

THE UNDERSTORY

The newsletter of Legacy Land Conservancy

Fall



2019



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LEGACY
Land Conservancy

Land Conservation Protects our Water

Did you know that our service area of Washtenaw and Jackson Counties is unique in that it encompasses the headwaters for four rivers: the Huron River, the Upper Grand River, the Kalamazoo River, and the River Raisin? All four of these rivers and their tributaries flow into the Great Lakes, which means we all have a major responsibility in the protection of 20% of the planet's fresh water.

If we care about clean water for drinking, agriculture, and recreation, we should care about what's happening on the land that our water flows through on its way to our faucet, crops, and beaches. Land protection safeguards water quality and as supporters of our work, we know all of you care too.

Legacy staff, board, and volunteers take our role in safeguarding this natural resource to heart. We help protect high-quality land with stream frontage and healthy wetlands which directly improves water quality downstream by slowing runoff and removing pollutants before it reaches our waterways.

Our work is critical to an entire region: what happens on the land in these watersheds carries impact for drinking water, wildlife, agriculture, and recreation/tourism throughout the Great Lakes Basin.

As recent experiences have demonstrated, even in the Great Lakes State, our residents cannot be guaranteed access to the most fundamental of public services, clean drinking water. Fortunately though, with the help of supporters like you, Legacy continues to protect land and do its part to safeguard water for all Michiganders. As you enjoy the beauty that a Michigan fall provides, we thank you for your continued support and recognition of Legacy's work.

Legacy will be submitting for Land Trust Alliance accreditation in November and you will learn more in this newsletter. Not only are we proud to be an accredited land trust, accreditation from this professional governance association gives us access to important research, trends and information.

*Yours in Conservation,
Diana Kern, Executive Director*



Land Protected by Legacy in 2015

It's Time to Renew our Accreditation...

by Erika Taylor, Finance and Operations Director

...and we would like your help. The land trust accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. We are pleased to announce that this will be our third renewal. A public comment period is now open.

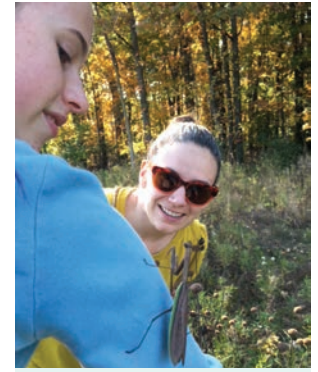
The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs.

Executive Director Diana Kern has found the accreditation process very useful for Legacy. "I am fairly new to land conservancies and am really happy to see that Legacy has been accredited for more than 10 years. Going through the process helps us find any inconsistencies in our operations, and give us the tools to correct them. There has been great discipline not only to do the right things, but also to do them in the right way. It helps make us confident that we are, in fact, protecting land forever as we promise."

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how Legacy Land Conservancy complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see <http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices>.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments: (fax) 518-587-3183; (mail) 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866.

Comments on Legacy Land Conservancy's application will be most useful by December 28, 2019



Lily Gray-Wright and former staff member Robin Burke collect native seeds at Skyline High School with the help of a praying mantis

LEGACY Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving
Southern Michigan*

STAFF

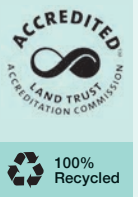
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The Changing Face of Stewardship

by Dana Wright, Land Stewardship Director

I rang in my 11th year with Legacy Land Conservancy this past April. Only ten years' experience out of Legacy's 46-year history, yet I have witnessed and been a part of enough change that some days it feels like all I can do is play catch up. Our organization-wide effort toward re-accreditation this year comes at a fortuitous moment in our history characterized by a confluence of many changes and allows us (or forces us, depending on perspective) to pause long enough to choose and document how we'd like to move forward.

Stewardship is the forever side of our mission. How do we ensure that our public preserves and the lands on which we hold conservation easements are protected into the future? A recent publication by Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies talks about some of this change:

"What are we learning about stewarding conservation land to maximize climate benefits, such as greenhouse gas reduction and resilience in the face of changing weather patterns? This question is particularly relevant as land trusts transition from primarily focusing on acquiring properties for their conservation values to stewarding those same values in perpetuity. Looking ahead, it seems likely that the relevance of land conservation as a field will be increasingly viewed in terms of the benefits that land trusts bring to the environment and society through their management of the lands they are entrusted with. In this light, climate change presents an opportunity for increasingly stewardship-focused land trusts to address two major problems at once."

—Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies

The authors talk about a shift in focus for land trusts that is nation-wide and also the case here at Legacy. In the beginning of the land trust movement land trusts were looking at acquisition, acquisition, acquisition. Over time we are realizing that stewarding these conservation values into perpetuity is a very important part of "protection" and deserves some front and center attention.

Climate change is one of the challenges we face that can impact how we steward our lands. Other emerging issues involve conservation agreement landowner changes, new invasive species, green energy infrastructure, and environmental policy changes. As the climate changes new pests and diseases can alter the entire ecology of a preserve, or keep agricultural lands from being planted for years at a time. When new landowners take over management of a conserved property they bring a new perspective to the table for that piece of land. This new perspective needs to be integrated with the conservation values for which the property was protected.

Considering these challenges, as well as other emerging issues, during the conservation agreement writing process, is important. Conservation easements require language that is

both strong enough to protect a property's conservation values and general enough not to tie the hands of future landowners in the face of the constantly evolving environment of land management.

At the very base of the land protection process is prioritizing protection of lands that are the most important to the communities they serve. Land conservation is about preserving the lands people need to thrive as surrounding lands are developed. In southeast Michigan we have an abundance of soils that are rich and productive. In addition, our actions in southeast Michigan directly impact the future and fate of three of the Great Lakes. Together the Great Lakes are 84% of North America's above-ground fresh water. Even on a national scale, Legacy's service area holds several priority areas for conservation including the Pinckney Waterloo area, the River Raisin headwaters, and the Huron River headwaters: working farms, fresh waters, and natural areas. Keeping forever in our sites and knowing that we won't know everything, our priorities will adapt, be reimagined and recommitted to using experience, science-based knowledge, and community involvement along the way to keep up with the needs of the communities we serve.

Each preserve and conservation easement property Legacy holds has conservation value to the landowner, the ecological communities the land supports, and the community of people who rely on that land (and others like it) for food, clean water, and places to play. Stewarding these important lands means preserving those values. With community support, Legacy works with the landowners who make it all possible under a constantly evolving set of parameters to keep forever in the sights.



Eagle Scout group installs new boardwalk sections at Creekshed Preserve.
Photo by John Metzler

Where We Are and Where We're Going

by Susan LaCroix, Land Protection Lead and Allene Smith, Land Stewardship Coordinator

The last word you had from Legacy's Land Acquisition department was the closing of a conservation easement in the spring of this year. Since then Legacy's Land Acquisition staff have been busy little beetles making sure that Legacy runs like a well-oiled machine.

First, the Land Acquisition department has some new faces! Land Protection Lead Susan LaCroix joined Legacy in April and has hit the ground running. Legacy's Land Stewardship Coordinator Allene Smith has also shifted some of her attention to Legacy's Land Acquisition tasks and is excited to continue growing her skillset.

In 2008 Legacy was among the first land trusts to become accredited, meaning that we adhere to the highest standards and practices identified by an accrediting body. This year Legacy is up for our third round of accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). While this process requires an incredible amount of work, it is also a great time for reflection. Are our organizational policies and procedures up to date? Do they meet or exceed LTA standards?

To respond to these inquiries, members of our staff are working to bring in new ideas and document processes. We're making updates to our conservation easement template, which acts as a starting point for negotiations with landowners interested in conserving their land. Periodic updates ensure that it reflects current IRS requirements, evolving legal precedents, and emerging land use issues. We work with a few volunteer attorneys in the community (thank you!) to ensure these exhaustive documents will protect today's conservation values into the foreseeable (and unforeseen) future.

While reflection is vital, the re-accreditation process is also a good opportunity to think about the future, because as a land conservancy the future is our business! How can we improve our processes moving forward? What else can we do to bring Legacy into the future as an innovative, forward-thinking land conservancy? How can we and others in the conservation community respond thoughtfully to our changing world? These higher-level questions are among those that will be discussed as we prepare for re-imagining Legacy's strategic plan this fall.

While the re-accreditation process progresses and strategic planning begins, Legacy's Land Acquisition staff are all the while tending to a full pipeline of farmland properties and natural areas we are excited to permanently protect in the coming years. Although the future is rife with unknowns, Legacy remains committed to conserving and caring for our valued natural resources today, tomorrow, and forever.



Allene Smith collecting data in the Huron River

Legacy Welcomes New Staff and Board Members

by Scott Rosencrans, Associate Director of Development and Communications

Legacy has welcomed three new staff members and four new members to our Board of Trustees to enhance our knowledge and skillsets as we approach the organization's 50th anniversary.

Susan LaCroix has joined us as our new Land Protection Lead and brings a wealth of experience from having served with land conservancies in Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York and Washington State. She is returning to her home environs to connect with landowners interested in protecting their property with a conservation easement, conduct due diligence on projects to ensure the perpetuity of the easements, close on those easements, and keep us in compliance with new accreditation standards.



L-R Scott Rosencrans, Ann Agler, Susan LaCroix

Scott Rosencrans is our new Associate Director for Development and Communications. His lifelong pursuit of serving the greater good started with environmental causes and it remains his strongest passion. He is an accomplished fundraiser whose background includes organizational development, communications, and community project development for several nonprofits in Michigan. He has served on a variety of local civic and nonprofit boards, commissions, and task forces.

Ann Agler is our new Office Manager. She is a native of Northwest Indiana having grown up on the sandy beaches of Michigan City. Both of her daughters were born in Milwaukee, WI, where they resided and where Ann received her bachelor's degree in Business and Management from Alverno College. Previous to joining Legacy Land Conservancy, Ann was the manager of the NEW Center and a long-time office manager with Zingerman's Training.

Trustee Cindy Reach is a longtime resident of Washtenaw County and partner at Reach Law Firm. She brings a strong background in conservation easement language including gaining hands-on experience by representing various county departments including the Washtenaw County Parks & Recreation.

Trustee Sandi Smith started in real estate while still a student at the University of Michigan. In 2001 she and her wife opened Trillium Real Estate, an independent boutique brokerage in Downtown Ann Arbor. She has served on several local boards, including those of the Jim Toy Center and the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority, and was twice elected to the Ann Arbor City Council.

Charity Steere and Jerry Nordblom are returning members. "Because Legacy is about to engage in a three-year strategic plan and will build on our Emerald Arc work, the board and I knew we needed people with historical perspective but who would also be future-sighted," Diana Kern says. "We are approaching our 50th anniversary and both Jerry and Charity helped Legacy get to this milestone," she adds.

These new additions to our staff and board will provide more robust capabilities in fundraising, marketing, and land acquisition, and give us greater depth of experience providing oversight for legal and real estate matters while returning valuable long-term institutional knowledge.

As the season turns to gestures of gratitude and generosity, we hope that the prospect of safeguarding water quality, preserving local farms, and conserving natural areas like woods and wetlands will inspire your gift of support for Legacy. Watch for our year-end message, or give online any time. Your support fuels the work and warms the heart!

*Visit legacylandconservancy.org
or call 734-302-5263.*



Legacy Land Conservancy

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