. In summary, plant communities can and do shift when disturbance is introduced or removed; it goes both ways. Back to the FQA, once the number of plant species (n) is determined and the mean C-value is calculated, one can perform this FQA wizardry. After a bit of fancy math (insert boring math equation here), a final number, or score, is compared to a range of scores to determine if a site's floristic quality is exemplary, poor, or somewhere in between.

The most time-consuming portion of this process is not the math or the research, but the actual field work. You see, one cannot just go into the wild and identify all the plant species in a single day. Multiple visits must be made throughout the growing season as the herbaceous layer is typically dynamic, displaying a different cast of forbs and graminoids as the seasons progress. The only constant is the presence of woody species, and to some extent the ferns, which can generally be identified throughout the year. The observer must also cover as much of the site as possible as some plant populations may be small and/or infrequent. Others may not persist from year-to-year! It's easy to see that it requires many efforts to generate a comprehensive list of species and obtain accurate results from the FQA. As species continue to be added to the list, the overall site score will change with the increasing number of species and their range of C-values. Eventually, it will become more stable as additions will become fewer and have less influence on the overall score.

So far, in 2025, I have added 92 native species to the inventory during my walks and with the help of TLC members' iNaturalist observations. While many of these species fall into the categories of prefers or tolerates disturbance, there have been some notable finds, species we could call relics of plant community that existed in a less disturbed state. Among those are several forbs, including both red and white baneberry (*Actaea pachypoda* and *A. rubra*), yellow lady-slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *makasin* and var. *pubescens*), tufted loosestrife (*Lysimachia thysiflora*), wood-betony (*Pedicularis canadensis*), gay-wings (*Polygala paucifolia*), large-leaved shinleaf (*Pyrola elliptica*), and swamp goldenrod (*Solidago patula*). Most of these species have already shed their flowers and are developing fruits/seeds. The site is also home to a couple interesting shrub species, rough-leaved dogwood (*Cornus rugosa*) which is uncommon in southern Michigan as it prefers a more northern climate, and alder-leaved buckthorn (*Rhamnus alnifolia*), our only native species in the genus; it too prefers cooler, wet habitats and was found along the edge of a swale. While the tree canopy supports many species common to forests of southern Michigan, a couple relics are still holding on. A few arbor vitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), another species dominant in the northern landscape, are interspersed along the margins of the old beach ridge. Arbor vitae has suffered from deer herbivory, and likely climate change, and is becoming less and less common this far south. Perhaps the most interesting is a single, large tamarack (*Larix laricina*) on life-support; a true relic of the once conifer dominated swamp that existed at this location hundreds of years ago. This is another northern species that prefers less competition; overcrowding and shading by the much larger broad-leaved deciduous trees is likely contributing to this individual's demise (the woodpeckers aren't helping either). Sadly, the few living branches at the apex of the tree will not be able to sustain it, and unless we find others, this species will be extirpated from the site.



Yellow Lady-slipper on the Loznak Sanctuary. Photograph by Blake Short.

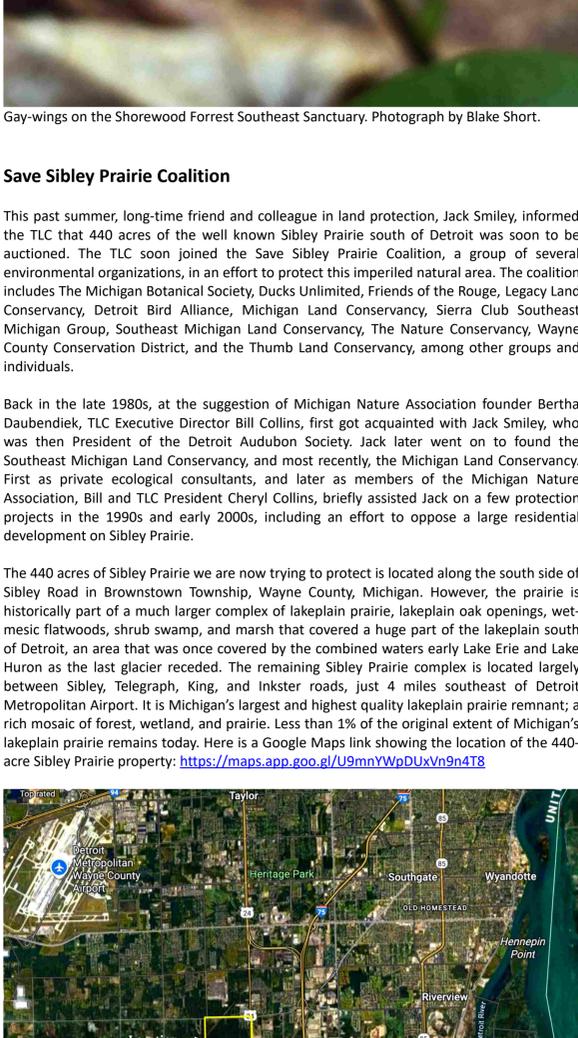


Tufted Loosestrife on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Blake Short.

As you can see, this sanctuary is a local refugia for a unique cast of southern and northern flora, which co-mingle in and around Michigan's climatic tension zone – a transitional area between two distinct ecological regions. In this case, the regions are southern and northern Lower Peninsula. Perhaps I will save that discussion for another time as I have noticed an interesting mix of species from multiple plant communities that co-occur on this site. Throughout the remainder of the summer and fall, I will continue to make bi-weekly visits, explore new areas, and continue to update my running plant list for the preserve, which I expect to increase considerably. I am simultaneously working on multiple preserves to provide inventories for each, which will eventually be made available through the Universal FQA website (www.universalfqa.org) and linked to the TLC website. This is a wonderful and easy to use tool that can provide a plethora of data with basically the click of a button. No fancy math needed! You can create an account for free and build your own plant lists for the places you love to frequent. So, while you're out enjoying the living world, you might as well do a bit of citizen science with these free tools, like iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org>), we are so lucky to have. You never know, you may be the next person to rediscover a species that has gone undetected for decades.



Wood-betony on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Blake Short.



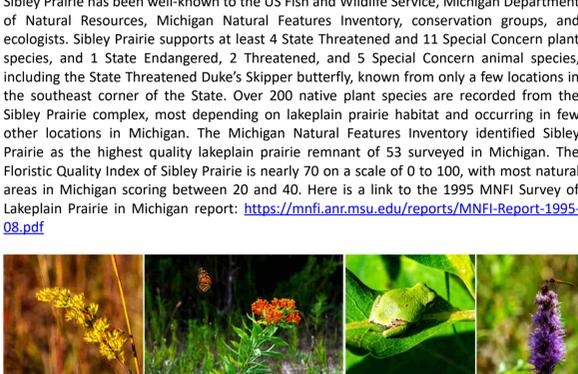
Gay-wings on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Blake Short.

Save Sibley Prairie Coalition

This past summer, long-time friend and colleague in land protection, Jack Smiley, informed the TLC that 440 acres of the well known Sibley Prairie south of Detroit was soon to be auctioned. The TLC soon joined the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, a group of several environmental organizations, in an effort to protect this imperiled natural area. The coalition includes The Michigan Botanical Society, Ducks Unlimited, Friends of the Rouge, Legacy Land Conservancy, Detroit Bird Alliance, Michigan Land Conservancy, Sierra Club Southeast Michigan Group, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Wayne County Conservation District, and the Thumb Land Conservancy, among other groups and individuals.

Back in the late 1980s, at the suggestion of Michigan Nature Association founder Bertha Daubendiek, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, first got acquainted with Jack Smiley, who was then President of the Detroit Audubon Society. Jack later went on to found the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, and most recently, the Michigan Land Conservancy. First as private ecological consultants, and later as members of the Michigan Nature Association, Bill and TLC President Cheryl Collins, briefly assisted Jack on a few protection projects in the 1990s and early 2000s, including an effort to oppose a large residential development on Sibley Prairie.

The 440 acres of Sibley Prairie we are now trying to protect is located along the south side of Sibley Road in Brownstown Township, Wayne County, Michigan. However, the prairie is historically part of a much larger complex of lakeplain prairie, lakeplain oak openings, wet-mesic flatwoods, shrub swamp, and marsh that covered a huge part of the lakeplain south of Detroit, an area that was once covered by the combined waters early Lake Erie and Lake Huron as the last glacier receded. The remaining Sibley Prairie complex is located largely between Sibley, Telegraph, King, and Inkster roads, just 4 miles southeast of Detroit Metropolitan Airport. It is Michigan's largest and highest quality lakeplain prairie remnant; a rich mosaic of forest, wetland, and prairie. Less than 1% of the original extent of Michigan's lakeplain prairie remains today. Here is a Google Maps link showing the location of the 440-acre Sibley Prairie property: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/U9mnYVpDUxVn9n4T8>



Sibley Prairie location map.



Sibley Prairie parcels.

Sibley Prairie has been well-known to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Natural Features Inventory, conservation groups, and ecologists. Sibley Prairie supports at least 4 State Threatened and 11 Special Concern plant species, and 1 State Endangered, 2 Threatened, and 5 Special Concern animal species, including the State Threatened Duke's Skipper butterfly, known from only a few locations in the southeast corner of the State. Over 200 native plant species are recorded from the Sibley Prairie complex, most depending on lakeplain prairie habitat and occurring in few other locations in Michigan. The Michigan Natural Features Inventory identified Sibley Prairie as the highest quality lakeplain prairie remnant of 53 surveyed in Michigan. The Floristic Quality Index of Sibley Prairie is nearly 70 on a scale of 0 to 100, with most natural areas in Michigan scoring between 20 and 40. Here is a link to the 1995 MNFI Survey of Lakeplain Prairie in Michigan report: <https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/reports/MNFI-Report-1995-08.pdf>



Help Save Sibley Prairie!

Within a few hundred feet of busy Telegraph Road, one could be surrounded by a magical garden of asters, goldenrods, lupine, ironweed, milkweeds, mountain mint, coreopsis, Indian plantain, prairie dock, lobelia, and many more, within a matrix of tall Indian grass, cord grass, and big bluestem. A gardener's delight, emulated in many of the most famous botanical gardens. Please help save this from the bulldozers!

To donate or for more information, go to:
SaveSibleyPrairie.org

Rare and imperiled species that have either been observed and documented from Sibley Prairie or could occur there based on the plant communities, include the following:

US Endangered: Karner blue butterfly, northern long-eared bat, and Indiana bat.

US Threatened: monarch butterfly (proposed US Threatened), prairie white-fringed orchid, and eastern massasauga rattlesnake.

Michigan Endangered: Gattinger's gerardia, Skinner's gerardia, short-eared owl, Henslow's sparrow, round-seed panic grass, lambda snaggletooth snail, downy gentian, prairie vole, Indiana bat, prairie white-fringed orchid, black cottonwood, king rail, few-flowered nut-rush, and barn owl.

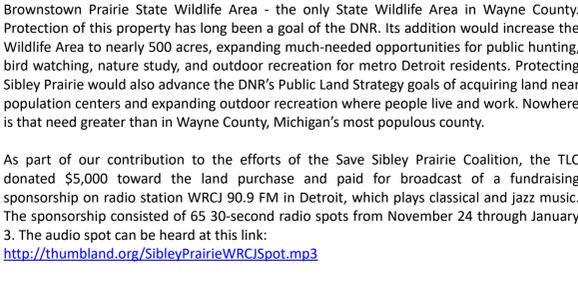
Michigan Threatened: tall green milkweed, purple milkweed, Sullivant's milkweed, panicked screwstem, Missouri rock-cress, fescue sedge, spotted turtle, least shrew, white lady slipper, Persius duskywing butterfly, upland boneset, tinted spurge, Dukes' skipper butterfly, leafhopper, pumpkin ash, downy sunflower, pincled hawkweed, short-fruited rush, Vasey's rush, woodland lettuce, least pinweed, Leggett's pinweed, Indiana flax, northern prostrate clubmoss, rough-stemmed monkey-flower, eastern fox snake, Culver's root borer, silphium borer moth, Karner blue butterfly, sand cinquefoil, Maryland meadow-beauty, netted nut-rush, eastern massasauga rattlesnake, Atlantic blue-eyed-grass, eastern box turtle, and Virginia spiderwort.



Sullivant's Milkweed in remnant lakeplain prairie in western Marysville, Michigan. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Michigan Special Concern: grasshopper sparrow, hairy angelica, three-awned grass, Cooper's milk vetch, dusted skipper butterfly, American bittern, Richardson's sedge, northern harrier, leafhopper, Engelmann's spike-rush, Blanding's turtle, whiskered sunflower, gentian-leaved St. John's-wort, conochea, furrowed flax, northern appressed bog clubmoss, bog conehead katydid, red-faced meadow katydid, delicate meadow katydid, green desert grasshopper, blazing star borer, maritime sunflower borer, Wilson's phalarope, cross-leaved milkwort, Shumard's oak, meadow-beauty, tall beak-rush, tall nut-rush, prairie warbler, dickcissel, prairie dropseed, and willow aster.

Presumed Extirpated from Michigan: chestnut sedge, violet wood-sorrel, sand milkwort, honey-flowered Solomon-seal, and Farwell's blue-eyed-grass.



Marsh Blazing-star in remnant lakeplain prairie in western Marysville, Michigan. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

The 440-acre Sibley Prairie property is located within the DNR acquisition boundaries of the Brownstown Prairie State Wildlife Area - the only State Wildlife Area in Wayne County. Protection of this property has long been a goal of the DNR. Its addition would increase the Wildlife Area to nearly 500 acres, expanding much-needed opportunities for public hunting, bird watching, nature study, and outdoor recreation for metro Detroit residents. Protecting Sibley Prairie would also advance the DNR's Public Land Strategy goals of acquiring land near population centers and expanding outdoor recreation where people live and work. Nowhere is that need greater than in Wayne County, Michigan's most populous county.

As part of our contribution to the efforts of the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, the TLC donated \$5,000 toward the land purchase and paid for broadcast of a fundraising sponsorship on radio station WRCJ 90.9 FM in Detroit, which plays classical and jazz music. The sponsorship consisted of 65 30-second radio spots from November 24 through January 3. The audio spot can be heard at this link: <http://thumbland.org/SibleyPrairieWRCJspot.mp3>

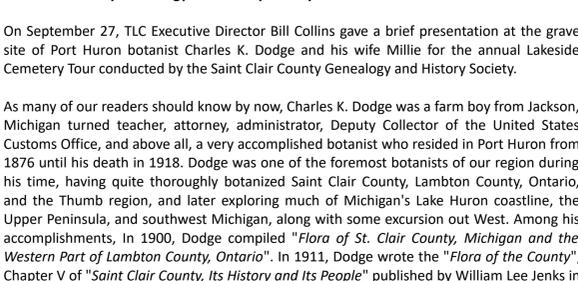
For more information about the Sibley Prairie and to make a donation to the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, see the web site at: SaveSibleyPrairie.org

Nicky Marcot, Rhizome

As mentioned in the previous article, the TLC joined the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, a group of several environmental organizations working to protect 440 acres of the well known Sibley Prairie complex south of Detroit. About that same time, the TLC was awarded The Carls Foundation match grant and decided we needed to hire a professional development director to help us raise the matching funds. Through our work with the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, we got acquainted with Nicky Marcot of Rhizome Services and soon contracted her services. We have been working hard to keep up with her since.

Nicky is the first professional development director hired by the TLC. With her help, the TLC has transformed its e-mail newsletter, created new fundraising materials, inquired or applied to new potential funders, and is in the process of completely revitalizing our web site. We are also increasing our presence on social media.

Nicky Marcot is an environmental activist, free-lance strategist, home-school parent, and urban farmer, living on the west side of Detroit. Raised in the city, Nicky earned her BA in Secondary Education and English from University of Detroit Mercy in 2007, and MA in Linguistics from Wayne State University in 2014.



Nicky Marcot of Rhizome Services.

Early in her career she worked as an educator in urban settings, focused on literacy. She then branched into grassroots nonprofit organizing work in a number of neighborhood based organizations centered around community revitalization, urban gardening and food security. Since 2018, deep concern for the environment has led her into environmental and conservation activism as a volunteer with Moms Clean Air Force and Michigan Climate Action Network, as well more recently with Coalition for a Clean Rouge River and the Wayne County Conservation District.

In 2022 she began working as strategist for Sidewalk Detroit, leading infrastructural improvements, natural areas restoration and programming efforts in Detroit's third largest park - Eliza Howell. In 2025 she launched her business, Rhizome Services, as a free-lance strategist for a number of regional environmental and conservation nonprofits.

So, if you get a call or e-mail from Nicky, now you know. With her help, the TLC is getting closer to completing the first phase of our match grant, but there is a long way to go.

Lakeside Cemetery Tour Saint Clair County Genealogy and History Society

On September 27, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins gave a brief presentation at the grave site of Port Huron botanist Charles K. Dodge and his wife Millie for the annual Lakeside Cemetery Tour conducted by the Saint Clair County Genealogy and History Society.

As many of our readers should know by now, Charles K. Dodge was a farm boy from Jackson, Michigan turned teacher, attorney, administrator, Deputy Collector of the United States Customs Office, and above all, a very accomplished botanist who resided in Port Huron from 1876 until his death in 1918. Dodge was one of the foremost botanists of our region during his time, having quite thoroughly botanized Saint Clair County, Lambton County, Ontario, and the Thumb region, and later exploring much of Michigan's Lake Huron coastline, the Upper Peninsula, and southwest Michigan, along with some excursion out West. Among his accomplishments, in 1900, Dodge compiled "*Flora of St. Clair County, Michigan and the Western Part of Lambton County, Ontario*". In 1911, Dodge wrote the "*Flora of the County*", Chapter V of "*Saint Clair County, Its History and Its People*" published by William Lee Jenks in 1912. In this publication, Dodge advocated for protection of the Black River valley at the confluence of Mill Creek, what later became the Port Huron State Game Area. You can watch a video about Charles Dodge at the following link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aWuYIPv-wXq-0rWxgY7N0KGuYoMHGw/view>

Grave stones of Charles and Millie Dodge at Lakeside Cemetery in Port Huron. Photograph by Bill Collins.

After the Lakeside Cemetery presentation, TLC Board Member and genealogist Fred Fuller cleared-up a mystery. Charles Dodge and Millie Burns married in 1897. Dodge was 53 and Millie was 24. Both Charles and Millie died in 1918, Millie about 7 months after Charles, at

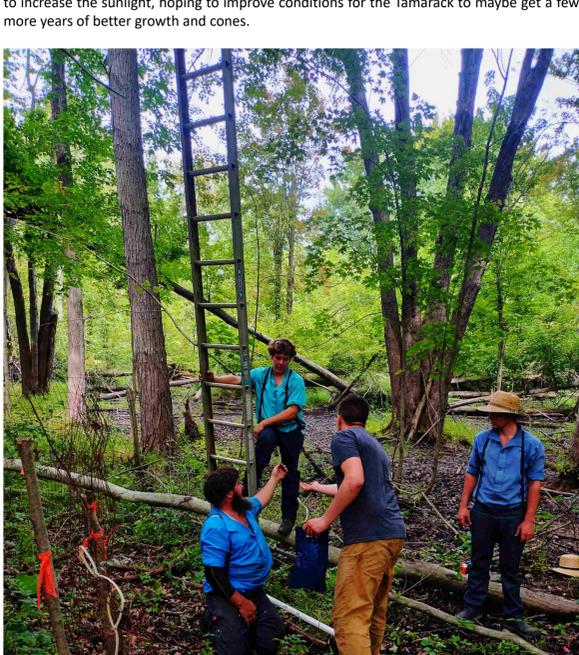
the age of only 45. The stated cause of death on her death certificate is "shock from falling into river". This was on October 16, 1918, when the river was not likely very cold. It appeared to be suicide due to grief of losing Charles. Fred was able to verify this by finding various newspaper articles and other documents. So, there is now an added layer to the story Charles and Millie Dodge; one of love, grief, and tragedy that one would never guess looking at their humble grave stones. Well, at least Charles got a lot of good botanizing in before they left this world.

Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

Work continued on our 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary through the summer and fall of 2025. Earlier in the season, important discoveries were made on the preserve when the work crew found several Yellow Lady-slipper orchids, expected in the dune and swale forest complex, but none-the-less, good to see. Deer take a heavy toll on orchids as they often nip off the leaves and flowers. The crew also encountered a small grove of mature Northern White-cedar or Arbor Vitae in a low area near the center of the 80-acre preserve, named "The Grove" by Connie and crew. These trees are undoubtedly descended from the original plant community of the dune and swale complex, much of it cedar swamp prior to Euro-American settlement. While cutting invasive shrubs in early May, Teddy caught the flash of yellow on a turtle in the adjacent swale. In true form, he jumped in the water and caught a Blanding's Turtle, a Michigan Special Concern species. While Blanding's Turtle is widespread in Michigan, the number of recorded occurrences is somewhat low. Blanding's Turtle is an exciting find for the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary, indicating there are likely more.

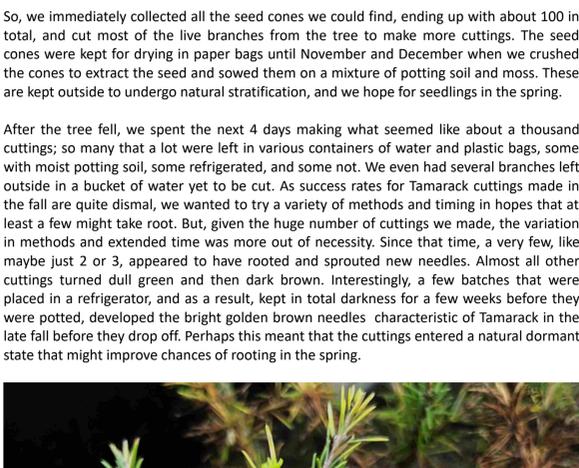
As if a Cedar Grove wasn't enough, while botanizing on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary, TLC Board Member Blake Short found an approximately 12-inch diameter Tamarack (or Larch) - *Larix laricina* along the same ridge bottom as The Grove. There was no doubt that this Tamarack tree was descended from the original plant community of the dune and swale complex. The story of this tree was full of surprises. The tree was in rough shape, with several holes drilled out by a Pileated Woodpecker or two, and with what may have been pest damage. As if sensing this true senior citizen needed help, a Northern White-cedar tree grew up against the west side of the Tamarack, seemingly to help hold it up.

We searched the preserve, but the old Tamarack appeared to be truly, the "Lone Larix". Seeing that the tree was clearly in its final years, we wanted to propagate it by cuttings and seed. Problem was that all of the live branches and seed cones were at least 40 feet up. In late July, Teddy found a small live branch on the ground that had broken off in a storm. We quickly made about 20 cuttings, applied rooting compound, stuck them in a pot of moist soil, and placed the pot inside a plastic bag held up by small wire arches. The branch even had a small immature cone, but maybe it was late enough in the season to get seed, so we left it on the branch and stuck the end in water.



Tamarack cuttings in mini hoop house. Photograph by Bill Collins.

We waited until early September when we got an Amish crew with a 30-foot ladder and a branch pruner that extended up to about 15 feet with a pvc pipe addition, hoping to knock down seed cones and cut a few branches of nearby trees to decrease the shade. Turned out John Troyer couldn't reach any branches from the other trees, and even when he climbed a little above the ladder top and reached up with the pruner, he was barely able to touch a few branches with cones and knocked a few to the ground. The crew collected about 20 cones total. We also had the crew cut down a Silver Maple and a small Black Cherry nearby to increase the sunlight, hoping to improve conditions for the Tamarack to maybe get a few more years of better growth and cones.

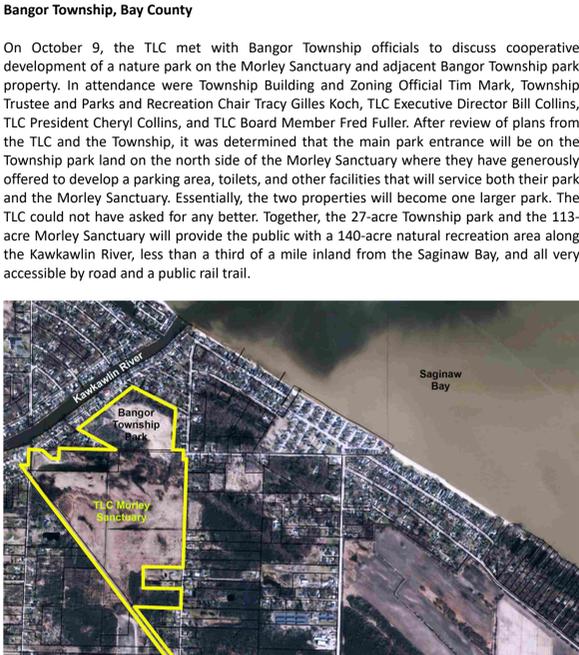


Collecting Tamarack seed cones. Left to right: Ora Yoder, John Troyer just down from the top of the ladder, Teddy Wiley, and Joseph Yoder. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Returning the next day to work on the sanctuary, to his shock, Teddy found that the Tamarack tree had fallen over! We knew it was in bad shape but didn't think it was that bad. The last Tamarack tree known in the entire Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park was no longer; a species that likely covered much of the wetland swales just a few hundred years ago. But, there were two good things about it falling over. Most importantly, had the tree fallen the previous day, John Troyer might be dead. Also, it was as though the tree threw itself down for us, saying, "OK. You guys apparently aren't good enough to get up to my top, so I'll make it easy for you." It was perfect timing for the seed cones, but bad timing for cuttings, and it meant that we now had just one shot to propagate this tree rather than multiple years.

So, we immediately collected all the seed cones we could find, ending up with about 100 in total, and cut most of the live branches from the tree to make more cuttings. The seed cones were kept for drying in paper bags until November and December when we crushed the cones to extract the seed and sowed them on a mixture of potting soil and moss. These are kept outside to undergo natural stratification, and we hope for seedlings in the spring.

After the tree fell, we spent the next 4 days making what seemed like about a thousand cuttings; so many that a lot were left in various containers of water and plastic bags, some with moist potting soil, some refrigerated, and some not. We even had several branches left outside in a bucket of water yet to be cut. As success rates for Tamarack cuttings made in the fall are quite dismal, we wanted to try a variety of methods and timing in hopes that at least a few might take root. But, given the huge number of cuttings we made, the variation in methods and extended time was more out of necessity. Since that time, a very few, like maybe just 2 or 3, appeared to have rooted and sprouted new needles. Almost all other cuttings turned dull green to then dark brown. Interestingly, a few batches that were placed in a refrigerator, and as a result, kept in total darkness for a few weeks before they were potted, developed the bright golden brown needles characteristic of Tamarack in the late fall before they drop off. Perhaps this meant that the cuttings entered a natural dormant state that might improve chances of rooting in the spring.



Tamarack cuttings with new growth. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

As mentioned in the July Thumb Naturalist, TLC Board Member Blake Short started a botanical inventory of the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in June. He found or confirmed 92 native plant species, several with high coefficients of conservatism, or in other words, characteristic of mature remnants of the original plant community. These included: Tufted Loosestrife, large-leaved Shinleaf, Swamp Goldenrod, Doll's-eyes Baneberry, Red Baneberry, Long-awned Wood Grass, Gay-wings, Alder-leaved Buckthorn, and Wood-betony. We need to give Teddy credit for finding Alder-leaved Buckthorn, Wood-betony, and a few others first. Undoubtedly, all of these species are descended from the original vegetation of the dune and swale complex.

As usual this spring, the Shorewood Forest Sanctuary was full of migratory birds, particularly warblers. On a brief walk through the preserve, we heard at least 10 different bird species calling, several being warblers. Likewise, in the fall, many of these same birds stop over in the dune and swale forest on their way back south.

The TLC again thanks the Consumers Energy Foundation, our sole funder for the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary acquisition. We also thank Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner Bob Wiley for working with us to ensure this significant area of dune and swale forest remains protected and part of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

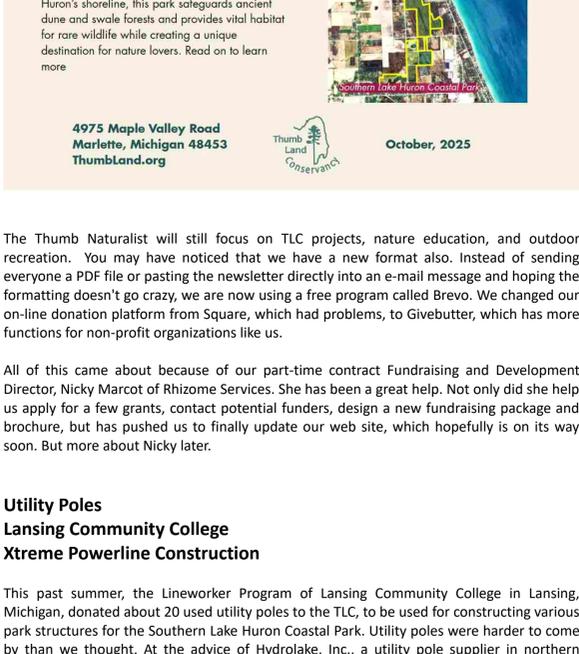
Morley Sanctuary Restoration and Development Bangor Township, Bay County

On October 9, the TLC met with Bangor Township officials to discuss cooperative development of a nature park on the Morley Sanctuary and adjacent Bangor Township park property. In attendance were Township Building and Zoning Official Tim Mark, Township Trustee and Parks and Recreation Chair Tracy Gilles Koch, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC President Cheryl Collins, and TLC Board Member Fred Fuller. After review of plans from the TLC and the Township, it was determined that the main park entrance will be on the Township park land on the north side of the Morley Sanctuary where they have generously offered to develop a parking area, toilets, and other facilities that will service both their park and the Morley Sanctuary. Essentially, the two properties will become one larger park. The TLC could not have asked for any better. Together, the 27-acre Township park and the 113-acre Morley Sanctuary will provide the public with a 140-acre natural recreation area along the Kawkawlin River, less than a third of a mile inland from the Saginaw Bay, and all very accessible by road and a public rail trail.



Combined TLC Morley Sanctuary and Bangor Township Park. Bay Area Fetch GIS, app.fetchgis.com

The TLC is now in the process of assisting Bangor Township with a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant for park development, and a permit application to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy to impact a small amount of State-regulated wetland for a foot trail. Ducks Unlimited has also completed an elevation survey of the Morley Sanctuary and a wetland restoration plan for the lakeplain prairie by blocking ditches and cutting field tiles. Restoration of the site will be coordinated with Ducks Unlimited and the US Fish and Wildlife Service through their Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.



Proposed Morley Sanctuary park plan. Thumb Land Conservancy.

On May 13, the TLC was awarded a grant of \$20,000 from the Bay Area Community Foundation to begin development of the proposed nature park facilities at the Morley Sanctuary. This was one of the largest grants the foundation has awarded in their history and will be a great help in developing the Morley Sanctuary as a recreational and educational asset for the community and Bay area visitors.

The TLC thanks all partners involved with this project, including: Ducks Unlimited for funding the property acquisition and planning the wetland restoration with the US Fish and Wildlife Service; the Bay Area Community Foundation for their generous park development funding; and not least, Bangor Township for working with us and making this project even better than we hoped.

The Thumb Naturalist October Special Fundraising Edition

If you didn't see it, the TLC issued a Special Fundraising Edition of The Thumb Naturalist in October. This was motivated largely by the \$100,000 match grant awarded by The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan to help the TLC build capacity and future sustainability of our organization.



The Thumb Naturalist
October 2025, special edition
Supporting nature and naturalists of Michigan's Thumb region and adjacent Ontario

The Thumb Land Conservancy (TLC) has been working tirelessly to preserve and restore some of the most ecologically important natural areas in Michigan's Thumb region, using most donor dollars to expand, connect, and steward over 350 acres of rare habitat including dune and swale forests, lakeplain prairies, and wetlands.

With a focus on land acquisition, invasive species removal, native species propagation, and public access, the TLC is protecting threatened ecosystems while creating future recreational trails and nature sanctuaries for residents and visitors alike. From the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park to the Morley and

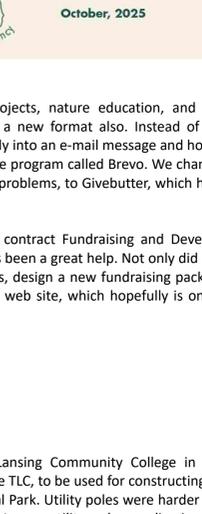
Loznak Sanctuaries, and efforts like Ramsar designation for the St. Clair River Delta, the TLC is safeguarding biodiversity and building a natural legacy. Our mission is clear: to protect and connect natural spaces across the Thumb, keeping them wild, accessible, and thriving for generations to come.

The TLC is a volunteer-driven organization focused entirely on land protection and stewardship. As we seek to expand our capacity to steward our preserves and acquire new land, please consider supporting us! Read on to discover how the TLC has been putting donor's dollars to work.

Saving Rare Places, One Acre at a Time

The Thumb Land Conservancy has spent over a decade building the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park—a growing network of preserves protecting one of the rarest ecosystems in Michigan. Stretching over three miles along Lake Huron's shoreline, this park safeguards ancient dune and swale forests and provides vital habitat for rare wildlife while creating a unique destination for nature lovers. Read on to learn more.

**4975 Maple Valley Road
Marlette, Michigan 48453
ThumbLand.org**



October, 2025

The utility poles at the Bidwell Sanctuary entrance. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

In a surprise gesture of generosity, Xtreme Powerline Construction of Port Huron, Michigan volunteered to haul the utility poles from Lansing Community College to their Port Huron facility and then to two TLC preserves in Fort Gratiot and Burtchville in the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. They did this free-of-charge without the TLC asking. The TLC thanks Xtreme Powerline Construction President, Scott Sheldon, along with Sammy Clark and driver Scott Howe.

The New Touma Family Sanctuary Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

The 31.62-acre Touma Family Sanctuary is located north of Parker Road at Parker Road and is critical to connecting the north and south halves of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park, and to routing the coastal walking trail that would connect the Shorewood Forrest sanctuaries with the Water Works Preserve and Hamzavi-Peltier Sanctuary to the north. Without acquiring the Touma Family Sanctuary, extending the coastal trail through this area may have been impossible as the TLC made purchase offers on adjacent parcels to the east without success.

On 2025 July 09, the TLC received a signed purchase agreement for the property granting us one year of fundraising time while the owner could continue to list and market the property. In mid September the seller's agent informed us that they had a better offer, giving us 45 days to close or withdraw our offer. For lack of successful fundraising, we made use of a private loan and closed on the property on October 29.

The Touma Family Sanctuary is located on the western-most dune ridge of the dune and swale complex in Saint Clair County, part of the same ridge that runs southeast to near the Blue Water Bridges and upon which Lakeside Cemetery and Saint Mary's Cemetery are located. Much of this large dune ridge on the Touma Family Sanctuary was mined for sand decades ago, but most of it remains intact, consisting of a mix of sparsely vegetated dune-like open sand, and wooded shrub thickets with Black Oak and what appear to be Hill's Oak. This is the site where, several years ago, Ray Peltier pulled a large Eastern Hognoe Snake from its burrow in the main sand ridge, the photograph of which the TLC has used in promoting the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. As old ground disturbance took the sand ridge on this sanctuary back to more open conditions that existed centuries ago, it will be interesting to explore in more detail to see what might be remnant here.



Eastern Hognose Snake on the Touma Family Sanctuary. Photograph by Ray Peltier.

Most of the parcel consists of dune and swale forest except open areas on the highest sand ridge and two man-made ponds, one near the center of the parcel and the other at the north end of the parcel adjacent to the Galbraith Drain which flows directly to Lake Huron. The parcel consists generally of about 13 acres of southern swamp forest wetland swales, about 10 acres of mesic to dry-mesic southern forest upland sand ridges, about 6.5 acres of sparsely vegetated open sand, and about 2 acres of ponds and marshy shoreline. Dominant vegetation is typical of the dune and swale forest in this region, the canopy consisting largely of Silver Maple, Eastern Cottonwood, and American Elm, with Green Ash, Black Ash, and other associated understorey species of sandy muck wetland swales. The upland sand ridges are dominated largely by Black Oak, Red Oak, Black Cherry, Big-tooth Aspen, and other associated understorey species of dry-mesic to mesic sand. The primary invasive weed on the parcel is Reed – *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis* with about 10%, or about 1.5 acre, of coverage concentrated around the ponds and adjacent wetland. Invasive shrubs on the parcel are moderate, with about 10%, or about 1.5 acre, of coverage by Common Privet – *Ligustrum vulgare*, Tartarian Honeysuckle – *Lonicera tatarica*, Japanese Barberry – *Berberis thunbergii*, Asiatic Bittersweet – *Celastrus orbiculatus*, and Garlic Mustard – *Alliaria petiolata*.



The Touma Family Sanctuary parcel north of Brace Road at Parker Road.

The previous owner dug extensive ditches that drain wetland swales to the adjacent Galbraith Drain. Multiple field tile lines were also likely installed to drain additional wetland in an attempt to create deer habitat. As part of site restoration, ditches will be filled and tile lines cut and blocked. This drainage appears to have substantially diminished wetland hydrology across the sanctuary, and likely decreased the total wetland size. Restoration of surface water and shallow ground water retention in the wetland swales will improve water quality discharging to the Galbraith Drain which flows directly to Lake Huron less than 1 mile to the east. This will help alleviate downstream flooding, help restore the wetland macroinvertebrate populations which serves as the base of the food chain, and will improve habitat suitability for amphibians, reptiles, birds, small mammals, and other wildlife inhabiting the dune and swale complex on the Touma Family Sanctuary.

The Touma Family

Our supporters are very important to the continued work of the Thumb Land Conservancy, and not all of them are local, at least not in recent years. Bess Touma, her sister Chris Powell, and Chris's husband, Bern Smith, live in Washington DC. Chris and Bess grew up in Port Huron on Lake Huron. Their father, Dr. George C. Touma, the son of Lebanese immigrants, was a local dentist and lived his entire life in Port Huron until he passed away in 1998. He raised his family of five children on the lake that he loved, and they happily spent their childhood swimming, sailing and growing to know and love the lake environment.

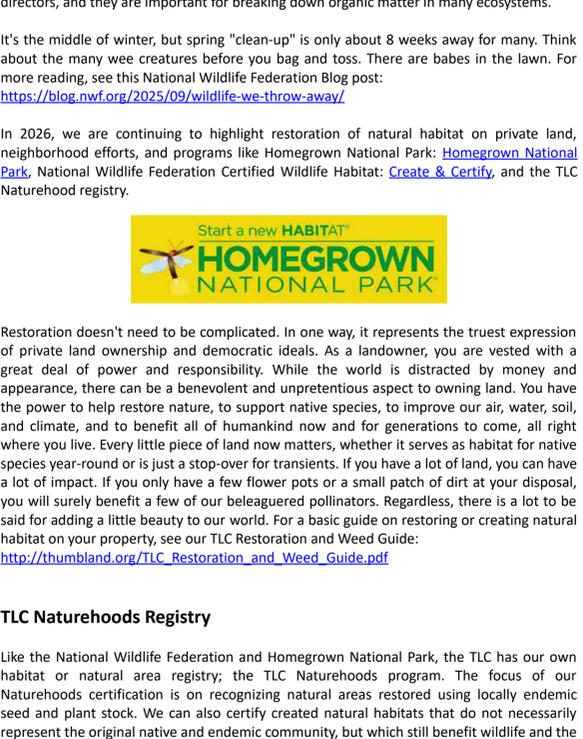


Left to right: Bern Smith, Chris Powell, and Bess Touma.

Bess's and Chris's brother, Mike Touma, who passed away in March of 2025, turned his love for Lake Huron into a successful career as a naval architect in Washington, DC. Mike's wife Patsi was born and raised in Gaylord, Michigan, but also grew to love Port Huron. They would often vacation there with their children Andy, Laurie and Kevin. Their sister Carol lives in Oceanside, California with her husband Don. Two sisters carried their love of the outdoors with them as they moved west of the Rockies. Carol lives in Oceanside, California with her husband Don. Lucy, lives in Park City, Utah with her husband Chris and daughters Catherine and Natalie.

Now living in Washington DC, Bess, Chris, and her husband Bern, are birders, outdoor enthusiasts, and involved in local and national conservation issues. Chris retired as Chief of Staff of the National Park Service. Bess manages the planned giving program for the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, California. Bern is retired from a career in property restoration in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has been involved with building public trails and provided the TLC with advice and references to help with our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Trail.

Bess, Chris, and Bern are avid supporters of the TLC, having first learned about our work in 2020 through an article in the Port Huron Times Herald about our Bidwell Sanctuary acquisition and Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project. They were immediately attracted to the work of the TLC and contacted us for more information. After a few phone discussions with TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, they made the decision to financially support the conservancy.



Left to right: Bess Touma and Chris Powell sitting on the White Bench at the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Bill Collins.

The Touma family stays current on what is happening in the Port Huron area and visits from time-to-time for family gatherings, as they did on August 22, 2025 when 10 family members and friends joined 8 TLC staff, board members, and volunteers for a walk on our new Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot where they saw first-hand the important natural features being protected by the TLC. The tour pointed out the importance of the dune and swale complex of forested ridges and wetlands that run parallel just west of the Lake Huron shore. Since their childhood was focused on the lake, Bess and Chris were not intimately familiar with this unique and important natural area just west of the lake. Having the opportunity to walk on it and learn from the TLC deepened their commitment to the conservancy.



At "The Grove" on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Left to right: Dave Ladensack, Monica Bannigan, Jake Defrain, Teddy Wileya, Bern Smith in back, Patricia Touma in front of Berna, Joyce Savage, Bill Savage, Laurie Wileya, Bess Touma in front of Teddy, Bob Eppley behind Teddy, Connie Neese, Audrey Eppley, Dan Rhein, Travis Jodway, Blake Short, and Chris Powell. Photograph by Bill Collins.

After our walk on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary, we were joined by a few more people and had a nice opportunity to meet for lunch at a house on Lake Huron where we shared stories and discussed various TLC projects and issues. It was there that the Touma family pledged a substantial donation to the TLC; this in addition to their already generous donations. At the same time, the TLC was in the process of acquiring a new 31.62-acre parcel on the north side of Brace Road; a critical part of our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. Because of the generosity and encouragement of Bess, Chris, and Bern, the TLC Executive Board chose to honor them by naming our new preserve the "Touma Family Sanctuary".

Although the Toumas no longer live in Michigan, preserving the remaining parcels of dune and swale forest along Lake Huron is in their hearts. They know that as more people discover this wonderful area, development will increase, and the time to preserve these resources will have passed. They are proud to be a part of this effective and impactful organization and look forward to working together to protect the natural heritage of Michigan's Thumb region. The family is honored to have the Touma Family Sanctuary named in their honor. They hope residents and visitors will enjoy and appreciate the Touma Family Sanctuary and will also support the work of the TLC. They look forward to future trips where they will spend time enjoying the solace of this sanctuary and seeing first-hand which birds, frogs, snakes and rare plant species are calling the area home.

We truly appreciate the support and enthusiasm of the Touma family.

You Got The Power To Restore and Fix in 2026

Save Nature Any Place □ Sustain Native Animals & Plants

Wildlife Thrown Away

Fallen leaves are vital for wildlife. They provide food, insulation, cover, and a place for wildlife to overwinter, among other benefits. When homeowners dispose of fallen leaves, they not only throw away organic gold, they destroy habitat and condemn the wildlife hidden among the leaves to the landfill, compost facility, or incinerator. Have you ever considered how much wildlife is in those leaves? Everything from moths, cocoons, caterpillars, firefly larvae, spiders, sowbugs, centipedes, millipedes, worms, toads, salamanders, and many others. What might future archaeologists digging through the layers of our landfills think about us?

Known as sowbugs, roly-polies, woodlice, and many other names, these little terrestrial crustaceans have fascinated children for ages, including future executive directors, and they are important for breaking down organic matter in many ecosystems.

It's the middle of winter, but spring "clean-up" is only about 8 weeks away for many. Think about the many we create before you bag and toss. There are babes in the lawn. For more reading, see this National Wildlife Federation Blog post: <https://blog.nwf.org/2025/09/wildlife-we-throw-away/>

In 2026, we are continuing to highlight restoration of natural habitat on private land, neighborhood efforts, and programs like Homegrown National Park: [Homegrown National Park](#), National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat: [Create & Certify](#), and the TLC Naturehood registry.

Restoration doesn't need to be complicated. In one way, it represents the truest expression 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 money and appearance, there can be a benevolent and unpretentious aspect to 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 now matters, 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 a lot of impact. If you only have a few flower pots or a small patch of dirt at your disposal, you will surely benefit a few of our beleaguered pollinators. Regardless, there is a lot to be said for adding a little beauty to our world. For a basic guide on restoring or creating natural habitat on your property, see our TLC Restoration and Weed Guide: http://thumbland.org/TLC_Restoration_and_Weed_Guide.pdf

TLC Naturehoods Registry

Like the National Wildlife Federation and Homegrown National Park, the TLC has our own habitat or natural area registry; the TLC Naturehoods 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 by connecting 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 Board of Directors

Cheryl Collins, President
Marlette, Michigan

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 wetland 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 Commissioner.

Katherine "Kay" Cumbow
Cottrellville, Michigan

Kay Cumbow of the Brown City area was 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
North Street, Michigan

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
Yale, Michigan

Fred Fuller grew up in 1990, Yale, Michigan and has lived most of his life there, serving as Mayor of the City of Yale in 1991, 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 Geological Research from Boston University, he started a company, Huron Genealogy Services LLC, to assist people searching for ancestors and creating family histories.

Daniel Rhein
Port Huron, Michigan

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 a many obscure plant species, especially grasses and shrubs. Dan graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Fisheries and Wildlife. 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 1990's, 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
Port Huron, Michigan

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 20's, 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 during 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
Fargo, North Dakota

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 Pulitzers, 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
Marlette, Michigan
mail@thumbland.org

Bill Collins of Brown City - Marlette is a naturalist and botanist who grew up in Fort Gratiot and Port Huron townships. 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 Bachelors 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, employed 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
Marysville, Michigan

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.

Jake Defrain, Stewardship Assistant
Fort Gratiot, Michigan

Jake started working as a volunteer with the TLC in the spring of 2025. He took the lead in trail clearing and maintenance on our Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary and Cunningham Connector Sanctuary.

Jason Sawyer, Stewardship Assistant
Capac, Michigan

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 further 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.

Nicky Marcot, Development Director
Detroit, Michigan

Nicky is the first professional development director hired by the TLC, starting in August of 2025. With her help, the TLC transformed its e-mail newsletter, created new fundraising materials, inquired or applied to new potential funders, and is in the process of completely revitalizing our web site. We are also increasing our presence on social media.

Nicky began working as a development director for the TLC in August of 2025. Marcot is an environmental activist, free-lance strategist, home-school parent, and urban farmer, living on the west side of Detroit. Raised in the city, Nicky earned her BA in Secondary Education and English from University of Detroit Mercy in 2007, and MA in Linguistics from Wayne State University in 2014.

Early in her career she worked as an educator in urban settings, focused on literacy. She then branched into grassroots nonprofit organizing work in a number of neighborhood based organizations centered around community revitalization, urban gardening and food security. Since 2018, deep concern for the environment has led her into environmental and conservation activism as a volunteer with Moms Clean Air Force and Michigan Climate Action Network, as well more recently with Coalition for a Clean Rouge River and the Wayne County Conservation District.

In 2022 she began working as strategist for Sidewalk Detroit, leading infrastructural improvements, natural areas restoration and programming efforts in Detroit's third largest park - Eliza Howell. In 2025 she launched her business, Rhizome Services, as a free-lance strategist for a number of regional environmental and conservation nonprofits.

TLC Organization

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

TLC Web Site
ThumbLand.org

TLC Web Site Host
LochánDé IT Services, LLC
Port Huron, Michigan
LochanDelT.com

TLC Legal Counsel
Lozen Davidson and Kover, P.C.
Port Huron, Michigan
LozenLaw.com

TLC Accountant
Rovano Accounting
Sterling Heights, Michigan

TLC Real Estate Representative
Summit Realty, LLC
Lakeport, Michigan

TLC Contractors
Koester Maintenance and Building Repair
Fort Gratiot, Michigan

R.A. Duthler Land Surveyor
Imlay City, Michigan
DuthlerLandSurveyor.com

Lighthouse Lawncare & Irrigation
Lakeport, Michigan
LighthouseLci.com

TLC Financial Institution
Tri-County Bank
Brown City, Michigan
Tri-CountyBank.bank

TLC Liability Insurance
Conserv-A-Nation Insurance Program
Underwritten by Chubb Group of Insurance Companies
Alliant Insurance Services, Inc.
Franey Muha Commercial Group
Chantilly, Virginia
AlliantInsurance.com

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

TLC Memberships and Affiliations
Land Trust Alliance
Washington, DC
LandTrustAlliance.org

Clyde Historical Society
Clyde, Michigan
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481890455361159/about/>

TLC Tax Statements

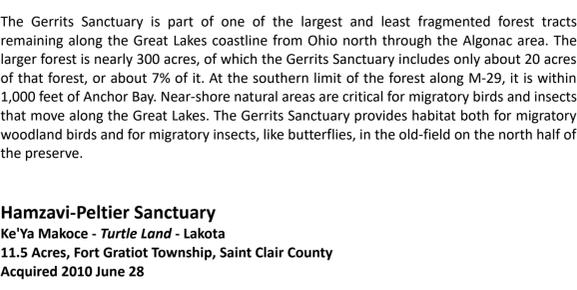
Annual tax statements of the Thumb Land Conservancy are available upon request and at the following IRS web site: <https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/>

| 2024 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 | 130,619 |
| 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 local tax assessments, less than 1% for special events, mainly the 2024 Thumb Heritage Festival, and less than 1% 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. | |

| 2025 Projected IRS Tax Statement Summary | |
|---|----------|
| Total Revenue | 185,313 |
| Total Expenses | -300,017 |
| Net Income | -114,704 |
| Revenue | |
| General Contributions | 4,113 |
| Touma Family Sanctuary Donation | 145,000 |
| Bay Area Community Foundation | 20,000 |
| Carls Foundation Match Grant Donation | 10,000 |
| Four County Community Foundation | 1,500 |
| Lexington Park Inspection & Report | 200 |
| Morley Sanctuary Appraisal Reimbursement | 4,500 |
| Total Revenue | 185,313 |
| Expenses | |
| Touma Family Sanctuary Purchase | -201,666 |
| Cunningham Connector Purchase | -60,964 |
| Appraisals, Permits, Legal, etc. | -6,762 |
| Stewardship, Projects | -16,178 |
| Preserve Materials & Maintenance | -3,529 |
| Local Tax Assessments | -7,007 |
| Liability Insurance | -1,121 |
| Sibley Prairie Promotion | -1,000 |
| Lochan De IT - TLC Web Site Upgrades | -300 |
| Lochan De IT - TLC Web Site Upgrades | -1,490 |
| Total Expenses | -300,017 |
| Net Income | -114,704 |
| In 2025, 160% of TLC revenue was used for preserve acquisition. Factoring-in funds budgeted in 2024 for future land acquisition, the TLC spent 80% of its 2024-25 land acquisition revenue. 9% of TLC revenue was used to pay three workers for preserve stewardship. 2% of TLC revenue was used for preserve improvement. 4% of TLC revenue was used to pay local tax assessments. Less than 5% of TLC revenue was used for administrative costs, including liability insurance, legal counsel, and small miscellaneous costs. | |

TLC Properties

Dead End Woods Sanctuary
Makadewagmitiggweyainniwak - 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-hazelnut. The upland is dominated by Red Cherry, Red Oak, Sassafras, Black Cherry, Witch-hazel, 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 Gumzel, Black Ash, Butterfern, Spicebush, Tuliptree, Cardinal Flower, Indian Pipe, Black Walnut, 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 striders, and various protozoa, all generally indicating high water quality.

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



Black Cherry, American Beech, and Sugar Maple from 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, Spinelove 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 Algonac 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.

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

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

The Hamzavi-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 Rasperry, the Lower Peninsula's equivalent of the Upper Peninsula's Thimbleberry, Yellow Lady-slipper orchids, and a variety 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 1879. 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

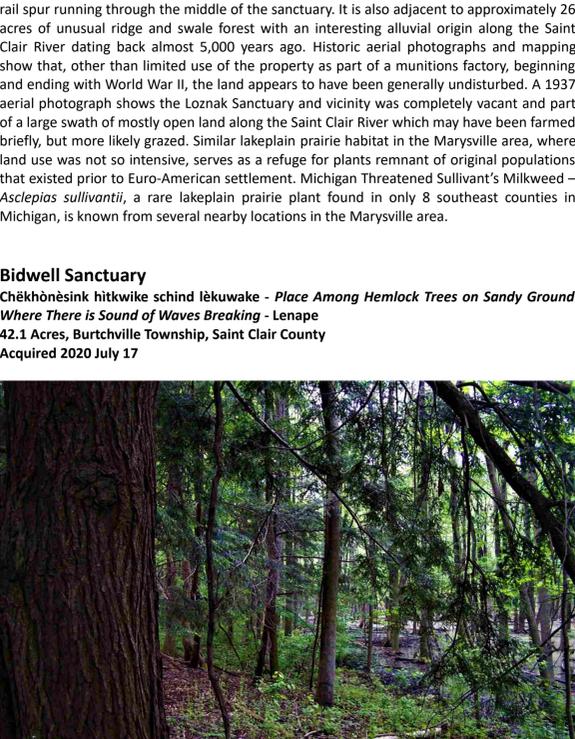


TLC field trip group in October 2020 at Bertha's Haven Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

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 Bertha 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

Yānhdawa' yeh de yenhtha' iyaen' - 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



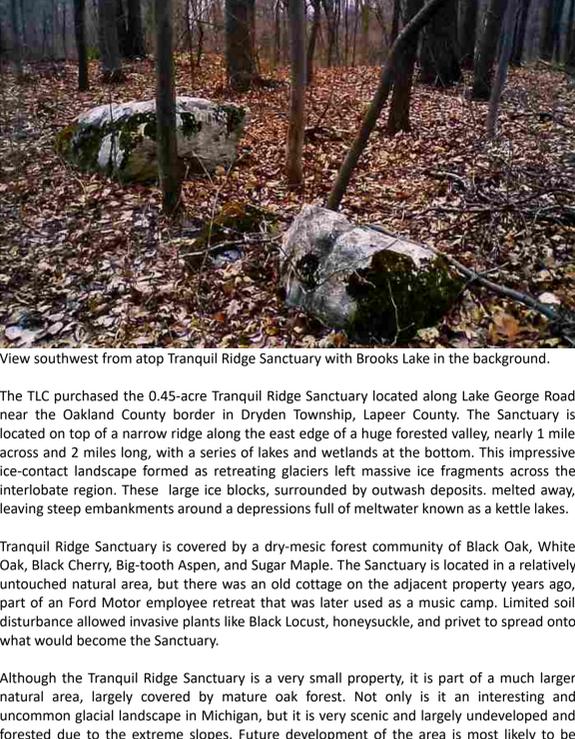
Monarch butterflies on Tall Boneset on the Loznak Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

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 Oatgrass. A unique plant species on the Loznak Sanctuary is Tall Boneset, a relatively recent arrival from the east coast via railroads, but uncommon and not recorded any 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 Sullivant'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

Chékhòhènsink hitkwike schind lèkuwake - 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 swale 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.

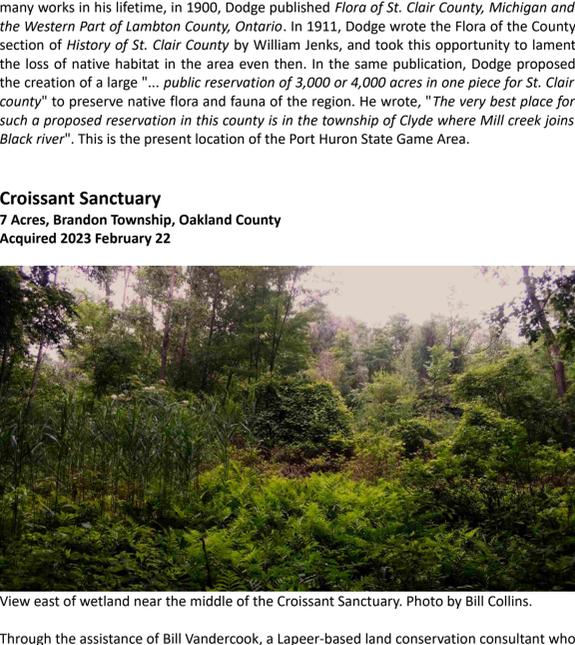
The Bidwell Sanctuary is an important part of the proposed Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park, a band of several preserves and parks extending along Lake Huron through Fort Gratiot and Burtchville Townships. The preserves are generally inaccessible to the public and somewhat disconnected from each other, 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 mucky 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 Raspbery, almost identical to Thimbleberry of the Upper Peninsula, Yellow Lady-slipper orchid, Pink Lady-slipper orchid, Eastern Hogsnose 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.

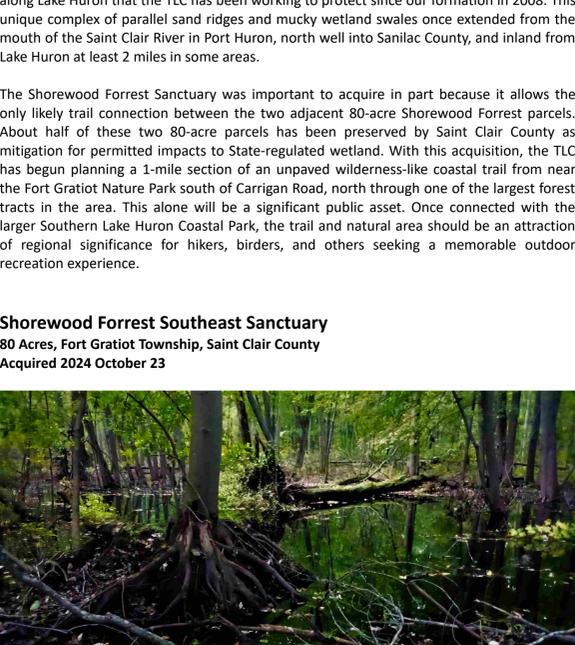
The TLC purchased the 0.45-acre Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary along Lake George Road near the Oakland County border in Dryden Township, Lapeer County. The Sanctuary is located on top of a narrow ridge along the east edge of a huge forested valley, nearly 1 mile across and 2 miles long, with a series of lakes 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 in France in 1857, the TLC thought it appropriate to be limited to very disperse 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



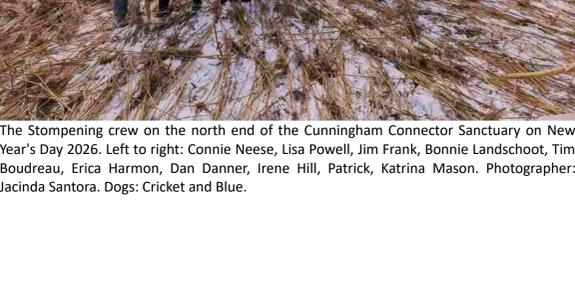
Black Oak, Red Oak, and White Oak on the Full Circle Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

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



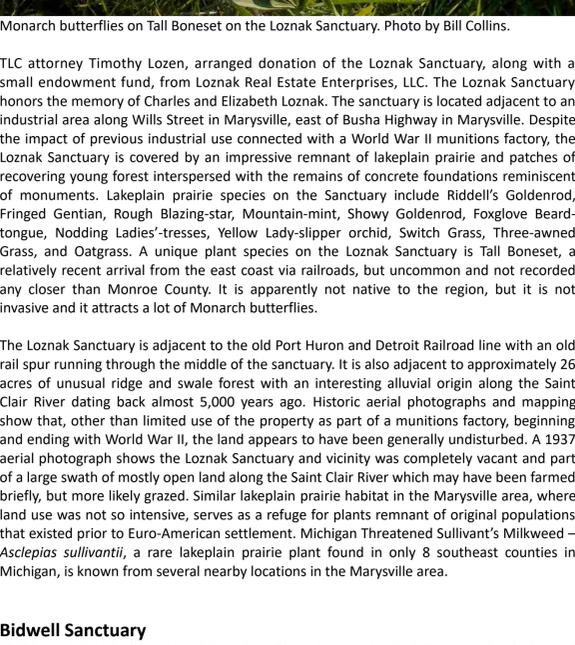
Marginal swamp forest with tip-up mounds on the Charles Dodge Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

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 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 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.

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.

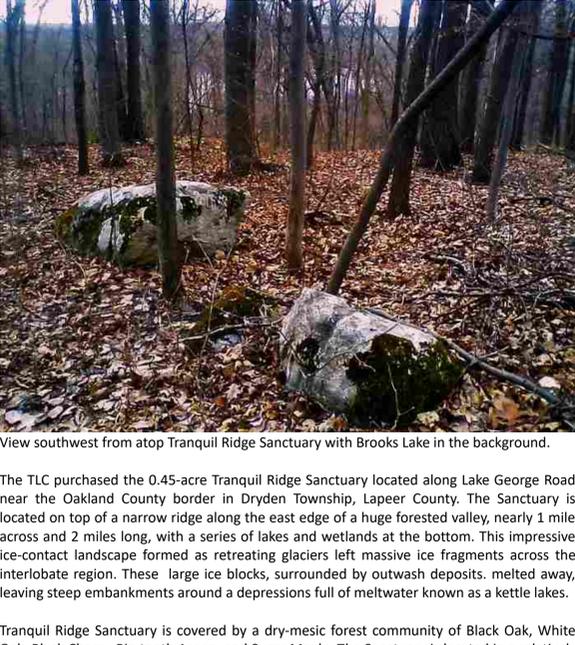
Through the assistance of Bill Vandercook, a Lapeer-based land conservation consultant who has worked with landowners in the region for many years, the TLC was given a generous donation of about 10 acres of property from Dr. Paul Croissant of Clarkston. Dr. Croissant was a neurological surgeon with Trinity Health in Pontiac and practiced in Oakland County since 1970. Dr. Croissant has 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 Forrest 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 Forrest Northeast Sanctuary

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



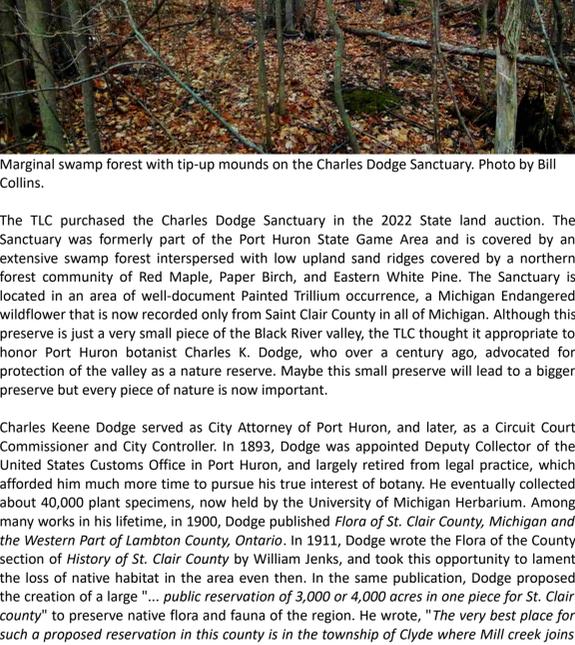
Wetland swale on the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

With generous grant funding from The Carls Foundation and income from the sale of the M-15 commercial frontage of the Croissant property donated 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 Forrest subdivision in Fort Gratiot. The Shorewood Forrest 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 Forrest Sanctuary was important to acquire in part because it allows the only likely trail connection between the two adjacent 80-acre Shorewood Forrest parcels. About half of these two 80-acre parcels has been 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 Forrest Southeast Sanctuary

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



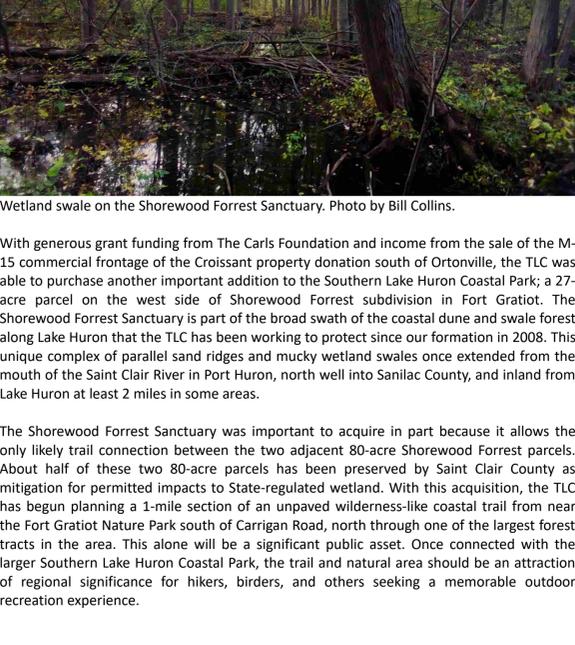
Wetland swale on the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary. Photo by Bill Collins.

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 Forrest subdivision in Fort Gratiot. The Shorewood Forrest 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 Forrest 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.

Cunningham Connector Sanctuary

5 Acres, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2025 January 10



The Stomping crew on the north end of the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary on New Year's Day 2026. Left to right: Connie Neese, Lisa Powell, Jim Frank, Bonnie Landschoot, Tim Boudreau, Erica Harmon, Dan Danner, Irene Hill, Patrick, Katrina Mason. Photographer: Jacinda Santora. Dogs: Cricket and Blue.

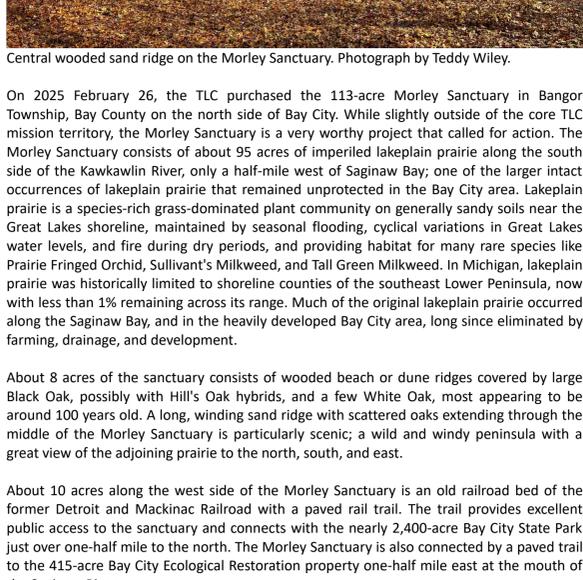
The TLC purchased the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary in the 2025 State land auction. The Sanctuary was formerly part of the Port Huron State Game Area and is covered by an extensive swamp forest interspersed with low upland sand ridges covered by oaks. It is also located in an area of well-documented 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.

On 2025 January 10, the TLC closed on the 5-acre Cunningham Connector Sanctuary on the south side of Carrigan Road in Fort Gratiot Township. Except for having to cross Carrigan Road, this preserve connects our 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary with the 152-acre Fort Gratiot Park to the south. The south end of the preserve still contains intact dune and swale forest, extending south to the 40-acre pond on the Fort Gratiot Nature Park. The Cunningham Connector Sanctuary was named in honor of the former owners; the Cunningham family.

Purchase of the Cunningham Connector Sanctuary was made possible by funding provided by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council with assistance from the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited in Dexter, Michigan.

Morley Sanctuary
113 Acres, Bangor Township, Bay County
Acquired 2025 February 26



Central wooded sand ridge on the Morley Sanctuary. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

On 2025 February 26, the TLC purchased the 113-acre Morley Sanctuary in Bangor Township, Bay County on the north side of Bay City. While slightly outside of the core TLC mission territory, the Morley Sanctuary is a very worthy project that called for action. The Morley Sanctuary consists of about 95 acres of imperiled lakeplain prairie along the south side of the Kawkawlin River, only a half-mile west of Saginaw Bay; one of the larger intact occurrences of lakeplain prairie that remained unprotected in the Bay City area. Lakeplain prairie is a species-rich grass-dominated plant community on generally sandy soils near the Great Lakes shoreline, maintained by seasonal flooding, cyclical variations in Great Lakes water levels, and fire during dry periods, and providing habitat for many rare species like Prairie Fringed Orchid, Sullivant's Milkweed, and Tall Green Milkweed. In Michigan, lakeplain prairie was historically limited to shoreline counties of the southeast Lower Peninsula, now with less than 1% remaining across its range. Much of the original lakeplain prairie occurred along the Saginaw Bay, and in the heavily developed Bay City area, long since eliminated by farming, drainage, and development.

About 8 acres of the sanctuary consists of wooded beach or dune ridges covered by large Black Oak, possibly with Hill's Oak hybrids, and a few White Oak, most appearing to be around 100 years old. A long, winding sand ridge with scattered oaks extending through the middle of the Morley Sanctuary is particularly scenic; a wild and windy peninsula with a great view of the adjoining prairie to the north, south, and east.

About 10 acres along the west side of the Morley Sanctuary is an old railroad bed of the former Detroit and Mackinac Railroad with a paved rail trail. The trail provides excellent public access to the sanctuary and connects with the nearly 2,400-acre Bay City State Park just over one-half mile to the north. The Morley Sanctuary is also connected by a paved trail to the 415-acre Bay City Ecological Restoration property one-half mile east at the mouth of the Saginaw River.

The Morley Sanctuary even contains the remnants of an historic open-pit coal mine dating back at least to the late 1800s. The pit has since been largely filled and is partially a pond. An old railroad spur bed is still visible across the lakeplain prairie where coal was hauled from the pit to the main section of the Detroit and Mackinac Railroad.

The Morley Sanctuary was named in honor of the previous owner, Jack Morley, and his family.

Acquisition of the 113-acre Morley Sanctuary was made possible by a Wetland Conservation Program grant from Ducks Unlimited and Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The Wetland Conservation Program is 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.

Touma Family Sanctuary
31.62 Acres, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County
Acquired 2025 October 29



Eastern Hognose Snake on the Touma Family Sanctuary. Photograph by Ray Peltier.

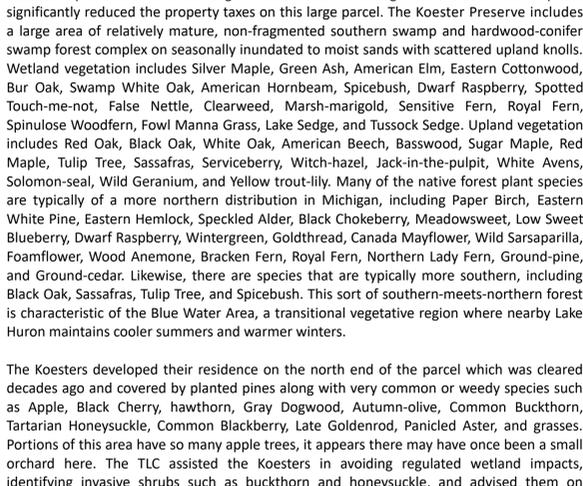
On 2025 October 29, the TLC acquired the 31.62-acre Touma Family Sanctuary, located north of Brace Road at Parker Road in Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County. The Touma Family Sanctuary is a critical connection between the north and south halves of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

The Touma Family Sanctuary is located on the western-most dune ridge of the dune and swale complex in Saint Clair County, part of the same ridge that runs southeast to near the Blue Water Bridges in Port Huron and upon which Lakeside Cemetery and Saint Mary's Cemetery are located. Much of this large dune ridge on the Touma Family Sanctuary was mined for sand decades ago, but most of it remains intact, consisting of a mix of sparsely vegetated dune-like open sand, and wooded shrub thickets with Black Oak and what appear to be Hill's Oak. This is the site where, several years ago, Ray Peltier pulled a large Eastern Hognose Snake from its burrow in the main sand ridge, the photograph of which the TLC has used in promoting the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

The Touma Family Sanctuary was named in honor of sisters Bess Touma, Chris Powell, and their family. They grew up in Port Huron where their father, Dr. George C. Touma, was a dentist for many years. Having lived on the shoreline, the Touma family developed a great appreciation of Lake Huron and went on to careers and lives centered on protection and enjoyment of the natural environment.

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.

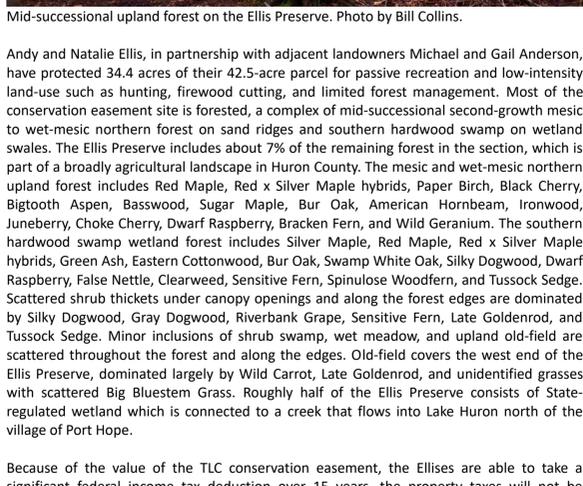
Bob Putze was the first residential landowner to place a conservation easement on his land with the TLC. His property adjoins the Port Huron State Game Area along the west side of Abbottsford Road just south of Ruby. It is a nice northern forest community with lots of Eastern White Pine, and tall Red 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



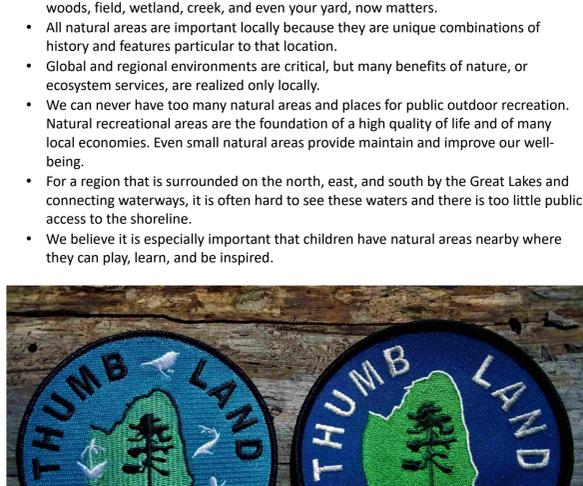
Red Maple, Red Oak, and American Beech sapling on the Koester Preserve. Photo by Bill Collins.

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 swamp 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 Avenis, 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 Hawthorn, Gray Dogwood with very common or weedy species such as Apple, Black Cherry, planked pines along with Silver Maple, Red Maple, Red x Silver Maple hybrids, 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, Junberry, 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, 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 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, Junberry, 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, 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

The Thumb Land Conservancy (TLC) was founded in 2008 to preserve natural areas, protect native species, provide places for outdoor recreation, and to educate the public about our natural environment in Michigan's Thumb, a largely neglected region with a lot of great natural features.

TLC Territory

The TLC works to protect natural areas in six counties of the Thumb region, including Saint Clair, Sanilac, Huron, Tuscola, Lapeer, and Macomb Counties. The TLC also works in adjacent areas as opportunities arise, where we seek to work with other conservancies and similar organizations.

The Thumb of Michigan is 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. Many fascinating natural features remain in the Thumb region, very worthy of protection, including:

- Lake Huron, Saginaw Bay, Saint Clair River, Lake Saint Clair
- Saint Clair River Delta, one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world
- Black River, Mill River, Cass River, Flint River, Clinton River, Pine River, Belle River, Salt River, Sebawaing River, Pigeon River, Pinnebog River, Rush Lake, New River, Willow Creek, and many tributaries
- 29 State Game and Wildlife Areas
- 6 State Parks and Recreation Areas
- Post-glacial landscapes with lakeplain, till plains, outwash plains, hills, pothole lakes, eskers like Deanville Mountain, and moraines like the Port Huron Moraine
- Lake Huron bluffs, scenic overlooks
- Lake Huron creek ravines, nearly 200 with northern flora
- Sandstone outcrops near the tip of the Thumb, one of very few outcrops
- Sand Point, large sand spit extending 4 miles into Saginaw Bay
- Beaches and dunes
- Great Lakes marsh
- Dune and swale forest, a complex of sand ridges and muck swales
- Lakeplain prairie, less than 1% remains
- Lakeplain oak openings, less than 1% remains
- Wet-mesic flatwoods, very limited originally, less than 1% remains
- Hardwood swamp forest
- Conifer swamp forest
- Bogs
- Minden Bog, 8 square miles, one of southern-most raised bogs in North America
- Northern and southern upland forests
- Floodplain forest
- Over 200 imperiled species including Lake Sturgeon, Eastern Sand Darter, Northern Riffleshell mussel, Rayed Green mussel, Eastern Fox Snake, King Rail, Cerulean Warbler, Prairie White-fringed Orchid, and Painted Trillium

TLC Principles - Why We Protect

- There has been a misconception that little is worth saving in the Thumb because of agriculture and development. Much of the region has been drastically altered, but many high quality natural areas remain, not unlike those that existed prior to Euro-American settlement about 200 years ago. These are the last vestiges of our regional natural heritage.
- The TLC works to protect exemplary natural areas and also small remnants, all now important.
- The TLC also promotes restoration of native habitat on private land. Despite the broad alteration of our region, even degraded fragments can be restored, expanded, and often serve as isolated havens for small populations of native plants and animals that have been present for centuries.
- Given the widespread destruction of nature across the world, every plant, animal, woods, field, wetland, creek, and even your yard, now matters.
- All natural areas are important, locally because they are unique combinations of history and features particular to that location.
- Global and regional environments are critical, but many benefits of nature, or ecosystem services, are realized only locally.
- We can never have too many natural areas and places for public outdoor recreation. Natural recreational areas are the foundation of a high quality of life and of many local economies. Even small natural areas provide maintain and improve our well-being.
- For a region that is surrounded on the north, east, and south by the Great Lakes and connecting waterways, it is often hard to see these waters and there is too little public access to the shoreline.
- We believe it is especially important that children have natural areas nearby where they can play, learn, and be inspired.

