Fall 2016 • Vol. 25, No.3

Landscapes

Close to Apogee

Creating the Portman Nature Preserve

Balmy September breezes seemed to carry the mosquitoes away; nay much to dampen the enthusiasm of a memorable night for the SWMLC faithful who rallied under the festive radiance of globe lights framing the carnival tent. The grand reunion was thoroughly in order; some high-brow chow to celebrate 25 splendid years, and a buoyant proposition for the future to follow.

While I scanned tables of familiar faces, our ambitious project was introduced by its most ardent proponent and SWMLC's longest-tenured staff member, Nate Fuller. My gaze shifted to early founder Bob Pleznac, standing at the rear of the tent. Touching the shoulder of his wife, Pleznac glanced up and directed her attention toward the projected image displaying the words 'Portman Conservation Project'. "This is my dream" he said.

SWMLC officially began laying the groundwork in 2008, with an award to study the flora of the Portman property from the Defenders of Wildlife. "A regional hot-spot of biodiversity" was the confirming verdict. Floristic evaluations of the 188-acre property yielded an unheard of number of plant species: 446, with many rare and declining plant species populating the large, intact, high-quality prairie fen habitats on-site. It is these keystone habitats that harbor the highly vulnerable and rapidly disappearing federally-endangered Mitchell's satyr (see article on page 16) which are in turn supported by an impressive high pressure artesian zone that forms the fen's rich headwater springs. Furthermore, these celebrated springs are a major supplier of clean cold water to the Paw Paw River.

All of this notwithstanding, a place of this size so close to the suburban fringe of nearby Mattawan, fronting all or parts of three inland lakes with oaks and hickories towering above a diverse native ground flora, this alone would more than whet the appetites of the land protection junkies. The investigation, as stated, revealed much more and the enormity of a land protection opportunity began to take shape and focus. There was the confirmation of the fen's purity, and the oaks and hickories towering above a diverse native ground flora; but perhaps more rousing yet, the botanical clues pointed to important constituents of another rare community: oak savanna. This shook the purists among those working in ecosystem health, as the place revealed an alluring opportunity for landscape-level restoration, integrating two rare and critically vulnerable natural communities while bringing them back to health.

Was the Portman Conservation Project pre-ordained for SWMLC? Probably. And it transcends old and new around the saving of an iconic species, while engaging people in a rare, exceptional natural offering that should not be taken for granted here in southwest Michigan. From a primarily scientific origin, SWMLC was born into the quest of sparing the magnificent survivors in their vulnerable places, meaning we sought to protect rare plant communities and extend a permanent lifeline.

continued on page 3

Mud Lake (aka Julie Lake), the largest of the three lakes on the Portman property | Ivan LaBianca

The Portman Acquisition Project has partnership written all over it, with committed partners at the federal, state, and local levels on the public side in addition to several private foundations.

In all, nearly two million dollars have been raised to date with $200,000 to go and a matching challenge grant from the Carls Foundation underway for up to $75,000 in additional funding.

Please consider helping us meet this challenge by making a holiday gift that helps create the Portman Nature Preserve!

For those of you who have helped carry SWMLC forward year after year, this opportunity represents the pinnacle of what we can achieve as your local land conservancy.

The following entities have stepped forward with individual support of over $100,000 for the Portman Nature Preserve project:

- **The Conservation Fund through Enbridge, Inc.**
- **Julie and Jerry Portman**
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**
- **U.S. Forest Service**

Generous financial support has additionally been provided by:

Audubon Society of Kalamazoo, The Burdick-Thorne Foundation, The Carls Foundation, Environmental Action Fund at the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, Fort Wayne Zoo, the H.P. and Genevieve Connable Fund, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Mitchell's Satyr Recovery Team, and the Nancy Malcomson Connable Fund.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to making a landscape level impact through conservation work in Southwest Michigan.

PHOTO CREDITS

LEFT COLUMN

WMU student field trip — Nate Fuller

Immature tamarack cone — Tyler Bassett

Pitcher plants — Ivan LaBianca

Ronda Spink and Ashley Wick of Kalamazoo Nature Center release Mitchell's satyr butterfly larvae that were grown in their captive-rearing program. — Mitch Lettow

RIGHT COLUMN

Michael Anderson, of Kalamazoo Nature Center's captive-rearing program, heading into the fen — Mitch Lettow

Mitchell's satyr butterfly — Nate Fuller

Fritillary butterfly nectaring on swamp milkweed — Nate Fuller

Mud Lake, view from the causeway — Ivan LaBianca

Close to Apogee, *continued from page 1*

From this blueprint, SWMLC slowly ascended to 1,000 and 10,000 foot views where increasing value was placed on the unfragmented landscape and where efficiency, clean water priorities, and resonation with a broader segment of society became guiding precepts. And henceforth we go, seeking to connect people to the land.

Back when they bought the property in the 1980's, owners Jerry and Julie Portman saw enormous potential as a blue-ribbon trout farm. Today, a community of regional stakeholders sees enormous potential in what this project might hold for area educators. "This presents an exciting and wonderful opportunity for authentic learning in a natural setting," retired Mattawan educator Bill McNulty affirms. Western Michigan University classes are already engaged in determining the public use potential, and an open public day and design charrette are soon to come. "The Portman Nature Preserve will be an ideal and unique outdoor learning laboratory for children and adults of all stages and ages," McNulty predicts. "There is so much to be learned from this place on many different levels," adds Fuller. "And a rare opportunity to work in a setting with such great biodiversity."

Fuller easily recalls the day he first met Jerry Portman in 2003. Then, the Portman property was one of 21 remaining viable Mitchell's satyr breeding sites (today there are just 15), and we were given permission by the Portmans to conduct annual monitoring of the species through our work with the satyr recovery team. "Jerry was very protective of his land and their privacy, but so proud of its wilderness-like beauty. He made it clear we were welcome as long as we respected it likewise." The magnitude of what their property means to the satyr and to so many other species, and our role in helping to manage that, eventually helped us earn the Portmans' trust.

Today, Jerry and Julie are overjoyed by the astonishing public and governmental support for this project. As evidence of their commitment, the Portmans have given SWMLC time and a significant donation of value to facilitate this acquisition. So now we must finish the job.

And in as much as the flapping wings of a smallish, brown butterfly led us to this work, we will not know the depth of impact that saving a place for a butterfly will have until the last dollar is raised and the story is well and told, generations from today. From what science has revealed, this indicator species begs us to learn and understand the repercussions of modern land use on biodiversity, and to get a little sophisticated with our land use controls for nature's sake! With unprecedented public and private support, SWMLC is now staring down a Herculean opportunity to nurture and protect a formidable climate refugia. The acquisition will earn us more responsibility and we hope that elevates the odds of taking this delicate beacon of ecosystem health to apogee; bringing the satyr back from the brink of extinction. All the while, creating a place where organic interactions between people and the nature they hold little dominion over can unfold.

— Geoffrey Cripe

"A Regional Hotspot of Biodiversity"

The Portman property features three lakes, a high-quality prairie fen, remnants of a historical oak savanna, and numerous seeps, springs, and headwater streams that recharge and influence the greater Paw Paw River Watershed. In its current condition, the Portman property helps to ensure clean, abundant water throughout the watershed. In its restored condition, the Portman property will not only have expanded functionality for cleaning water but will contain even healthier versions of the oak-hickory forest, oak savanna, and prairie fen habitats that make it so special.

These habitats are home to 23 state-listed species, in addition to the federally-threatened Eastern massasauga rattlesnake and federally-endangered Mitchell's satyr butterfly. The water quality and wildlife habitat values and their potential enhancement represent objectives of the highest order of priority for SWMLC. A major focus for SWMLC post-acquisition will be to restore damaged areas of the property through activities such as invasive and non-native species eradication, nurturing remnant habitats with supplemental plantings, and restoring some of the altered hydrology on-site.

— Geoffrey Cripe

Photo collage by Nate Fuller

The pattern on each Eastern box turtle's shell is as unique as a fingerprint. SWMLC is building a collection of box turtle "mug shots", recording their location and gender whenever they are found. The photo collage above is a sample of turtles found on the Portman property so far. This information will help create a better understanding of the distribution of these increasingly rare turtles and identify important habitat areas.

— Nate Fuller

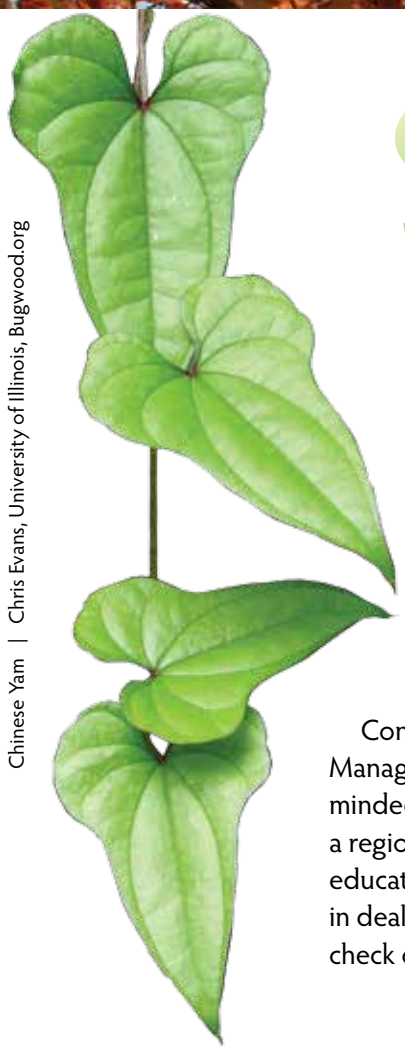
Portman Nature Preserve Steering Committee

SWMLC has assembled a steering committee to ensure that public use and stewardship objectives are balanced so that the future Portman Nature Preserve will be a place of incredible value for students and educators. We were fortunate to convene professionals from diverse locations and backgrounds to advise and support us in this unprecedented effort. This committee will represent and help implement a vision for this future nature preserve.

SWMLC Board representative Thom Coder

William Buhl, Dave Lemberg, Bill McNulty, John Paquin, Rich Wyrwa

THE FUTURE
Portman Nature Preserve
Van Buren County, Michigan
Lime Lake
N
potential boardwalk
LEGEND
Existing Two-Track
Potential Trails and Features
Preserve Boundary
potential viewing platform
Cedar Lake
Mud Lake
potential boardwalk
proposed entrance area
0
250
500
1,000 feet



Chinese Yam | Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

SWMLC NEWS

Southwest by Southwest Corner CISMA

Hydrilla and Chinese yam and knotweed, oh my! With a steadily increasing — and sometimes demoralizing — list of invasive species in Michigan, it's refreshing to hear some good news on this front every once in a while. Cue the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program, established in 2014. In 2016, 3.6 million dollars were allocated across the state, including nearly $300,000 to the Van Buren Conservation District and its partners SWMLC, Chikaming Open Lands, and Cass and Berrien County Conservation Districts. One of the grant's stipulations is that a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) must be created. A CISMA is essentially a working group of like-minded organizations, agencies, landowners, and individuals who have a vested interest in a region — in this case, Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. Through mapping, managing, educating, and — most importantly — preventing invasive species, they better equip the region in dealing with invasives. To learn more and get involved in this emerging community effort, check out: vanburencd.org/programs-services/invasive-species/

— Mitch Lettow

$530,000 Grant to Conserve Land in the Battle Creek Watershed

Map courtesy of Kalamazoo River Watershed Council

In partnership with the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council and students from Michigan State University, SWMLC has been awarded a $530,000 matching grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to permanently conserve lands that protect water resources in the Battle Creek Watershed.

This success is due to the partners' 2015 Kalamazoo River Watershed Conservation Plan, which was subsequently adopted by the MDEQ and prioritizes the most important lands to protect for water quality throughout the entire 2,020 square mile watershed.

In the next year, SWMLC will use the MDEQ funding to purchase conservation easements on the highest ranking properties in the Battle Creek Watershed. One parcel in particular will protect 470-acres, with 130 acres of wetlands and almost a mile of Ackley Creek, adjacent to Michigan Audubon's Baker Sanctuary and the site of the annual Cranefest.

The Conservation Plan is based on GIS mapping analysis and identifies numerous clusters of high priority properties in the Battle Creek River sub-watershed. This suggests that the Battle Creek River is an MDEQ high priority waterbody, making SWMLC eligible to apply for MDEQ funding. MDEQ's grants restore impaired waters and protect high-quality waters by reducing nonpoint sources of sediment, nutrients and other contaminants.

— Emily Wilke

Adapted from Eastern massasauga rattlesnake photos by Laura Christensen

NEW PROTECTIONS FOR EASTERN MASSASAUGA RATTLESNAKE

As of November 1, the Eastern massasauga rattlesnake was added to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife under the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined that the rattlesnake is at risk of extinction, primarily due to the loss of habitat but also from persecution and disease. The rattlesnake still exists in ten states and one Canadian province, but Michigan is the only state where it can still be found relatively regularly. Even in Michigan, populations are diminishing as their preferred habitats of sedge meadows and open oak woodlands get shaded out by invasive woody species.

With this ruling, it is now illegal to harm or harass Eastern massasauga rattlesnakes or to actively destroy their habitat. SWMLC worked with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and USFWS to develop management plans for over 40 of SWMLC's protected lands (30 preserves and 13 conservation easements) where these secretive snakes may still live — only 12 of those sites have had documentation of a rattlesnake in the last decade. The hope is that with active habitat management at these sites, SWMLC can play a role in bringing the rattlesnakes back from the brink of extinction and maintain Michigan's rich natural heritage.

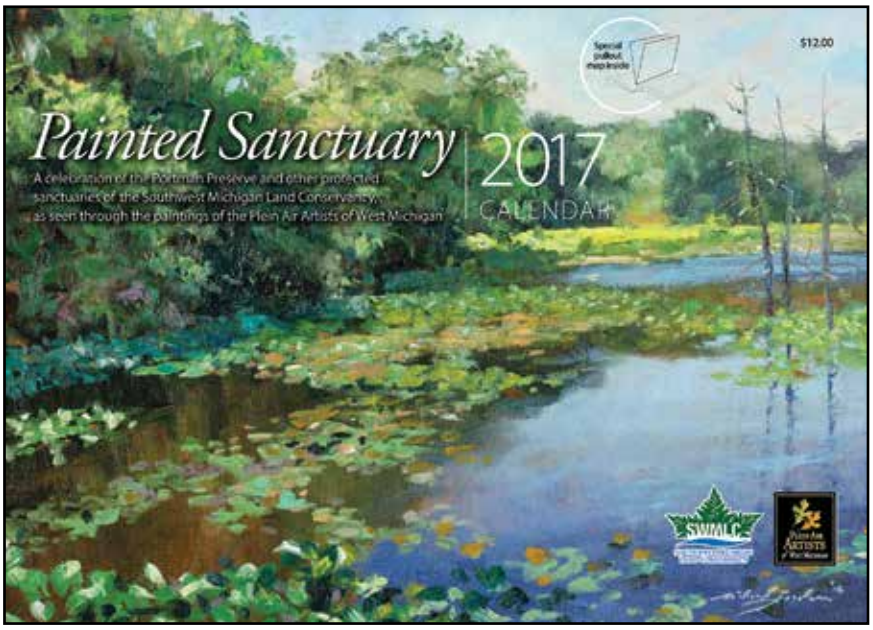
— Nate Fuller

GREAT GIFTS THAT DO GOOD: PAINTED SANCTUARY CALENDARS!

This year's calendar is dedicated to the creation of the Portman Nature Preserve (see cover story). All of SWMLC's proceeds from calendar sales will support the establishment of this public preserve.

It includes a large, pullout map to 18 of our public preserves and their features. Fold it up and stick it in your car's glove box so you can find the perfect place to play outdoors at any time of year!

Printed on high-quality paper stock, its beautiful, full-color reproductions of oil and water color paintings were created by members of the Plein Air Artists of West Michigan (PAAWM).



On the *Painted Sanctuary* cover, the oil painting *Mud Lake, South Shoreline* by Richard Jordan depicts a view of the largest lake on the Portman property.

The paintings in this calendar were created onsite at SWMLC preserves and conservation easements by the PAAWM artists, braving heat, snow, wind, and bugs. The paintings are not only pictorial representations of the scenes that inspired the artists, they are also visual records of the painters' emotional responses to the inspiring landscapes. Bring a bit of nature's power to inspire into your home by purchasing one of these calendars . . . and be sure to buy some for family and friends! At just $12 each (plus $5 shipping for a single calendar), they make inexpensive, classy holiday gifts!

Order directly from our website (http://bit.ly/2ghpneP) or call to get the most up-to-date list of retail outlets.

Thank You. We couldn't do it without you!

Welcome and Thank You to Our New Members and Supporters: May 21, 2016 - September 30, 2016

Thanks also to all who renewed their memberships, supported us through their United Way program, or contributed to our annual campaign, year-end appeal, and other fundraisers. Our sincere apologies for any omissions.

New Members

Louie Abnet
Kathryn Almy and Robert Kakuk
Maggie Ardito
Richard D. Bradley
Timothy Bunch
Sam Ewbank
Rebekah L. Fatzinger
Sarah Ferguson
Miguel Fernandez
Rusty and Julie Fry
Dan Garrett
Tom Goolsby
John Hatt
Gregory Himes
Mark Larsen
Phyllis Malpas and Yvonne Caswell
Randy Mark
Juliet Miller
Nancy Nordlie
Donald and Suzanna Paarlberg
Martie Peters
Dean and Ruth Sanford
Henry Valkema

Gift Memberships were given to:

Brandon and Chaney Bear
by Thom Coder

John and Daryl Ann Letts
by Mary Houser

Donations were made in honor of:

Ken and Marlena Kirton for five decades of giving back to the Kalamazoo community
by Kal and Becky Csia

Honorariums:

In honor of Nate Fuller:
"We appreciated his excellent guidance for our field trip to your new (Portman) property on September 10th."
by Wild Ones, Kalamazoo Area Chapter

In honor of Robert Pleznac for his *". . . excellent guidance for our field trip to the Chipman Preserve on August 4."*
by Wild Ones, Kalamazoo Area Chapter

Memorial Contributions

The following gifts were made in memory or remembrance of:

Doris E. Brady
by Jack and Nanette Keiser

George Bancroft Long
by Patricia Long

Rebecca S. Pernice
by Laura Pernice

Business Supporters

Approved Protection Systems

Building Reports

Cody Kresta Vineyard & Winery

Clubs/Organizations

Deer Creek Open Space Association

Michigan Botanical Club

Grants

Arcadia Ales

Whirlpool Foundation

United Way Agencies

Pfizer Foundation United Way

In-Kind Donations

Hike it Baby!
Hosting a crafts table at the 25th Anniversary Jubilee Event

Kellogg Bird Sanctuary reps and their Birds of Prey visitors
Participation at the 25th Anniversary Jubilee event.

Latitude 42 Brewing Company
Discount on catering for 25th Anniversary Jubilee event.

Dennis Tyson
Painting demonstration at the 25th Anniversary Jubilee event.

Matching Gifts

The organizations listed below made matching gifts on behalf of SWMLC members.

The Boeing Company Gift Match/ BPAC Program

Pfizer Foundation Matching Gifts Program

WK Kellogg Foundation

Did you know that you could potentially **double** your gift to SWMLC?

Contributions to Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy are **matched** by many corporations. If you are employed by (or retired from) a company that has a matching program, please let us know! Send your company form with your gift and we'll be sure to follow-up. Any questions? Email Nicole at nmspeedy@swmlc.org or call 269-324-1600 x307.

What is AmazonSmile?

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support your favorite charitable organization (SWMLC, of course!) every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at **smile.amazon.com**, you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price (0.5%) to your favorite charitable organization. You use the same account on both Amazon.com and AmazonSmile, plus your shopping cart, Wish List, registries, and other account settings are also the same. Once you have selected SWMLC as your designated organization, AmazonSmile will remember and every eligible purchase that you make will result in a donation to us! Quarterly, we will receivenotification and an automatic deposit from Amazon into our Program Fund.

INTRODUCING OUR NEW MEMBERSHIP LEVELS!

We've recently renamed our membership levels to help draw attention to some of our most threatened and endangered species in southwest Michigan, and spread the word about how you can help. And we've restructured our membership benefits to ensure that they are meaningful to you, and provide a significant value for your support.

Thank you!

BLUE GREEN SOCIETY

The Blue represents the abundant waters that surround us here in southwest Michigan, and the Green represents the rich and diverse land that we're blessed with. The Blue Green Society is an exclusive group of supporters who pledge to support SWMLC's mission annually at the Mitchell's Satyr Butterfly level or above.

$1000
SUSTAINING

All of the benefits listed below PLUS invitations to early receptions at major SWMLC events and an exclusive annual Blue Green Society guided hike.

NATE FULLER

MITCHELL'S SATYR BUTTERFLY

This inconspicuous little brown butterfly lives only in prairie fen wetlands, and is a federally- and state-endangered species. Its biggest threats are loss of habitat and chemical runoff of pesticides and fertilizers that pollute the fens.

$1000+

All of the benefits listed below PLUS free SWMLC t-shirt (or comparable).

PUBLIC DOMAIN

EASTERN MASSASAUGA RATTLESNAKE

This charismatic, but shy, "swamp rattler" is now listed as a federally-threatened species. It is also state-listed as a "Species of Special Concern." This beautiful snake lives in prairie fen wetlands and nearby open uplands. It is most threatened by habitat loss, and humans who kill it out of fear and lack of understanding.

$500+

All of the benefits listed below PLUS free SWMLC cap and 10% discount on additional swag.

MDF

CERULEAN WARBLER

This cheerfully blue songbird lives in the upper canopy of large tracts of deciduous forest near river systems and water bodies. It is currently listed as state-threatened, and its biggest threats are habitat loss and fragmentation.

$250+

All of the benefits listed below PLUS *Painted Sanctuary* Calendar.

NICK SCOBEL

SPOTTED TURTLE

This little turtle with the amiable face lives in bogs, fens and grassy marshes. Due to loss of wetland habitat and removal of turtles from the wild by collectors, the spotted turtle is now listed as state-threatened.

$100+

All of the benefits listed below PLUS SWMLC car magnet (one time) instead of window cling.

USDA FOREST SERVICE SOUTHERN RESEARCH STATION, USDA FOREST SERVICE, SRS, BUGWOOD.ORG

LITTLE BROWN BAT *

This tiny little mammal (less than ½ an ounce!) lives in buildings, caves, trees, rocks, and woodpiles. It prefers sites near bodies of water since it feeds largely on aquatic insects. The little brown bat is state-listed as a "Species of Special Concern," and its biggest current threat is the "White Nose Syndrome" fungus.

$50+
*50% DISCOUNT FOR STUDENTS AND SENIORS

SWMLC window cling (one time), subscription to *Landscapes* newsletter, member invitation to Annual Meeting, special invitations to all public SWMLC events, priority RSVP to public SWMLC events with capped attendance.

Original art by Amelia Hansen, based on photos by Nate Fuller and Peter Ter Louw

AUTUMN IN THE PRESERVES!

by SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

Whether you're seeking a peaceful retreat or a place to whoop it up with the kids, SWMLC's public preserves offer the perfect location for cold-weather activities! Extra special places to visit in the winter include the following:

What can you do outdoors on a frosty day?!

- MAKE PATTERNS WITH PRETTY LEAVES
- ENJOY A THERMOS OF HOT SOUP
- MARVEL AT THE BARE-BONES WINTER LANDSCAPE
- SKETCH IN A NATURE JOURNAL
- CATCH UP WITH FRIENDS • MEDITATE
- LISTEN TO THE CALLS OF MIGRATING GEESE OVERHEAD
- MAKE SNOW ANGELS
- TAKE SOME KIDS SLEDDING
- BUILD SNOW PEOPLE & SNOW FORTS
- FOLLOW ANIMAL TRACKS THROUGH THE SNOW

Use your imagination!

December

Wolf Tree Nature Trails

With the leaves fallen from the trees, the unusual glacial topography of this beautiful preserve is on full display.

Hidden Marsh Sanctuary

This is an easy walking preserve offering beautiful views of the cold, crisp Portage River in winter.

Chipman Preserve

Dust off your cross-country skis and snow shoes and explore the rolling hills on the north end of the preserve.

Hike Our Preserves!

LOOK FOR THIS EXCITING NEW PROGRAM IN SPRING 2017!

EARN MEDALLIONS AND BOOKS!

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BOOKBUG & OUR LOCAL MEDICAL COMMUNITY

January

Spirit Springs Sanctuary

Spirit Springs offers lots of great trails for a winter hike, snowshoe walk, or cross-country skiing. Tiny tracks in the snow provide evidence of our elusive winter friends living below the snow.

Kesling Nature Preserve

Kesling Nature Preserve is a great vantage point to observe the icy Galien River as it winds its way between the snow-covered banks.

Hidden Pond Preserve

This preserve is another peaceful place to go snow-shoeing or cross-country skiing. Easy trails are more challenging with a good layer of snow.

PLEASE NOTE

ACCESS TO SOME PRESERVE PARKING AREAS MAY BE LIMITED DURING HEAVY SNOW EVENTS!

SWMLC PULL-OUT POSTER

PRESERVES ARE ADMISSION-FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC EVERY DAY FROM DAWN TO DUSK

CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR DIRECTIONS & DETAILS! • WWW.SWMLC.ORG

SILVER

SWMLC CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF LOCAL LAND PROTECTION

We are pleased to be able to share with you some highlights from the past 25 years — projects, programs, and people representing some of our best moments. Distilling down all of the work that has been accomplished has been no small feat! We are keenly aware — and hope that you understand — that there's just no way for us to honor all of the hard work, expertise, soul, money, and spirit that have carried this organization forward throughout the years.

If you feel we've left out someone or something, we invite you to share your most important stories and favorite memories with us by mail or email (conserveland@swmlc.org) for inclusion in a new history page on our refreshed website, which will be unveiled in the near future. Help enrich this ongoing tale of local land conservation!

Renee Kivikko was hired in 1994 as SWMLC's first executive director with the challenge of bringing organization and structure to the then-all-volunteer land trust. Renee successfully guided this fledgling organization through many of its early challenges, including coordinating land transactions, fundraising for stewardship, and working with the board of directors and volunteers to bring focus to the mission. After six years as SWMLC's executive director, Renee became the Midwest Director for the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), the membership organization for land trusts, where she established a new regional Midwest program serving 12 states. She then served as National Services Director supervising all LTA regional programs, and since May 2008, has been LTA's Director of Education, overseeing all training, educational services, and conservation defense programs.

Fourteen years later, Hultmark Preserve remains as lovely as ever. Photo by Mitch Lettow.

Jeptha Lake Fen Preserve | Mitch Lettow

1991

Concerned citizens hold exploratory meetings.

SWMLC is incorporated as a Michigan nonprofit corporation.

1992

SWMLC's first public meeting is held at Portage Public Library.

SWMLC receives tax-exempt status.

First issue of *Deeds*, SWMLC's first newsletter, rolls off the presses.

Bob Traverse creates the iconic SWMLC logo.

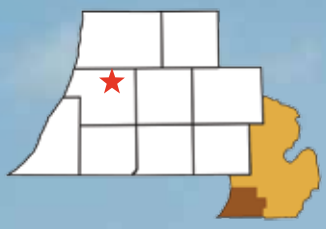
Inventory Committee is created.

1993

First land gift, Hultmark Preserve, is donated by Sara & Gordon Hultmark.

A wet-meadow full of Jeptha Lake Fen Preserve's iconic blazing stars. Photo by Kal Csia.

JEPTHA LAKE FEN



Jeptha Lake Fen holds a special place in the hearts of the SWMLC faithful as our very first preserve — the one that started it all. On a spring day in 1997, the Olson family contacted SWMLC's then-Executive Director Renee Kivikko with an offer to sell part of the property that had been owned by their family since 1910. Their intent was to ensure that it would always be protected in its natural state for future generations to enjoy.

When Renee first visited the 49-acre property with frontage on lower Jeptha Lake, as well as a tributary creek, she discovered a botanically rich fen wetland full of cardinal flower, Kalm's lobelia, golden ragwort, and marsh blazing star. She even found state-threatened turtles and the silver-bordered fritillary butterfly. This, she thought, is definitely a site worthy of SWMLC's efforts to protect.

In the fall of 1997, SWMLC entered into a purchase agreement with the Olson family for the below-market sum of $32,000 to purchase the Jeptha Lake Fen property. SWMLC spent most of the following year fundraising from long time members, and reaching out to new donors to raise the necessary funds, finally acquiring the property in December 1998. This concerted fundraising effort not only made the Jeptha Lake Fen Preserve possible, but it also helped SWMLC to increase its capacity and its outreach to the community.

Almost 20 years later, Jeptha is a continuing focus of our conservation work and now boasts a boardwalk lovingly constructed by SWMLC volunteers so that visitors can enjoy the fen. Each summer, the Olson family gathers at Jeptha Lake Fen to picnic and celebrate this amazing gift that will now be loved, not only by future generations of the Olson family, but by future generations of all of us who call southwest Michigan home.

— Peter Ter Louw

In 2003, the Wednesday Warriors tackled their first project: construction of an ambitious 200-foot boardwalk at Jeptha Lake Fen Preserve.

Photo by Nate Fuller.

Renee Kivikko is hired as first executive director.

* **

First SWMLC office opens on Cox's Drive.

Topinabee Lake Preserve is created, a 71-acre lake and wetland in Berrien County that is a popular birding site

* **

Donated by Ken & Alice Jones, Aurohn Lake is SWMLC's first protected conservation easement, serving as a catalyst for conservation efforts in Barry County.

Purchase of Jeptha Lake Fen is SWMLC's first fundraising campaign to acquire high-priority habitat.

* **

Donation of 258-acre Paw Paw River Preserve increases SWMLC's focus in the Paw Paw River Basin.

1994 1995 1997

WAU-KE-NA, WILLIAM ERBY SMITH PRESERVE

Wau-Ke-Na (Forest by the Lake), two properties totaling 385 acres with over 1,300 feet of frontage on Lake Michigan, is the legacy of William (Bill) Erby Smith. Founding board member Phil Willson recalls Bill as a man of integrity and vision, an astute observer of his surroundings who understood the need to protect and preserve the wild elements of our outdoor world.

SWMLC began conservation efforts at Wau-Ke-Na long before the land was bequeathed with Bill's passing in 2005. A comprehensive plan was developed through many conversations and visioning sessions with board members, staff, volunteers, and local residents. The present day Wau-Ke-Na is the result of efforts of many committed individuals. Our stewardship of the preserve has focused on providing public access while restoring, expanding, and managing the prairies, and protecting the forested areas from overcrowding and invasive species.

Bill's efforts, however, extended beyond conserving Wau-Ke-Na and include establishing the Lake Michigan Shoreowners Association, renovating Glenn's first fire hall, the original dry goods building, and Shell Fuel station. Bill was a man who valued history, the landscape, and the need to preserve structures which tell the stories of its people and lifestyles.

Wau-Ke-Na is identified — and Bill Smith's gift memorialized — by two large entrance signs at each tract. The construction of these signs, and other activities at the preserve, have benefited from the generous support of Bill's brother, Mark Smith, and the Smith Foundation.

Chipman Preserve | Nate Fuller

WARREN WOODS

In 2010, SWMLC was appointed as special trustee of the Warren Woods State Natural Area (and 258 acres of a designated natural area that is located at the core of Warren Dunes State Park) by the Berrien County Circuit Court.

SWMLC's involvement in the proceedings was critical in allowing the Court to transfer ownership of the properties to the State of Michigan. Our track record of land management and oversight ensures that these spectacular resources will always be open to the public.

SWMLC is the only land conservancy in Michigan to be granted this special trustee status. In this capacity, we are required to provide perpetual oversight that ensures that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources complies with the Warren Foundation's original restrictions, but not the day to day operations.

Warren Woods State Park is special. It is a designated State Natural Area and also a federally designated National Natural Landmark. With old growth beech-maple forest growing along the banks of the Galien River, it contains a host of rare and endangered plants and animals. Warren Dunes State Park is Michigan's most visited park and a valuable public resource for both ecological conservation and public recreation.

The incredible, undisturbed beach at Wau-Ke-Na, William Erby Smith Preserve. Photo by Kal Csia.

Conservation hero Dr. Lewis Batts' 555-acre Brewster Lake is protected by CE and purchased by the Pierce family, to become Pierce Cedar Creek Institute.

Hidden Marsh Sanctuary is donated by Dr. Lawrence & Sylvia Wong, our first preserve with trails and parking area.

SWMLC moves office to Prairie Edge Office Park on Sprinkle Road.

Carter Lake Preserve, 57 acres in Hastings, is created — SWMLC's first Barry County Preserve.

1998 1999 2000

CHIPMAN HOUSE & PRESERVE

In December of 2002, John and Patti Chipman donated their 180-acre property in Comstock Township to SWMLC as a nature preserve. Originally a planned gift in their will, John and Patti decided that they wanted to see our stewardship restoration work in action, and personally help to share the land that they had called home for over 50 years with the broader community. In 2004, John purchased and donated 50 more acres to the preserve, and in 2012 Patti donated the family home, which has now become SWMLC's new home: Chipman House.

Chipman Preserve has served as our stewardship classroom, where we can work with partners and volunteers while learning how to best restore habitats and effectively manage invasive species. We continue to refine these skills, while sharing this beautiful piece of nature with the community.

The trust and generosity that this special, accomplished family has placed in us to protect and share their beloved land has been instrumental to SWMLC's achievements over the last 25 years, lending vital credibility and visibility to our work.

Photo by Alfred J. Gemrich

John and Patti Chipman at the Chipman Preserve Dedication, September 25, 2004

BARRY STATE GAME AREA CONSERVATION PLAN

The 17,000-acre Barry State Game Area (SGA) is home to the headwaters of the Thornapple and Gun Plain Rivers, numerous endangered and threatened species, and a diversity of habitats, including essential habitat for uncommon migratory songbirds such as the cerulean warbler.

In 2009, SWMLC began working with the DNR and Barry County conservation partners on a collaborative plan to build upon one of the largest contiguous habitat areas in this region, seeking to conserve an additional 2,000 acres. Utilizing GIS analysis, SWMLC sharpened its focus on the southern and eastern edges of the SGA and looked for opportunities to acquire in-holding properties within the game area.

To date, the plan partners have protected over 1,200 acres of their 2,000-acre goal. The project has expanded to include collaborative research projects, community outreach, and habitat restoration projects. The Barry SGA plan serves as SWMLC's model for defining how we work and for creating valued partnerships toward our mutual goals of protecting southwest Michigan's most important natural areas.

John Chipman had it all figured out. When we asked him why he wanted to conserve their land, he said,

"I wanted there to be a place for a kid to go out in the woods, climb a tree, and just be free."

The purchase of Hickory Creek Preserve (St. Joseph Township, Berrien County) expands the township's Knauf Park and is a recreational greenway corridor.

SWMLC begins Mitchell's satyr butterfly endangered species recovery work.

Dunes Parkway Preserve, a 100-acre forested dune along Blue Star Highway that is comprised of seven combined properties, grows by 60 acres.

Pete Ter Louw is hired as executive director.

Chipman Preserve donated by John & Patti Chipman

Wednesday Warriors volunteer stewardship group is established.

2001 2002

MITCHELL'S SATYR BUTTERFLIES

The year 2000 stands out for many people as a significant milestone (remember Y2K?) and SWMLC is no different. A collaborative grant with Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) marked the beginning of SWMLC's effort to save the Mitchell's satyr butterfly from extinction. The grant gave SWMLC the resources to hire staff to survey satyr habitat, develop site management plans, and establish relationships with the landowners who hosted the butterflies.

A little over 15 years later, SWMLC is one of the leaders in Mitchell's satyr recovery, soon to have permanent protections on 6 of the15 sites remaining on the planet that support the butterfly. Support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Michigan Department of Nature Resources have provided much of the resources to both acquire and care for satyr sites. Habitat management at satyr sites by SWMLC's field staff has helped stave off extinction. Just this summer, we were ecstatic to find Mitchell's satyrs had recolonized an area at Sarett Nature Center where the satyrs hadn't been found in over a decade. The combination of selective woody species removal and prescribed fire worked to not only bring the satyrs back but double their usable habitat.

Meanwhile SWMLC has worked with partners such as MNFI, Michigan State University, The Nature Conservancy, Toledo Zoo, and Kalamazoo Nature Center to create a strategy to not just avoid extinction for the satyrs, but restore populations to the point where they can be safely removed from endangered species status. It will require a collaborative effort that includes additional land protection, habitat restoration, captive rearing, and willing landowners to welcome the butterflies back across their historic range.

— Nate Fuller

Mating Mitchell's satyr butterflies.
Photo by Nate Fuller

This past summer, Kalamazoo Nature Center staff and volunteers released hand-reared Mitchell's satyr larvae into the fen at the future Portman Nature Preserve.
photo by Mitch Lettow

Pilgrim Haven Natural Area | Peter Ter Louw

Fen habitat at Sarett Nature Center.
Photo by Nate Fuller

2003

First prescribed burn performed at Chipman Preserve by stewardship staff.

Sand Creek Preserve donated by Russ Schipper and Ilse Gebhard, our first grassland restoration project

Fenn Valley CE protects 145 acres of vineyard in the Lake Michigan fruitbelt.

2004

Kesling Nature Preserve is created, 52 acres along the Galien River with ravines full of spring wildflowers and nesting sites for yellow throated warblers.

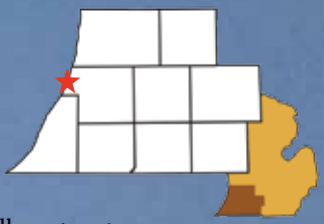
2005

385-acre Wau-Ke-Na Preserve, containing 1,300 feet of Lake Michigan coastline, is donated by William Erby Smith.

2006

SWMLC purchases Dowagiac Fen, our first Mitchell's satyr butterfly site.

PILGRIM HAVEN NATURAL AREA



A woodsy patch on the Lake Michigan shore, enlivened by a creek that spills out onto a bright beach, a place that has been cherished by people for a very long time . . . that's Pilgrim Haven.

With the passing of Suzanne Parish in 2010, SWMLC was fortunate to be gifted the 27-acre Pilgrim Haven property, a former summer camp that contains 800 feet of frontage on Lake Michigan.

Recognizing the unique opportunity and challenges of owning a lakefront property, SWMLC created a committee of local volunteers. Together, they engaged the greater South Haven community through a series of forums to explore the public's vision for the property.

By developing a management and use plan through community conservation, we formed a partnership with the South Haven Area Recreation Authority (SHARA), who is now responsible for improvements and maintenance. Community input also identified this preserve as a perfect place for barrier free access to the beach.

Time and weather took a toll on the remaining camp buildings and they were removed. Since then, SWMLC has focused on improving the health of the natural areas, specifically the forested creek corridor, by removing invasives — and will continue to do so. And we are pleased to see that public access improvements, including barrier-free access, are being undertaken under SHARA's leadership.

It is very satisfying to see that this beloved patch next to the big lake will be available and accessible to people of all abilities as a restful getaway for generations to come.

Peter Ter Louw

Riley Hallett

Mitch Lettow

Kristin Schinske Adams

Fabius Township Citizens Coalition donates the 12-acre Coon Hollow Preserve property.

Bow in the Clouds, 60 acres within the City of Kalamazoo, is donated by the Sisters of St. Joseph

Oak Legacy Society is established with a major anonymous planned gift.

Villa Miller Farms, a 347-acre agricultural conservation easement along the Portage River in St. Joseph County, is donated by Henry & Martha Miller.

Coldwater Fen in Branch County is purchased, a prime Mitchell's satyr butterfly site.

SWMLC begins work on Prairieville Creek Watershed, a MDEQ-funded project to protect 300 acres of a headwaters stream of Gull Lake.

2007 2008

THANK YOU, WEDNESDAY WARRIORS!

Warrior sampler, circa 2015 . . . In back, L to R: John Chenault, Stan Rajnak, Kristi Chapman, Jeff Flemming, Chuck Quoss (aka Chainsaw Chuck), Harry Bird. In front: Bruce Alden

Photo by Mitch Lettow

One thing that has always set SWMLC apart is our commitment to stewardship — taking care of the land that we protect, and the habitats, flora, and wildlife that first inspired our founding members to action.

During its first decade, SWMLC held Saturday volunteer workdays on the preserves. Board member and stewardship volunteer Stan Rajnak remarked that Saturdays weren't enough to finish all the work there was to do and suggested that a group meet more often — maybe on Wednesdays? And so the Wednesday Warriors were born.

Stan organized and led the workdays for two years, then passed the leadership to board member Dr. Paul Olexia and then-newbie (and recently retired) Kristi Chapman, who quickly became the Warriors' organizer, motivator, and master team-builder.

Fourteen years and many workdays later, the Warriors have transformed hundreds of acres into resilient, diverse habitat for the enjoyment of wildlife and people alike. Stan, Kristi, and the other Warriors agree that no single project stands out as their most important accomplishment. What stands out, they say, are the incremental, persistent, week-to-week, year-to-year changes on the preserves. Knowing that a piece of the earth is better off — *healthier* — after a three-hour workday is a tangible and satisfying feeling that has proven addictive to this intrepid bunch of volunteers.

Mitch Lettow

Although we can't thank the Warriors enough, Kristi doesn't hesitate to correct us. "Don't thank me, it's my organization too! This is what we all like to do, and what we care about. **It's the volunteer-driven heart that makes the organization so strong."**

— Mitch Lettow

Please visit our website for a longer version of this article, complete with quotes, anecdotes, and photos! Go to www.swmlc.org/swmlc-blog/wednesday-warriors

Sand Creek Preserve | Nate Fuller

SWMLC begins Barry State Game Area project to promote public awareness and expand wildlife habitat, to date conserving 1,300 acres adjacent to the Game Area.

***

Sherwood Boudeman and Family conserve over 1,000 acres through conservation easements.

Spirit Springs Sanctuary is purchased, identified as a priority in the Rocky River Watershed Conservation Plan.

***

SWMLC wins the LTA Land Trust Excellence Award.

***

SWMLC is appointed Special Trustee for Warren Woods and Warren Dunes by the Berrien County Circuit Court .

***

Hidden Pond Preserve is donated by Tyden Ventures.

***

SWMLC establishes annual gift Blue Green Society.

Wolf Tree Nature Trails is donated by Dr. Richard Malott.

***

Pilgrim Haven Natural Area is donated by the estate of Suzanne Parish.

***

SWMLC purchases Black River Preserve with GLRI funding, protecting one mile of river frontage.

2009 2010 2011

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IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

NAMES IN **ORANGE** ARE FOUNDING MEMBERS

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Jim Birkes
Brian Bosgraaf
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Sherwood Boudeman
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Mitch Lettow
C. Miko Dargitz
Cindy Mills
Ross Crawford
Amelia Hansen
Nicole Speedy
Bruce Howe
Devin Wild
Hannah Hudson

As SWMLC celebrates its 25th anniversary, we honor all of the board members, volunteers, land donors, and supporters who have offered their wisdom and expertise, sweat and hard work, ideas and enthusiasm, their cherished land, and financial support to help protect southwest Michigan's most wild and scenic places.

SWMLC has conserved over 14,000 acres of high-quality natural areas — land that gives us clean water to drink, fresh air to breathe, fresh food to eat, abundant wildlife, and open spaces where we can explore and play, and reconnect with ourselves and with nature.

Today, SWMLC is recognized as a national leader in habitat restoration and natural areas management, a valued partner in conservation planning and land protection, and has grown to a staff of 11, implementing a broad range of programs that continues to grow and evolve.

But there is so much more for us yet to do. The Portman Nature Preserve sets a new standard of excellence and approach to our work, combining natural areas protection with public access, and exploring how we share our preserves with area schools and children. And once we complete Re-Accreditation this spring, SWMLC's board and staff will undertake a new strategic plan to evaluate and refine our current programs and initiate a vision for the future.

We are blessed to live in such an ecologically distinct and beautiful place as southwest Michigan — and equally blessed to share this place with so many people who love the land and are willing to work together to conserve it forever. We are proud of all that we've accomplished together, and excited to see what the next 25 years will hold!

Pete

2012

In collaboration with Kalamazoo River Watershed Council and U. of M., SWMLC leads 40 organizations in creating a land conservation plan that protects Kalamazoo River waters.

***

SWMLC becomes an Accredited Land Trust.

2013

Glen Oaks Conservation Easement, 137 acres in Calhoun County, is protected by Glen and Edite Walter

***

SWMLC completes 3-year MDEQ-funded Paw Paw River Watershed Conservation Project — protecting 8 properties and 890 acres.

2014

SWMLC acquires Corey Lake Preserve through a gift from the Mittler Family Foundation.

***

SWMLC begins a preserve public access and barrier-free improvements initiative.

2016

Barrier-free access completed at Pilgrim Haven Natural Area.

***

SWMLC moves office to the Chipman House near Galesburg, next to Chipman Preserve.

***

SWMLC conserves the 287-acre Augusta Floodplain Forest that contains three miles of frontage on the Kalamazoo River.

SWMLC
Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy
2016
Celebrating 25 Years

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Hannah Hudson
Devin Wild

Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation that conserves ecologically important and scenic landscapes that give our region its natural character — now and for generations to come.

Federal EIN 38-3038708. MICS 10463

For more information, please contact:
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269-324-1600 • Conserveland@swmlc.org • www.swmlc.org

All programs and services are provided on a nondiscriminatory basis.

Together, we are conserving wild and scenic places for today, and keeping them healthy for tomorrow.

ACCREDITED LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

Please donate today at www.swmlc.org

Milk snake found inside the tent in the Chipman House yard during the 25th Anniversary Jubilee in September. The children safely caught it and released it in the brush at the side of the yard. | Photo by Nate Fuller