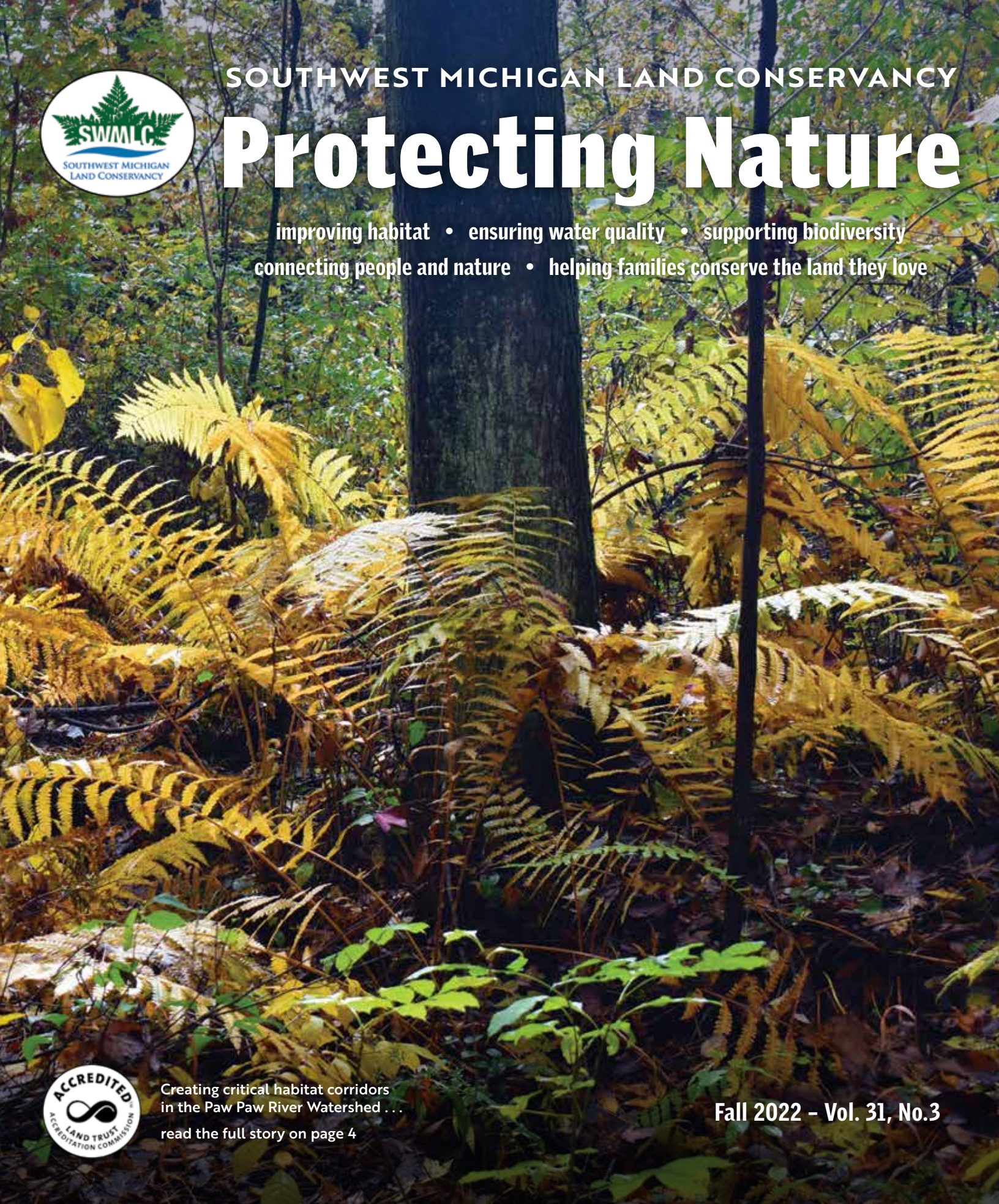


SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

Protecting Nature

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

Creating critical habitat corridors in the Paw Paw River Watershed . . .
read the full story on page 4

Fall 2022 – Vol. 31, No.3

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

Amelia Hansen

On October 15, over 200 people celebrated the opening of Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve, SWMLC's newest public natural area, located just south of downtown Allegan. There were new faces and familiar ones, too – SWMLC members and supporters, DNR officials, members of the Milbocker Family, and lots of neighbors and local folks. We heard many enthusiastic, positive comments and are humbled by the community's support!

The morning was chilly but gorgeous, with autumn colors blazing and the sun blinking in and out. Several speakers addressed the crowd and talked about the significance of the new preserve: TJ Wilkinson, SWMLC Board Secretary; Dr. Lisa Williams, Environmental Contaminants Branch Chief, USFWS; Delora Andrus, Allegan City Mayor; and Mitch Lettow, SWMLC Stewardship Director. And as a special gift and good omen, a large flock of sandhill cranes graced the gathering by flying low overhead.

We were especially excited to unveil the 2+ mile long trail system, with its crushed limestone surface, scenic views of the Kalamazoo River, and several short loops for those needing a quick nature fix. The trails are available for walking, for those using mobility devices, leashed dogs, and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. They are not open to bikes, motorized vehicles, or horses. We were also pleased to show off the preserve's large parking area which offers two accessible spaces, and has been designed to accommodate school buses, enabling its use as an outdoor classroom for Allegan Public Schools and other groups.

Continuing infrastructure improvements will include an entrance sign, trailhead kiosk, and benches. Ongoing habitat restoration work will include invasive species removal, prescribed fire, and other management techniques *(look for future volunteer opportunities!)*.

Dave Armintrout later offered a heartfelt statement, "I've always thought that there was something special about the land and setting of – what is now, thanks to you and the people involved – a nature preserve, that will last forever. I could not be happier about it. I hope that many, many people will enjoy it and appreciate it as much as I have.

"I've been very impressed with all of the people I've met from and through the land conservancy. I've found them all to be dedicated professionals with a passion for what they are doing.

"Congratulations and thank you for all of the work and planning that you have done. The trails are laid out beautifully and look great! I feel blessed that the land is in such good hands."

Thank you to everyone who helped create Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve!

You made it happen and we are forever grateful for your support!

Check it out for yourself! Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve is now open everyday from dawn to dusk. Find directions, maps, and other details on our website: www.swmlc.org/armintrout-milbocker-nature-preserve

CLINK!

Here's to natural collaborations!

Many thanks to Tanya and Patrick Westover, owners of Tantrick Brewing Company (243 Hubbard St, Allegan, MI) for creating a fabulous new wheat beer called "Wanderin' Wit" in support of SWMLC and in honor of the trails that folks will wander at the new Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve, which is located near the brewery. All the ingredients were there to make a fantastic beer release party on Sunday, October 9: sweet location, awesome atmosphere, fun people, a delicious new brew, lively conversations, and a uniting cause: supporting local nature conservation! SWMLC Stewardship Specialist, Dave Brown, and Stewardship Director, Mitch Lettow, were onhand to answer questions about the new preserve . . . and to sample the new brew, of course. It was wonderful seeing so many SWMLC friends show up and great making new friends, too. And we were delighted that members of both the Armintrout and Milbocker Families came to celebrate the new beer and the preserve that's named for them in honor of their long-term vision to see their beautiful land become a public natural area that's protected forever.

Nicole Speedy

Dave Brown, Mitch Lettow, and Dave Armintrout

Keepin' up the good fight . . .

After long conversations, the board of the Four Townships Water Resource Council (FTWRC) recently made the decision to dissolve the organization – after 30 years of dedicated work protecting water quality in Barry and Prairieville townships in Barry County, and Richland and Ross townships in Kalamazoo County. Generously, they donated their remaining assets to other area organizations to continue their good work. Recently, FTWRC presented SWMLC with a check for $25,000 to further our conservation work in the Gull Lake/Augusta Creek watershed area.

SWMLC is grateful for the Council's work over the years, and our continued partnership. ***Thank you!***

Amelia Hansen

Nicole Speedy, SWMLC Operations Director; **Justin Gish**, SWMLC Land Protection Specialist; **Sharon Gill**, SWMLC Board of Directors; **Thomas Georgoff**, SWMLC Board Treasurer; **Steve Allen**, FTWRC President/Treasurer; **Ken Kornheiser**, FTWRC Vice President; **Emily Wilke**, FTWRC Board of Directors; **Robin Byrn**, FTWRC Secretary

Weaving Nature's Network

Creating corridors of protected, high-quality habitats that allow plants and animals to safely move between conserved lands.

An enormous beech tree at the edge of a wetland in the Paw Paw River Watershed.
Amelia Hansen

The young male bobcat learned the hard way that the old tom was to be avoided. With a fresh scar on his nose, he crept cautiously through the older cat's territory and noted the 'no trespassing signs' . . . clawed tree bark, a cat-sprayed tuft of marsh grass. The young male needed to locate a place of his own where he could safely hunt, rest, and find a mate – so he followed the Paw Paw River, hidden and protected by the dense wetland foliage on its rich banks. Squirrels, rabbits, and voles – potential prey animals – left scent trails among the splayed tree roots and thick tangles. Barred owls hooted from the tops of ancient trees. Coyotes whooped it up in the distance. The bobcat peeped out, then jumped onto a waterlogged tree trunk that gently moved with the river's rhythm, scanning for danger, short tail twitching.

While we don't have any recent sightings of these cats along this river, the habitat is there – big blocks of intact forest, thick cover, and few busy roadways. As day-dwelling, distracted humans, we rarely notice the shy and secretive critters (bobcats, otters, weasels, and others) that undoubtedly walk through our midst in wild places like the Paw Paw. Though the river lives a domesticated life where it passes through farmland and villages, it also has mysterious, untamed sections where its natural twisting creates oxbows and backwaters . . . where many of these creatures hide out. Here, the water absorbs slowly into the soft ground. Humans tend to avoid such muddy, mosquito-infested places – but these floodplain forests are home to a rich biodiversity: giant sycamores, swamp white oaks, and other water-loving trees; unique plants like cardinal flower and lizard's tail; and animals like prothonotary and cerulean warblers, snakes and turtles, herons, ducks, insects and fish galore, and shy mammals such as bobcats.

The Paw Paw River Watershed (PPRW) takes its name from this meandering waterway, and has been identified by the State of Michigan as one of the most intact and diverse watersheds remaining in southern Michigan. This important watershed drains 445 square miles and flows more than 60 miles from its headwaters in western Kalamazoo County to its end in the St. Joseph River near Benton Harbor. It contains 175 miles of rivers and streams and 5,800 acres of lakes and ponds. A number of the rivers, creeks, and sub-watersheds that feed the Paw Paw River are of notably high quality: the North and East Branches, Hayden Creek, and Campbell Creek. And with more than 90% of the PPRW covered in either farmland or natural habitat[1], its capacity to filter and recharge groundwater systems is huge.

But some of the other sub-watersheds are less pristine and have had to endure industrial pollution, heavy loads of silt from erosion, bacteria from animal manure, and chemical runoff from farms, lawns, and roads. These toxins not only injure the watershed, they also threaten the health of Lake Michigan and groundwater supplies.

Protecting the land within the watershed softens these blows to water quality and starts the healing process. Because the watershed is so large and touches so many people – and because so much of it is still unspoiled and natural – the PPRW has received a lot of attention over the years from the state, local municipalities, and conservation organizations like SWMLC. Working with like-minded land owners, SWMLC has already protected 3 ½ square miles of land along the Paw Paw River through 18 conservation easements and preserves!

Unfortunately, roads, parking lots, commercial strips, and housing developments break these natural habitats into small chunks that are separated by (from an animal or plant's point of view) impossible gaps. Conserved areas must be more than islands of biodiversity in a sea of human-made landscapes to be ecologically functional. They must be connected to create a corridor of protected, high-quality habitat that allows plants and animals to safely move to find perfect growing conditions, food, shelter, mates, places to raise young, and species-saving genetic diversity.

Even more land needs to be protected in order to make this happen. Using our recently-completed Climate Resilience Strategic Conservation Plan as a guide, SWMLC has pinpointed a number of high-quality parcels within the PPRW that are especially important to protect and has several new projects underway to help ensure that our southwest Michigan landscape is resilient in the face of climate change.

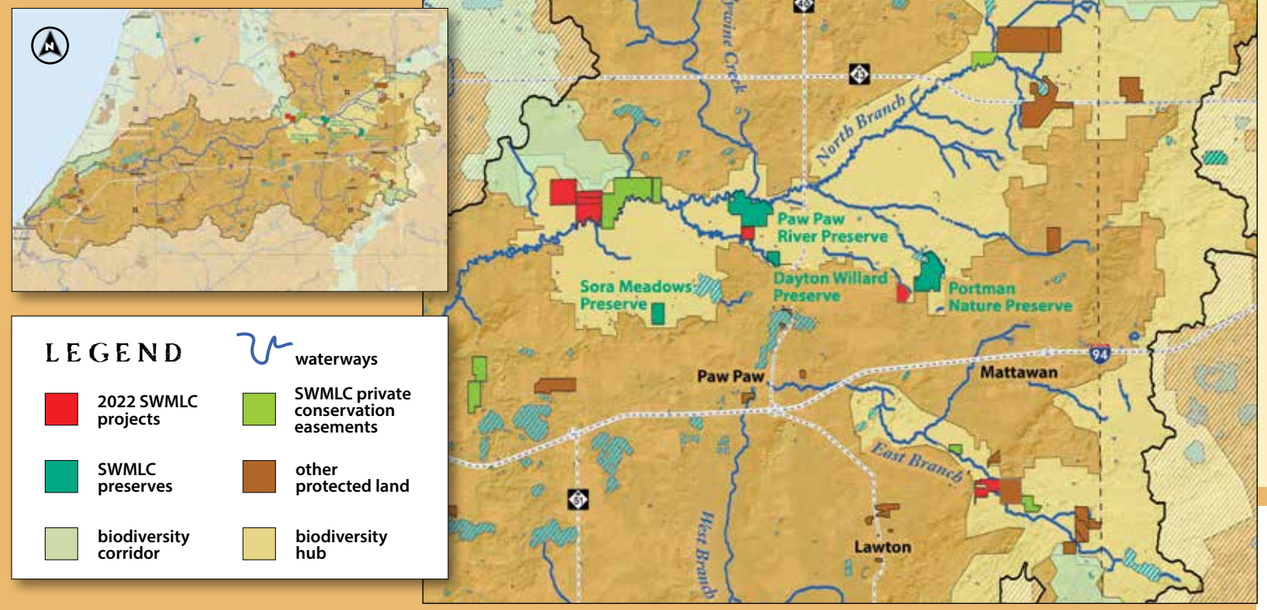
Did the young bobcat find that safe place where humans rarely go among the wild floodplain forest, swamps, and oxbows of the Paw Paw River? Thanks to you, after following the river's twists and turns for several nights, he found a homeplace on a buggy, backwater island that was unclaimed by any other male bobcats, had plenty of food and cover, and where the scent of a female bobcat still lingered.

[1] Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plan, Southwestern Michigan Planning Commission, 2008

Intact, naturally diverse watersheds like these are disappearing rapidly, so we must protect them while we can.

Check your mailboxes in November for our Annual Appeal and your chance to help.

Drone photo | Keto Gyekis, SWMLC Board of Directors



Map, Justin Gish

small map: THE PAW PAW RIVER WATERSHED ***from Lake Michigan to western Kalamazoo County***

large map: CURRENT AREA OF FOCUS ***Paw Paw River Main Stem and Paw Paw River East Branch***

These natural refuges of biodiversity are under constant threat of development and fragmentation.

You can help us protect them now, while we still can.

SWMLC currently has the opportunity to protect, acquire and steward a combination of parcels that, combined, make up almost 600 acres and nearly 3 miles of waterways in two different parts of the Paw Paw River Watershed.

The first project is a partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to assist in acquiring a **350-acre** property that has been identified as a major conservation priority for over 15 years due to its exceptional biodiversity, 1.4 miles of frontage on the Paw Paw River Mainstem, and its proximity to existing conserved land. **Protecting this one parcel will add to the 650+ acres that has already been conserved in this stretch of the river, resulting in over 1,000 acres of conserved land and over 4 miles of frontage.**

Ucumari Photography
Creative Commons

The second project involves the acquisition of multiple parcels of land totaling about **230 acres** along the East Branch of the Paw Paw River, including one with a significant population of Eastern box turtles – a species of Special Concern in Michigan. **If we can acquire these parcels, we can create nearly 500 acres of conserved land within a 3 mile stretch of the East Branch that will be protected for wildlife like Eastern box turtles, and for people for generations to come.**

If we're successful, we will be able to create two separate, critical conservation corridors exceeding 1,500 acres and 6.5 miles of river frontage in the Paw Paw River Watershed that will be protected forever . . . so that our great, great, great grandchildren might someday catch a glimpse of a stealthy bobcat making his way down the river in search of habitat to call home.

You can help win the race to protect critical conservation corridors before it's too late!

Thanks to the generosity of two anonymous donors, every dollar you donate up to $50,000 between now and December 31 will be matched 1 to 1, giving your gift double the impact!

Meeting this challenge will give us a head start toward raising the money we need to protect and steward two critical corridors in the Paw Paw River Watershed that allow plants and animals to safely move between conserved lands.

PLEASE DONATE TODAY.
www.swmlc.org/2022-year-end-appeal

Ikigai

Kristi Chapman,
Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy Volunteer

Okay all you volunteers out there. You are definitely trending. As the Wednesday Warriors celebrate their twentieth year of volunteering for Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, we might just serve as the poster children of the idea of *ikigai.*

Ikigai is the Japanese concept of having a sense of purpose. What gets you up and doing? When we head out into one of the 50 preserves to restore habitat, scout new terrain, harvest seeds, we always seem to go home with more than just some dirt under our nails. We have a sense of satisfaction that we are making our little corner of the world a little better.

And research shows this sort of thing makes us healthier. Now, we certainly didn't need a scientific study to convince us. We can just look at 80-something Stan plunging through the underbrush to subdue another surly honeysuckle. And newcomers who try us out, just keep coming back for more.

Sense of purpose is one of the characteristics of the people in Okinawa, Japan, who live long, healthy lives. Researchers also point to their bean-heavy diet, but the Warriors are going to have to deviate here, unless Bradley finds some bean doughnuts to keep us stoked.

While we're at it, the rest of the Blue Zone shtick includes moving naturally, having the right tribe, belonging, doing what you love, doing what you're good at. I think I'll save those for another article, but they sure seem to fit, don't they?

If you want to fire up your ikigai with other active, motivated nature-lovers, consider joining us some Wednesday, as your schedule permits. There is also a spin-off group, the Privateers who meet on Mondays. For more information, contact SWMLC at conserveland@swmlc.org and ask to get on their email list. Their website is also kept up-to-date with details of each week's workdays (www.swmlc.org/wednesday-warriors). Bring your own work gloves. And beans.

This article first appeared in the October 2022 issue of *Southwest Michigan Spark* magazine. Reprinted with permission.

A recent Wednesday Warrior "selfie." | Kristi Chapman

ARMINTROUT-MILBOCKER NATURE PRESERVE

Creating a New Nature Preserve from the Ground Up

Mitch Lettow, SWMLC Stewardship Director

Few things are more exciting for SWMLC than opening a new public nature preserve!

And few things better represent our organizational values: collaborating with diverse partners; protecting, restoring, and stewarding land; creating outdoor classrooms for schools; and providing the benefits of healthy greenspace for the community. From first seeing the land on a map, to imagining its future as a nature preserve, to finally opening it to the public – the efforts that turn vision into reality are immense, and well worth it. Following the evolutionary path of SWMLC's new 140-acre Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve (AMNP) reflects the sheer amount of work and planning that goes into making something that will outlast us all.

2014

Finding a gem

Analysis found that AMNP scored in the top 10% of 15,000 parcels in the Kalamazoo River Watershed. Its value to wildlife and water quality made it one of the watershed's highest priorities for conservation.

Dave Armintrout and Buster Milbocker (members of the families that formerly owned Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve).

2015

Conservation-minded landowners

SWMLC staff walked the land with Dave Armintrout, Buster Milbocker (former owners of AMNP) and Michigan Department of Natural Resources staff. The landowners clearly had a strong conservation ethic and wanted to see this special place protected forever – and were willing to wait for SWMLC to find the way to do it.

2018-2019

Finding the funding

AMNP not only had amazing conservation value, an appraisal showed it also had amazing property value. So SWMLC put a tremendous amount of work into identifying and applying for a combination of funding sources to match the $1.3 million price tag – and was awarded three highly competitive grants from the Kalamazoo River Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration Fund, the US Forest Service Community Forest Program, and the North American Wetland Conservation Act.

2019 - current

Acquiring the land

SWMLC was finally able to purchase the property with this grant funding, boosted by a generous bargain sale by the Armintrout and Milbocker Families. Our focus shifted to planning a sustainable public nature preserve that welcomed the public while still protecting wildlife and habitat.

2021

Connecting with community

Wanting to connect with the local Allegan community, SWMLC looked for relationship-building opportunities. We offered an informational Sneak Peek event at the future preserve and asked for local residents' perspectives. We assembled an 11-person committee of community representatives with a variety of experiences and perspectives to advise us as we developed a plan for the preserve. And we had many meaningful conversations and preserve walk-abouts with neighbors, teachers, police officers, tribal staff, business owners, firefighters, politicians, and even local brewers!

2021-2022

Understanding the land

We can't properly take care of a preserve without knowing which plants, animals, and habitats are there, so we began a "deep dive" into AMNP's biodiversity. The results blew us away: botanists found 562 plant species, including more than a dozen plants rare to Michigan, and a wide diversity of habitats. We also found an amazing 93 bird species – 57 of which breed on the preserve – including prothonotary warblers, red-shouldered hawks, and bald eagles. Armed with information, we created a detailed "Community Forest Plan" that describes the preserve's rich diversity of life and provides a strategy for caring for it.

2021

Funding infrastructure & stewardship

Purchasing land costs money, but turning land into a public nature preserve does too, so SWMLC launched a fund-raising appeal. A Consumers Energy Foundation Planet Award, a grant from Mignon Sherwood Delano Foundation, a matching gift from The Carls Foundation, and more than 200 individual donations generously provided funding for infrastructure at AMNP: a 32-car gravel parking lot with two accessible parking spaces, a place for school buses to turn around and park, trailhead, benches, signage, and robust 2+ mile trail system.

2022

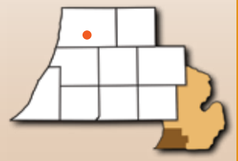
Designing thoughtful access that lasts

Though the community was excited by the prospect of a new public natural area, we wanted to first take time to design an engaging trail system that would stand the test of time, while protecting sensitive species. We kept some of the old logging roads that provided a basic trail system and decommissioned others, then added new trails that highlight this beautiful stretch of the Kalamazoo River – while steering people away from sensitive wildlife habitat. We also took guidance from "Trails for All" – a set of principles that emphasizes accessible and inclusive trail design – to create a trail system where nature can be enjoyed by everybody, regardless of physical or mental capacity. We worked with a professional trail builder (TrailSense) to create 2.25 miles of trails with a firm, crushed limestone surface and a flowing design that minimizes steep slopes, so that overlooks and river views are accessible to more people. Accessibility for those with vision impairments was also considered in the design of the bilingual (English/Spanish) kiosk signage.

2022

Community celebration

AMNP was finally ready to be used and loved by the community! On October 15, nearly 200 nature lovers from Allegan and beyond arrived at the freshly opened public preserve to enjoy the fall colors, sip cider and snack on donuts, exchange stories, and explore the new trails. Speakers TJ Wilkinson (SWMLC Board), Lisa Williams (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Delora Andrus (Mayor of Allegan), and Mitch Lettow (SWMLC Stewardship Director) reminded us of why accessible natural areas are so important to communities and conservation, and showered praise upon the beautiful preserve.



forever . . .

A commitment to forever

It's tempting to kick our feet up and enjoy the fruits of our labor. But really, the commitment to care for AMNP forever has only just begun. Maintaining the trail system, managing invasive species, coordinating volunteers, restoring healthy forests are all ongoing, rewarding challenges – and we hope folks will continue to support our efforts.

SWMLC is now a lifelong member of the Allegan Community, and we couldn't be happier about it!

A huge thank you to everyone who helped create Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve!

Mitch Lettow

Mitch Lettow

Mitch Lettow

Instruction Manuals

Habitats would be so much easier if they came in a box with pictograph instructions for best care and handling. But every prairie, forest, wetland, and stream is a unique living system and in order to best protect and restore the habitats that are in our care, we need to learn as much as we can about them.

Baseline surveys that count the number and types of plants and wildlife on a site provide deeper understanding, and give us a solid foundation on which to build habitat management plans. After acquiring the Freese property in Barry County earlier this year, we conducted several site surveys to help guide our future restoration work on the preserve.

In July, we conducted a fish survey with our partners from Michigan DNR Fisheries Division on a short section of Podunk Creek, the idyllic stream at the preserve's heart. Using a backpack electroshocking unit, we temporarily stunned the fish, scooped them into nets, counted and identified them, and released them as quickly as possible. Though we didn't turn up any "lunkers," the survey captured 145 individual fish representing 18 different species with flashy names like "rainbow darter" and "central stone-roller." This diversity of fish is due to the wide variety of aquatic habitats in this untamed portion of Podunk Creek: dark lairs and safe hideouts in the undercut banks and among fallen trees; quiet spots where silt settles; and oxygen-rich "riffles" that flow briskly over gravel.

Mitch Lettow

In August, SWMLC staff met with ecologists Ashley Cole Wick, Pete Badra, and Lydia Mehlhose to collect mussel data from the creek. Like canaries in coal mines, mussels have a lot to say about water quality. Mussels feed by sucking tiny food particles suspended in the water through their slightly opened shells. If the water quality is bad, toxins can build up in their bodies and may eventually kill them.

Mussels are very sensitive to change, especially those that affect the fish species on which they depend. Not being very mobile creatures, mussels find new habitat by hitching rides on fish! They shoot their microscopic babies (called glochidia) into the gills of passing fish, where they latch on, then later fall off in a new spot. Some mussels can use many kinds of fish, but others specialize in just one fish species – such as the Johnny darter, one of the species that was found in the fish survey. But if the habitat loses that special fish (because of pollution, physical barriers, or climate change), it loses the mussels, too. This may be one reason why mussels are some of the most rapidly declining animals in our region.

At Podunk Creek, the ecologists measured pH and oxygen levels, and looked for mussels using ingenious tools like buckets with plexi-glass bottoms that made it easier to see underwater. They found evidence of 5 of the 43 mussel species found in Michigan (two of which are considered rare), critters with weird names like slippershell, creek heelsplitter, spike, and round pigtoe. But, even though the creek looked promising, no live mussels were found – only shells and fragments.

Although the status of mussels in Podunk Creek remains unclear, the information gathered in both these aquatic surveys provides an important "baseline" to compare with future surveys, information we need to protect land and water quality on a landscape level.

Mitch Lettow

SWMLC STAFF PICKS

FAVORITE TRAILS FOR FALL & WINTER

CINDY

Any of the trails are great with a variety of habitat and lots of glimpses of the Black River. Fall color is amazing this time of year.

MIKO

Small but mighty, Hidden Marsh is close to downtown Three Rivers, but offers a peaceful walk through the woods for folks who need a quick, nearby nature fix. The fall colors are breathtaking, and when the leaves come off, the views open up to reveal the expanse of the Portage River and Hoffman Pond to the south, which are especially pretty in the snow.

DAVE

I love all the preserves in all the seasons for different reasons, but Wau-Ke-Na is incredible in the winter. The North Tract allows you to see Lake Michigan in all of its winter glory – the immense power of the wind and waves is a sight to behold. And the wide open spaces of the South Tract are a cross-country skiing and snowshoeing paradise.

JUSTIN

Spirit Springs.
Autumn leaves.
Reflecting pond.

NICOLE

Fall is my busiest season of the year, and the upper loop at Bow in the Clouds down to the overlook offers a shot of Fall color that's quickly and easily accessible at any point that you can squeeze a stop into your day.

KALEIGH

Portman offers a wide variety of views in a short amount of time since you can complete the full loop in under an hour. The shorelines of Mud and Lime Lake are beautiful in the fall, and the boardwalk section through the fen makes for a great photo op in the winter after a fresh snow.

AMELIA

It's hard to choose a favorite, but I do love the wide skies and long views at Hidden Pond. No matter what the season, that bigness never fails to offer peace-giving perspective.

MITCH

The leaves are nice and all but at Chipman, the tan and russet-colored prairie grasses bending in the breeze are beautiful and mesmerizing. The rolling hills through the prairie and savanna areas allow long views across this unique landscape shaped by glaciers and fire. On top of that, there are five miles of trails to enjoy it all!

Share YOUR favorite SWMLC trail (or preserve) on Instagram by posting photos using #MySWMLCTrail!

TOOL OF CHOICE

Knitting needle, chef's knife, chainsaw, fire . . . these potentially dangerous tools are perfectly suited for their work when used correctly. When it comes to bringing biodiversity and health back to fire-adapted habitats, prescribed fire is the tool of choice.

Fire was once so common that entire landscapes evolved alongside it. In southwest Michigan, prairies, prairie fen wetlands, oak savannas, and oak-hickory forests are home to plants that need fire to thrive. But conventional land management practices have stamped fire out so well that these habitats have been overrun and changed by new plants previously held back by fire – sometimes beyond recognition. Invading maples fill the much-needed canopy gaps in oak-hickory forests, creating deep shade that kills the seedlings of fire-adapted trees. Autumn olive engulfs former savannas. Buckthorn chokes the prairie fens.

Some animals also need fire-adapted habitats. Federally-endangered Mitchell's satyr butterflies and Eastern massasauga rattlesnakes depend on fire to keep prairie fens healthy. And many birds, including red-headed woodpeckers, bluebirds, and meadowlarks, are in decline from the loss of savanna and prairie habitats, partly due to the lack of fire.

As part of our efforts to revive these natural systems, SWMLC staff try to "read the landscape" and do our homework to learn if fire was part of the bygone landscape. Historical vegetation maps, fire and sun-loving plants, and mature wide-branching oaks can all be signs of the land's history with fire. We have found evidence of historical fire-adapted habitat at a number of SWMLC Preserves including: Armintrout-Milbocker, Portman, Bow in the Clouds, Chipman, Hidden Pond, Corey Lake, Sand Creek, Wolf Tree Nature Trails, and Spirit Springs Sanctuary. Prescribed fire is the most effective and natural tool we have for bringing back rare habitat to these places.

In using prescribed fire, our goals include opening tree and shrub canopies so that sunlight can reach the ground; setting back invasive plants; returning nutrients to the soil, stimulating dormant seeds, and reducing the buildup of burnable debris that fuels (non-prescribed) wildfires. And, although fire can be expensive, a well-executed fire can do as much in one day as a small crew might do in a month using hand tools – saving us money, herbicide, and time.

SWMLC staff attend workshops and pay attention to recent developments in the field. Across the country, researchers are studying the effects (and major benefits) of prescribed fire, from wildlife use, to setting back disease-carrying ticks, to carbon storage. Staff and volunteers also undergo comprehensive training to learn how fire behaves and how to keep staff, volunteers, and communities safe. And the prescribed fires themselves are carefully planned and cautiously executed with help from professionals, and with local fire departments involved every step of the way.

Prescribed fire is one of the most powerful tools in our toolbox and we respect it. When handled correctly, fire gets the job done as gracefully as a needle knits a sweater.

There's more information about the role of fire in the environment and how SWMLC uses prescribed fire as a habitat management tool here: "The Past is Our Lesson, Habitat Management Strategies at Portman Nature Preserve," www.swmlc.org/the-past-is-our-lesson.

Mitch Lettow

Donations • June 16, 2022 – October 15, 2022

The following contributions were made by people who want to make sure that there will still be wild places for future generations of people and wildlife.

You make our work possible. Thank you!

Honor Gifts

Anonymous
In honor of Donna Keller

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

Chapter CN P.E.O. Sisterhood
In honor of Sister Ginny Jones

Cecilia Falcone
For Momcat and all her letterboxing memories

Pam Hjelmquist
In honor of Ken Kirton for his 88th birthday and Father's Day

David and Judith Kossy-Perry
To celebrate Rebecca Sive and Steve Tomashefsky's 50th Anniversary!

Rita and Allan LaReau
In honor of Kathy Shurtz's birthday

Oshtemo Historical Society
In honor of Pete TerLouw's presentation

Bettylu and Paul Saltzman
Happy 50th Anniversary Rebecca Sive and Steve Tomashefsky! Here's to many more, from us who have had many more.

Wild Ones Kalamazoo Area Chapter
In honor of Lars Brudwig's oak savanna field trip.

Memorials

Craig Allen
In memory of Marlene Clark

Mary Brumley
In memory of Miriam Jones

Lorraine DeBaptiste, Heather Hill
Phyllis Hoger, Carrie Lyn,
Marcie Waite, and Barb Witte
In memory of Jeff Klimeki

David M. Dybicki
In memory of our dear friend David Novak

Bill and Peggy Hauke
In memory of Miriam Jones

Julia Sharon Modrzejewski
In memory of Robert D. Baker

Rachel Sankofski
In memory of River Alden Fitch

Matt Telfer
In memory of my late uncle, Robert "Bob" Baker

In-Kind Donations

Landscape Forms
Three replacement bench seats for Chipman Preserve interpretive circle

John and Maureen Lewandowski
Samson Expedition XP106 PA system

Julie Sokolow and Jay Bonsignore
first aid supplies and insect repellent

Welcome New Members!

Mitchell's Satyr Butterfly ($1000+)
Stanley Clark Carmichael

Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake ($500+)
Julie and Anthony Estell
Rick and Diana Lloyd

Spotted Turtle ($100+)
Frank Aiello
Devin D. Bloom
Philip Carter
Cassandra Kellogg
Dillon Martin
Dr. Gail M. Simmons

Little Brown Bat ($50+)
Mike Bax
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Peggy St. John

Grants

The Burdick-Thorne Foundation
Entergy Palisades
Four-Townships Water Resources Council
The H.P. and Genevieve Connable Fund
The Esther and George Jaruga Charitable Foundation
Nancy Malcomson Connable Fund
Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy – Paw Paw River Headwater and Floodplain Protection grant

Matching Gifts

Allstate Insurance Co.
GFO
Pfizer Foundation
Zoetis

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.

Your online shopping dollars can still help nature locally when you use Amazon Smile

SWMLC advocates local shopping whenever possible, but sometimes that hard-to-find item is only available online. When that happens, AmazonSmile has nearly all the same stuff as regular Amazon, but automatically donates 0.5% of the purchase price to your chosen charity.

It's easy to sign up: just go to smile.amazon.com, sign into your regular account (or open one), choose a charity *(pick us!)*, then continue shopping - it even works with Prime and with your Amazon mobile app.

It really adds up!

Between January 1 and June 30, 2022, supporters who named SWMLC to be their designated charity generated a $273.29 donation – simply by shopping AmazonSmile!

Thank you!

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 by using this QR code or typing: ***www.swmlc.org/membership***

What's with all the QR codes? We can fit so much more on our website than between the covers of the newsletter! Find extra content quickly by focusing your smartphone's camera at the QR codes, then tapping the link that's offered.

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.

Share SWMLC with Friends!

Julie Collard

People love to share the things they love. Your friends adore the dessert you made and everyone wants the recipe. You see a mind-blowing movie and call (insert name of your important person here) because you know they will love it, too. You text all your friends about the awesome podcast you just listened to. You practically become the new spokesperson for a new tool (paint brush? air fryer? dog shampoo?) that has made your life better.

So . . . what if everyone who already supports Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy shared their passion for our conservation work with their family and friends?

• Take a friend for a walk at your favorite preserve and tell them all about us. • Recycle this newsletter when you're done reading it by sharing it with others. • Let people know that good things are happening for nature right here, right now, in southwest Michigan . . . ***you're part of it – and they can be, too!***

Invite them to become SWMLC members and join the community of caring people who share a vision for southwest Michigan where wild and scenic places are protected forever for future generations of people and wildlife.

It's as easy as pointing them to www.swmlc.org/membership.

Share the love!

SWMLC is pleased to announce that it is applying for renewal of accreditation – and public input is invited!

The land trust accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) is pleased to announce it is applying for renewal of accreditation. A public comment period is now open.

In 2010, SWMLC received the National Land Trust Excellence Award from the Land Trust Alliance. The award was given for leadership in conservation for our collaborative approach and breadth of work in stewardship and conservation planning.

In 2012, SWMLC achieved land trust accreditation, a milestone accomplishment. Awarded by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, accredited land trusts meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust, and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent. In 2017, SWMLC was reaccredited, and now, in 2022, SWMLC is seeking its second reaccreditation.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs.

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how SWMLC complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments: (fax) 518-587-3183; (mail) 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866.

Comments on SWMLC's application will be most useful by January 14, 2023. **Thank you for your support.**

Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy
8395 East Main St.
Galesburg, MI 49053

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Photo, Amelia Hansen

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