

THE UNDERSTORY

Legacy Land Conservancy

Spring



2024



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LEGACY
Land Conservancy

GREETINGS

Five years! I can't believe it's been *five years* since I was offered the opportunity of a lifetime to lead Legacy as its executive director. To take the reins of such a well-established and respected organization was humbling. I was honored, excited, and to be honest—a little nervous!

So much has happened in those five short years! When I arrived, I knew the organization was in a prime spot for an immense amount of growth. Between the climate crisis and the pressure to develop land, conservation is and continues to be a vital part of the solution.

With the Board of Trustees' support, we dove into increasing organizational capacity to keep up with new and existing demands. We deepened staff expertise, growing from five to thirteen, including two full-time AmeriCorps members. And we invested in a diverse range of talent and perspectives, preparing us to tackle the challenges ahead. We also adopted a 10-year financial sustainability plan to strengthen our future.

In a few months we will unveil our newest strategic vision. As part of our visioning process, we formalized a set of core values. And one value—that we cannot do this work alone and we purposefully choose to center partnership and collaboration in our work—is a driving force in our way forward.

The health of our planet and the land we love thrives on connection—within the natural world and with the people who use it—and it depends on strong relationships. So, we're leaning more than ever into our community and the Legacy family. From our grassroots volunteers and supporters to our governmental and nonprofit partners, we're committed to growing community-driven conservation together!

Yours in Conservation,



Diana Kern, Executive Director

Welcome, 2024 AmeriCorps!

Legacy is relishing the opportunity to participate in the Huron Pines AmeriCorps program for the third year in a row!

As part of the 2024 program—and thanks to generous funding through ITC Energy—service members Kai Garcia and Annika Moran joined the Legacy team in January.

Annika and Kai both have a great deal of experience working with and organizing volunteers. Their passion for conservation combined with their strong backgrounds in volunteer engagement will build on prior AmeriCorps work while helping to support our newly expanded Preserve Volunteer Program.

Welcome, Kai and Annika!



Legacy staff and volunteers head to a workday.



Partnerships drive stewardship

By Kyler Moran, Preserve Stewardship Manager

During the 2023 stewardship season, we held 15 workdays on Legacy preserves, which is triple the amount we had in 2022!

In all, we welcomed 124 volunteers during multiple workdays at Shatter, Johnson, Sharon Hills, and Beckwith Preserves. Combined, volunteers and staff spent over 600 hours on woody and herbaceous invasive plant removal, trail clean-up, and preserve infrastructure maintenance. And thanks to these collective efforts, we removed 62 garbage bags (approximately 1230 pounds) of herbaceous invasive species!

We are thrilled by all the work accomplished last season, and we are especially proud of the success of our partner-focused workdays. Accounting for many of the volunteer hours logged, partner workday volunteers are tied to groups and organizations like schools or companies that choose to volunteer on the preserves.

Our partnerships with Eastern Michigan University (EMU) and Lenawee Intermediate School District (LISD) student groups continue to be volunteer powerhouses for us and contributed almost half of our volunteer work. We also welcomed our first group of students from Ann Arbor Green Hills school and look forward to deepening this relationship in the coming years!

Not to be outdone by our student groups, a small group of dedicated volunteers from Meijer Scio Twp Store #173 helped build over 60 feet of raised-plank-boardwalk in one day at Johnson Preserve!



Eastern Michigan University Sierra Club members join Kyler Moran (L) for a workday at Johnson Preserve.

Taking care of Legacy's preserves is an enormous responsibility and one that we can't do alone. I am so grateful for the amazing volunteers who dedicated their time to the stewardship of our preserves last year. And, I'm grateful for the partnerships with our 2023 Business Sponsors who invested additional resources into our preserve stewardship program, which helped us extend our reach and deepen our impact!

This year we are preparing to add one more preserve into our care. The strong volunteer and community partnerships we've come to count on will be even more invaluable in the coming months as we focus on getting our newest preserve, Iron Creek, ready for opening. We'll be organizing multiple workdays throughout the summer and fall, so stay tuned for upcoming volunteer opportunities!

Thank you to our 2023 Business Sponsors!

WATER

Toyota Motor Company
of North America

FARM

Ann Arbor People's Food Coop
Chelsea State Bank
Retirement Income Solutions

WETLAND

Bank of Ann Arbor
TRUE Community
Credit Union

Tapping into our volunteer roots

Volunteers have a long and storied history with Legacy—deeply woven into the fabric of its very existence. Over fifty years ago it was a group of community leaders who banded together to form Washtenaw Land Conservancy, an all-volunteer nonprofit (that eventually became Legacy Land Conservancy!), dedicated to protecting land along the Huron River.

Volunteers founded Legacy. They are the backbone of who we are and what we do. Without them, there is no Legacy.

For almost thirty years, Legacy was run solely by volunteers. And while led by an official staff beginning in 1999, throughout Legacy's entire history, volunteers have remained a constant—filling in the gaps as the organization has grown.

The health of our land thrives on connections and it depends on the strength of our relationships as we strive to support diverse, resilient, and thriving communities. Currently, as we confront the realities of climate change impacting our work and increasing stewardship costs, we're again leaning more heavily into the support of our volunteers.

We're tapping directly into our volunteer roots with the goal of bolstering the solid group of dedicated and committed people we have relied on and who have supported us through the years. In our commitment to continuous improvement, greater impact, and increased capacity building mapped out in Legacy's ten-year sustainability plan, we're feeding on the power of our volunteers and rebooting our volunteer program to take our work to the next level.

As part of that commitment, in July of 2023 we hired a donor outreach coordinator, Hannah Weillnau. With a strong background in relationship building and outreach, Hannah is tasked with evaluating the current volunteer program, identifying places and processes we can improve, and implementing new ways to make the volunteer experience more rewarding as well as deepen their impact.

Leaving no stone unturned, Hannah is looking at all possibilities to make improvements on an already solid program built on the hard work of those before us. In addition to streamlining back-end processes and reporting, in her first six months she is already reimagining ways for Legacy to think bigger. Last fall she relaunched the annual Volunteer Appreciation Event and this spring she helped organize the first annual Volunteer Training & Season Kick-off event replacing the more specific photomonitoring training.



Legacy staff Hannah Weillnau (L) and Krista Jacob (R) pose for a photo during the 2023 Volunteer Appreciation Event.

She's also re-centering around the volunteer experience and the variety of ways people can work with Legacy, which is integral to our future success.



Volunteers from Meijer Scio Twp #173 install a boardwalk at Johnson Preserve.

“It’s not just Legacy who benefits from the expertise and dedication of volunteers,” Hannah said. “It’s really important to us that volunteers also get something out of their experience with Legacy.”

Instead of focusing on just a few ways volunteers can help Legacy, Hannah’s helping us flip our old way of thinking on its head. She wants volunteers to think outside of the box and share with us ways they can and want to work with Legacy. More importantly, Hannah sees value in volunteers “choosing their own adventure” and we’re excited to see where this new way of thinking takes us!

Ready to choose your own adventure with Legacy? Hannah is waiting to hear from you! Send her an email at hweilnau@legacylandconservancy.org or give her a call, 734-780-6627.



Scan the QR code for a list of upcoming volunteer events!



Bringing Back the Volunteer Appreciation Event

On an unseasonably warm October day, Legacy gathered in the beer garden of the Corner Brewery in Ypsilanti to celebrate our volunteers at our first Volunteer Appreciation event since 2018.

Under the backdrop of stunning blue skies, dappled sunlight, and falling leaves, it was a wonderful fall evening dedicated to honoring the people who are integral to Legacy’s work. Legacy staff and volunteers mingled with each other while enjoying delicious food and drink before executive director Diana Kern thanked the group for their dedication and support.

We are grateful to all our volunteers. Their support and time spent helping advance our mission is so impactful. Thank you, volunteers!



Legacy staff and volunteers at the 2023 Volunteer Appreciation Event.

Volunteer Stats – Since July 2019:

- 247 volunteers donated a total of 8,185 hours
- 179 volunteered for the first time
- 855 hours contributed by 40 photomonitors who traversed a total of 7,350 acres
- 565 hours contributed by 161 volunteers caring for our 7 nature preserves; last year alone, more than 1,000 pounds of herbaceous invasive plants were removed!
- 1 volunteer logged over 300 hours transcribing virtual board and committee meetings

Amaizin' Pop Protected

In January, Legacy Land Conservancy permanently protected a 17-acre farm located in northern Washtenaw County and almost completely surrounded by other conserved farmland.

Amaizin' Pop Farm, conserved thanks to the efforts of landowner Charlie Sing, consists of picturesque barns, idyllic rolling pasture fields, and prime agricultural soils. Situated northwest of Ann Arbor in an area heavily sought after for development, its protection through a conservation easement is vital to ensuring rich, productive soils are permanently protected and remain viable for agriculture now and in the future.

"I'm happy to do my part by protecting my farm from development," Charlie said. "It helps out my fellow farmers, the community, and helps save a little more green space for the planet."

Though small in size, Amaizin' Pop Farm adds to the nearly 1,000-acre block of farmland in the area already conserved through a multi-partner regional effort. Legacy is grateful to work with partners like the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt, Webster Township, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) who recognize the importance of conserving large blocks of farmland and helped to make conserving Amaizin' Pop Farm possible.

"Context really matters for this parcel," Rosie Pahl-Donaldson, Land Acquisition Supervisor of the Ann Arbor Greenbelt said. "It is a crucial piece of a larger conservation landscape, located in one of the most impressive blocks of contiguous protected land within the Greenbelt."

By conserving smaller parcels of farmland—like Amaizin' Pop Farm—within a larger protected area, it benefits farmers today as well as in the future. When conserved in close proximity to other farms, the tight-knit supportive farming community remains intact. And as farms change hands over time, small parcels are a good fit for farmers starting out or growing a new business.



Amaizin' Pop breeding patch



Amaizin' Pop pasture and fields



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



Charlie Sing (C), Susan LaCroix (L), and Diana Kern (R)

Collective connects communities to conservation resources

Just as the land we work to protect is interdependent on the diverse ecosystems that live and thrive within them, Legacy is made whole through the reciprocity of our relationships, partners, and supporters.

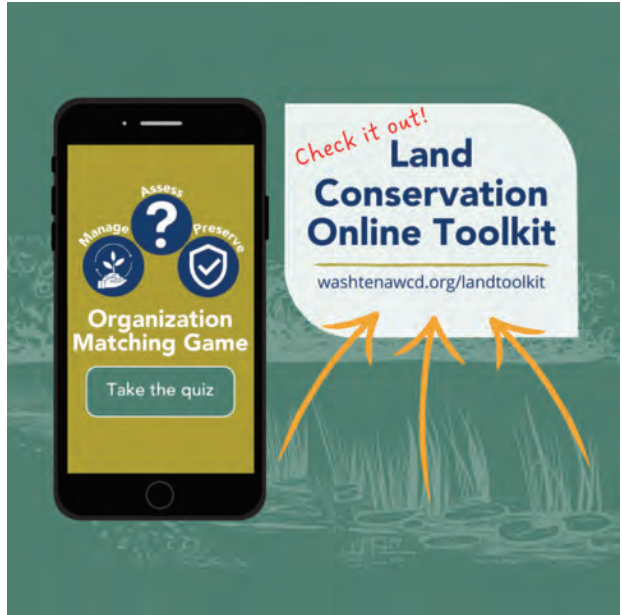
Legacy has built a reputation for partnering with community members and other like-minded organizations to increase the pace of conservation. Much of our land protection success in southern Michigan is the result of informal collaborative partnerships with entities and organizations throughout Washtenaw County, our original service area.

Building on this successful concept, in 2022 we officially joined with five local organizations—Washtenaw County Conservation District, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, River Raisin Watershed Council, Ann Arbor Greenbelt, and the Huron River Watershed Council—forming the Washtenaw County Conservation Collective.

As a partner, Legacy is part of a cohort of conservation organizations in the County who regularly host informational sessions to encourage and educate landowners on conservation practices and tools. We have participated in presentations to the communities of Bridgewater Township, Manchester Township, Sharon Township, and Ypsilanti Township.

This spring, the Collective expanded its services to include a new online tool for landowners helping them find the right resources and connect to local organizations that can help assess, manage, and preserve their land. Visit www.washtenawcd.org/landtoolkit.html to explore the toolkit.

Although the group wasn't formalized until recently, Legacy and our partners have spent years perfecting this type of coordinated outreach. And to its credit, Legacy has seen an influx of interested farmers and landowners join our conservation easement program as a direct result. With such a great model in place, we're eager to replicate a similar program in our newer service areas. While it's years in the making, by mobilizing partnerships to drive community-led support for land protection through township townhall meetings, outreach events, and strategy development with local partner organizations, we're confident it will inspire a more collaborative approach to conservation outreach in Jackson and Lenawee counties.



LEGACY Land Conservancy

*Protecting and Preserving
Southern Michigan*

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BIG NEWS!



Legacy's 8th nature preserve Iron Creek is officially on the books! Stay tuned for details and upcoming workdays.



*Scan the QR code for
the Legacy Annual Report
2023-2024 on our website!*



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