

THE UNDERSTORY

Legacy Land Conservancy

Fall



2022



McCullough-Helmer project property protected in June 2022.

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LEGACY
Land Conservancy

Friends, it's been a *busy* summer for Legacy. We welcomed the return of our in-person Land Partner Gathering, held multiple preserve volunteer workdays, and continued our preserve accessibility push. With the help of two stewardship crew members and our very first Huron Pines AmeriCorps member, we completed an enormous amount of invasive species removal, updated our preserve trail blazes, and installed a new boardwalk at the Shatter Family Preserve.

Since June we've also closed on four spectacular pieces of land, protecting a total of 150 acres including critical frontage and wildlife habitat on the River Raisin plus an incredible and rare prairie fen in Jackson County. Additionally, Legacy took responsibility for the first three Raisin Valley Land Trust (RVLT) conservation easements being transferred to us as RVLT ceases operations. Bringing these projects to the finish line is a win for our community, for land protection, and for future generations of land lovers.

It feels so good to say the land protection log jam amplified by the pandemic has finally broken free! And this is only the beginning! Our conservation easement pipeline is growing at a tremendous rate as more and more people are joining Legacy to conserve the land, water, and natural spaces we all cherish. With current acquisition projects varying from a small dairy farm and popcorn breeding farm to recreational spaces and habitat corridors, we're on track to protect another 500 acres in the upcoming months. We've got a lot of work ahead of us, and we need your help in moving these important projects forward.

Each acre we protect means a cleaner, healthier future for all of us. With your support, Legacy can continue to ride the tide of land protection and stewardship opportunities to preserve even more of our beautiful forests, prairies, wetlands, farmlands, and waterways. We're so fortunate to have you along for the ride with us!

Yours in Conservation,



Diana Kern, Executive Director



Legacy Preserve Stewardship Manager Kyler Moran (front) gets help from Lenawee Intermediate School District students during a September Sharon Hills Preserve workday.

More to celebrate!

Unfortunately, printing a newsletter means limited space and a really early deadline for copy. That means this issue we couldn't fit in the details of all our wonderful work. Check out

www.legacylandconservancy.org for more information on our most recent land protection projects!

- Another 89 acres protected, including a rare prairie fen in Jackson County
- The first three Raisin Valley Land Trust (RVLT) conservation easements transferred



Spring-fed pool on the newly conserved Arnold fen property

Proud to be Legacy's first Huron Pines AmeriCorps member

By Ally Audia, 2022 Huron Pines AmeriCorps Member, Legacy Preserve Stewardship Technician

From May to October of this year, I was honored to be the first Huron Pines AmeriCorps member serving at Legacy Land Conservancy! As an individual who from a young age has been passionate about the conservation of Michigan's natural resources, the Huron Pines AmeriCorps position at Legacy was a perfect fit.



AmeriCorps is a national service program that brings dedicated citizens together to tackle the country's most burgeoning issues within health, education, disaster services, and environmental stewardship. Huron Pines AmeriCorps is an AmeriCorps program started in 2007 that focuses on developing conservation leaders in Michigan through volunteer engagement, habitat restoration, environmental stewardship, and improved environmental knowledge. After earning my Bachelor of Science from the University of Michigan-Dearborn, serving as Legacy's Preserve Stewardship Technician gave me the ideal opportunity to explore the conservation field while serving southern Michigan, where I grew up.

During my time, I joined the Preserve Stewardship Manager and seasonal field crew in the stewardship and management of Legacy's nature preserves. Together we performed invasive species treatment and removal, and completed preserve infrastructure maintenance. We removed hundreds of pounds of invasive species, repaired a bridge and a bench, removed a truckload of fencing, built a kiosk, and painted new blazes along all preserve trails.

Most notably, we completed Phase 1 of the Shatter Family Preserve Trail Project by adding 362 feet of boardwalk along the wetter areas of the trail system. Over three days, Kyler, Chris, and I staged lumber, cut materials to size, and built the boardwalk. We finished with shoulder bruises and back aches. But knowing our hard work improves access for the community, it was totally worth it.

Throughout my service term it is clear to me that Huron Pines AmeriCorps and Legacy share many of the same overall values, especially in their commitment to conservation. I am thankful to both organizations for an amazing opportunity and giving me the chance to work with great people. I look forward to the continued collaboration between Huron Pines and Legacy, and I am proud to have been a part of something so special!

Shatter Family Preserve Trail Project

Phase 1



Before

After

Phase 1 was generously funded by the Speckhard-Knight Charitable Foundation!

Phase 2, a floating boardwalk trail connector, is dependent on ongoing fundraising.

Donate today! Scan the QR code





McCullough-Helmer Project landowners at closing (L-R) John and Carol McCullough, Freida and Byron McCullough, Jennifer and David Helmer

Three sets of landowners team up to protect 90 acres along River Raisin in Sharon Hills

In June Legacy Land Conservancy permanently protected 90 acres of forest, prairie, and wetlands, including 3,850 feet of frontage along the River Raisin, in western Washtenaw County.

In a unique joint effort of three sets of landowners—John and Carol McCullough, Byron and Freida McCullough, and David and Jennifer Helmer—the McCullough-Helmer Project consists of three conservation easements in the Sharon Hills area of Manchester. The properties contain restored open prairie, multiple wetland areas, and steep wooded slopes leading down to the River Raisin.

The landowners are extremely pleased to protect their properties' highly invaluable natural wetland areas and ensure the quality and quantity of water resources within the River Raisin Watershed via conservation easements with Legacy, which offers permanent protection of privately-owned land.

The three families were inspired to collaborate and protect their properties in 2016 when they observed the establishment of the Washtenaw County Parks & Recreation Commission's (WCPARC) River Raisin Preserve just up the river from their land.

"Seeing the nearby land preserved years ago motivated us to find a way to protect our land too," landowner John McCullough said. "Thanks to Legacy, WCPARC, and their partners, our vision is now a reality and the land we love is protected forever."

The McCullough-Helmer Project is partially funded by a Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, & Energy (EGLE) Non-Point Source Pollution Grant—a grant that aims to restore waters impaired by Nonpoint Source (NPS) Pollution and protect high quality waters from degradation. NPS pollution is a



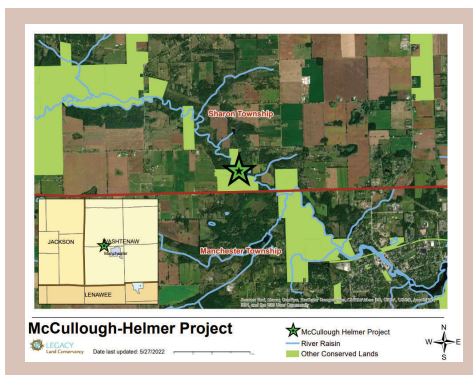
leading cause of pollution in waterways. It is a combination of pollutants from a large area rather than from specific sources such as discharge pipes at industrial and sewage treatment plants. As water runoff caused by rainfall or snowmelt moves over and through the ground and accumulates contaminants from sources like gardens or parking lots, it is emptied into streams or rivers.

Permanent protection of the land within the McCullough-Helmer Project is an essential part of reducing NPS pollution. Its large swath of exceptional wildlife habitat, open space, riparian area and open river along the River Raisin helps ensure there is quality water filtration and ample flood plain to maintain a healthy river downstream through more urban areas, like Monroe, and contributes positively to the overall health of the River Raisin and Lake Erie.

“Land protection in the Upper River Raisin sub-watershed remains a high priority for the continued health of the larger watershed and Great Lakes Basin” explained EGLE watershed project manager Julia Kirkwood. “Keeping the forests intact and preserving the natural land cover ensures these lands will provide significant water quality benefits in downstream areas.”

The project also adds to existing protected lands in the Sharon Hills greenway area and along the River Raisin, building on river protection momentum and benefiting water quality in the corridor. Its 3,850 feet along the river joins the string of protected lands and 43,000 feet of protected river frontage from Sharonville State Game Area, to the Nan Weston Preserve, to Sharon Mills park, to the WCPARC River Raisin Preserve, and down to Legacy’s Mann easement and WCPARC’s Leonard Preserve.

Additional funds to purchase the conservation easement from the landowners were secured in partnership with WCPARC. Legacy is honored to work with amazing landowners and partners in order to protect land and help safeguard clean water in the River Raisin Watershed and surrounding waterways.



McCullough-Helmer Conservation Easement Project



Time to close = 4 years (2018-2022)

90 acres of forest, prairie, and wetlands in Washtenaw County

- ✓ Consists of 3 conservation easements; 3 sets of landowners
- ✓ Includes 3,850 feet of frontage along the River Raisin
- ✓ Adds to existing protected lands in the Sharon Hills greenway area and along the River Raisin
- ✓ Builds on river protection momentum and benefits water quality in the corridor

Building connections to support ongoing conservation commitments

For those who have entered into a conservation easement with Legacy, it is more than just a legal document. It is a solemn promise—for the landowners and Legacy—to defend the land and uphold its conservation values for all time.

It is a tremendous responsibility, and we know there is a lot that goes into stewarding land forever. We also know that the amount of information and resources available can be overwhelming. So as part of Legacy's ongoing commitment to our dedicated landowners, we sift through the information and provide connections to new and existing resources.

For landowners David and Alisande Read, one of those connections came in 2021. During Legacy's Annual Land Partner Gathering they heard a presentation by Jim Hazelman, the US Fish & Wildlife Service Biologist tasked with running the State's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The Program provides free technical and financial assistance to landowners interested in improving wildlife habitat on their land.

Eager to build on stewardship work they had been doing on their land since 2009, David and Alisande contacted Jim. After an in-depth conversation, the Reads enrolled in the program to help them tackle another piece of their management plan. They received technical assistance to design, oversee, and implement plans to establish native grasses and wildflowers on former agricultural land and to restore a wetland basin. And they received funding to cover more than 75% of project costs!

"Working with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program really helped us with the heavy lifting on our wetland restoration project," David Read said. "Restoring a one-acre wetland basin required the removal of agricultural drain tiles, the construction of berms, and the installation of a water control structure. Their assistance was indispensable. Now, all we need to do is grade the berms, seed them with native vegetation, and continue regular maintenance."

Over the last many years, David and Alisande have made great strides to restore some of their land, formerly used for agricultural production, to a more natural state. While it has been a gradual process, they have successfully established wetland and prairie/grassland habitats for native plants and animals to thrive. The fields once depleted of nutrients and overtaken with invasive plants are now brimming with life. Big Bluestem, Indian grass, little blue stem, side-oats grama, and wildflowers provide nesting habitat for monarch butterflies, native bees, and other pollinators, as well as waterfowl and grassland dependent song birds.



David Read (L) and Jim Hazelman (R) speak at the 2022 Land Partner Gathering



Before Restoration



After Restoration

Programs like the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program are often an overlooked landowner resource, and it's best promoted by showcasing success stories. So, at this year's Annual Land Partner Gathering, we invited our landowners out to the Read's property. Jim and David talked about their collaboration and showcased the large-scale, ongoing ecological restoration project in the hopes of inspiring another landowner to participate.

David, Alisande, and their family's strong commitment to their land is an inspiration for us all. We're proud

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Legacy Board welcomes three new trustees

We are delighted to welcome three new members—Brenda Pilgrim, Shikha Singh, and Sandra Sorini Elser—to the Legacy Land Conservancy Board of Trustees.

Brenda, Shikha, and Sandra are outstanding community members from the Jackson and Washtenaw County areas whose experience in nonprofit financial development, invasive species management, and real estate law with a conservation easement emphasis, will be great assets in supporting Legacy’s land protection efforts.



Brenda Pilgrim



Shikha Singh



Sandra Sorini Elser

Scan the QR code to read their bios



“Bringing three new members onboard with such a wealth of knowledge and expertise in a variety of skillsets enhances the great work Legacy is already doing. We look forward to integrating Brenda, Shikha, and Sandy’s unique perspectives as we build on our commitment to innovative land protection.” ~Larry Doll Legacy Board of Trustees President

Volunteer Spotlight

Rosanne Bloomer – Committee Volunteer

After Rosanne and her husband protected their 152-acre farm – Bur Oaks – in 2005 through the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program, not only did Rosanne devote her time to making delicious traditional, non-GMO varieties of popcorn at the family farm, she began volunteering her time to Legacy. Since 2007, Rosanne has generously donated over 300 hours throughout various board, committee, and task force positions.



Rosanne Bloomer

As a retired Senior Financial Officer with Greenstone Farm Credit, Rosanne’s financial knowledge has most recently been an integral part of the Finance Committee and Legacy’s overall financial stability.

We are extremely thankful for Rosanne. Her passion for land protection and meticulous financial acumen are essential to Legacy’s success! Thank you, Rosanne!

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

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of the fantastic work the Reads and US Fish & Wildlife Services are doing together, and we’re happy we were able to connect them!



Jim showcases a new growth site on the Read property during the 2022 Land Partner Gathering

LEGACY Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving
Southern Michigan*

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A special thank you to Ally and our stewardship crew, Xu and Chris, for all their work this summer!



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