

# THE UNDERSTORY

Legacy Land Conservancy

*Fall*



*2023*



*Shepherding in a new management method – Page 3*

*Family farm protected forever – Page 4*

*Forest to Mi Faucet: Connecting Forests, Water, & Communities – Page 6*

LEGACY  
Land Conservancy

# GREETINGS

The personal benefits of land protection today are many: cleaner water to drink, cleaner air to breath, fresher food to eat. But the work we do together is truly designed to protect not only our individual futures, but the future of this planet and everything—plant, animal, or human—who lives here. And I think that takes quite a lot of love. Love for our communities, our children, our farms, our waterways, our pollinators, our trees.

**Land protection at its core is a selfless act of love, and it begins with our landowners.**

Some have taken care of the land they love for generations, like the Kress family who has cared for their 223-acre farm for over 100 years. Others, like James and Joyce Grace, have only owned their land a short time, but it's their long-time love of nature and community that inspires them.

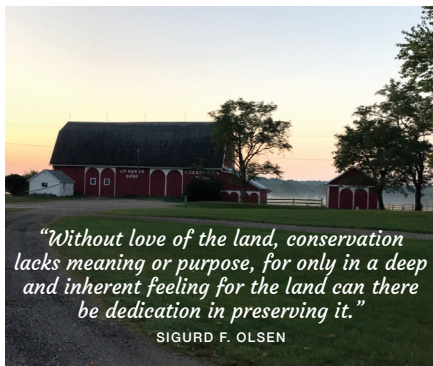
Soon, another family who has been lovingly stewarding their 80-acre property for generations, will entrust Legacy with their land as a public preserve for all of us to enjoy.

**This love continues with us.** We are moved by our devoted landowners and are proud to ensure their love of the land lives on through Legacy. Through our dedication to conserving and stewarding the land forever, and through our supporters, like you, who share your love of the land through hundreds of volunteer hours and generous donations to support our mission.

*Yours in Conservation,*



*Diana Kern, Executive Director*



## Volunteer Spotlight

### Jo Mayer – Stewardship Volunteer

For over ten years, Jo has been involved with Legacy through her work at Beckwith Preserve. Her deep community ties have made Jo the go-to resource and strong influence behind Legacy's connection with the surrounding area.

Retired from the Stockbridge Community Schools in 2017, Jo remains committed to the area and serves on the board of the Stockbridge Area Wellness Coalition. Always looking to improve the health of her community, she helped champion the Stockbridge Pathways Initiative—which ties into the Beckwith trails by design— and helped with Beckwith's most recent connection to the Michigan DNR Mike Levine Lakelands Trail!

And when she's not literally connecting Legacy to the community trails, Jo connects us with area leaders, publications, and organizations (like the local high school!) AND organizes and participates in cleanups at Beckwith. Thank you, Jo!



Spring workday at Beckwith Preserve



## *Shepherding in a new management method*

Legacy has been working for many years to remove woody invasive species from the forested areas of Lloyd & Mabel Johnson Preserve. Recently, we have been focusing primarily on the hedgerows near the restored prairie. These forested strips contain invasive plants such as common buckthorn and honeysuckle that threaten to expand into the prairie.

In the constant battle to control their spread, we are always looking for new and innovative management methods. Typically, our volunteers help cut the plants down and then Legacy staff apply herbicide to the stumps. But this year our stewardship team tested out a new herbicide-free method—sheep!

In March and April, two groups of Eastern Michigan University (EMU) students helped cut down the invasive shrubs into a more snackable size for our four-legged crew members. And instead of Legacy staff applying herbicide, in September we enlisted a herd of sheep via Project Mow to eat the buckthorn and honeysuckle sprouts. For one week the sheep were fenced in around the hedgerow and supervised by volunteers as they nibbled on the invasive understory plants.

After our first time hosting sheep on the Preserve, it is safe to say that this treatment method was a smashing success! During their time in the hedgerow, the sheep defoliated (ate all of the leaves off) all of the honeysuckle, buckthorn, and autumn olive that was within reach. As the week progressed and the amount of available food at ground level was scarcer, volunteers had to augment the available food by cutting back branches of large shrubs for the sheep to munch on.

Although some additional treatment may be necessary to fully eradicate the invasive plants that the sheep ate for us, it's likely that we'll bring back the sheep to the same area next year for a second helping and to finish off this year's leftovers. It was a pleasure working with Project Mow and their sheep. We are looking forward to seeing next year's progress!

A special thank you to all the volunteers who kept a watchful eye on the sheep, and to those who helped turn the shrubs into snackable sizes for the sheep—Johnson Preserve Steward Chuck Sawicki, EMU Sierra Club, and Dr. Maria Goodrich's biology class!



Hedgerow at Johnson Preserve -  
Before Project Mow



Hedgerow at Johnson Preserve -  
After Project Mow



Volunteer checks on the sheep -  
Photo by Adela Pinch

## Family farm protected forever

In June, Legacy permanently protected a family farm bisected by Pleasant Lake Road in western Washtenaw County.

Locust Hill Farm, conserved thanks to the efforts of siblings from the Kress family, consists of idyllic farm fields, a classic German-style dairy barn, a picturesque farm house, and forest with rolling hills. One of the siblings, Joe Kress, currently lives on and farms the property.

"All of us had ridden a tractor by the time we were five and we spent most of our childhood helping dad on the farm," Joe said. "Knowing we banded together to permanently protect the farm would make him proud."

Originally established by the Dresselhaus family, the Kress family has cared for and cultivated the land since 1920. After the passing of their parents, the Kress siblings—Joe, Jean, Jeff, Jana, and John—began working with Legacy in 2017 to secure a conservation easement on the farm, which ultimately, helped keep the farm in the family.

At 226 acres, Locust Hill Farm is larger than the average size farm in Washtenaw County and it is one of Legacy's biggest projects to date. The cost to purchase the development rights from the Kress family farm was over half a million dollars. Legacy worked over multiple years to secure a myriad of funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Washtenaw County Parks & Recreation Commission, and other private entities.

"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 land conservation," Legacy's Executive Director Diana Kern said. "To help the Kress family continue their family farming tradition is a wonderful feeling."



*There's more to the story on our website! Scan the QR code for details & more photos*



Kress siblings, Jean Lathrop (L) and John Kress (R)



# Protected Grand River waterfront property benefits community

With all the heavy rains we saw this summer, conserving land with water frontage like the one we protected in Jackson County this August is even more significant!

With 1350 feet along the Grand River and land noteworthy for its natural and permeable floodplain habitat, River Hills, owned by James and Joyce Grace and protected via a donated conservation with Legacy, sits between the River and suburban neighborhoods. It provides for flood and erosion mitigation and groundwater recharge within the Upper Grand River watershed, and it helps to ensure the quality and quantity of water resources for the Jackson area, Lake Michigan, and the entire Great Lakes basin.

River Hills is directly upriver of the city of Jackson. By protecting its floodplain, wetland, and forested land, it helps reduce the impacts of heavy rain storms and flooding within the City.

“When we bought the land, our goal was to conserve it and keep it in its natural state, not only for our benefit, but for the benefit of the community too,” the Graces said. “Although it’s not open to the public, you can’t drive down Winbar Drive without enjoying the scenic view. And more importantly, we’re thrilled our undeveloped land helps water quality and eases the flooding effects of heavy rain for those living downriver.”

Additionally, Ella Sharp Park, which is located in the city limits of Jackson and contains over 300 acres of natural area, is immediately adjacent to River Hills. The contiguous habitat adds to vital corridor wetlands and upland habitats that serve as a connection for wildlife movement along the Grand River, creating a natural “greenway” through an otherwise urbanized area.



James and Joyce Grace

*There's more to the story on our website! Scan the QR code for details & more photos*



# Forest to Mi Faucet: Connecting Forests, Water, & Communities

Many of us don't think twice about the water coming out of the faucet. We turn it on and the water comes out. We take a drink, wash the dishes, and move on with our day. It's easy to forget—and for a majority of Americans, *not even know*, there is a much bigger water story happening behind the scenes.

Unfortunately, the sophisticated public water system that brings water right into our homes has resulted in a disconnect between people and nature. As far as many folks know, their water comes from the tap. And while that is technically not false, our tap water *actually* originates from nature.



- *Help municipal water utilities implement their source water protection plans.*
- *Inspire and empower landowners to manage and conserve their woodlands to protect drinking water.*
- *Plant 60,000 trees in riparian zones of urban and rural forests for water quality and reduced runoff.*
- *Educate people about connections between forests and their drinking water.*
- *Plant 750,000 trees on state forests to match USDA Forest Service investments.*

## Before the tap

The Great Lakes contain 20% of the planet's fresh water. Over 28 million people—including many Michiganders—get their drinking water directly from the Great Lakes. And those who don't, get it from a nearby river, lake, or groundwater well.

These water sources are routinely replenished when it rains or snows. We see it when the precipitation falls directly onto and into the waterways. But, it's what we don't see that is having a big impact on the quality of our water.

Rarely noticed, the rest of the water that falls on the ground also makes its way back to our water sources. And it's the type of land the water travels through—forests, agricultural, and developed—that impacts how clean (or unclear) our water is.

## Vibrant forests, healthy waters

Forests cover 56% of Michigan's land. More than half of our water flows through 20 million acres of forests on its way back to a water source. And while 62% of those acres are in private ownership, only a small amount is within a conservation easement, nature preserve, or protected watershed.

Research shows individual Great Lake water quality is better when the percentage of forested land surrounding it is higher. Forest land is a natural sponge and slows water down. When intense rains hit, it helps reduce rapid runoff which can wash dirt into streams and lakes. Forest floors also act as a natural filter, resulting in high-quality source water that requires minimal treatment.

Minimal treatment also leads to lower costs. A 2002 survey—conducted by the Trust for Public Land and American Water Works Association’s Water Source Protection Committee—of 27 water suppliers indicated that for every 10% increase in forest cover in a source area (up to ~60% forest cover), treatment and chemical costs decreased by about 20%.

## Forests to Faucets

In 2011, the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service began the Forests to Faucets program creating a national tool for understanding the importance of forests for water. They built upon this program with the National Forests to Faucets 2.0 Assessment in 2020. It expanded on the original tool and identified priority watersheds—like the ones in Michigan—important to protecting surface drinking water in the United States.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources and its Forest Stewardship Program began a Michigan-specific initiative called Forest to Mi Faucet in 2022. Leading a team of state-wide conservation partners, the program helps educate Michiganders and their communities about the connections between forests and clean water. Eventually, Forest to Mi Faucet hopes to create the foundation for a program to provide payment for ecosystem services where forest owners are compensated for practices that provide clean water.

In 2023, Legacy proudly joined as a partner organization with Forest to Mi Faucet. Over the next year, we look forward to helping the team meet its goals!

## Legacy Board welcomes three new trustees

We are delighted to welcome three new members—Jena Agler, Rosanne Bloomer, and Steve Palms—to the Legacy Land Conservancy Board of Trustees.

Jena, Rosanne, and Steve are three outstanding Washtenaw County community members whose experience in estate planning, finance, and real estate law with a land transaction emphasis, will be great assets in supporting Legacy’s long-term financial goals.



Jena Agler



Rosanne Bloomer



Steve Palms

Scan the QR  
code to read  
their bios



*“In 2022, Legacy began working on a ten-year plan to build a stronger foundation for a future of fiscal sustainability. The wealth of financial and legal expertise Jena, Rosanne, and Steve bring to our team, will be an integral part of building this foundation and greatly enhance the work we started.”*

*~Bill Strohaber Legacy Board of Trustees President*



# LEGACY

## Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving  
Southern Michigan*

### CONTACT

734-302-5263

[info@legacylandconservancy.org](mailto:info@legacylandconservancy.org)

[legacylandconservancy.org](http://legacylandconservancy.org)



### STAFF

Pam Bierzynski, Communications Manager

Mario Black, Business Manager

Krista Jacob, Development Director

Kyto Katori, Easement Stewardship Associate

Diana Kern, Executive Director

Susan LaCroix, Land Protection Director

Clint McGill, Easement Stewardship Manager

Kyler Moran, Preserve Stewardship Manager

Michelle Sigakis, Director of Finance & Operations

Allene Smith, Land Protection Specialist

Cayla Tinney & Shawn Zellers, Reichert Preserve Caretakers

Hannah Weinau, Donor Outreach Coordinator

### TRUSTEES

**Bill Strohaber**, President; **Karen Ufer**, Vice President;

**Rosanne Bloomer**, Treasurer; **Jeff Lake**, Secretary;

Jena Agler, Larry Doll, Ginny Leikam, John Moran, Steve Palms,

Shikha Singh, Sandra Sorini Elser, Simon Whitelocke



© 2023



*A special thank-you to all volunteers from our spring and summer workdays!*



**Legacy Land Conservancy**

6276 Jackson Rd., Suite G

Ann Arbor, MI 48103

NONPROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**

PERMIT #62  
ANN ARBOR, MI