

THE UNDERSTORY

Legacy Land Conservancy

Fall



2024



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LEGACY
Land Conservancy

GREETINGS

In 1973 students from the Stockbridge Future Farmers of America (FFA) at Stockbridge High School planted hundreds of 6-inch pine saplings on farm fields of what we know today as Beckwith Nature Preserve. These pines now stand over 30 feet tall and make up the “nature play” area on the southeast portion of the preserve where visitors are encouraged to leave the trail and play on the mossy, needle covered soil.

Now, over 50 years later, a new generation of Stockbridge FFA students came back to Beckwith helping to plant 100 trees as part of our participation in the Forest to Mi Faucet initiative. And in another 50 years these trees will have grown into a diverse forest and riparian shrub buffer helping to filter our drinking water and mitigate climate change.

It's stories like these that remind us that we don't do this work for ourselves. We do it for future generations.

And, our work is not limited to planting trees. We're safeguarding southern Michigan's land and water to support diverse, resilient, and thriving communities—forever. And that shows up in many different ways.

It's the land we protect through conservation easements on properties like Jansen Farms that secure a legacy for future generations who can continue to grow food on the land and ensure that the farmland feeds our communities into the future.

It's land we protect as preserves like Iron Creek that will serve as a place where anyone can build a connection with nature and experience the same beauty, serenity, and joy the land donors were so fortunate to enjoy.

It's also in your support through planned gifts, volunteer workdays, and generous donations. Each gift – whether that's time, treasure, or talent – is a seed that grows into protecting the places we love forever.

Yours in Conservation,



Diana Kern, Executive Director

FreeWill Partnership

Because so much of our land protection work is about ensuring that the places we save today will be protected forever, planned gifts—a will, bequest, trust, annuity, insurance, or deferred gift—are indispensable.

There is no better way to continue to make a difference for land conservation in our community many years from now. However, future charitable gifts require some planning today, before they are made.

To aid your planning, Legacy has partnered with FreeWill, which can help you create a basic will if you don't have one already. This online will-writing resource takes just 20 minutes to use.

With their secure online tool, you can make your plan and designate a portion to Legacy Land Conservancy safeguarding Michigan's land and water to support diverse, resilient, and thriving communities—forever.

There is absolutely no requirement to leave a gift to Legacy Land Conservancy in your will. This resource is offered at no cost. FreeWill is a tool that has been used by over 900,000 people to complete their wills online, and partners with hundreds of well-known nonprofit organizations and educational institutions. Please consult your financial or legal adviser regarding your will or estate planning at any time.



“When we plant a tree, we are doing what we can to make our planet a more wholesome and happier dwelling-place for those who come after us if not for ourselves.”

~Oliver Wendell Holmes



FREEWILL   **LEGACY**
Land Conservancy

Write your will today!

Photo by Austin Thomason

Celebrating 25 Years of Beckwith Preserve

It's been 25 years since Fran and Campbell Laird worked with Barry Lonik of what was then called the Potawatomi Land Trust* to create the Beckwith Nature Preserve, named in honor of Fran's parents.

At the time, it was an easy decision for the Lairds. Fran's mother and father, prominent Village of Stockbridge community members Dr. Sidney and Harriet Beckwith, originally purchased the land in 1948. During a 2004 interview, Fran recalled: "My parents had always been very open about letting people wander through the woods. I just felt that I should keep that spirit of openness & accessibility—and of 'welcomeness'. My mother was a very welcoming person. They were birdwatchers, and my father was always interested in wildflowers & plants."

When Fran inherited the land upon her mother's death, she knew exactly what her parents wanted for their land. They wanted it to be preserved and her mother had spoken of donating it.

After a fateful visit to her daughter on the east coast where Fran saw small protected plots donated by people, she knew that some local group would be interested in their land. When Fran returned home, she found the Potawatomi Land Trust and the rest is what we call history.

Flash forward to a beautiful July morning in 2024. Fran, Campbell, and their son Drew, joined Legacy staff, volunteers, community members, and friends and family of the Laird's to celebrate the 25th anniversary of opening Beckwith as a public nature preserve.

While the group enjoyed a delicious ice cream treat, Legacy honored and thanked the Laird family for their generous donation of the Preserve. Stories were shared reflecting on the importance of the Preserve's history, community impact, and years of stewardship.

Although some things have changed over the years, Fran's vision of the land when she spoke about Beckwith in 2004 remains a guiding force for Legacy: "I see 30 acres of land that is preserved, that cannot be built on or developed. I see lots of possibilities for use by the people of Stockbridge and by the people of the WLT* and anyone who is interested in nature. I see a lot of possibilities in the future for restoring it to the way it was when I lived there. I see a place for people to walk and find quiet and spiritual renewal."

We are honored to be a part of something so special and to continue the legacy of Fran, Campbell, and the Beckwith family. The inter-generational impact of their gift means generations of nature lovers can enjoy this beautiful corner of Stockbridge forever.

**Washtenaw Land Trust and Potawatomi Land Trust merged in 1999 becoming Washtenaw-Potawatomi Land Trust. In 2001, Washtenaw-Potawatomi Land Trust changed its name to Washtenaw Land Trust. In 2009, Washtenaw Land Trust changed its name to Legacy Land Conservancy.*



Diana thanks the Laird family during the 25th anniversary celebration.

Iron Creek – Legacy’s



Susan LaCroix, Maan Abdulbaki, Sybil Kolon, Diana Kern, and Steve Palms (L-R) at the Iron Creek Preserve closing.

Farmhouse Deconstruction Project

The property contained a well-loved but beyond repair historic farmhouse that had to be removed before Legacy could accept the land donation. Sybil’s personal history with the house and her desire to keep it out of a landfill resulted in a special deconstruction project prior to the deed transfer. Sybil coordinated between Legacy Land Conservancy and Architectural Salvage Warehouse of Detroit to have the farmhouse taken apart by hand and salvage everything that could be reused. Sybil also worked with the Manchester Area Historical Society to organize a series of workshops about the process. For more information on the project, visit – <https://mahsmi.org/dtp/>



Photo of the farmhouse on the Sutton Farmstead.

Legacy’s newest nature preserve—Iron Creek—is officially on the books! To say that we are EXCITED is an understatement!

Located in Manchester Township, the 79-acre preserve lies in the southwest corner of Washtenaw County situated in the heart of Legacy’s tri-county service area.

It was made possible through the generosity of landowners and long-time land stewards Sybil Kolon and Maan Abdulbaki who donated their land so that future generations can experience the same beauty, serenity, and joy they have been so fortunate to enjoy.

“In 1948 my grandparents decided to leave the city, where they had built a successful business, to rehabilitate a rundown house and farm. They were not the coddling type, but I have to think they did it for their grandchildren,” Sybil Kolon said. “The relationship I formed with this land, coming out here as a kid from Detroit with many other cousins, helped define who I became.”

Sybil and Maan approached Legacy in 2014 with the intentions of leaving their property to Legacy as part of their estate plan. The original idea didn’t materialize as planned though, and gifting the land to Legacy as a nature preserve sooner rather than later turned out to be the best approach.

“One goal of mine is for this land to be a place where anyone can build a connection with nature, as I did,” Sybil said. “Giving this gift during our lifetime allows us to participate in the project and see our hopes come to fruition.”

Permanent protection of this land is significant as it helps to capture and store carbon, benefit water quality, and preserve critical wildlife habitat. It consists predominantly of forested rolling hills interspersed with various wetlands and includes 1000 feet of water front on Iron Creek, a tributary of the River Raisin.

Eighth Preserve!

The preserve is not yet open to the public. Legacy is tentatively working toward an opening in spring 2025, but an official date depends on raising the remaining funds for a stewardship endowment. Legacy is currently fundraising to cover ongoing management costs ensuring the preserve is responsibly managed forever. More than half has been raised by leveraging federal, state, and local funding sources, but over \$400,000 is still needed.

In addition to a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to prep the preserve for visitors, Legacy also received a grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, managed through Ducks Unlimited, to cover the acquisition transaction costs.

“We’re so grateful to our many partners who have come together to see this project come to life,” Executive Director Diana Kern said. “This work takes many hands, and we’re proud to have the trust and funding from our partner organizations to share this unique and beautiful preserve with our community.”

Visit our website to learn more about the project and to support our fundraising efforts, www.legacylandconservancy.org



Volunteers help remove garlic mustard during a spring workday.

Current Preserve Projects

Staff is diligently working behind the scenes to ensure that when we do open the preserve to visitors, it is accessible and safe. Some immediate tasks in addition to trail prep, include hiring a bridge engineer to ensure the footbridge is safe for public use, delineating a parking lot, as well as installing an information kiosk, a detailed map, and a boot brush station. Volunteers have assisted with multiple workdays to remove invasive species and haul debris away.

Scan to learn more



A volunteer loads leftover pieces of the old cabin into the Legacy truck for disposal.

200-Acre Farm Along Scenic Heritage Trail Permanently Protected

In August, thanks to the commitment of landowner Ron Jansen, Legacy permanently protected a 200-acre working family farm straddling Washtenaw and Lenawee counties and boasting scenic views along the US-12 Heritage Trail.

Preservation of Jansen Farms through a conservation easement, which consists of prime agricultural land and high-quality natural areas, is significant as Michigan continues to lose land, especially farmland, at an alarming rate.

Approximately 90% of soils on Jansen Farms have been identified as 'prime farmland' and/or 'farmland of local importance' by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service. The property has a long history of productive farming in a farm-dependent community, and it remains an important part within our food system. Ron currently lives on the farm and raises sheep. A portion of the farmland is leased out to local farmers.

Preserving farmland protects more than open space, scenic views, and productive agricultural soils. It also protects a patchwork of natural areas that contain critical infrastructure supporting wildlife corridors, carbon storage and sequestration, climate resiliency, and pollinator habitat. Trout lily, trillium, and may apples blanket the forest floor, and game birds like pheasants and turkey roam the property's fields.

Jansen Farms sits uniquely within Washtenaw and Lenawee counties and is Legacy's first conservation easement in Lenawee County since officially expanding its service area there in 2021. Jansen joins a small list of protected lands in Bridgewater and Clinton townships, and becomes an anchor for future land protection projects among a community dealing with significant development pressure.

"I've always wanted to keep my farmland for farming. No matter how many times I was approached by various developers and companies to sell or lease my land," Jansen said, "working with Legacy on a solution that balanced my financial needs and ensured the land would remain natural and agricultural was the right choice."

The cost to purchase the development rights from Jansen Farms was more than \$700,000. Jansen will use the funds to invest in farm infrastructure and operations, and the conservation easement will be a central component of his succession planning. Family farms are increasingly disappearing as farmers age out of their work with no successors in place and sell their land to developers. Without a successor to take over his farm, the easement secures a legacy for future generations who can continue to grow food on the land and ensure that the farmland is kept working long after Jansen.



Jansen Farms conservation easement closing. L-R Diana Kern, Ron Jansen, Susan LaCroix.



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



Jansen Farms

Volunteers Help Legacy Plant Hundreds of Trees

In 2023, Legacy joined as a partner organization with Forest to Mi Faucet (F2MF)—a Michigan-specific initiative lead by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and its Forest Stewardship Program designed to help educate Michiganders and their communities about the connections between forests and clean water.



Stockbridge community volunteers at a Beckwith spring workday.

As one piece of the broader initiative and its priorities, Legacy has been busy doing our part to help the F2MF team meet its goals! Over the last year, we've focused on education and planting trees—including prepping the land for planting—in riparian zones to positively impact water quality and reduce runoff.

Legacy staff attended several local events and enjoyed speaking to hundreds of people throughout our service area about forests and clean water. But our team hit their stride out on the land doing its small part in helping the F2MF group initiative reach its lofty goal of planting 60,000 trees in riparian zones.

In preparation for planting trees, our field work began in earnest last fall. Together with the help of our wonderful volunteers, we held workdays throughout Sharon Hills, Beckwith, and Johnson preserves to remove invasive species like autumn olive and common buckthorn, and clear areas for tree plantings.

Then in the spring, our stewardship team completed one prescribed burn at Johnson Preserve to help kill invasive vegetation and remove leaf litter to stimulate native plant species growth. And, we held two more volunteer workdays—at Sharon Hills and Beckwith preserves—to pull garlic mustard in designated tree planting areas.

Once the areas were prepared, staff and volunteers planted the trees throughout April and May. In all, 500 trees were planted at Beckwith and Sharon Hills Preserves. Thanks to over 30 volunteers, which included our core group of Beckwith volunteers and students with Stockbridge schools, 365 of those trees were planted at Beckwith Preserve!

And in our continuous effort to deepen outreach in Lenawee County, F2MF helped us connect with leaders in Blissfield Township who held a workday with their Parks & Recreation Advisory Board to plant 120 trees within their community along the River Raisin. Legacy's participation in F2MF allowed us to provide spruce, oak, maple, dogwood, and arborvitae trees—free of charge—to Blissfield for their planting!

What's next? Legacy's participation in the F2MF initiative continues through September of 2025, so we're not done yet! More preserve workdays have already been scheduled as we work to remove woody invasive vegetation and make room for future plantings of native trees and shrubs on our preserves. And we're using the remainder of this year to work out even more collaborations, plantings, and events for next spring. Stay tuned for more details and ways you can get involved!



Stockbridge student volunteers at a Beckwith spring workday.

LEGACY Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving
Southern Michigan*

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*A special
thank you to
volunteers who
helped us during
a summer or fall
workday!!*



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