

THE UNDERSTORY

Legacy Land Conservancy

Spring



2022



Maple buds - Photo by Barbara Michniewicz

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LEGACY
Land Conservancy

The problems the world is dealing with lately can feel crushing. At every turn we are faced with new crises. And big issues, like climate change, can feel overwhelming.

Despite the climate doom, we can all be part of the solution. Changes in precipitation and extreme weather events are already influencing national, state, and local planning and response activities across most sectors. Individuals are making lifestyle changes. And organizations like land trusts are committed to making an impact, too, through formidable goals and actions.

We know that land protection is one piece of the climate change solution, and Legacy is proud to do our part. Plants are an effective way of removing carbon from the atmosphere, and by protecting and preserving large swaths of land we are helping to mitigate climate change locally. Every acre of land we protect helps capture carbon emissions from our atmosphere and sequester it back into the soil.



Photo by Russell Bronson

Ultimately, land trusts of all sizes can help shape climate change policy, reduce community-wide carbon footprints, and enhance the resilience of natural and developed environments to ease climate change impacts. And, as we continue our work together—especially with our partners, volunteers, and landowners—I know we can accomplish a lot.

We're using the energy from celebrating our 50th year to give us a little 'spring' in our step and help us meet the breadth of work we are taking on as we continue to step up to the climate change challenge. As Legacy updates our strategic plan and sets ambitious five and ten-year goals, we are committed to being part of the solution alongside the world, our country, our state, and YOU!

Yours in Conservation,

A blue ink signature of Diana Kern.

Diana Kern, Executive Director

*Be assured that our individual actions,
collectively, make a huge difference.
~Jane Goodall*

Grantor gratitude

All of the hard work our staff does to protect and preserve southern Michigan wouldn't be possible without the support of our foundation and corporate partners. Thank you to:

- **The J. Ferrantino Foundation, The Harry A. and Margaret D. Towsley Foundation, Cherry Republic,** and the **James A. and Faith Knight Foundation** for their support of our mission.
- **ITC Holdings** – new iPads for our photomonitors to help them monitor our 80-plus conservation easements more quickly and easily.
- **Land Trust Alliance** – support for a new prairie restoration project beginning this summer at the Reichert Preserve.
- **Americana Foundation** – outreach and communications support in our newly adopted service area, Lenawee County.



Upholding forever in local land protection

One thing that makes conservation easements so impactful is the “forever” part. Given that the only constant in our world is change, being in the business of forever means that people and organizations working with conservation easements have to think differently. They have to anticipate an unknown future, and translate that into the language of a legal document. One way that “forever” shows up in conservation easements is a provision on “cessation of conservancy existence,” “assignment,” or other similar language. This section ensures that even if an easement-holding organization doesn’t exist in the future, the conservation easements it holds will be assigned, through succession planning or by court order, to another qualified entity.

The Raisin Valley Land Trust (RVLT) was formed by a group of motivated individuals seeking to preserve land in the Raisin River watershed. Many years later, and with an aging, all-volunteer board, RVLT began to recognize they were not equipped to continue managing the conservation easements they held. Confronted with this new reality, in 2019 RVLT leaders approached Legacy with a question: if RVLT dissolved, would Legacy consider assuming responsibility for their 14 conservation easements?

After much discussion among Legacy staff, board, attorneys, and RVLT leadership—and with the understanding that, as an accredited regional land trust, Legacy was the most qualified entity to accept this responsibility—in 2021, Legacy’s Board of Trustees formally agreed to assume RVLT’s conservation easements.

However, agreeing to assume the easements is only the beginning of a long and complicated process. The work required to get to closing day is complex, involves a lot of moving parts and people, and creates a very long task list!

So far, we’ve sifted through all existing documentation and developed a plan to get each easement up to current Land Trust Accreditation standards. We’ve begun the required due diligence for each easement, which includes boundary surveys, environmental site assessments, title review, and preparation of current conditions reports. In some cases, this work has surfaced new issues that will require additional time and attention. Last but not least, we’ve begun the integral process of developing relationships with the RVLT easement landowners through due diligence efforts and annual monitoring in partnership with RVLT board members.

We are on track to have the RVLT easements under our wing by the end of the year, and look forward to sharing the process with you along the way!

Volunteer Spotlight

Marguerite Smith – Office & Photomonitoring Volunteer

Marguerite has been a volunteer with Legacy for over ten years and has logged over 850 hours! Her dedication to Legacy and our mission is truly one of a kind. She is one of those special volunteers you can always count on. Whether it’s answering the call for ordinary office tasks—like data entry, mailings, and uploading monitoring reports—or heading out into the field to monitor multiple properties, she’s got it covered.

And when the pandemic made volunteering more complicated, Marguerite stepped up and helped in any way she could. She continued to



Marguerite Smith

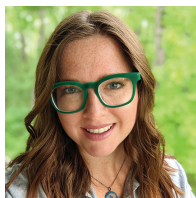
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Fresh Faces: Meet the Land Team



Land protection doesn't happen in a single moment with the signing of a conservation easement at the closing table. Certainly, that moment is a peak one—a conservation easement is the legal document that enables the protection of a property's natural and/or agricultural values forever—but land protection is so much more. It also includes the due diligence required to prepare a conservation easement prior to closing. It includes the perpetual enforcement of that easement through changes in ownership and within the context of a changing environment. And for Legacy, it also includes the intentional management of natural communities and enforcement of use restrictions on our public preserves.

While every Legacy staffer is integral to our land protection work, a team of four (known internally as the Land Team) is responsible for the day-to-day work. This team has seen a lot of change in personnel over the last several years, but our commitment to land protection has stayed the same! Here's a list of the current Land Team members and a brief description of their role within the process.



Susan LaCroix (she/her/hers), Land Protection Manager –

Susan has led land acquisition projects at Legacy for three years, but she's been working with land trusts throughout the country for the last eleven. Once a property officially enters our acquisition pipeline, Susan is the main point of contact and helps our landowners right up through closing day.

Allene Smith (she/her/hers), Land Protection Specialist – Allene spent six years managing Legacy's preserves, but has recently transitioned into a new role supporting all three facets of Land Protection: Acquisitions, Easement Stewardship, and Preserve Stewardship. She handles all new land inquiries, assists with due diligence work, including baseline production, and supports on all land acquisition projects.



Clint McGill (he/him/his), Easement Stewardship Coordinator –

Clint is a new face at Legacy! He joined the team in 2021 and heads up our Easement Stewardship Program. He is the main point of contact for all our current conservation easement landowners, manages the annual monitoring of 90+ easement properties, coordinates our volunteer photomonitoring team, and oversees conservation easement violations.

Kyler Moran (he/him/his), Preserve Stewardship Manager – Kyler spent his first year at Legacy managing our Easement Stewardship Program, but recently transitioned to the role of Preserve Stewardship Manager. He is responsible for managing Legacy's publicly accessible preserves and their associated stewardship activities.



*Still not sure who to contact about your land protection question?
Send us an email at info@legacylandconservancy.org or call 734.302.5263
and someone will point you in the right direction!*

Volunteer Spotlight - Marguerite Smith

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photomonitor even with the extra precautions, and she transitioned into new office tasks (from afar!) as a result of the new “work from home” culture. Most notably, as Legacy's Zoom meetings skyrocketed during this time, Marguerite took on the important job of translating all virtual committee and board meeting calls into draft minutes. No easy feat, unless you are Marguerite!

Great volunteers are a gift to any nonprofit, and we are so lucky to have Marguerite as part of the Legacy team! Marguerite, thanks for everything!

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

Increased preserve use modifies planning and accessibility efforts

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, we saw firsthand the restorative power nature can hold. As lockdowns began, our public nature preserves became a safe place for our community to get outside, gather with friends and loved ones, and take in the natural beauty of southern Michigan.

With that came an explosion of preserve use. From 2020 to 2021 visitors to our preserves doubled, and we've seen no signs of that slowing down. As usage increases and awareness of equity and inclusion issues related to land access heightens, so does the need for expanded preserve stewardship and maintenance to ensure a positive experience for visitors.

Each year Legacy's stewardship team continues to prioritize improving preserve accessibility, while maintaining and, where possible, accelerating momentum for habitat restoration and improvement projects. Staff, seasonal field crews, and volunteers remove invasive species, collect and disperse seeds, trim back vegetation near the trails, post signage, install or repair boardwalks, manage compost piles, and conduct prescribed burns. But in addition to this regular work load, more preserve usage also calls for an increase in trash removal, parking lot upkeep, trail map replenishment, and more.



Clearing the trail at Johnson Preserve



Adding a sign to the trailhead at Shatter Family Preserve

More people are exploring outdoor recreation, and trends are showing those people are overall younger, more diverse, and new to the outdoors. As the pandemic ebbs, we're working on eliminating any barriers to enjoying the beauty of our preserves. That means upgrading our signage, adding maps and wayfinding signs, and making our spaces more accessible so our new community members feel welcome to return over and over again.

The first barrier to the outdoors is often access. Unkempt trails can be unsafe and uninviting for users,

especially those with mobility challenges and families with children. Unclear signage and trail markers can make users feel unwelcome and be a confusing challenge. We want everyone who visits our preserves—whether they're a seasoned birder, a senior looking to spend some time outside, or a college student taking a respite from mid-terms—to feel welcome, safe, and free to be their authentic selves while experiencing our natural world.



Improved trailhead entrance at Creekshead Preserve

Short-term and long-term planning for turning our updated preserve vision into a reality is currently underway. With it, we have also identified how much money it will take. While our long-term plan will cost in the millions of dollars, our short-term, most immediate needs will cost around \$100,000. And thanks to an anonymous donor and their generous \$25,000, that work is well under way! So as the weather warms and you head out to our preserves, keep an eye open for our staff working hard to implement those upgrades. Stay tuned to learn more about all our preserve plans and how you can help us create a more accessible outdoors for everyone!

Thank You to our 2022 Business Sponsors!

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*Want to become a Legacy business sponsor? Contact Development Associate
Krista Jacob at kjacob@legacylandconservancy.org or 734-780-6948.*



FY 2020-2021 Annual Report

The Legacy Land Conservancy
Annual Report is available at
www.legacylandconservancy.org



Scan the QR code
to view the Report

LEGACY

Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving
Southern Michigan*

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Photo by Barbara Michniewicz



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