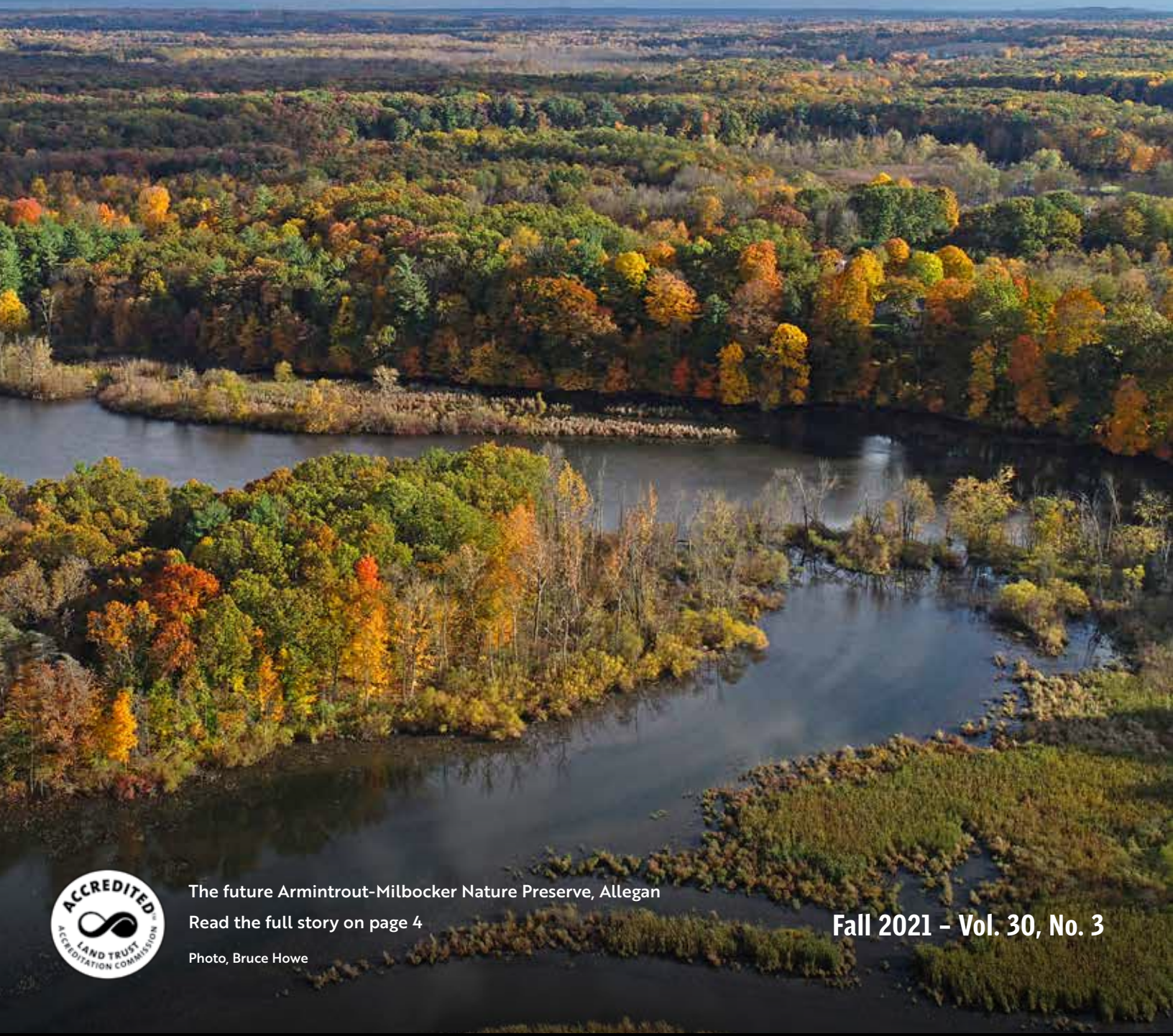
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

Protecting Nature

CELEBRATING 1991 30 2021 YEARS

improving habitat • ensuring water quality • supporting biodiversity
connecting people and nature • helping families conserve the land they love



The future Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve, Allegan

Read the full story on page 4

Photo, Bruce Howe

Fall 2021 – Vol. 30, No. 3

If we, the people of southwest Michigan, don't protect our land and water – *who will?*

Walking the Path

Peter Ter Louw, President and Executive Director

Spirit Springs Sanctuary, St. Joseph County | Allyson Wentela

During the past decade, SWMLC has opened several new nature preserves to the public – and we are excited and pleased to see the amount of use they are receiving. A rough estimate indicates that we have over 20 miles of trails throughout our preserves, including boardwalks, paved and graveled walkways, and footpaths. Preserve usage jumped even higher during the early stages of the COVID pandemic – and we now understand that one of the greatest services that we can offer to the community is providing peaceful places where people can walk while enjoying nature.

This increased activity and interest in recreating and exploring our natural areas also creates new challenges in the development and maintenance of those trails. In the past, trail maintenance consisted of staff and preserve stewards simply mowing the paths several times a year. But now, the work has become more complicated and includes addressing erosion problems, monitoring for visitor-created trails that disturb ecologically fragile areas, and other human-use issues.

In response to this, we will undertake multiple trail improvement projects over the next few years to upgrade existing trails, develop new trail alignments, and improve the quality of discovery the trails offer. This past summer, we expanded the parking lot at Chipman and began trail updates (see story on page 11). In the coming year, we will examine new routes at both the north and south tracts of Wau-Ke-Na, W.E. Smith Preserve, and begin work with a trail designer to develop a trail at Porter Legacy Dunes. We have also begun discussions with the National Park Service's River, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program to explore the feasibility of creating a nearly two-mile long dune trail that would connect SWMLC's Pilgrim Haven Natural Area with Van Buren State Park.

We will also explore possible overlaps between established, regional trails (such as the North Country Trail, Kal-Haven Trail, and Kalamazoo River Trailway) and targeted focus areas from *Nature's Network,* SWMLC's new Strategic Climate Resilience Plan. These longer trailways not only provide access for people, they also provide vital migration corridors for animals and plants, which is essential to our region's climate resiliency.

We now understand that one of the greatest services that we can offer to the community is providing peaceful places where people can walk while enjoying nature.

And this year, our Annual Appeal is dedicated to raising money to implement public access and care for the future Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve. A key component of our approach at this newest SWMLC preserve is the development of a trail system that's integrated into the preserve's planning and design at the outset, so that restoration and enhancement of the site's habitat will occur simultaneously with trail system development.

We strive to make our public nature preserves safe, enjoyable places where people can relax and recreate – and healthy, high-quality habitats where wildlife can thrive and find refuge.

It's a balance and responsibility that we carry with great pleasure.

Rockin' it at Rally

Congratulations on an excellent presentation!

A shout out for two SWMLC staff members, Hilary Hunt (Director of Land Protection) and Mitch Lettow (Stewardship Director), who tag-teamed an outstanding virtual seminar at the Land Trust Alliance's 2021 Rally national conference. They pre-recorded a presentation on developing a climate resilience plan (a powerful tool that SWMLC will use going forward as part of the evaluation process in focusing our conservation work) (see *Protecting Nature,* Summer 2020, Vol. 29, No. 2, pages 8-11), then conducted a live Q & A session afterward. We're so proud to see two members of our staff share their knowledge and experience with their peers from other land trusts, and grateful for having the opportunity.

Backstage view while watching the pre-recorded video
Photo, Hilary Hunt

Annual Meeting Wrap

About 150 people braved the late summer heat and humidity to join SWMLC board and staff for our 30th Anniversary Annual Members' Meeting on Saturday, August 28 – held this year at Pilgrim Haven Natural Area near South Haven. The morning featured breakfast snacks provided by The Silo Banquets and Catering, toe-tapping acoustic swing by jazz trio The Birdseed Salesmen, and self-guided Sneak Peek walks at the not-yet-open Porter Legacy Dunes. Thanks for coming, everyone!

Whether you made it to the meeting or not, we THANK YOU all for your crucial support that makes our work possible!

Watch a recording of the business meeting and speakers on SWMLC's YouTube channel: https://youtu.be/T7vpZN6NpUY

The Birdseed Salesmen: Helen Yee, Jay Gavan, and Nathan Tabor
Photo, Amelia Hansen

We need your feedback!

We would like to get your thoughts on a variety of topics related to SWMLC's conservation work in southwest Michigan, so we're placing a link to very short online surveys in each of our 2021 newsletters.

Please take this short survey that will not only help us get to know you better, but will also help make SWMLC a more effective conservation organization.

Survey #3: Safe & Welcoming Preserves

Making SWMLC preserves safe and welcoming for everyone, including people of color, LGBTQ+ people, persons with disabilities, those with mobility challenges, and other underrepresented and underserved folks is a priority for us. Which of the following actions, if any, do you think would help to make SWMLC preserves more welcoming?

The survey will take about two minutes to complete. To reach the survey, please use this QR code or type this link into your browser: https://bit.ly/3nvxF5q

We hope you will participate and look forward to your candid responses and new ideas!

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE ARMINTROUT-MILBOCKER NATURE PRESERVE!

The future Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve is a unique opportunity to protect and enjoy a large and ecologically healthy natural area that's less than five minutes from downtown Allegan.

Building a parking area and trailhead, maintaining trails, and protecting and restoring healthy habitat are all very expensive – but necessary to creating a haven for both people and wildlife.

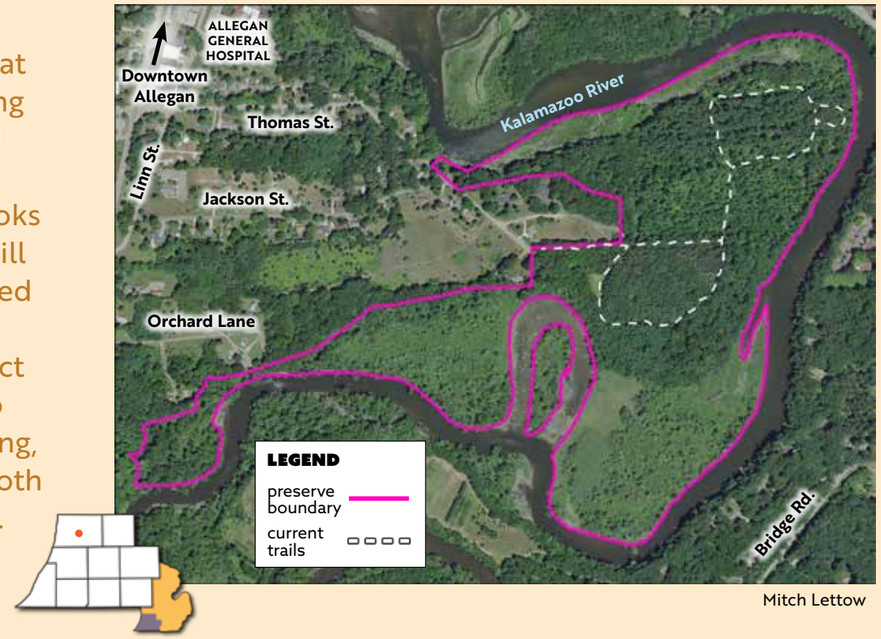
As a non-profit organization, we depend on community support to create and care for public nature preserves like this.

Please donate today.

www.swmlc.org/armintrout-milbocker-nature-preserve

Bruce Howe

With walking trails that wind through towering pine and hardwood forests, the future preserve's high overlooks and riverside paths will provide an unparalleled chance for the community to connect with the Kalamazoo River in a natural setting, creating a refuge for both people and wildlife.



Mitch Lettow

Your donation will go toward matching a $50,000 challenge grant from the Carls Foundation, giving your gift double the impact!

Acquisition: Complete!

We extend our deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to our incredible partners who provided the funding needed to purchase the Armintrout-Milbocker property!

- **Natural Resources Damage Assessment Kalamazoo River Trustees**
- **USDA Forest Service – Community Forest Program**
- **US Fish & Wildlife Service North American Wetlands Conservation Act**
- **The Armintrout and Milbocker Families**

Next Step: Public Infrastructure and Stewardship!

With a **$100,000 grant generously provided by the Consumers Energy Foundation Planet Award,** our next step is to raise the funds necessary to implement public access infrastructure, and create a management plan and dedicated funding that will ensure long-term stewardship of the Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve.

And this year, our Annual Appeal will be focused on helping to raise these much-needed funds. Specifically, your donation to support the Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve will help create safe and accessible preserve parking, a trailhead, trail system, and wayfinding and interpretive signage throughout the preserve. As part of the long-term stewardship of this beautiful nature preserve, we will also be creating a management plan that includes invasive plant and trail management, as well as habitat restoration work.

Check your mailboxes in November for our Annual Appeal and your chance to help create this beautiful nature preserve just minutes from downtown Allegan!

Final Step: A grand opening, tentatively scheduled for Spring/Summer 2022!

THE FUTURE ARMINTROUT-MILBOCKER NATURE PRESERVE

Armintrout-Milbocker Cool Species

HAIRY LEAFCUP *(Smallanthus uvedalius)*

- 8 out of 10 on the Floristic Quality Assessment Index
- According to Univerity of Michigan's Herbarium: *"Very rare and local in rich forests and moist borders of mixed hardwoods."*

Amelia Hansen

SOME REALLY COOL PLANTS!

A recent botanical survey of the future Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve, conducted by Bradley Slaughter of Orbis Environmental Consulting, emphasized that the property's beauty goes way beyond "good bones." Like most West Michigan parcels, it's been farmed and timbered in the past and suffers from the expected invasions of obnoxious plants like garlic mustard and autumn olive. But it's also botanically rich, with an incredible **560 plant species** calling it home - **including 10 that are either endangered or threatened in Michigan!** In addition, there are some impressively large trees on the property, including a red oak whose trunk measures 5 feet in diameter. In an email, Brad wrote, "The immediate banks of the Kalamazoo River were not cleared where relatively steep, so the remnant bands of forest on the steeper slopes are relatively intact and support a plethora of conservative native plant species, not to mention old-growth trees."

SNEAK PEEK REPORT

Even with minimal advertising, more than 200 curious people joined us for the four-hour Armintrout-Milbocker Sneak Peek on Saturday, October 16. Many of them told us that they lived nearby and were excited to learn that a new public natural area is coming to Allegan. People were encouraging and supportive, and several people stated their interest in volunteering at the preserve. Visitors were urged to walk the one-mile trail loop where we had posted temporary interpretive signs, and many stopped to ask questions of SWMLC staff.

Amelia Hansen

Tom Georgoff (SWMLC Board Treasurer), Peter Ter Louw (SWMLC President & Executive Director, TJ Wilkinson (SWMLC Board Secretary) are presented with a 'Big Check' by Derek Nofz of Consumers Energy Foundation.

Several of our project partners offered informational displays, including Kalamazoo River Watershed Council, Allegan Conservation District, and the Natural Resources Damage Assessment Kalamazoo River Trustees (US Fish & Wildlife Service), who are providing a $1 million grant for purchasing the property. A 'Big Check' symbolizing a $100,000 Planet Award from Consumers Energy Foundation was presented by Derek Knofz, Consumers Energy Community Affairs Manager for Southwest Michigan. Lisa Williams of USFWS remarked on the project and comments were given by Allegan County's State Representative Mary Whiteford, who advocates for increased use and protection of the Kalamazoo River. We were happy to see property owner, Dave Armintrout, in attendance along with members of his family.

Later, Lisa Williams mentioned, "One of the memorable moments for me was getting to talk with Mr. Armintrout and hear more of the history of the parcel. When I thanked him for his patience as the funding has been pulled together, his response was to chuckle and say 'I grow trees!'"

PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING IN SUPPORT OF THE FUTURE ARMINTROUT-MILBOCKER NATURE PRESERVE:

www.swmlc.org/armintrout-milbocker-nature-preserve

Survey Says . . .

Findings from our recent preserve user surveys

C. Miko Dargitz, Development Associate

Earlier this year, SWMLC received a grant from the Land Trust Alliance (and sponsored by The Carls Foundation) to conduct a series of surveys to help us better understand and connect with the people who use our preserves – and determine whether their preserve use has been affected, positively or negatively, by COVID.

SWMLC engaged a consultant specializing in land trusts to help us develop and implement a survey tool – then analyze the results – in an effort to gain a clearer understanding of what motivates our preserve users and how we can better serve them and the rest of our community through our public natural areas.

We administered a short 6-question survey to visitors at five different public SWMLC preserves during one 2-hour weekday period and one 2-hour weekend period. SWMLC board, staff, and volunteers surveyed people at Black River Preserve near South Haven; Bow in the Clouds Preserve in the city of Kalamazoo; Portman Nature Preserve near Mattawan and Paw Paw; Wau-Ke-Na, William Erby Smith Preserve on Lake Michigan; and Wolf Tree Nature Trails just west of Kalamazoo in Oshtemo.

In total, over 60 people were kind enough to spend a few minutes telling us why they were visiting that preserve. What we found is that COVID brought a lot of new people to our preserves, and increased use among those folks who were visiting pre-COVID. There also appear to be many people who use our preserves regularly – several times per week to several times per month.

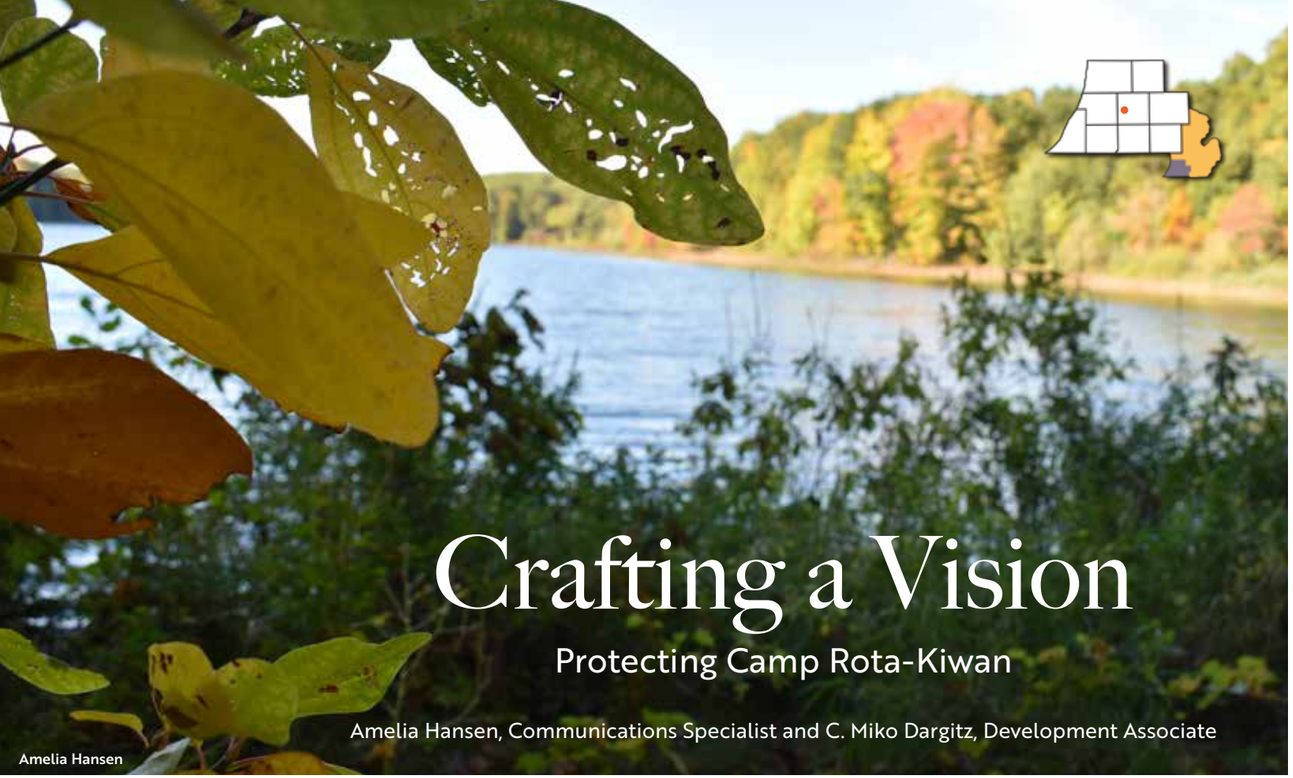
Many of the regular users are neighbors or people walking their dogs, and most of them enjoy nature and quiet.

Unfortunately, we also learned that many of the preserve users, despite being frequent visitors, were not SWMLC members – and did not even know who SWMLC was! We have been working on better signage and a stronger web presence to help gain more exposure and awareness of the work that we do, and to broaden our base of support, but these findings have helped us realize that we need to do even more . . . things like targeted outreach events, more active communication with nearby neighborhoods, and more listening sessions with people on our preserves!

And, as a SWMLC member and supporter, we would LOVE your help and ideas about how to increase awareness in the community about the beautiful natural areas that SWMLC has to offer, and the importance of donating to support this conservation work! Please feel free to email conserveland@swmlc.org with any ideas that you might have and, in the meantime, please share the SWMLC website or this newsletter with a friend, consider giving a SWMLC gift membership for the holidays, or wear your SWMLC cap or t-shirt to show your proud support!

WE know that being a "Nature Nerd" is cool, we just need everyone else to figure it out!

Amelia Hansen



Crafting a Vision

Protecting Camp Rota-Kiwan

Amelia Hansen, Communications Specialist and C. Miko Dargitz, Development Associate

Amelia Hansen

One person sees a sunny open field, a dark pine forest, and a pretty lake. Another person remembers an archery range full of happy kids, tree seedlings planted among the leftover corn furrows, and the lake forming after they built the road. The land can change dramatically within just one person's lifetime, but its past lives on in memories.

I recently enjoyed a walk around the Camp Rota-Kiwan property in Texas Township with retired middle school biology teacher and Boy Scout camp leader, Bill Breyfogle. Bill shared his love of nature with the kids at the former Boy Scout camp for more than 50 summers, and has fond memories of the place and the people. He showed me a sycamore tree that he had planted in the 1970's, the little corralled area where they kept turtles for the kids to see up close, and the spot where he once stood mere feet away from a beaver that was too focused on dam building to notice him. "I'm so glad that this place isn't going to be developed," he said as we crunched down the gravel road together.

Amelia Hansen

Bill Breyfogle

Bill was referring to Kalamazoo County's recent purchase of the 212-acre Rota-Kiwan property and the conservation easement that Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy holds that will ensure that the property's natural features and conservation values are protected forever.

But the protection of the beautiful, historic natural area wasn't always guaranteed. When the Boy Scouts announced in 2019 that they would be closing the 98-year old camp, many people were upset by the thought of it being developed and held public meetings to discuss what could be done to save it. Early on, SWMLC was invited into the process of figuring out how the property could be conserved.

As it turns out, SWMLC had already been talking with nearby landowners about the ecological and public health importance of the property and surrounding area, and the need for a long-term conservation plan. Rota-Kiwan's two lakes, Bass Lake and Scouter's Pond, form the headwaters of the West Fork of Portage Creek, which flows into the adjacent 700-acre Al Sabo Land Preserve, which is owned by the City of Kalamazoo and contains a wellfield that supplies drinking water to residents in the western portion of Kalamazoo County. We knew that protecting the surrounding land to maintain clean, unpolluted water was vitally important, and that the camp's natural area, which had been protected for the last 98 years, had become essential for wildlife, as well as for past and future generations of people who love nature.

Thankfully, we weren't the only ones looking for ways to protect the beloved former Boy Scout Camp. Ultimately, SWMLC helped to facilitate the purchase of the property by Kalamazoo County Parks who worked with the Irving S. Gilmore Foundation, the Parks Foundation of Kalamazoo County, and conservation philanthropist Dr. John Woollam, who provided a leadership gift. The total purchase price of $2 million was funded entirely through private donations, with no expense to taxpayers.

John Woollam's vision to create a public natural area that would be protected forever was integral in crafting SWMLC's conservation easement. John worked closely with Kalamazoo County's Parks Director Dave Rachowicz and SWMLC's Hilary Hunt, Director of Land Protection, and Justin Gish, Land Protection Specialist, to draft an easement that reflected his vision. As part of the easement process, Justin recorded Rota-Kiwan's every physical detail. "I spent quite a bit of time on the property this summer and got to know the location very well," Justin said. "Visitors will likely be as impressed as I am by the views of Bass Lake and the property's moraines. I'm excited for it to be open to the public and looking forward to working with the county to make sure that it stays protected in perpetuity."

Nearly two years later and thanks to the tireless efforts and generosity of so many public and private partners, the former Boy Scout camp will now become Kalamazoo County's only park west of US-131. Called the Arthur E. & Mildred H. Woollam Nature Preserve, in honor of John Woollam's parents, the park will offer miles of nature trails and kayak rentals. The county plans to remove the former scout camp's older, more rundown buildings – but save some of the best ones for over-night camping for youth groups. When combined with the adjacent Al Sabo Land Preserve, more than 950 acres of wildlife habitat and clean wetlands in western Kalamazoo County will be protected.

Amelia Hansen

Dr. John Woollam

Kalamazoo County Parks Director David Rachowicz reflected on the project, "It's remarkable that the opportunity to purchase Rota-Kiwan, create a new county park, and Dr. Woollam's generosity all came together at the same time. The County appreciates everything that SWMLC has done and its willingness to hold the conservation easement – which is an essential ingredient in fulfilling Dr. Woollam's gift."

Walking with Bill Breyfogle past Scouter's Pond, I'm struck by his continued delight in his natural surroundings. "People sometimes ask me how I can just keep looking at the 'same things' all the time." He pauses to take in the lily pads, the heron rookery across the lake, the sunlit willow leaves. "But it's not the same. It's nature, and it's always changing. That's what I love about it."

Hearing those words, I think I can speak for SWMLC and say that we are honored to be a part of this collaborative community effort that will make sure that Rota-Kiwan's nature is ever-present and ever-changing.

Amelia Hansen

Dave Brown

An Attractive Nuisance

It's sad to see the decline of a once-loved building.

Maybe it's when the last window has been smashed or after the critters have moved in but, at some point, an unused structure will eventually slide from 'empty' to 'ramshackle' to 'dangerous.' And once it's reached that state, it's hard to reverse.

Such was the case with an old building at Portman Nature Preserve. It had originally been built to be a quiet forest getaway, and when SWMLC acquired the property in 2017, there were conversations about turning the 30-by-30-foot building into an educational structure. But analyzing the realities and costs of fixing it up, bringing in utilities, and everything else that goes into making a building public threw a wet blanket over the idea. It just wasn't practical.

Tucked into the woods between Mud and Lime Lakes, the unused structure wasn't even visible from the trail unless you knew where to look. But some people knew right where it was and, over time, it had morphed into an unsavory 'party house', complete with graffiti, illegal firepit, and after-hours mischief. After discussing the issue with folks on the Portman Advisory Committee, SWMLC decided the best thing to do was to simply tear it down.

But there's nothing simple about tearing down a building that has no road access. Demolition equipment couldn't reach the site using the preserve's established trails and removal seemed impossible - until a kind neighbor agreed to allow the big vehicles to drive across his property. SWMLC's stewardship crew spent days preparing a route that skirted the large trees and their delicate root systems, then clearing shrubs and smaller trees to make a temporary roadway to the structure.

Even with this temporary access road, the job required skillful maneuvering around the site's small footprint in the woods. Not many companies know how to gracefully dance their big machines through a forest without harming the trees, but we knew who to call: Generation III Excavating, a locally-owned company that we've worked with many times before, and respect for their finesse and environmental ethic. SWMLC Stewardship Specialist Dave Brown describes them as "surgeons with excavators," adding that he knew they would "tread lightly and leave the site in good shape when they were done." And they did. Gen III toppled the building, broke up the concrete slab upon which it sat, took away the debris (with plans to recycle the concrete and metal), and left behind a level patch of dirt where the stewardship crew has planted a mix of shade-friendly native grass mix.

Now the deer and turkeys can make their own kind of mischief in the clearing in the woods, until the oaks and hickories eventually fill it back in.

— Amelia Hansen, Communications Specialist

Generation III Excavating

Generation III Excavating

Dave Brown

Keepin' It *FRESH*

UPDATES AT CHIPMAN PRESERVE

Chipman Preserve is one of SWMLC's largest and most popular preserves, and its parking lot certainly seemed big enough when we first opened the preserve back in 2004. But fast forward 17 years and you could easily find it packed with cars on any gorgeous Sunday afternoon. Have you ever driven half an hour only to find no place to park at Chipman? Or tried to back up your car when the lot was full and nearly bumped another car that was also backing out?

Well, that should no longer be a problem! This past July, we greatly increased the size of the Chipman parking area and improved the traffic flow of its design. It still looks a little raw but will soften as plants grow back around the edges and a native wildflower mix takes hold around the entrance sign.

"The two main jobs at our public preserves are to 1) create an enjoyable experience for visitors and 2) take care of protected habitats and wildlife."

We also tackled a much needed trail project that has untangled Chipman's confusing labyrinth of parallel paths, closed badly eroded sections, improved wildlife habitat by making "quiet zones," and enriched the preserve's ecology by creating areas where native plants can thrive. Color-coded markers posted along the trail now help users know which path they're on and a current map has been posted at the trailhead. In the future, we will install "You Are Here" orientation maps like those at Black River and Portman Nature Preserves. Please stop by and give it a spin!

When asked why we've changed a 17-year old trail system, SWMLC Stewardship Director Mitch Lettow said, "The trails at Chipman have been confusing for many years. New visitors often got lost and, over the years, we've had several people call the office for help in finding their way back to the parking lot.

"The two main jobs at our public preserves are to 1) create an enjoyable experience for visitors and 2) take care of protected habitats and wildlife. Having too many trails can be tough on a site's ecology. Some birds won't nest in areas that are frequently disturbed by people or even dogs that are leashed. Trails can be entry points for invasive plant species like multiflora rose and autumn olive. And poorly-designed and badly-maintained trails lead to erosion, which is not only bad for soil ecology, it can also make trails dangerous. As the preserve has grown more popular, some trails that held up well to occasional use by the Chipman family's neighbors just can't take the increased impact of so many more feet."

With over 220 acres and 5.5 miles of trails for hiking, dog walking, trail-running, snow-shoeing, and cross-country skiing (more than any other preserve we own) Chipman Preserve is still big enough to lose yourself in – but it's now a much-improved sanctuary for both people and wildlife.

— Amelia Hansen, Communications Specialist

Dave Brown

Dave Brown

HAPPY 30TH ANNIVERSARY!

Heart-felt thanks to all the folks who sent their thoughts on SWMLC's 30th Anniversary. Your positive energy keeps us going!

"It took no time at all for me to feel comfortable that the conservancy was exactly the right group to protect our land. It was later as a board member that I really understood all that SWMLC does from outreach to stewardship to donor relations to VERY long-term planning to ensure that the beautiful landscapes of southwest Michigan are protected forever."

— Donna Keller
Retired teacher, conservation easement owner, former SWMLC Board Director

"It is greatly satisfying to know that with the dedicated staff and other volunteers, the preserves and easements will be conserved over the next 30 years and beyond."

— Brad Yocum
Wetland ecologist at Envirologic and SWMLC land protection team volunteer

"With so many global and regional threats emerging today, taking care of nature for the future can be daunting and intimidating for most people. I support and celebrate SWMLC, because they take strategic action locally to ensure that nature will thrive and remain resilient here."

— Bryan Burroughs
Executive Director at Michigan Trout Unlimited

"Generations from now, everyone will marvel at SWMLC preserves – the few places they know where wildlife still thrives, wetlands remain healthy, and centuries-old trees survive – and ask, 'Why wasn't everyone part of SWMLC?'"

— Gary Stock
Officer, Information Technology Specialist at First National Bank of Michigan, founding SWMLC board member

"If you want to reconnect with that childhood sense of wonder, take one of the many SWMLC preserve paths to get there. Better yet, your support of SWMLC ensures those paths will be there for generations to come. Do it for yourself, your children, your grandchildren, and your community."

— Bill McNulty
Retired principal and Superintendent of Mattawan Consolidated Schools, Portman Preserve Advisory Committee

"Living on a piece of land without spoiling it is an inspiring goal. But with the Wednesday Warriors I learned that you can go even further, you can revive a spoiled piece of land, and I learned how to do the work to start that land on its way back to thriving health. We can live with the land, not just on it."

— David Riggs
SWMLC Wednesday/Winter Warrior volunteer and Privateers group leader

"Between coordinating outreach efforts to helping play matchmaker for folks who normally wouldn't work together very often, SWMLC has helped all of the conservation groups in the area recognize that we can do more together."

— Sara Syswerda
Education & Field Station Director at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute

We couldn't fit them all into this space! To read full quotes and more well-wishes, please visit our website:

www.swmlc.org/celebrating-30-years

SWMLC 1991 30 2021 YEARS

protecting nature, forever.

For 30 years, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy has been saving and restoring healthy habitat for wildlife, taking care that headwaters remain pure to ensure clean drinking water for thousands of people, helping families protect the land they love, and making sure there are natural outdoor spaces for everyone to enjoy, for generations to come.

Made possible by our supporters, a community of passionate nature-lovers who are working with us to save the places we all care about.

Jeptha Lake | Mitch Lettow

Outdoor Classrooms

Providing opportunities for positive outcomes for kids and community alike.

The school buses were the first clue that it was a special day at Portman Nature Preserve. The loud sounds of happy kids were the second. Five classrooms from Mattawan Upper Elementary School were using the preserve as an outdoor classroom - and the place was sparking with their energy.

Five third grade teachers – Brandon Bear, Jenn Omo, Jessica Coy, Amanda Meyer, and Kathy Sills -- had put their heads together to create an enriched curriculum that tosses science, reading, writing, math, and social studies into one big salad bowl called nature. They set up five stations along Portman's trails, each one focusing on a different subject, and (with parent chaperones) the kids hiked in large groups from station to station.

The kids blew off steam in between stations, talking loudly, scampering, messing around with each other. But once they reached the next destination, they quickly settled and listened to each teachers' instructions with an amazing degree of focus. Gathered in a ring on the ground, one group intently filled in worksheets on phonetics. Another class worked together to write a Halloween poem. Other kids sharpened their observational skills with a scavenger hunt. And another bunch squeezed together on the boardwalk at the edge of Lime Lake to sing along with Mr. Bear and his guitar, savor some snacks, and listen to a story told by children's author, Julia Richardson.

These children are fortunate to have teachers that understand and appreciate the unique learning opportunities and health benefits that outdoor classrooms offer to kids. Many recent studies parallel similar results: outdoor education increases standardized test scores, makes learning more relevant, decreases stress and ADHD symptoms, boosts confidence, plus a long list of other positive outcomes that benefit children and the community.*

When I returned to the parking lot, the two school bus drivers had moved their lawn chairs into the buses' shade. As I left, they waved goodbye with smiles, as content as the kids to be spending some time outdoors.

— Amelia Hansen, Communications Specialist

* Outdoor Education – Research Summary, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, College of Natural Resources (https://bit.ly/3B7hgZE)

Amelia Hansen

Donations • June 16, 2021 – October 15, 2021

You make our work possible. Thank you!

The following contributions were made by people who love the forests, fields, lakes, marshes, prairies, rivers, streams, swamps, and woods of Southwest Michigan.

Honor Gifts

Bud and Judi Baldwin
In honor of Woody Boudeman's birthday

Pam Hjelmquist
In honor of Ken Kirton for Father's Day and his birthday

Germaine Hylok
In honor of the November 20th, 2021 marriage of Valerie Litznerski and Jason Eicholtz

Raelyn and Richard Joyce
Celebrating the 50th wedding anniversary of Joe and Rosalie Novara

Kalamazoo Garden Club
In honor of Joyce Leppard, our September speaker

Benjamin Cole Leonard
In honor of Candy Leonard

Robin and Nancy Nott
In honor of the marriage of Nick Zussman and Katie Burns

Brian and Katy O'Boyle
In honor of Robert O'Boyle this Father's Day!

Dr. Corbin Sullivan
In honor of Dr. Bradley Sullivan, one of your volunteers and supporters, and grandfather to Oscar, Elliott, Alice, and Ela

Michael Wright
In honor of Dr. Thomas Wright's 65th birthday

Memorials

Mark and Mary Clyne
In memory of Tina Wilson

Alfred and Jean Gemrich
In memory of Sharon Boudeman

Jim and Carolyn Kline
In memory of Bob Mason

Nancy Kolas
In memory of Thomas J. Mertz

Robin Larson
In memory of our pup Bowie, who would have enjoyed exploring trails with us

Carol Mason
In memory of Carol Briney

Jeffrey Mohney
In memory of Justin and Russell Mohney

Anne May
In memory of Joseph Ferrara

Kathleen M. Meyer
In memory of Robert Gordon Stickland

In memory of Kate McKenney
C. Miko Dargitz
Mitch Lettow
Shawn McKenney

In memory of Jamieson (Jamie) Michael
Tony and Traci Chipman
C. Robert and Marcia Cowell
Samir Murty
Elizabeth Palmer Kellogg

In memory of Steven Mitchell
Anonymous
Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Burnell, "We will always think of you when we are out on the lake in Michigan!"

Joseph and Susan Czolgosz, in gratitude for his love and care for nature
Greg and Roxane Danneffel
Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan Team
Matthew McLarnon
Christin Nohner
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In memory of Luciano Shincariol
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Cutting and Cutting, PC
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Stephen C. McCloskey
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Dave and Jan Wilder

In-Kind Donations

Corinn Rutkoski
Linocut prints of native and threatened Michigan flora

Jordan Semark
Toward the purchase price of a Dodge Ram truck for stewardship

Gift Memberships

Nancy Kolas
to Martha Fuerstenau

Maria Roesner
to Charles Roesner

Welcome to New Members!

Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake ($500+)
Annie Posther

Cerulean Warbler ($250+)
Mo Garber

Spotted Turtle ($100+)
Zachary I. Cattell
Andrew Conkling
Alan L. Freid
Carol Harris
Cameron Lockwood
Stacey McCarthy
David and Lorri Walch

Little Brown Bat ($50+)
Todd and Melody Charlton
Jean Frances Flower
John Langmore
Edwin F. Meyer II
Amy and Rick Verkow

Grants

Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy – Highbanks Creek Watershed Restoration grant

Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy – Paw Paw River Headwater and Floodplain Protection grant

Matching Gifts

Pfizer Foundation Matching Gifts Program

Double Your Impact! Many corporations match contributions made to Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.

Are you an employee of – or retired from – a company with a matching gift program? Send your company form along with your gift and we'll be happy to follow-up! Call Nicole at 269-324-1600 x307 or email her at nmspeedy@swmlc.org.

Make a difference for nature every month

Set up a sustaining membership that will be automatically billed to your credit card and you will provide Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy with a stable source of support. You decide how much you want to contribute and how often: monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, or annually. It's easy! Set up your account online by using this QR code or by typing: ***www.swmlc.org/become-a-member*** and clicking **"***join now!***"**

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It really adds up!

Between January 1 and June 30, 2021, supporters who named SWMLC to be their designated charity generated a $238.49 donation – simply by shopping AmazonSmile!

Thank you!

If we have accidentally omitted your name, or you find an error, we apologize. Please call Nicole at 269-324-1600 x307 so we can correct the mistake. Thank you.

Amelia Hansen

YOU CAN HELP by making a planned gift to Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.

To learn more about making a planned gift to SWMLC, please visit our website (www.swmlc.org/planned-giving) or contact President and Executive Director Pete Ter Louw at terlouw@swmlc.org.

Planned gifts can come in many forms – from bequests to IRA distributions to gifts of land or other property. Your gift may be directed toward land protection, stewardship, or program funds. Or you can contribute to one of our two endowment funds, the Sustain SWMLC Endowment Fund or the George Lauff Land & Stewardship Endowment Fund.

These internal endowment funds will grow year after year, eventually paying for SWMLC's basic operating expenses and ensuring that SWMLC will continue to protect and care for our natural areas for generations to come.

Whatever the gift, we are immensely grateful for the foresight and commitment of those who leave planned gifts to further the cause of conservation even beyond their lifetimes.

Thank you.

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"Let us be the ancestors our descendants will thank."

— Winona LaDuke

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Pilgrim Haven Natural Area, South Haven | Caitlin Eyvaz

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

All programs and services are provided on a nondiscriminatory basis. Federal EIN 38-3038708