

THE UNDERSTORY

The Newsletter of Legacy Land Conservancy

Spring



2017



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Ring in Spring at Legacy's nature preserves | pages 6-7

Excitement builds over rare birds at Watkins Lake | page 8

LEGACY
Land Conservancy

Innovative local partnership brings \$1.8 million to protect Huron River

By Meghan Prindle, Community and Landowner Outreach Coordinator



John Lloyd

The Huron River is the cleanest urban river in Michigan and provides clean drinking water for half a million people, so there's a lot at stake in keeping it healthy.

A lot has changed since the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) was created in the depths of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s—but the agency's commitment to innovation remains strong. NRCS strategies include local conservation districts, cost-share programs, watershed-wide planning initiatives, and rental payments for converting cropland to grassland and forest. NRCS has continued to push the envelope as each generation's conservation challenges arise.

Today, that innovative spirit lives on in yet another way (one that involves Legacy): the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Facing budget cuts prior to the renewal of the 2014 Farm Bill, lawmakers—including Michigan's own Senator Debbie Stabenow—got creative. They addressed cuts by creating a program that puts local partners (like us!) in the driver's seat, rewards teamwork, and streamlines funding by targeting watershed-specific natural resource concerns.

What is RCPP?

RCPP is a competitive program that earmarks additional funding to be spent by NRCS programs in a specific project area. Legacy is proud to be the lead partner on our local RCPP project, *The Huron River Initiative* (one of eight projects in Michigan). The Huron River watershed provides clean drinking water and abundant outdoor recreation opportunities for its half-million residents. As the cleanest urban river in Michigan, the Huron is a showcase for what's at stake in keeping it healthy.

Our partnership secured \$1.8 million in federal NRCS direct-to-landowner funding over the next five years in our project area, which extends from just north of Ann Arbor upstream to the Huron's headwaters in White Lake and Highland.

This is great news for our region. The very competitive RCPP process provides partners greater flexibility and control when navigating traditional NRCS programs. The result? Now landowners can more easily tap into funds

for projects on their property that improve water quality and protect the Huron River.

How it works

Our RCPP partnership (see **Partners**, right) will help local landowners directly access this special federal funding for purchase of conservation easements, wetland restoration, and implementation of farmland best-management practices, such as buffer zones and cover crops. These approaches will protect 400 acres of farmland in an area at high risk of loss to development, and will reduce runoff-related pollution to the Huron River (and ultimately to Lake Erie).

A critical part of this project is leveraging partners' strengths, including experience with farmland protection, a taxpayer-supported millage, a dedicated volunteer base, and outreach capacity. This specially designated \$1.8 million is quite an investment in the health of our region's land and waters. I like to think that NRCS's continued innovation is comparable to Legacy's own evolution, with RCPP providing yet another boost to securing this generation's contribution to the Emerald Arc.

If you own farmland in northern Washtenaw County and would like to learn more, please contact Meghan Prindle, Legacy's Outreach Coordinator, at 734-302-5263 or meghan@legacylandconservancy.org.

Special thanks to the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan, the James A. and Faith Knight Foundation, and the Carls Foundation for helping us lay the groundwork to earn this RCPP award.

The project will improve water quality in the Huron River through strategies including land protection, so that more properties can join this one in being permanently protected.

Photo courtesy of Ruth Thornton, Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program



Allene Smith

The Huron River Initiative will protect 400 acres of farmland in an area at high risk of farmland loss to development, in part by funding the purchase of conservation easements that enable farmers to permanently protect their land. The above farm is protected in partnership with Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission.

Partners in Protecting the Huron River Watershed

The Huron River Initiative leverages the strengths and expertise of seven partners:

- Legacy Land Conservancy (lead partner)
- Ann Arbor Greenbelt (City of Ann Arbor Openspace and Parkland Preservation Program)
- Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission
- Six Rivers Land Conservancy
- Huron River Watershed Council
- Ducks Unlimited, LLC
- Natural Resource Conservation Service



En route to protection partnerships

By Roger Valade, Legacy Development Committee volunteer

Matt Turner grew up in Ann Arbor, not far from the serpentine Huron River, and studied economics at his hometown university. He furthered his studies at the University of Monaco and earned his MBA from Webster University in Vienna. Next, he worked as an automotive-supply sales engineer and ultimately realized a dream shared by speed-entranced Matchbox-collecting children everywhere: he raced professionally for Porsche Cars GB.

Matt has since returned home and is now President and CEO of the Amherst Fund, providing capital and connections to entrepreneurs building their businesses.

Like a nearly-lost river navigator, I wound through the construction labyrinth that currently surrounds Crisler Arena to Matt's office, where Matt was eager to show me maps of the area near Legacy's

Reichert Nature Preserve that he has been studying with fellow historian Jim Woodruff. He pointed out the spot where Hugh Heward, a Detroit-based British fur trader, camped on April 4, 1790.

As Woodruff wrote in *Across Lower Michigan by Canoe 1790*, Heward was trying to find a water route from Detroit across lower Michigan to Lake Michigan (then called Lake Illinois). Such a route would save the time needed to sail all the way around our mitten. It turns out that Heward, like any good adventurer, took a wrong turn or two, but, after being redirected by local natives, he did eventually find the headwaters of the Grand River, and from there made his way to Lake Michigan and on to the village of Chicago.

Matt's enthusiasm for the local landscape and the historic river near where he grew up led him and his wife Jackie to contribute



Matt Turner paddles with his children.

On the Cover

Virginia bluebell (*Mertensia virginica*),
a showy, early spring wildflower
Photo by John Lloyd



to a Reichert Nature Preserve addition. The acquisition protects wetland habitat along Portage Creek. It keeps the creek connected to its floodplain, maintains habitat for a wide variety of plant and animal species, and prevents uses that could have contributed to erosion and water quality problems in the future. The acquisition will eventually allow public access improvements to Reichert Nature Preserve, including a parking lot, restrooms, and a footbridge over Portage Creek.

Future local history and nature lovers will be much more comfortable than Heward was on his journey and, thanks to the Turners and other donors, Legacy is helping to protect these waters and the stories they hold.



Matt added a layer of historical intrigue to Reichert Nature Preserve by sharing that in 1790, fur trader Hugh Heward canoed through the area in his quest for a water route across lower Michigan. Here, modern-day explorer Bill Steere collects modern-day trash from the creek flowing through Reichert Nature Preserve.

ENTREPRENEURIAL spirit builds community for long-term return

At Legacy an entrepreneurial spirit lies at the core of how we function. It is our job to be nimble and responsive to changes in our environment, to operate in an atmosphere of urgency, and use limited resources and strategic partnerships to leverage bigger and better results for our stakeholders—you.

We harness the energy and bold initiative of a start-up while keeping our eyes on the returns like a fully mature business. Our business model is, however, somewhat unique in that we deal with forever: the landscapes we protect are not an end to what we do, but the beginning of a permanent relationship with the land—all for the benefit of our community.

At Legacy, we look at natural areas, farmland, rivers, and woods and see the value they bring to our community. Michigan's agricultural sector creates more than \$101 billion dollars of economic activity each year. The economic value of the outdoor industry is over \$18.7 billion per year in Michigan, surpassing recreational meccas like Colorado and Oregon. Walkable communities with easy access to trails and nature attract and retain residents, from Millennials to Boomers in active retirement. Clean water consistently ranks at the top of concerns for choosing a place to locate a family.

Legacy is designed to serve our community forever. In order to build the community we wish to live in, we work together with the business community as the natural entrepreneurial partners we are.

Fresh Air & Sunshine

What can you see and do at Legacy's nature preserves during spring? Let's find out!



Kateri Fahey

Orange jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) sparkling with dewdrops at Beckwith Preserve



Kateri Fahey

Stroll the boardwalk at Beckwith.

Beckwith Preserve

This scenic preserve in Stockbridge is a quiet retreat for walking, picnicking, and bird-watching. Wide, flat trails wind through mature pine and spruce forests and along Portage Creek. On pleasant spring days, you'll find the open meadow to be a lovely spot for a sunny picnic or gazing at clouds.



Staff photo

An impressive cottonwood tree at Sharon Hills Preserve



John Lloyd

Sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis*)

Sharon Hills Preserve

Explore a wide variety of natural areas, including kettle wetlands, black walnut and aspen stands, and rolling grassy meadows. The swamps in the southeast corner of the preserve are popular resting areas for sandhill cranes. During the spring or early summer, you may hear their distinctive calls throughout the preserve.



One of three projects underway at Johnson Preserve: experimental seed plots planted by EMU students to study the best way to restore native prairies in southern Michigan

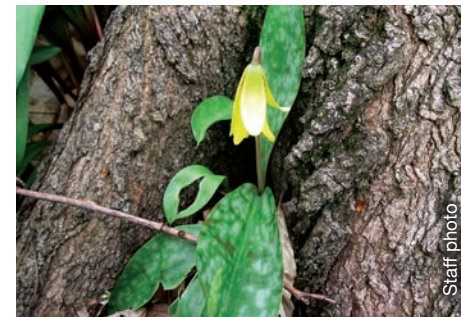
Lloyd and Mabel Johnson Preserve

In 2016 we embarked on three projects at Lloyd and Mabel Johnson Preserve to improve the land and serve our community. Learn about them on Page 8. Visit Johnson Preserve this spring and summer to see these projects come to life!



John Lloyd

Look and listen for a variety of frogs



Staff photo

Trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*)

Creekshead Preserve

Enjoy a bountiful display of native wildflowers in late April and early May due to the high quality of this undisturbed preserve. An easy walk will take you past ground carpeted with spring beauty, trout lily, trillium, and other ephemeral blooms.

The vernal pools and seasonal flowing creeks are ideal environments for amphibians. Brush up on your frog calls before heading out in the spring and you'll be able to identify several types of frogs seeking mates.

Find maps and directions at legacylandconservancy.org/preserves.

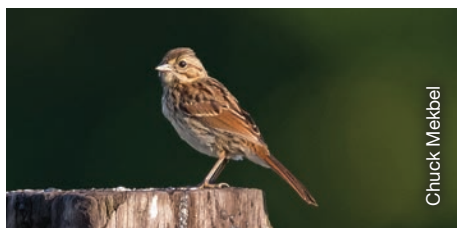
Michigan's newest state park: a birder's delight

By Gary Siegrist, naturalist and volunteer with Legacy Land Protection and Stewardship committees

Birders throughout the region (including me) are excited that Watkins Lake is finally protected. The lake is the centerpiece of a new park managed by Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation. It was protected last summer after a decade of effort by Legacy and other partners.

Watkins Lake is special to the birding community because it hosts an incredible variety of waterfowl species during migration season. The sheer number within each species is also impressive. In one-day counts, birders have tallied 2,146 ring-necked ducks; 1,538 mallards; 700 canvasback ducks; 316 ruddy ducks; 150 redheads; and 137 hooded mergansers—to name just a few species. Watkins Lake is also a tantalizing place to seek rare birds, including the great white-fronted goose, Ross's goose, cackling goose, little gull, and little blue heron. Finish it off with fantastic viewing from Arnold Road and you have a world-class birding experience.

For instance, grassland birds already sighted at Watkins Lake include Henslow's sparrow (endangered in MI), grasshopper sparrow and dickcissel (species of special concern, meaning they are rare or declining in number), bobolink, and northern mockingbird. Grasslands are no longer a common habitat type in our area and many birds depend on it, so it's fortunate that this land is protected forever.



Chuck Mekbel

Watkins Lake is home to rare grassland birds like the Henslow's sparrow (top) and grasshopper sparrow (bottom), which are rare or declining in number.



Chuck Mekbel

If birds aren't your cup of tea, how about mammals, reptiles, or insects? Survey work is just getting started and already we've learned that the property is home to the federally-endangered Indiana bat, and to the eastern massasauga rattlesnake, a species of special concern. I can just imagine the butterflies and moths that await us. So, grab your binoculars and a water bottle and head for Michigan's newest state park. You won't be disappointed!

Directions to Watkins Lake State Park and County Preserve can be found at tinyurl.com/DNRWatkinsLake.

From novice to insider: my journey with Legacy

By Charity Steere, Legacy Trustee

I became involved with Legacy 14 years ago, when the Waterloo Land Conservancy Trust (WLCT) merged with Washtenaw Land Trust (WLT—now Legacy Land Conservancy). WLCT was asked to provide a representative to the WLT Board of Trustees. In all innocence, I raised my hand and said, "That sounds interesting, I'll do it." I was told that all it would involve is a meeting every other month. HA! My journey began.

Fortunately, someone gave me a copy of the Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices. I quickly figured out that land protection wasn't just some little committee, but a real, serious, effective enterprise—and I was now part of it!

In the following years I have learned, gained, and helped accomplish so much. The organization has protected almost 7,000 acres of land since I joined the board. Land protection has become my passion and is the life's activity of which I am most proud. It has also taken more of my time and attention than I expected, but it has almost always been a joy. Having the opportunity to make a truly significant and lasting difference for the place I live in and love has been a privilege.

Although I'll be leaving the board in June after the allowed four terms, I won't be leaving Legacy. I will remain on the Stewardship and Land Protection committees, and I will continue to do what I can to help protect more land in our service area. We need protected farmland, watersheds, and more land for public recreation.

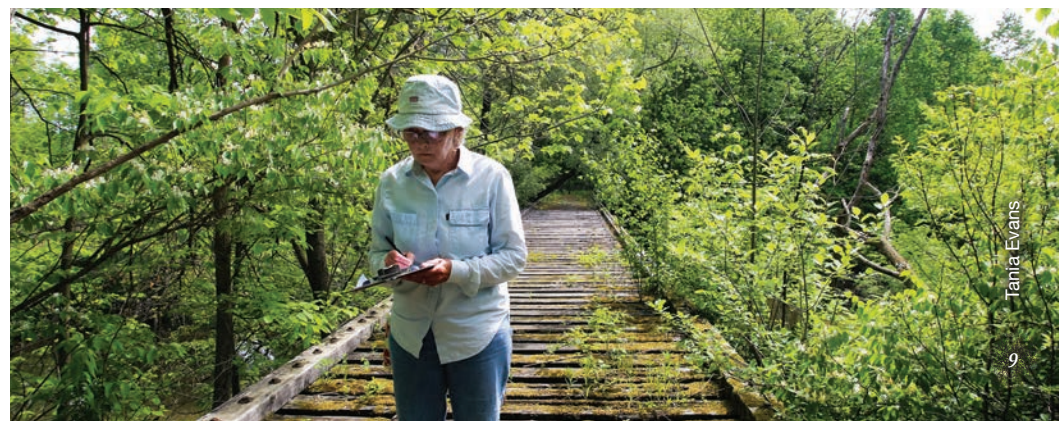
I was right 14 years ago: this work has been interesting and worthwhile. I'm glad I raised my hand. Consider how you might raise yours to make our community a better place.



Jonathan Jarosz

Charity received the 2016 Abby Gartland Stewardship Award from Heart of the Lakes for her lifelong commitment to caring for the environment.

Charity in one of her many volunteer roles: monitoring a protected property. Whether it's through monitoring, leading workdays, or advocating for conservation, Charity carries out the land ethic every day.



Tania Evans

A land use TRIFECTA

Prairie restoration, scientific research, and community gardening

By Sarah Turner, Legacy volunteer and School of Natural Resources and Environment master's candidate



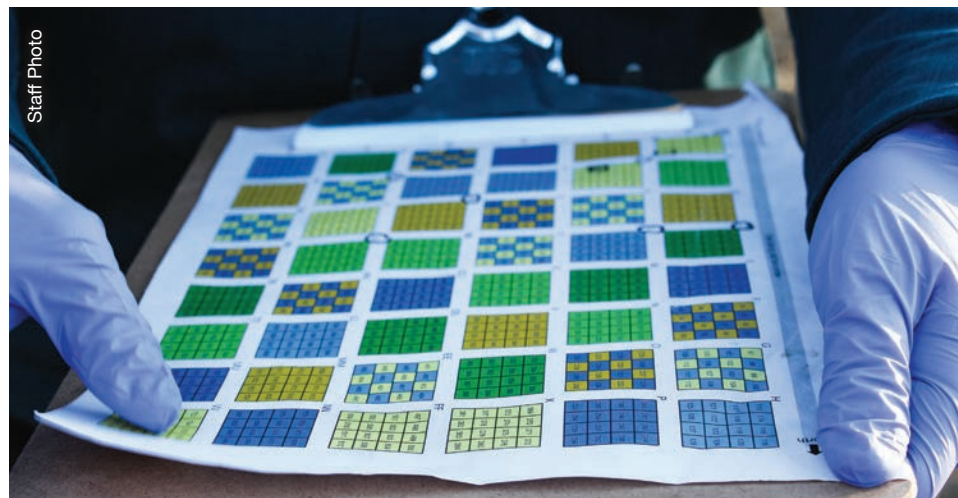
Sarah Turner

Of Legacy's six public preserves, Lloyd and Mabel Johnson Preserve is the only one with both natural and agricultural lands. It is home to regionally important natural communities including mesic (moderately wet) forest, buttonbush swamp, and a shallow-water wetland. The preserve also contains 18 acres of farmland that have been under cultivation since the nineteenth century.

Since acquiring the property in 2007, Legacy has hoped to restore the farm fields to a more natural and sustainable land cover. During the summer of 2016, I worked with Legacy staff to develop a comprehensive restoration plan. With financial support from the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Conservation Reserve Program



Professor Emily Grman (second from right) and her students have enthusiastically helped clear invasive plants at the preserve to help prevent contamination of their seed plots.



Staff Photo

These test plots contain 768 different treatment areas to find the best seed mixture for restoring prairie ecosystems in southern Michigan.

(CRP), Legacy is turning fifteen acres of agricultural land into a native prairie. The CRP is designed to help landowners remove sensitive land from agricultural production by planting long-lived native grass and wildflowers to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide wildlife habitat.

Beginning this spring, a rich diversity of native grasses and wildflowers will take the place of soybeans and corn. We selected a combination of native plant species that suit the current soil and water conditions. The deep roots typical of native grasses will reduce soil erosion and improve the quality of water entering the nearby marsh and buttonbush swamp. The plantings will also provide abundant habitat for native pollinators, insects, mammals, and birds. The trail system on the preserve will remain the same, so preserve visitors can view all stages of the restoration effort.

This is Legacy's first large-scale ecological restoration project. It will serve as a demonstration for farmers or other landowners who may be interested in returning parts of their land to a more natural state.

The remaining three acres of agricultural land at Johnson Preserve are devoted to two partnerships:

- Dr. Emily Grman of **Eastern Michigan University** is conducting a long-term prairie restoration experiment to examine weed suppression, native biodiversity, and performance of various seed mixes. These experiments provide hands-on learning for EMU students and will contribute to the science of grassland restoration in southern Michigan.
- **Project Grow**, a nonprofit that provides community garden space, will create at least ten new garden plots to increase community members' ability to grow fresh food.

On a more personal note, I'm excited to watch all the positive results from returning an ecologically important ecosystem to this site. Developing the plans for this site has given me the opportunity to dig into the field of farmland restoration. We hope you'll stop by Johnson Preserve to see our progress over the coming months and years!

APPRECIATION

WELCOME

new Legacy Society members!

Elizabeth S. Bishop
Larry and Stephanie Doll
Sybil Kolon and Maan Abdalbaki

By making plans to benefit Legacy Land Conservancy with future gifts—accomplished through bequests, estates, trusts, insurance policies, beneficiary designations, and other planned giving options—Legacy Society members will continue to make a difference for land conservation far into the future.

If you have named Legacy Land Conservancy in an estate provision, please let us know so that we can recognize your forward-thinking decision and thank you on behalf of future community members. For more information, contact Diane Dupuis: diane@legacylandconservancy.org.



EVENTS

Give a Bird a Home

Saturday, July 15, 10 am – 12 pm

Reichert Nature Preserve (near Pinckney)

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch Project says, "Give a bird a home and they'll show you their world." If you're interested in attracting more avian activity to your yard, build a birdhouse with us and take home an opportunity to learn more about the lives of Michigan's cavity-nesting birds. Wear closed-toe shoes and bring a hammer if possible. Family-friendly. Cost: \$10/birdhouse. Register by 7/12 at legacylandconservancy.org/events.

Medicinal Plants Walk

Saturday, August 5, 10 am – 12 pm

Sharon Hills Preserve (near Manchester)

Discover common plants used as medicine on a stroll with Land Steward Allene Smith through the varied botanical communities of Legacy's Sharon Hills Preserve. Learn to identify some of these "herbal allies," their historical uses as medicine, and why today's trained herbalists prize

certain species. Expect to walk no more than two miles, with regular breaks for meeting and greeting our botanical companions. Free. Register with Allene at stewardship@legacylandconservancy.org or 734-302-5263.

Cranes, Colors, and Cabernet Walks

Saturday, October 21, 1-3 pm

Two locations: Sharon Hills Preserve and Beckwith Preserve

As part of the Big 400's fall celebration, join Legacy for a guided wine-tasting hike at one of our preserves: Sharon Hills Preserve just north of Manchester, or Beckwith Preserve in Stockbridge. Learn a bit about how and why trees change color in the fall. Each new bend or hilly alcove in the trail may feature a Sandhill Crane Vineyards wine or show of anthocyanin color! Free. Register with Allene at stewardship@legacylandconservancy.org or 734-302-5263.

For all events: please dress for the weather, wear sturdy shoes, and bring a water bottle.



*Racing toward the
Campaign finish line!
Emerald Arc update*



The Emerald Arc Campaign supports Legacy's work to protect farmland and places to play, among many other contributors to our quality of place.

By Janet and Charlie Crone, Campaign Co-Chairs

As we reflect on our involvement with Legacy Land Conservancy over the years, we are greatly impressed with what Michigan's oldest local land trust has accomplished. Legacy has directly, and through partnerships, protected more than 8,200 acres in its 45-year history.

Most recently, we have been assisting with Legacy's Emerald Arc Campaign, which aligns with Legacy's objective of permanently protecting 25,000 acres of significant lands across Jackson and Washtenaw counties, and beyond. This important conservation corridor supports economic vitality and enhances the quality of place where we live.

So far, over its first four years, the Emerald Arc Campaign has:

- raised \$4.4 million to support the organization's work
- provided additional staff capacity in land protection and stewardship
- allowed Legacy to protect more than 3,200 additional acres

Nearly 40% of Legacy's work has been accomplished in the past four years, thanks to the community's support of the Emerald Arc Campaign.

The new staff capacity that the Campaign has established is critical in continuing this rapid pace of conservation. . . all while ensuring Legacy's promise of FOREVER.

Given the acceleration of development in Jackson and Washtenaw counties, it is important that we continue to increase the pace of conservation to secure a land base for future generations.

The Campaign goal is \$5 million by **June 30, 2017**.

Our goal is within reach. Let's get there together!

Give at legacylandconservancy.org/donate.

In Greek mythology, a nymph named Chelone insulted the gods and was turned into a turtle as punishment. The flowers are said to look like the heads of turtles.

Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*) at
Beckwith Preserve
Photo by Kateri Fahey



LEGACY Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving
Southern Michigan*



CONTACT US

1100 N Main St Suite 203
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

734-302-5263

info@legacylandconservancy.org
legacylandconservancy.org

FOLLOW US



STAFF

Pam Bierzynski, Office Systems Associate
Robin Burke, Land Protection Manager
Diane Dupuis, Development Director

Katrina Folsom, Communications and
Engagement Coordinator

Doug Koop, Executive Director

Remy Long, Land Protection Coordinator

Meghan Prindle, Community and Landowner
Outreach Coordinator

Allene Smith, Land Steward

Erika Taylor, Operations Manager

Dana Wright, Land Stewardship Manager

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Need a speaker for your group? Have questions or feedback about *The Understory*? Contact Katrina: kfolsom@legacylandconservancy.org.





PLEASE JOIN US FOR

LEGACY OF THE LAND

Summer Farm Soirée

SATURDAY
JUNE 3, 2017
6-9 PM

DOLL FAMILY FARM
SOUTH OF CHELSEA
REGISTER BY MAY 25



#LEGACYOFTHELAND



Join us June 3 on a peaceful, protected farm for an evening to step out and kick back in support of Legacy Land Conservancy!

Featuring:

- Sumptuous strolling supper
- Live music
- Entertaining opportunities to learn how land protection is enhancing our community

\$100/person. Purchase your tickets at legacylandconservancy.org or by calling 734-302-5263. For more information, call us or visit our website.



Legacy Land Conservancy
1100 N Main St Suite 203
Ann Arbor, MI 48104