

Making a Difference

Protecting and Preserving Southern Michigan

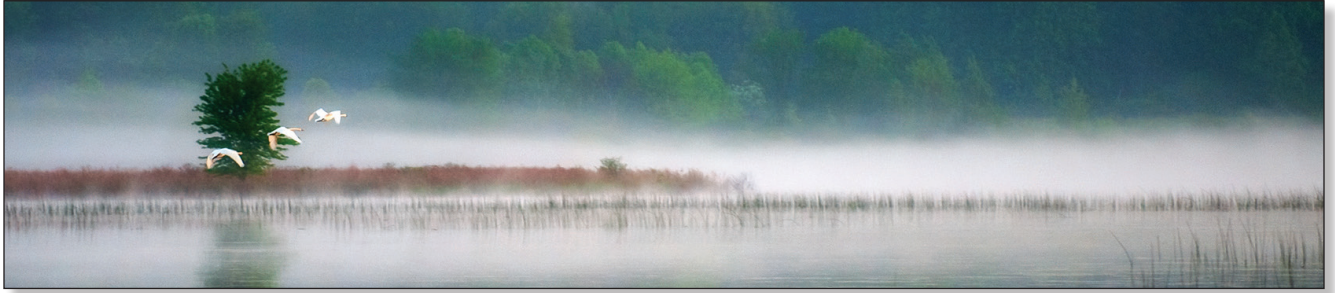


photo: Paul Morrison

“If you would go far, go together.”



By Susan Lackey
Executive Director

I may as well begin with a confession. I've begun writing this at least four times now. I find it very easy to say “thank you” to you, Legacy's staunchest supporters, for all you have allowed us to accomplish in the past decade. But, realizing that this is my final *Making a Difference* makes it difficult to put into words my personal journey with you.

Trying to frame my thoughts, I went back to my very first *Making a Difference*, in the spring of 2005. We were proud to tell you that our endowment had, after 34 years,



Barn dance, 2009

finally reached a size that justified professional management. Today, our Forever Fund and endowment combined have reached nearly three-quarters of a million dollars. Building that fund was a condition of Legacy's receiving national accreditation, and you responded, allowing us to raise \$500,000 in the midst of the worst recession of our generation.

Building capacity

That first *Making a Difference* was the product of a staff of three, none of whom had deep conservation skills. We knew we did good work, but we also knew that work was limited by our knowledge. Over the past 10 years, we, as a growing staff, have built an internal skill-set that now includes naturalists, botanists, landscape architects and other technical professionals. As a result, our work is broader and deeper, and

our promise of “forever” more secure than ever. That skill-set comes with a cost, and you have helped give us the courage to commit to a young, smart staff that will take Legacy into the next generation.

In that 2005 letter, we highlighted our third farmland protection project, for which we had just received a federal grant. Today, our farmland protection staff serves as a resource to a national learning network, and we are frequently consulted by other conservancies and by our federal partners on best practices. We serve as staff to Washtenaw County's Natural Areas Protection Program farmland component, and are developing innovative programs to help ensure land access to a new generation of aspiring farmers.

Envisioning The Arc

Behind the scenes ten years ago, we were planning for a Board retreat that would ask the critical question: “What will our community look like if we are successful?” From that retreat evolved a series of land priorities in farmland, fresh waters, and public recreation that ultimately became our “Emerald Arc” vision. As you know, we are currently in the first phase of funding the capacity we need to make the Emerald Arc vision a reality.



Community Farm of Ann Arbor

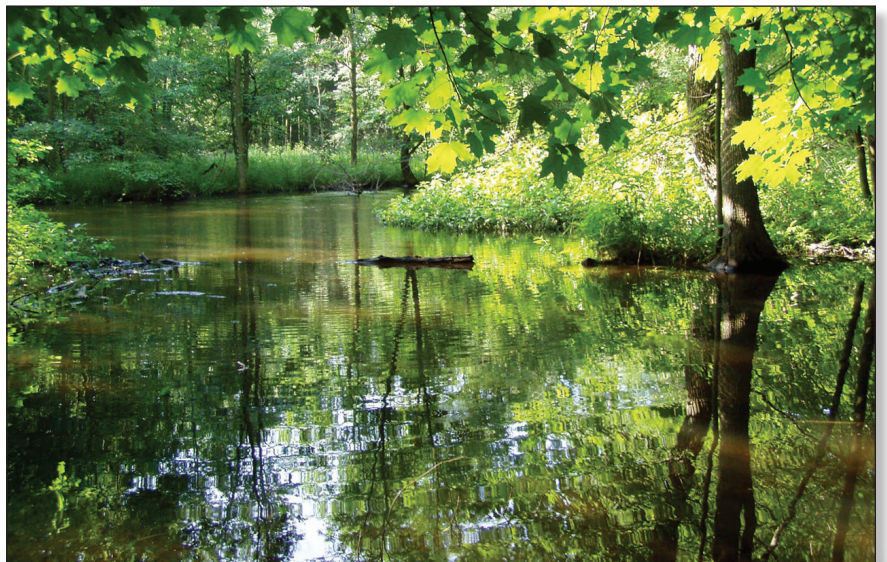
I'm most excited by the fact that our conservation partners throughout southeast Michigan are beginning to talk about the Emerald Arc as a regional asset, not just in Washtenaw

support
the

and Jackson counties, but beginning at Lake St. Clair and spanning the region. This vision is the continuation of a legacy left to us by

community leaders who began the Huron-Clinton Metroparks and state park system in the depth of the Great Depression, knowing that the future of our state and region was bright, and that the pressure on our natural resources would be great.

As we talked here in the office that first summer of mine, we realized we needed partners if we were going to be successful. You've often heard me quote former Land Trust Alliance President Rand Wentworth on the subject: “If you would go fast, go alone. If you would go far, go



On the River Raisin – Susan's first easement

together.” We opted for far, and helped to establish Preserve Washtenaw, to bring together conservancies and governments engaged in conservation here. Today, Washtenaw County is recognized as one of the national leaders in conservation, due in no small part to the fact that the diverse priorities and funding sources of the partners make it possible to work creatively with landowners to conserve the most important places.

Sustaining partnerships

Partnerships have remained a thread for Legacy. In Jackson County, with Dahlem Conservancy, Jackson Audubon, the Waterloo Hunt Club, and others. In southeast Michigan, with our SEMIWILD partners, and a focus on the Huron River. Statewide, with Heart of the Lakes, which I’m proud to chair, and with state agencies. Nationally, with partners such as The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, The Conservation Fund and others, whose national and global priorities frequently overlap with our, more locally important, goals.



You have made this partnership work possible as well. Time and commitment are necessary to build and nurture these relationships. Your support has allowed us to expand our staff, and made it possible for us to complete our core mission, while looking to the future and the long-term benefits these relationships provide.

All of this could, of course, have been



Landowner gathering

great fun, very gratifying, and still not terribly successful. But, I’m proud to say it has worked.

In 2005, we had conserved 1800 acres in our 34 years. One board member would ask me each and every meeting: “When are we going to get off that number?” Today, with an even more rigorous process for determining what land we will conserve, we have protected 6300 acres, and that number will have grown significantly by the time you receive this letter. In 2005, we owned four nature preserves, open to the public. Today, that number is six, and we are using them in new and interesting ways.



Wine in the woods

Increasing access

In addition to providing great places for our partners to host educational programming, we bring our own unique twist to programming we initiate. You may have attended our “Scratch and Sniff” hikes, our strolling (through the woods) wine tastings, or our annual “10 Minutes Off the Interstate” bus tour. We think these programs reflect the personality of our community, while connecting people more deeply with the land around them.

The future holds great things for this organization we have built together. In 2015, we completed a new strategic framework, designed to give my successor a point of beginning. Legacy is going to continue to increase the pace of conservation, particularly as we continue to increase our understanding of the conservation interests of Jackson County. We will go back to our roots, more deeply engaging with the community at large to understand how our work can help build the place we want to live, work and play in—now and into the future. We will continue to focus on the future and provide leadership to the conservation movement, while increasing our commitment to work in the here and now.

Focusing forward

I know these results will accrue, because I know you will support the work that will enable Legacy to accomplish them. The next *Making a Difference* will be crafted by a new executive director, with new ideas on how to move the organization forward. Together, the volunteers, landowners, donors and staff of Legacy will help shape those ideas and continue the journey, begun 44 years ago, when our community first realized it could make a difference, conserving the most valuable lands, protecting our natural resources, and maintaining a vibrant and attractive place to live. I will enjoy watching you do it together.



Reichert Preserve dedication



photo: Callum Gray



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