

THE UNDERSTORY

The newsletter of Legacy Land Conservancy

Fall



2021



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LEGACY
Land Conservancy

"The earth has its music for those that will listen." George Santayana

George Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás (George Santayana, as he is known in America) was a philosopher, essayist, poet, and novelist from Spain. I am moved by his writing, and this particular quote resonates with me because I feel we need both – the earth and music – to live a truly inspired life. As Legacy wraps up its 50th year of protecting land, we are feeling thankful, refreshed, and recharged. Taking the year to celebrate an amazing milestone has given us new energy and focus for the upcoming year, where the music we hear is one of **urgency**.

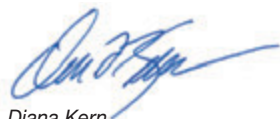
Climate change, the loss of family farms, dwindling wildlife habitats and species degradation, a lingering pandemic, and the increasing risks to Michigan's clean, fresh water sing **loudly** to us. And we are listening to the earth's song! We know each of us has a critical role to play in protecting these resources for the future.

In response, we're putting boots to the ground and rolling up our sleeves! We've officially added Lenawee County to our service area, and are jumping in to help with land protection in an area critical to farmland and water protection in southern Michigan.

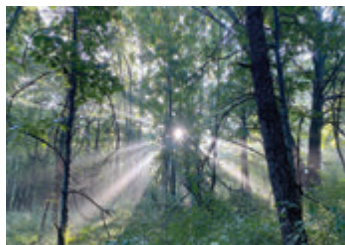
As we enter our 51st year, Legacy is ready to embrace the next phase. We are committed to innovative land protection and making a larger collaborative impact as a trusted, professional partner. With an expanded service area, new partnerships, and additional staff, we are poised to close on two conservation easements in Washtenaw and Jackson counties and assume multiple conservation easements in Lenawee County in 2022.

The earth is singing. Our trustees, staff, and volunteers hear it more loudly than ever and are united in helping to tackle these challenges – the disappearance of nature, climate change, and inequitable access to the outdoors – will you join us and listen, too?

Yours in Conservation,



Diana Kern
Executive Director



Sunlight behind the trees at
Sharon Hills Preserve -
Photo by Dani Wyman

Thank you!

All of our work preserving and protecting land couldn't be done without the support of our foundation and corporate partners!



Seasonal Preserve Stewardship
Crew members Thomas and Dani
install a trail cam at the
Johnson Preserve.

Toyota North America – support for our seasonal preserve stewardship crew and the #50ForTheLand Preserve Challenge, which encouraged folks to explore Legacy preserves.

Speckhard-Knight Foundation – boardwalk and signs at our newest preserve, the Shatter Family Preserve, which will be completed in early spring!

Land Trust Alliance - COVID-related technology upgrades so staff can stay nimble in the office and out in the field.

The Carls Foundation and an **anonymous grantor** – land acquisition support for expansion into Lenawee County.

Small team, big impact

Give three motivated people four months on seven public preserves and a lot can happen! The 2021 growing season demanded a long list of tasks, and our Crew made some tracks. Comprised of Seasonal Stewardship Technician Madelyn Gaharan and Crew members Dani Wyman and Thomas Huval, the “Stew Crew”, as we affectionately call them, spent hundreds of hours in intense heat and swarms of mosquitoes, diligently tackling Legacy’s most pressing preserve maintenance and restoration priorities.



Stewardship Technician Madelyn Gaharan and volunteers dispose of invasive Japanese hedge parsley during a Sharon Hills Preserve workday.

The crew logged over 300 hours pulling and treating invasive plant species on four preserves. Nearly 100 of these hours were completed in the month of June alone and were focused on removing herbaceous invasive species like garlic mustard, Japanese hedge parsley, and dame’s rocket from Beckwith, Sharon Hills, Reichert, and Johnson Preserves. Another 50 hours were spent treating invasive plants in conjunction with Eastern Michigan University at Johnson Preserve. The crew also logged many long days at Sharon Hills, Beckwith, and Johnson Preserves removing woody invasive plants, such as Japanese barberry, common buckthorn, and autumn olive.



Stew Crew member, Dani Wyman, installs a sign at Beckwith Preserve.

In addition, the crew spent nearly 100 hours ensuring the 9.5 miles of trail traversing our preserves were clear and well maintained, removing dozens of fallen limbs and trees after significant storm damage in July and August. New boundary signs were added to the Shatter Preserve, fallen boundary signs at Johnson and Creekshead Preserves were replaced, and an additional entrance sign at Beckwith was installed.

And, if that wasn’t enough, the crew squeezed in an invasive species training with the Jackson, Lenawee and Washtenaw Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (JLW CISMA), and hosted two workdays at Sharon Hills and Beckwith—Legacy’s first time working alongside preserve volunteers in more than a year! “It was a wonderful and engaging season,” Stewardship Technician Madelyn Gaharan said. “Spending countless hours stewarding the preserves in order to provide more space for beautiful and crucial species to thrive, as well as more accessible spaces for our community to enjoy, was very rewarding.”

Volunteer Spotlight

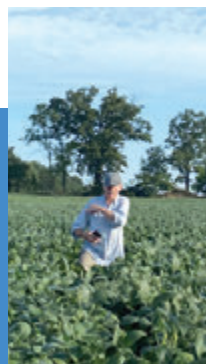
John Dryden - Photomonitoring Volunteer

“When John needed a new photomonitoring partner, we started going to properties together. He is always filled with energy and questions, and is up for anything. He cares a lot about the job, and always makes photomonitoring more fun.”

Last time we monitored, we walked through very wet soybeans for a long time which normally would not be the most pleasant, but catching up with John made the time fly by.”

~Madelyn Gaharan, Stewardship Technician

Interested in volunteering with Legacy or submitting yourself/someone else for a volunteer spotlight? Email stewardship@legacylandconservancy.org



John Dryden walking in soybean field

Sesquicentennial farm protected forever

A sesquicentennial farm—in the same family for over 150 years—is now permanently protected by Legacy Land Conservancy. The farm, owned by brothers Tom and Jim Irwin, consists of 158 acres of rolling farmland, forest and wetlands off Grass Lake Road in Grass Lake, Michigan. In 2017 Tom and Jim inherited the farm from their late father, Richard (Dick) Irwin, who had already conserved another portion of the farm with Legacy between 2004 and 2008. By working with Legacy Land Conservancy to protect their farm via a conservation easement the Irwin brothers are honoring their father's wishes. A conservation easement permanently protects private land by limiting the type and amount of development on a property, and restricting other uses that would damage natural features such as rich soils and high functioning wetlands.

"At a young age our father instilled the value to leave the Earth better than you found it for the next generation, by putting the conservation easement on the farm, our family feels we are putting his values to practice," the Irwin brothers said.

Preservation of the Irwin Farm is significant because it is adjacent to other protected lands, features high-quality soil and wetlands, and was at risk for development. In addition to ensuring a farmland base contributing to local food security, the property also adds to an existing 300 acre natural "greenway" in the Sharon Short Hills area, benefiting water quality and wildlife habitat.



Scenic views on the Irwin Farm -
Photo by Susan LaCroix



The Irwin brothers and family in front of the Irwin Farm barn. Front row L-R Ellie, Anna; Back row L-R Jim, Amanda, Tom; Dogs L-R Beau, Mindy

The Irwin Farm conservation easement exemplifies innovative land protection through local, federal, and private partnerships. Legacy worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Washtenaw County Parks & Recreation Commission (WCPARC), the Carls Foundation, and other private entities to secure a creative mosaic of funding sources to purchase the conservation easement from the Irwin brothers.

Tom and Jim have used that money to invest back into their family farm. Restoring the historic barn is underway,

The Irwin Farm Conservation Easement Project



Time to close = 4 years (2017-2021)

158 acres of farmland, forest, & wetlands in Washtenaw County

- ✓ Sesquicentennial farm in the same family for over 150 years
- ✓ Adjacent to other protected lands, features high-quality wetlands and wildlife habitat, and conserves high-quality, productive agricultural soils
- ✓ Adds to an existing 300 acre natural "greenway" in the Sharon Short Hills area benefitting water quality and wildlife habitat

the farmhouse restoration is nearly complete, and Tom and his family have moved back to the property to restart their farming business.

"This conservation easement will allow us to continue farming and keep the farm as one huge parcel far beyond our lifetimes," said the Irwins. "We can imagine our ancestors smiling down on us today as we finalized our conservation easement on Earth Day."

"We're thrilled to be protecting this piece of local farming history with such dedicated partners," Diana Kern, Legacy's executive director, said. "Family farms are increasingly disappearing as farmers age out of their work and sell their land to developers, making preserving farmland a critical part of creating a healthier local food system. To be helping the Irwin family return to their farming roots is an incredible win for land conservation in southern Michigan."

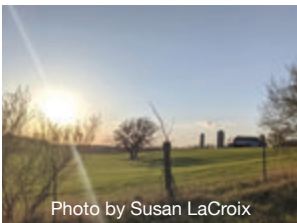


Photo by Susan LaCroix

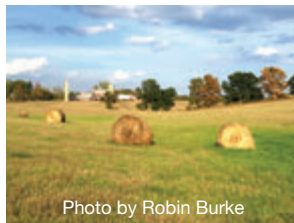


Photo by Robin Burke

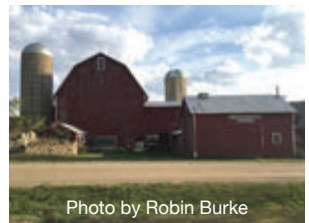


Photo by Robin Burke

The first 80 acres of the Irwin Estate were purchased in 1836 by James Irwin, the great great great grandfather of Tom and Jim Irwin. The original deeds to the land were signed by the eighth US president Martin Van Buren on sheepskin. At its zenith the Irwin Farm totaled approximately 354 acres. The deeds, along with other Irwin family memorabilia, are housed at the University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library.

Happy Birthday, Legacy! Celebrating 50 years of protecting and preserving land

When we started thinking about what our 50th Gala would look like, our staff, board and gala cabinet members dreamt of connection, laughter, and sharing our love of land with everyone who made our first 50 years possible.

What we didn't dream of was a pandemic! Early on in the planning process we decided that our number one priority was to celebrate as safely as possible. For us that meant taking the plunge and planning our big 50th birthday party online.



Adapting to virtual meant watching videos together on Zoom!



Attendees of the 50th Gala were treated to dinner by What's Cooking and Cupcakes by Rubina

we were able to craft an incredibly fun day! Tickets offered a delicious, locally-sourced meal from What's Cooking? and our staff spent months digging through our archives for the best photos and videos to tell the story of our first 50 years.

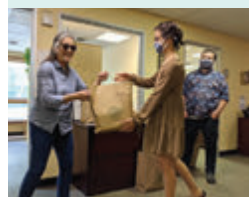
Of course, there were lots of things we missed about having an in-person event (food trials!), but that's been overshadowed by the overwhelming support from our community. As folks stopped by our office to pick up their meals mid-afternoon, we were able to connect with folks we hadn't seen in person in more than a year! For some of our staff, it was a joyful introduction to some of Legacy's longest, most ardent supporters. On top of that, it was the first time our staff had been able to be together in our offices since March 2020.



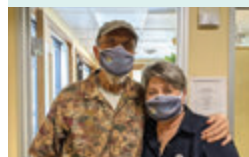
Our screens were filled with warm smiles and familiar faces



Marguerite Smith and Diana Kern



Karen Ufer and Madelyn Gaharan

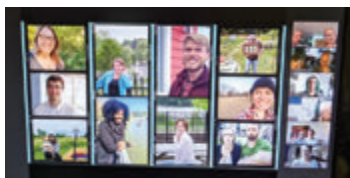


Jerry Nordblom and Diana Kern



Susan LaCroix, Steve Palms, and Paul Glendon

Later that evening, logging on to our Zoom event and seeing so many smiling faces really made the whole planning process worth it. As our staff sat in break out rooms and heard stories of connecting to the natural world and how each person became a Legacy supporter, we ended the night feeling inspired and ready to take on the next 50 years!



We also spent some time celebrating past staff, board, and volunteers who've helped make Legacy great!



Attendees strolled down memory lane and shared stories of conservation.

We're so grateful to each and every person who bought a ticket to our online celebration. It's the shared belief in our mission that will truly power us forward for the next 50 years! We can't wait for the next celebration, where we can share our love of the land together and, hopefully, in person.

A special thank you to our 50th Gala cabinet members!

Karen Ufer, Larry Doll, Jerry Nordblom, Jim Adams, Susan Lackey,
Paul & Anne Glendon, Chris & Elaine Graham

Thank you to our Sponsors!

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Thank you to our Art Auction Donors!

Thanks to the generosity of an awesome group of artists and artisans who donated jewelry, pottery, & paintings - and two farms that donated food - our online art auction was a success!

Marty Walker • Debbie Thompson • Marlene Dusbiber
Susan Craig • Scott Weaver • Deva Designs
Lisa Boererma • Bent Tree Flute Circle • Susie Stevenson
Robyn Mendenhall • Old Brick Farm • Bur Oaks Farm
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LEGACY Land Conservancy

*Celebrating 50 Years of Protecting
& Preserving Land*

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