

THE UNDERSTORY

Legacy Land Conservancy; The Home Office Edition

Spring



2020



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LEGACY
Land Conservancy

This spring, more than ever, those of us on the front lines of protecting land and water can appreciate the role nature plays in our well being. With all the personal and professional trials and fears we have faced together in the wake of the pandemic, our ability to go outside and see life emerging under our feet grounds us, and fills us with hope and peace. Though we are apart, we are all united in the benefits of protecting land.

In this version of The Understory we hope you will enjoy the pictures and articles that bring us together in celebration of clean water, working farms, natural habitats, rural culture and places to walk, reflect, play and learn. We hope you will smile and be inspired.

Our team is welcoming two new members that will help add to the incredible efforts that have allowed Legacy to serve the community for almost 50 years. Before the end of 2020 we will surpass 10,000 acres of protected land and we will emerge with a new strategic plan and path toward our next 50 years. We are working on new collaborations that will add to our outcomes.

Your support for our work means everything! We wish everyone a spring filled with renewal, with health, and with plenty of time out on the land. When the world brings us a pandemic, we double down on our efforts to conserve the land and water.

*Yours in Conservation,
Diana Kern, Executive Director*



Diana Kern

On the cover: skunk cabbage in bloom

LEGACY Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving
Southern Michigan*

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Susan LaCroix, Land Protection Lead

Scott Rosencrans, Associate Director of Development and Community Engagement

Allene Smith, Land Stewardship Coordinator

Erika Taylor, Finance & Operations Director

Dana Wright, Land Stewardship Director

Alice Elliott, Easement Stewardship and Volunteer Coordinator

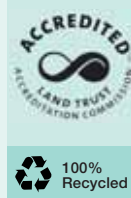
Shawn Zellers, Stewardship Crew Leader

Cayla Tinney, Reichert Preserve Caretaker

TRUSTEES

Simon Whitelocke, President; **Larry Doll**, Vice President; **George Borel**, Treasurer;

John Moran, Secretary; **Neal Biletdeaux**, Member at Large Executive Committee, Suzanne DeVine, Jerry Nordblom, Dale Sass, Sandi Smith, Charity Steere, Bill Strohaber, Ginny Trocchio, Karen Ufer



Meet our New Land Protection Staff Members

Alice Elliott, Easement Stewardship and Volunteer Coordinator

Alice grew up in southeast Michigan and received her M.S. from the University of Michigan, where she worked with a team to assess the potential for an inter-agency collaborative in New England. Since graduating, she worked out of our office as the Stiltgrass Coordinator for the Stiltgrass Working Group, a collaborative of local organizations that included Legacy Land Conservancy. You may have read about that project in our November 5, 2019 E-Newsletter. She has now joined Legacy as the Easement Stewardship and Volunteer Coordinator, monitoring conservation lands across our service area and coordinating stewardship volunteers. Alice is passionate about conservation not only as protection, but as collaboration between stakeholders. In her spare time, she works as a community activist, participating in activism around a variety of social and environmental issues. She can be found sitting in trees, staring at birds, or picking up rocks to find interesting things underneath.



Alice Elliott



Boardwalk Replacement
at Reichert Preserve

Shawn Zellers, Stewardship Crew Leader

Shawn Zellers has been working in land management, conservation and agriculture for over 20 years. Growing up fishing and hunting the Illinois river valley, Shawn developed a strong connection with the land including its historical and cultural use, and also began to understand the widespread loss of habitat and biodiversity. Shawn has worked for land conservancies and in the private sector in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, California, and Michigan. He has led school groups, camps, and volunteers in education and the practice of stewardship, ecological restoration, and sustainable agriculture. “To interact with and understand the living systems around us is part of what it is to be human and living on the planet. We are not apart from it. For me it is a constant source of intrigue and wonder”.



Shawn Zellers

When Shawn is not working he is often wood carving, fishing, or wandering somewhere outside with his son Cole.

Making the Adjustment to Working From Home



Ann Agler

Ann Agler: Our electronics are getting a workout! I have a new laptop so I can Zoom, Chat, Scan, Email, Google and every other kind of thing. Keeping in touch with coworkers online is a blessing! It's been great to share our news and also the fun and funny stuff – today we had a virtual birthday celebration for Susan 😊 Still, I miss seeing everyone in the office. I hope we'll get back to the new norm by the summer solstice.

Pam Bierzynski: Working from home used to be my happy place. Under the current circumstances, it has never been more stressful. My husband is working from home. My 3 year old and 5 year old are home from school. Our cat is sleeping under the bathroom sink to escape the chaos. My husband and I try to split house and kid duties as much as we can so I can also get my work done...but unfortunately this really never goes as planned. For me it's meant working in the wee hours of the morning and late into the night when everyone is sleeping. It's meant working on the weekends when my husband can take over kid duties. And it's meant hopping online during the day (when I'm not cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, teaching, or entertaining the girls) to quickly check emails.



Pam Bierzynski

Alice Elliott: My cat is ecstatic that I'm working from home, but he's decided he HAS to be involved in EVERY zoom call. As soon as I start talking to the screen, he HAS to sit on my lap and stare at whatever's going on. It can be something of a productivity killer-- but at least he's cute!



Alice Elliott



Screenshot of one of our Weekly Check-in Meetings,



Diana Kern

Diana Kern: As someone who has never had an opportunity to work from home I find this very challenging. While I have found the spot in my house that helps me focus, and is comfortable for doing work, it is ten feet from my kitchen.

- Kitchen = Food.
- Food = Weight Gain.
- Weight Gain = Unhappiness.

So I am trying to drink a glass of water when I get a craving to grab food.

- Water = Have to Use the Bathroom.
- Use the Bathroom = Use up my Stash of Toilet Paper
- Use up my Stash of Toilet Paper = Have to go to the Store
- Have to go to the Store = Unhappiness at Hoarders who have purchased all the toilet paper
- Unhappiness = Stress Eating.

Can't wait to be able to work from the office again. :-)



Susan LaCroix

Susan LaCroix: Home is my creative space and I have curated it to feed my energy in that manner. I hope some of that creativity can spill into my work while I connect with this space from this new angle. Without having to commute I have been spending about an hour each day outside, which is welcomed during these stressful times. I just wish I had more time before everything shut down to make my desk more work friendly, for example, I got an ipad for the holidays I can use as a second screen but I didn't get a stand for it in time! I have been enjoying how quiet it is here, I don't get as distracted by noises.



Which Happened to be Susan's Birthday Celebration

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Scott Rosencrans: At my house we've taken to eating "see food" regularly. You open the fridge and what you see are the ingredients for dinner. I'm comfortable working from home, but I particularly miss those pop-in moments with coworkers when we asked quick questions or shared funny stories. I'm wishing all of our readers good health and successful coping.



Scott Rosencrans

Allene Smith: Working from home during a pandemic has brought my kitchen stewardship to another level, one I hope



Allene Smith

to maintain even when I'm back to my daily commute. Peeling my last citrus fruits? Chop those peels and dehydrate for aromatic teas. My toddler decided to squish her remaining banana through her tiny fingers? Save it for this afternoon's peanut butter toast. "Waste not, want not" has never meant more, and putting energy into food security at this time, through careful purchasing of local goods and maximizing the use of what we have, has brought some comfort in the face of the unknown.

Erika Taylor. I've set up a workspace in my third-floor bedroom next to a window looking out on my bird feeder. It's nice to have my own quiet space. My cats love that I am home all day. My teenagers have taken over the rest of the house, but as is their natural cycle they have both started to go to bed later and later, now around 3am and waking up between 2pm and 4pm after I've pretty much finished my entire work day!



Erika Taylor



My daughter, finishing up her university semester online, has now decided to be vegan. This has led to some fun culinary adventures, which I love. See my pic of adzuki bean and potato samosas.

Dana Wright: I'm lucky to have a very cozy home workspace. From my cushy couch in front of a happy fire I can sit with my lap desk outfitted with laptop, mouse, notepad, and coffee, and see songbirds returning to Michigan and visiting my



Dana Wright

feeder outside the window. Working from home isn't new for me, but being part of a team that all works from home is. Like writing something vs. saying it, I think working from home stimulates different parts of the brain, or includes different thought processes at the very least. The novelty of the situation is bringing creativity and new perspective to many things I do, the ways our team interacts, and how we engage with the community. I look forward to seeing the positive ways we all integrate this experience into how we do our work moving forward.

Meet Bill Strohaver

Bill is one of the newest members of Legacy's Board having been elected in 2018 following three-years of monitoring a DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality, now EGLE) Wetland Preservation Area Management Plan for Legacy in Jackson County. He is a member of the Stewardship Committee, has served on the recent Executive Director Search Committee, and is also a member of the Strategic Planning Committee. His primary interest in joining the Board is his interest in stewardship - arguing that it is not only important to protect land from development but also to actually manage and care for the land in perpetuity. His stewardship activities include representing Legacy at the Land Trust Alliance Rally, photo-monitoring of conservation easements, removing invasive species, trail building and maintenance, and researching special projects such as fee-for-service options that could provide much needed revenue.



Bill pulling Japanese hedge parsley at Sharon Hills Preserve

When he retired from Jackson Community College where he had served for over forty years as a professor and administrator, he knew how important it was after retirement to find meaningful activities that were both intellectually and physically stimulating, and that provided personal growth and involvement. Throughout his life he has been an "outdoors person" as well as sharing with Leopold, Abbey, Steinbeck, Carson and Ehrlich concerns about environmental issues, particularly the accelerated rate of extinction caused by habitat loss and climate change. Shortly before retirement, Bill and his wife Deborah moved into a new home on Skiff Lake in Jackson County that has fifteen acres of land. They became interested in learning more about the esker that they lived on as well as what the pre-settlement landscape looked like and how it might be restored. Perhaps the most profound launching point of this new stewardship chapter was the good fortune to listen to a presentation by Douglas Tallamy and, after reading his book, "Bringing Nature Home, How you can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants," he became convinced that

Tallamy had found a meaningful way individual land owners could contribute to building habitat by creating a patchwork of neighborhood enclaves that would support and sustain wildlife. This could be done by removing invasive plants and replacing them with native plants. This "aha moment" created the readiness to learn about invasive plants, native plants, and land management in general so that their property could be restored as a wildlife habitat.



Invasive garlic mustard
Photo by Laurie Gendron

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After reading books, field guides, enrolling in the MSU Extension Master Gardening Program and the MSU Extension Conservation Stewardship program, volunteering for Legacy, Dahlem Conservancy, Michigan Nature Association and the Stewardship Network, he realized that the former farmland that he had purchased was a spawning ground for most



Invasive Dames Rocket - Photo by Judy Heady

of the invasive species in lower Michigan. Armed with chainsaws, brush cutters, loppers, a variety of herbicides and various types of “dabbers,” the mortal combat between Nature Scout and the Invasive Plant Force commenced. The battle waged back and forth with yearly losses – the arsenal of the invasive included massive seed production, reserves in the seedbank, enlistment of other allies like deer, birds and boots to enhance seed distribution, extensive roots and rhizomes, chemicals that retarded the growth of other plants, masochistic tendencies to thrive after cutting or burning and outcompeting natives by having a much longer growing season. He also confessed that sometimes he was at fault by distributing seeds on boots and clothing as well as transplanting dame’s rocket which he believed to be wood phlox.



Invasive Stiltgrass

This is year ten in his war with the invasives on his property. While he has not achieved complete eradication, he has enlisted the professional help of Matt Demmon of Feral Flora who is also a member of the stewardship committee. Matt has created a Multi-phase Restoration Plan using native plants. Phase one begins by sowing wildflower seeds and plugs along the driveway and a longer-term strategy of simulating an Oak Savanna in areas bush-whacked, treated with herbicide and burned before planting native grasses. Bill’s experience at home helped him to realize how daunting it is for Legacy to think about the time and money associated with managing and protecting property forever.

Woodland Preserve

At a little more than 13 ½ acres, Woodland is unique among our nature preserves in that no management such as trail installation, invasive species removal, or habitat restoration is permitted. The preserve's donors hoped the site could be used to observe long term change without human control. One enters the Woodland Preserve from its northern boundary on Joy Road. Look for the Legacy preserve sign between North Delhi Road and Jennings Road. The first section to traverse is what is known as "old field" habitat: land that was formerly



Woodland Preserve Old Field

cultivated or grazed, but whose cultivation has been abandoned. The area is dominated by perennial grasses with a few scattered shrubs and small trees. Visitors might spot deer trails and flattened grass where a deer may have spent the night. During wet times of year, standing water can be seen between hummocks of grass.

The next section is a mature oak-hickory forest. While signs of past grazing by livestock are evident, several large-diameter hickory, white oak, black oak, and bur oak trees remain within the stand surrounded by younger ash and basswood trees. Common buckthorn, an invasive shrub is present but not overwhelming, leaving the understory relatively open to support a few patches of mayapple and jack-in-the-pulpit.

The southernmost third of the property is primarily made up of two meandering creeks and their associated wetland corridors. The creek corridor is dominated by reed canary grass and also supports a few goldenrod species and plentiful populations of joe-pye-weed, skunk cabbage, and marsh marigold. When exploring the creek corridors in early spring, please step carefully to avoid the inconspicuous skunk cabbage flowers. Skunk cabbage is one of the first plants to emerge in the spring. It's thermogenic, meaning that it creates its own heat, and will melt surrounding snow in order for its flowers to emerge. They are quite beautiful, yet almost other-worldly, when in bloom.



Woodland Preserve Forest

Considering the lack of trails, Woodland is a place where it is particularly important to be conscious of the impact of every step you take. Even still, take joy in finding your own path while exploring the Preserve. The diversity of the habitats in this small Preserve makes for terrific bird watching and photography opportunities. Tread lightly and enjoy the many sights and sounds of nature.

Legacy Land Conservancy's Preserves



▲ **Anthony and Rose Shatter Family Preserve:** 25 acres of mesic southern forest and buttonbush swamps only a quarter mile south of the Creekshead Nature Preserve. Public opening planned for summer 2020!



▲ **Beckwith Nature Preserve:** 30 acres in Stockbridge, MI supporting a planted pine woodland, dry-mesic southern forest, and riparian corridor along Portage Creek. Well loved by Stockbridge residents as part of their Community Pathways Initiative.



▲ **Creekshead Nature Preserve:** 27 acres of mesic southern forest near Plymouth, MI. Home to headwaters of Nelson and Johnson Creeks, both tributaries of the Huron River, as well as an exceptional showing of spring ephemerals.



▲ **Lloyd and Mabel Johnson Preserve:** 50 acres of restored wet-mesic prairie and dry-mesic southern forest surrounding a buttonbush swamp in Ann Arbor, MI. Trails connect to the adjacent Lillie Park (managed by Pittsfield Township).



▲ **Woodland Nature Preserve:** 13 acres of open field and dry-mesic southern forest descending to wetlands along Brookwater and Boyden Creeks. Due to the donor's wishes, no management is permitted on the property, though monitoring and observation are encouraged.



▲ **Sharon Hills Nature Preserve:** 67 acres of dry-mesic southern forest and open fields near Manchester, MI. This preserve, situated in the Sharon Short Hills region, includes two kettle hole wetlands and several remnant prairie pockets.



▲ **Reichert Nature Preserve:** 108 acres in Pinckney, MI supporting dry southern forest, tamarack swamp, and riparian areas along Portage Creek. Due to the donor's wishes, this preserve can be visited only with Legacy's permission. To gain entry please call Legacy's office.

How to Get Outside (during a pandemic)

01 Make the health of others your number one priority.

The COVID-19 pandemic is life and death for many people. Please conduct yourself in every respect with that in mind.

02 You can go outside. Cautiously.

Don't go out if you're sick or have been in contact with those who have. Keep a safe distance from others. That includes in the car. Groups are out. Consider avoiding busy areas and times of day. Wash your hands. Follow CDC guidelines carefully.

03 Stay close to home.

Like, as close as possible. For away places or that recreation town an hour down the road are wonderful, but the further you travel, the more potential you have to spread illness. Shop and recreate in your neighborhood.

04 Keep it chill.

It's not a good time to get hurt. Healthcare systems are overwhelmed, or soon will be. Please do not add to the burden.

05 Respect closures and be a good steward.

If parks are closed, don't go. If parks are open, be mindful that areas might have limited maintenance. Pick up your trash, use the restroom before you leave the house. Check state guidelines and closures.



OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

Get Involved!

Land conservation benefits everyone and everyone can play a part. Get involved with Legacy and take your place in the land protection movement!

Volunteer

Attend our hikes, workdays, and partner events

Make a gift. Your generosity now is critical as we all weather a global crisis.

Subscribe to our e-newsletter

(legacylandconservancy.org/subscribe)

Visit a Preserve

Consider including Legacy in your estate plans

If you or your family owns land, talk about your long-term vision for it and contact us to learn more about your options

Spread the word! Share our newsletter and e-newsletter, and follow us on social media

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



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