

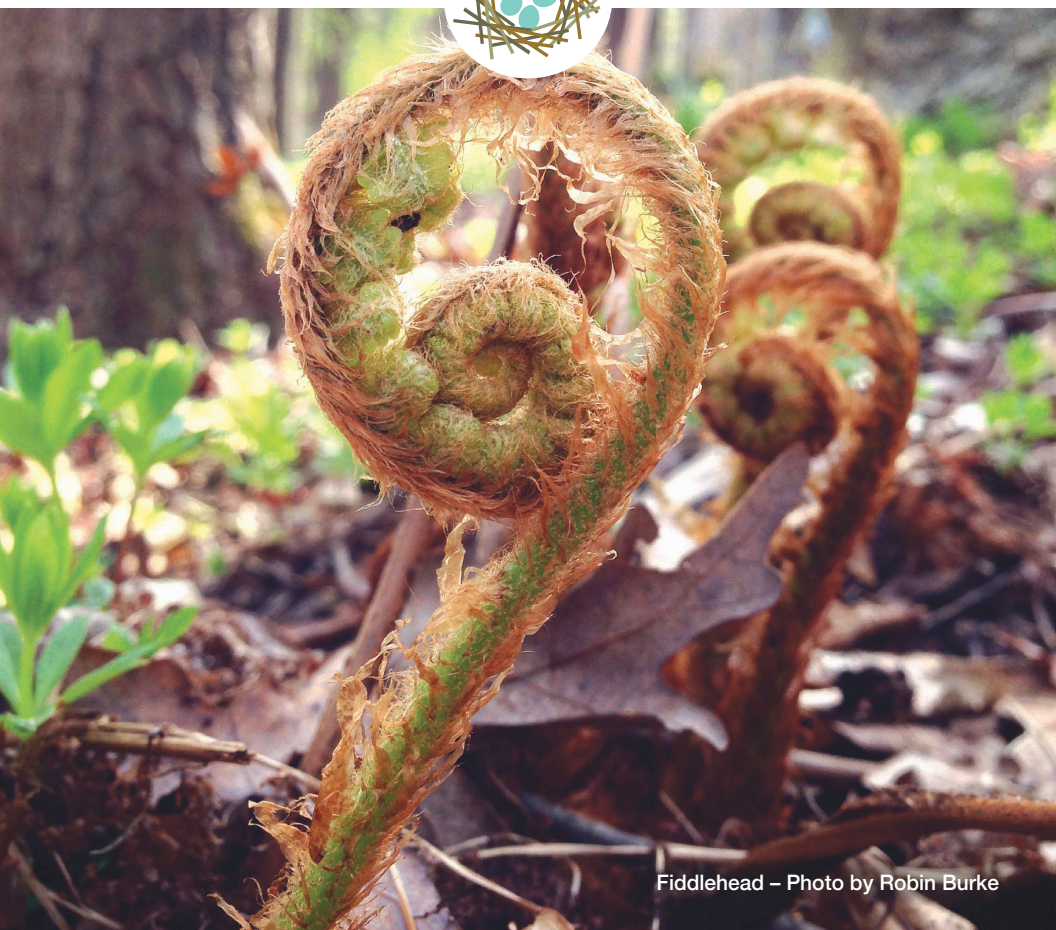
# THE UNDERSTORY

Legacy Land Conservancy

*Spring*



2023



Fiddlehead – Photo by Robin Burke

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LEGACY  
Land Conservancy

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# GREETINGS

Spring is here! It always seems like our “slow” season gets shorter every year, and as the skunk cabbage, Dutchman’s breeches, and trillium reemerge into the world, we are too!

Just as the land we work to protect is inter-dependent on the diverse ecosystems that live and thrive within them, Legacy is made whole through the reciprocity of our relationships, partners, and supporters. The power of those relationships is evident in the new friends we’ve made in Lenawee County and two partner-driven programs.



*“Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.”*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Braiding Sweetgrass”

We’re joining with eleven of our partner organizations and the Michigan DNR to participate in the Forests to MI Faucets program, spending the next two years working to connect our landowners with conservation practices to help protect drinking water. And thanks to the American Farmland Trust, we’re strengthening our stewardship through enhanced landowner soil health-related resources.

And speaking of strengthening our future, Legacy received a generous gift that’s proving to be instrumental in bolstering our work now and for years to come. Jackson County philanthropist Myrna Berlet left Legacy a \$1.295 million gift in her will, and thanks to her generosity we’re working toward strategic land stewardship planning. The gift she bequeathed to Legacy will help build and maintain a sustainable future of stewardship and accessibility on our current public nature preserves and those yet to come!

Legacy has an exciting season ahead of us throughout Jackson, Lenawee, and Washtenaw counties—full of growing partnerships, stewardship, and love for the land. We can’t wait to see you out in the community! And with your support, we look forward to building on this growth throughout the year.

*Yours in Conservation,*

Diana Kern, Executive Director

## Grantor Gratitude

Thank you to our most recent foundation, organization, and corporate partner support!

- **National Fish and Wildlife Federation and the Southeast Michigan Resilience Fund** – Support to remove invasive species and prepare a management plan to restore habitat and open public access to our new nature preserve project in Washtenaw County.
- **Toyota North America** – Support for our preserve stewardship and accessibility project.
- **ITC Holdings** – Support for our two 2023 AmeriCorps members.
- **Land Trust Alliance** – Support for strategic planning.
- **J. Ferrantino Charitable Foundation** – Support for easement stewardship.
- **Cherry Republic** – General support for our mission.



2023 AmeriCorps members, Ally Audia and Camryn Brent, lead a vernal pool training.

# Welcoming soil health to the land protection conversation

In 2021 American Farmland Trust (AFT) launched the Soil Health Stewards Program. It is a national effort to engage and support land protection practitioners—like land trusts—in promoting soil health practices with the farmers, ranchers, and others who own and manage permanently protected agricultural land.

The program focuses on targeting the more than 6 million acres of permanently protected farms and ranches nationwide to improve soil health, recognizing the lasting impact that this will provide to both the environment and farmers.

As part of the program, AFT is providing training, resources, and grants to help organizations throughout the country enhance their own efforts to support and incentivize landowners of protected land to address soil health. Recently, Legacy applied for and was awarded a \$10,000 grant to participate in the program.

“When Legacy heard about the program, we immediately knew it was something we wanted to be a part of,” Easement Stewardship Coordinator Clint McGill said. “Our service areas have large agricultural communities. As a result, a lot of the current and prospective easement landowners Legacy works with are farmers or own farmland that they lease out to local farmers. This program will help us connect landowners to resources from other local partners—an integral part of our conservation work—that could help them to improve the quality and productivity of their land while simultaneously benefitting our local ecosystems and watersheds.”

Legacy has completed the training portion and created an action plan. We'll be implementing it over the next year and a half, but we're already learning about economic and environmental benefits of soil health practices while building new skills to support landowners in adopting these practices. We're expanding our network of soil health professionals in our service region. And, we are meeting with the local Natural Resources Conservation Service, Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, and Conservation District staff so we can direct landowners to specific resources that can help them manage soil health or get paid for implementing better practices!

In the upcoming years, we anticipate developing more localized soil health education materials, training staff and volunteers on soil health basics, deepening relationships with local soil health experts, and connecting landowners with educational and grant resources to improve their land's soil health.

If you would like to learn more, contact Clint at [cmcgill@legacylandconservancy.org](mailto:cmcgill@legacylandconservancy.org).

## Two samples of the same soil type.



- A. Soil using improved soil health practices
- B. Soil using conventional farming practices

Sample A is a richer, healthier soil—a result of no till and cover crop practices. Its visibly darker color indicates the presence of higher levels of organic matter that are beneficial to crops. Its more robust root system, and smaller clumps with less compaction, improves water infiltration and reduces runoff.



# Generous gift boosts stewardship plan

“It was just like any other day, until I got the mail,” Diana Kern Legacy Land Conservancy Executive Director said. “When I opened the envelope and read the letter, my heart started racing. Myrna Berlet—who had never donated before—had bequeathed Legacy over a million dollars!”

It has been almost two years since Legacy was surprised with Myrna’s \$1.295 million unrestricted bequest. And after much contemplation and planning, we are ready to strategically put her generous gift to work.

After receiving the letter, Legacy staff and board spent several months discussing how best to use her gift. We diligently researched and learned more about her life and her values. We attended her Ceremony of Life and we held personal conversations with those who knew her best.

“Myrna was deeply passionate about the natural world, and about bringing her enthusiasm for the outdoors to everyone through film and education,” friend and caretaker Mark Snedeker said.



Myrna Irene (Anderson) Berlet Dutcher Dietrich, an award-winning wildlife filmmaker and teacher, nature-enthusiast, and philanthropist from Jackson had a passion for the outdoors and nature that began on her childhood farm in North Dakota. It deepened throughout her life—at home, in the classroom, through film—and reached far into the community with her dedication to Jackson Community College, the Dahlem Nature Center, and the Michigan and Jackson Audubon Societies.

As we learned her story and about her desire to protect and steward land locally that would benefit generations, it became clear—her gift should embrace her love of nature and teaching, while at the same time bolstering our land protection work now and in the future. We decided Myrna’s generous gift would be a great fit to strengthen our strategic, comprehensive land stewardship plan and help build a sustainable future of stewardship on our current public nature preserves and those yet to come!



Vernal pool training at Johnson Preserve

Over the last few years we have continued our accessibility push to accommodate more visitors and eliminate barriers to enjoying the beauty of our preserves. Within the last year, we finalized a Preserve Accessibility Project plan and cost projection that was years in the making. Expanding preserve stewardship and maintenance to ensure a positive, inclusive, and educational experience for everyone has become a top priority.



Our preserves provide more than nine miles of publicly accessible trails. Each year we maintain these trails; inspect, repair, and extend boardwalks; remove invasive species; and protect and restore native flora and fauna. To help visitors make the most of our wetlands, woodlands, and prairies, we enhance their usability with improved trailhead and interpretive signage and dedicated parking areas. We mow miles of grassy trails, conduct controlled burns to discourage the growth of invasive plants, spread seeds to restore or improve native habitat, remove trash, and rebuild and add boardwalks that allow visitor access while mitigating impacts to soil, vegetation, and hydrological conditions.

It's a lot of work, and we do it forever!

Thanks in part to an anonymous donor last year, we've already made great progress on implementing pieces of our plan like adding more boardwalks, removing hundreds of pounds of invasive species, and adding trail blazes to all our preserves. The additional funds from Myrna will help us build upon this work in the future, and it will allow us to expand on our work now as we make the outdoors accessible for all through new thoughtful signage, wayfinding, maps, and information accessibility. This fall we're proud to say we're on track to install new trailhead kiosks and increased signage throughout the preserves!

We are so grateful for Myrna and her dedication to the environment and conservation. Legacy's strength and commitment to a better future is in no small part thanks to the generosity of nature lovers like Myrna, and our wide community of supporters. Her legacy and love for the natural world will endure in every boardwalk built, every invasive plant pulled, and every acre of native habitat restored.

## TWO times the impact

After an extremely successful first-time partnership with Huron Pines AmeriCorps last year, Legacy is excited to participate in the program again for the 2023 service year!

Thanks to Huron Pines AmeriCorps and generous funding through ITC Holdings, Legacy will benefit from not one, but TWO members this year. We are fortunate to welcome back second-year member Ally Audia and welcome newcomer Camryn Brent.

Expanding on the work started in the summer of 2022, Ally and Camryn will join the Preserve Stewardship Manager in the management of Legacy's nature preserves, performing tasks such as invasive species treatment and removal, preserve infrastructure maintenance, vernal pool monitoring and leading volunteer work days.

Welcome, Camryn and Ally!

# welcome!

CAMRYN BRENT & ALLY AUDIA





## See a need, fill a need

**T**he Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission's (WCPARC) Natural Area Preservation Program (NAPP) and the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program (Greenbelt)—two millage-funded conservation efforts in Washtenaw County—both run their own conservation easement programs. To date, they have protected almost 8,000 acres through conservation easements and each year they protect more. As the amount of protected land increases for each program, both have sought extra help to ensure essential aspects of the conservation easement process are completed. And, that's where Legacy comes in!

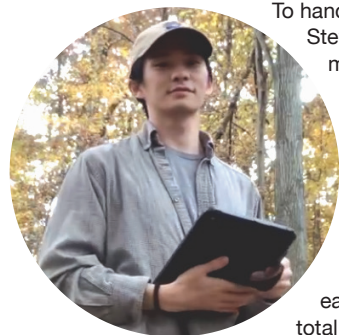
In 2008 Legacy became one of the first conservancies in the nation to be accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. After a rigorous review process, accreditation is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

Legacy has maintained its accreditation standing through two rounds of re-accreditation. The process ensures that we are meeting or exceeding land conservation industry standards and that our work keeps our promise of “forever.” It also means we are uniquely equipped to assist other entities with certain aspects of their land protection work.

Our accreditation status is a badge of honor in the field, one that doesn't go unseen by other conservation programs we work alongside like WCPARC and the Greenbelt.

In addition to 100% accreditation-required monitoring every calendar year for all 100+ Legacy-held easements, Legacy has monitored 22 easements in partnership with WCPARC for many years. And in July of 2022, we began a new contract with the Greenbelt to help them complete baseline documentation reports and annual monitoring—two incredibly important steps in upholding conservation easements.

Unlike Legacy-held easements, which can be monitored by volunteers, the contracts with WCPARC and the Greenbelt stipulate that monitoring can only be done by Legacy staff members. And when we partnered with the Greenbelt to monitor their 36 easements, it pushed the number of easements we annually monitor to well over 150!



To handle this increase, we welcomed Kyto Katori, Easement Stewardship Associate, to the team last September. His main responsibility is to conduct annual monitoring of the Greenbelt's easements. But he also helps with baseline and current conditions reports as well as the careful fostering of strong relationships with landowners. He will continue to introduce and familiarize landowners with Legacy and remind folks what our role is as a partner in the conservation of their land.

In four months, Kyto completed monitoring all 36 Greenbelt easements for 2022. This spring he will begin monitoring a total of 66 easements—the original 36, plus 4 new ones, and 26 WCPARC easements. But that's not all! Legacy also has agreed to complete 11 baselines this year, and Kyto is one of only three staff who will be preparing them.

The task list may be long, but Kyto is up to the challenge. “I'm excited to meet with Greenbelt landowners again and continue what I started last year,” he said. “It's an honor to partner with the City of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County as we all work to preserve important land for our community.”

# Ensure your vision can live on forever

**B**ecause so much of our land protection work is about ensuring that the places we save today will be protected forever, planned gifts are indispensable. Each planned gift—a will, bequest, trust, annuity, insurance, or deferred gift—contributes to Legacy's financial strength and our ability to protect and steward the beautiful places we all love for future generations. It also ensures that your values and vision can live on forever.

Join the Legacy Society with a planned gift commitment now and increase your impact during the Legacy Bequest Challenge. Generous Legacy Society members Tom and Debby McMullen have created a \$20,000 challenge grant. When you include Legacy in your will or estate plan, a donation of \$1,000 will be made to Legacy in your honor! This means your commitment to protect and preserve Southern Michigan through a planned gift in the future can also help Legacy today!



Contact Krista Jacob at [kjacob@legacylandconservancy.org](mailto:kjacob@legacylandconservancy.org) or 734-780-6948 for details.

*Already have Legacy in your plan? Don't forget to let us know!*



## Volunteer Spotlight

### Chuck Sawicki – Stewardship Volunteer

**C**huck first volunteered with Legacy in the fall of 2022 at a busy Sharon Hill Preserve workday with over 40 high school students in attendance. Since then, he has found his niche at the Lloyd and Mabel Johnson Preserve, taking frequent trips to independently remove woody invasives from the hedgerows that mark the edges of Johnson's prairie restoration project.

Chuck is eager to learn about land stewardship and the natural world, sharing engaging articles around stewardship with Legacy staff and taking any educational resources we can pass onto him.

His commitment is remarkable. Chuck even celebrated his birthday hanging out at the Legacy office talking about projects and picking up some more herbicide for his work at Johnson. Thank you, Chuck!

*Interested in volunteering with Legacy, or submitting yourself/someone else for a volunteer spotlight? Email [stewardship@legacylandconservancy.org](mailto:stewardship@legacylandconservancy.org)*



## FY 2021-2022 Annual Report

The Legacy Land Conservancy  
Annual Report is available at  
[www.legacylandconservancy.org](http://www.legacylandconservancy.org)



Scan the QR code  
to view the Report



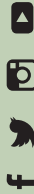
# LEGACY Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving  
Southern Michigan*

## CONTACT

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## STAFF

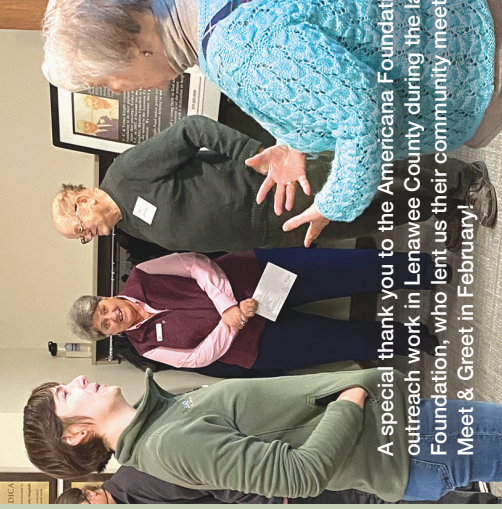
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Krista Jacob, Development Associate  
Kyro Katori, Easement Stewardship Associate  
Diana Kern, Executive Director  
Susan LaCroix, Land Protection Manager  
Clint McGill, Easement Stewardship Coordinator  
Kyler Moran, Preserve Stewardship Manager  
Michelle Sigakis, Director of Finance & Operations  
Allene Smith, Land Protection Specialist  
Cayla Tinney and Shawn Zellers, Reichert Preserve Caretakers

## TRUSTEES

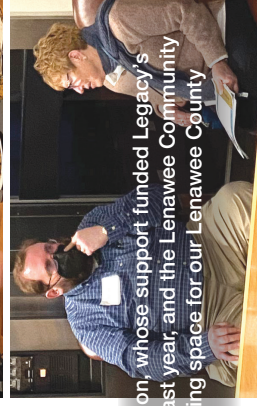
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A special thank you to the Americana Foundation, whose support funded Legacy's outreach work in Lenawee County during the last year, and the Lenawee Community Foundation, who lent us their community meeting space for our Lenawee County Meet & Greet in February!



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