SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

Protecting Nature

restoring habitat • conserving water quality • supporting biodiversity • strengthening climate resiliency
connecting people and nature • helping families protect the land they love

Robertson Addition to Bow in the Clouds Preserve, located within the city limits of Kalamazoo, MI

Learn more about updates at this beloved preserve on page 10.

Photo, Amelia Hansen

Fall 2025 – Vol. 34, No. 3

SWMLC protects nature in these Southwest Michigan counties:

Allegan • Barry • Berrien • Branch • Calhoun • Cass • Kalamazoo • St. Joseph • Van Buren

Fellow Travelers

Michael Larson,
SWMLC President and Executive Director

Wood Frog at Twilight Conservation Easement | Kaleigh Winkler

As in nature, nonprofit work follows some predictable cycles – with the occasional surprise thrown in here and there! For us, 2024 was an exceptional "land protection year," with SWMLC conserving over 1,300 acres, either directly or with partners. And now, 2025 is shaping up to be a really big "stewardship year," with our stewardship staff pulling out all the stops to get to all the habitat management and infrastructure work required by our 58 preserves.

SWMLC is fortunate to have a team that not only brings a high level of expertise to their work but also strives to use resources wisely and be conscientious with the incredibly generous donations and gifts our members entrust us with. We're also mindful of the importance of learning, strategizing, reflection, and collaboration. This year, with careful planning, generous partners, and some welcomed grant funds, SWMLC staff had a rich year of peer education and sharing – along with all of our "normal" work.

In late August, we spent time with Little Traverse Conservancy (LTC) staff, who generously provided us with our own personalized peer-learning experience . . . we will return the favor here in Galesburg next year.

Thanks to a capacity-building grant from EGLE, SWMLC sent eight staff members to Land Trust Alliance's National Land Conservation Conference (aka "Rally") in Cleveland, providing conservation-specific training in Stewardship, Land Protection, Fundraising, Communications, Outreach, and Finance. All together, SWMLC staff attended 50 workshops and seminars, in addition to plenaries, field trips, and receptions where we learned from colleagues and shared our own knowledge and experience.

And most recently, SWMLC Stewardship staff participated in Michigan Prescribed Fire Council's Collaborative Burn Week, where they received hands-on training and practical field experience that increases their ability to use prescribed fire safely and effectively as a habitat management tool.

The intentional learning and collaboration that we undertook this year reflects our commitment to excellence in every aspect of our conservation work. And it's that combination of hard work and dedication, constant study and partnership – along with ***your*** steadfast support – that will make our shared vision of a resilient, healthy, and natural southwest Michigan a reality.

We're deeply grateful for you and inspired by your mutual dedication to protecting and caring for our most important natural areas.

We hope you will continue to support this important work by being a Force for Nature again this year. ***Thank you!***

Mike Larson, SWMLC President and Executive Director • mlarson@swmlc.org • 269-324-1600 x307

Portman Nature Preserve Causeway Repair Complete

The causeway dam repair project at Portman Nature Preserve is finished! It still looks a bit raw but SWMLC's Stewardship Crew have started the healing process by spreading a native plant seed mix over the freshly graded soil that includes sandy species like little bluestem grass, fox sedge, and black-eyed Susan, and wetland faves like blue lobelia and swamp milkweed.

Erosion control blankets are keeping everything in place while the bank stabilizes, so we're asking folks to please stay on the trail and not walk on them. Also, please stay out of the areas near the new overflow pipe, on either side of the dam, because too many feet will cause new erosion issues. Split rail fences will soon be added to reinforce these boundaries.

Learn more about the how's and why's behind this ambitious project by visiting our website: www.swmlc.org/portman-causeway-repair

Collin Klute

Worth the Wait

Things worth waiting for . . . the butterfly emerging from its chrysalis. Baking bread. The sun slipping below the horizon. An eco-friendly trail at a beautiful preserve on the Lake Michigan shore.

SWMLC has been working with our preserve partners at South Haven Recreation Authority (and others) on designing a trail system for Porter Legacy Dunes, the 48-acre preserve near South Haven that protects a rare freshwater sand dune community. The thoughtful, low-impact design is sensitive to the preserve's fragile habitats, minimizing harm from foot-traffic while also providing a splendid and accessible user experience.

This summer, contractors began work on the elevated, erosion-resistant boardwalk trail that invites visitors to explore the special backdune habitat without damaging it. When this phase is finished, we will extend the trail so visitors can also mingle with the lovely woodland wildflowers without hurting them.

To keep both habitat and visitors safe, the preserve will remain closed until trail work is complete but, like so many fine things, we know it will be worth the wait!

Thank you for your continued patience as we create something that's both habitat- and user-friendly. We're deeply grateful to the many donors who have made this project possible!

Mike Larson

TALKIN' SHOP

SWMLC'S RECENT PEER LEARNING EXPERIENCES

An effective organization doesn't operate in a vacuum. The world of conservation is constantly evolving and, to be successful, we need to know about new ideas, findings, and techniques . . . and listen to others' experiences so we don't reinvent the wheel. This past summer was chock full of special opportunities for SWMLC staff to listen, learn, and share with colleagues within our field – while also having fun in the process.

Stewardship Strategic Planning Session

SWMLC recently passed a watermark: we've protected more than 20,000 acres – and over 5,236 of them belong to us and are ours to care for. To meet the increased habitat and infrastructure needs of our preserves, SWMLC's stewardship department has been expanding, thanks to the generous support of you – our members and friends. We've been able to purchase the proper equipment and hire more staff, and it's tempting to plunge right into the work. But we want to be careful and use those resources wisely to make the best impact possible, so we've taken a science-based approach to growing the department.

To get input from everyone on the team, Mitch Lettow, SWMLC Conservation and Stewardship Director, worked with a facilitator to design the agenda for a strategic planning session – a full day of review, assessment, and possibility. The group mapped the work that needs doing, looked for gaps, used a strengths assessment to determine skills and aptitude, asked questions to learn people's preferences, and imagined a more specific future together through some very meaningful conversations. It was time well spent, yielding valuable info that will help our Stewardship department grow in step with the rest of the organization. Dave Brown, Stewardship and Fire Manager, made an apt forestry analogy, "We're stewarding our department for old growth."

Collin Klute, Mitch Lettow, Lisa Brush, Lukas Bolton, Dave Brown, Joel Campbell

Sharing Knowledge with Our Friends at Little Traverse Conservancy

Talking shop with colleagues provides a rare chance to dig into the details that bore the pants off your friends and family. Recently, some of SWMLC's staff did just that when our good friends at Little Traverse Conservancy (LTC) rolled out the red carpet and welcomed us to a few days of peer learning.

Headquartered in Harbor Springs, MI, LTC's name may sound small but they are a large, impressive organization that serves a huge area, including the northwest tip of the mitt and eastern part of the UP. Founded in 1972 (19 years before SWMLC), they've protected nearly 73,000 acres, own 400 nature preserves, offer 130 miles of trails, and protect more than 330 private properties with conservation easements.

Their down-to-earth staff generously shared their work and approaches with us. "It's like your older sibling went to college and you're hearing all the stories!" quipped Mitch Lettow, SWMLC Conservation & Stewardship Director. In turn, LTC folks wanted to know more about SWMLC's methods, too, so the learning ran both ways and benefited everyone.

LTC also showed us some of their protected places. By boat, we toured the Inland Waterway Nature Preserve Complex, six connected preserves on Crooked River and Lake. Lukas Bolton, SWMLC Stewardship Tech, said, "I loved seeing multiple eagles on the boat ride!" Later, we got to fool around with the nature megaphone at Boyd B. Banwell Nature Preserve.

Kaleigh Winkler, SWMLC's Land Protection Director commented, "It was exciting to connect with another like-minded land trust to share strategies and experiences in our niche corner of land conservation. Bonus that some of this quality time took place on the water!"

SWMLC Stewardship Tech Collin Klute noted, "This highlighted the powerful intersection of community partnerships and ecological preservation – proof that collaboration can make conservation both effective and joyful!"

Mike Larson, SWMLC's Executive Director, summed it up, "This was a great opportunity to see and absorb the work and best practices of a land trust that's been around longer than SWMLC. It reinforced what we're doing – and showed us what we could be doing."

SWMLC Staff Attend Important Land Trust Alliance Conference

Wow! For the first time ever, many members of SWMLC's staff were able to attend Rally, the Land Trust Alliance's national land conservation conference (held in Cleveland, Ohio this year) – thanks to a generous grant provided by Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

What a fantastic opportunity to learn new techniques, compare strategies, and hear about fresh approaches from our peers, the folks that work at other land conservancies all around the country! Whether we work in dramatic mountain landscapes, on the edge of urban centers, on coastal shores, or here in beautiful southwest Michigan, we're all committed to the same goals: restoring natural habitats, protecting clean water, and connecting communities with quality natural experiences.

We didn't just soak up the knowledge, SWMLC Conservation & Stewardship Director Mitch Lettow also dished it out when he participated in a panel discussion and presentation entitled "Strategic Conservation Planning for Watershed Protection." We're proud of you, Mitch!

We also got a chance to explore Cleveland, a city that values green space and is proud of its interesting architecture and long history of making and shipping things. Each staff person got to choose one field trip from over a dozen on offer that showcased amazing and inspiring projects happening around the city

And maybe best of all, we got to spend time with each other in a relaxed atmosphere: eating, gawking at the city views, and getting to know one another as 'real' people and not just coworkers. Building that kind of team unity is priceless.

SWMLC's visit with Little Traverse Conservancy

Left to right around the edge: Joe Graham (LTC Chief Financial Officer), Kaleigh Winkler (SWMLC Land Protection Director), Mitch Lettow (SWMLC Conservation & Stewardship Director), Dave Brown (SWMLC Stewardship & Fire Manager), Lukas Bolton (SWMLC Seasonal Stewardship Technician), Collin Klute (SWMLC Stewardship Technician),Derek Shiels (LTC Director of Land Stewardship), Jessica Hagen (SWMLC OutreachCoordinato)r, Anne Fleming (LTC Director of Community Outreach & Communications), Kieran Fleming (LTC Executive Director). Mike Larson (in front, middle) SWMLC President & Executive Director).

We made a 60-second video about it! Watch it on SWMLC's YouTube channel.

We made a 60-second video about it! Watch it on SWMLC's YouTube channel.

SWMLC Staff at Rally in Cleveland

Mitch Lettow, Miko Dargitz, Emily Brown, Jessica Hagen, Amelia Hansen, Kaleigh Winkler, Dave Brown

Your support is what allows us to have learning experiences like these that freshen our perspectives and build the cohesion we need to energetically continue our critical work protecting nature in southwest Michigan.

Thank you!

Twilight Conservation Easement

Amelia Hansen

Kaleigh Winkler

When asked what he thought the first time he saw the wild property that he purchased back in the early 1980's, Richard Minter smiles, "I fell in love with it the moment I saw it. I rented a canoe so I could see what was in back and the friend who came along said it looked harsh . . . but I thought it was drop dead gorgeous!" Though the 41-acre property, now called Twilight Conservation Easement (CE), is mostly wet and had only one tiny old building on it at the time, Richard knew he had found the perfect place.

That first impression never wavered and Richard's love for the land and water is obvious in the way he has protected it by generously selling his property's development rights at a deep discount to SWMLC. We purchased it with funds provided by a Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy Nonpoint Source Program grant, then worked with Richard to create a thoughtful legal agreement that protects the property's natural features forever.

Just beyond Richard's beautiful home and large, inviting backyard lies a huge wet world. Moisture-loving shrubs and trees like winterberry, buttonbush, and poison sumac grow among sedges, asters, and ferns. Twilight CE protects over 36 acres of wetland that extends into similar terrain on three sides: 79-acre Methner Farms of Southwest Michigan CE (protected by SWMLC); Almena Woods, nearly 402 acres of floodplain forest owned by Almena Township on the north; and a 264-acre sanctuary conserved by Michigan Nature Association to the east. Altogether, it's some 1,500 acres of clean water and rich biodiversity, with room for native plants to thrive and wildlife to find food, mates, and nesting sites.

Twilight CE also protects 3,236 feet of frontage on both sides of Campbell Creek, a tributary of the North Branch Paw Paw River, which begins less than a mile upstream at Wolf Lake. Two watershed management plans (Paw Paw River and Black River) have noted that protecting this property is critical to the health of these watersheds. It's also located inside the Paw Paw Biodiversity Hub, as identified in SWMLC's 2020 *Strategic Land Conservation Plan,* and within five miles of about 2,389 acres of protected land that includes – along with those properties previously listed – SWMLC's public Portman Nature Preserve and Wolf Tree Nature Trails, SWMLC's limited-access Sand Creek Preserve, and four private properties protected by SWMLC CE's.

A retired lawyer, Richard is a naturally curious person and has enjoyed hearing local history from neighborhood old timers. And this city kid has learned from nature, too. "Every time I go for a walk I see something I've never seen before," Richard observes. He's encountered turtles galore, glimpsed a foraging woodcock, marveled at bird nests, found huge beaver-chewed stumps, and watched minks at play. He says his love for animals comes from his mother, his love of plants and growing things from his dad.

But the development that has been creeping westward down nearby state highway M-43 disturbs him. "We're losing land. Someone suggested to me that I should just drain my property and put in a golf course," he says, shaking his head. "By protecting my property with a conservation easement, I'd like to show others that **this** is what needs to be done."

Thank you for your conservation spirit, Richard!

A conservation easement is a permanent, voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust. Landowners continue to own their properties until they decide to sell or leave them to others, but the terms (which vary and are unique to each property) that conserve the land's natural features by restricting development are passed on with the deed and protected by the easement holder, SWMLC. With this, landowners have the peace of mind of knowing that their beloved land will be protected forever, no matter who owns it in the future.

PLEASE NOTE: Even though this property is protected by SWMLC, it remains private land and is not open to the public. Please respect the landowner's privacy and do not attempt to visit. ***Thank you!***

All the Best to You, Sarah!

SWMLC was fortunate this past summer to work with intern Sarah Obralija, a young scholar from Bosnia and Herzegovina, thanks to Jericho Foundation and her host family Dan and Stacy Burton.

The Ecology curriculum that Sarah studies at University of Sarajevo is very academic so she was eager for hands-on experience with SWMLC staff – and she got it! With her signature sunny smile and positivity, she removed invasive plants, conducted botanical surveys, and helped with baseline property reports. In her perfect English, she commented, "People here are so engaged and willing to teach!"

Sarah explained that her country is still rebuilding after the devastating civil war of the mid-1990's. Mining is an important industry, as is building luxury mountain homes – but ecology is not a priority and environmental laws are weak. "There are just so many problems for environmentalists to focus on," she said, adding that she is unaware of any conservation groups in Bosnia. A few international organizations have helped, but Sarah feels more needs to come from within the country.

"This internship has given me lots of motivation to do more!" she exclaimed, starting with her hometown's first pollinator garden. Sarah, with your smarts and inspiring attitude, you're going to make a huge difference, no matter what you do!

JERICHO FOUNDATION

www.jerichofoundation.org

Mitch Lettow

Be a FORCE for NATURE!

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

Are you concerned about the environment and looking for ways to make a lasting difference that touches future generations of people and wildlife?

You can help protect nature in southwest Michigan by becoming a SWMLC member,

a true Force for Nature!

Membership is at the heart of everything we do.

Your support keeps us strong, flexible, and responsive so we can continue and expand our critical work . . .

- Improving habitat
- Supporting biodiversity
- Strengthening our region's climate resiliency
- Protecting water quality
- Connecting people with nature
- Helping families conserve the land they love.

If you're not yet a member, won't you become a SWMLC Force for Nature today?

And if you already are a member, would you consider renewing your membership at the next level up?

Giving is easy – just return the envelope in the center of this newsletter
OR scan this QR code (www.swmlc.org/membership) to donate securely online
OR watch your mailbox for our year-end appeal!

A SWMLC MEMBER IS A TRUE

FORCE FOR NATURE!

We're doing lots of important conservation work and we're ready for more!

SWMLC
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

Won't you join us?

Orchard Road Bog, Barry County | Dave Brown

SWMLC

Thanks to you, SWMLC has now protected more than **20,000 ACRES!** To celebrate, here are **20 WAYS** you can help conserve **THE NEXT 20,000 ACRES!**

- ☐ 1. Become a SWMLC Member, a true Force for Nature!
- ☐ 2. Give someone a SWMLC Gift Membership
- ☐ 3. Make a gift in honor or in memory of someone
- ☐ 4. Volunteer at a SWMLC workday
- ☐ 5. Attend a SWMLC event and invite a friend
- ☐ 6. Share SWMLC's social media posts with your friends and family
- ☐ 7. Designate SWMLC as a beneficiary of an insurance or retirement account
- ☐ 8. Become a preserve or CE monitoring volunteer
- ☐ 9. Designate SWMLC in your estate planning
- ☐ 10. Buy a SWMLC t-shirt, cap, beanie, or car magnet and help spread the word about the important conservation work we're doing in southwest Michigan
- ☐ 11. Make a gift to SWMLC via your donor-advised fund (DAF)
- ☐ 12. Make a gift to SWMLC via a required minimum distribution (RMD) or qualified charitable donation (QCD)
- ☐ 13. Designate SWMLC to receive workplace giving donations (local companies like Stryker and Pfizer offer matching gifts for employee giving)
- ☐ 14. Donate a conservation easement on your property of 40+ acres
- ☐ 15. Become a SWMLC Business or Corporate Member
- ☐ 16. Donate your land to become a nature preserve
- ☐ 17. Become a SWMLC Annual Meeting sponsor
- ☐ 18. Make a one-time donation
- ☐ 19. Become a preserve steward
- ☐ 20. Donate a residence or non-conservation property to help fund SWMLC's conservation efforts
- ☐ 21. Bonus – coming soon! If you have a Consumers Credit Union account, look for upcoming opportunities to "Round up for SWMLC"

Making Lemonade Out of Lemons

Turning Challenge into Opportunity at Bow in the Clouds Preserve

Modern plumbing is a blessing: flush and the waste swooshes out of sight and mind! In urban areas, a network of underground sewage lines takes it to a water reclamation plant. One of those lines runs under SWMLC's Bow in the Clouds Preserve . . . *and it needs cleaning.*

Amelia Hansen

"Bow" is a beautiful public nature preserve located within the city limits on Kalamazoo's northeast side that provides a peaceful oasis for both people and wildlife. But below the shady woods and sunlit marsh lies the sewer line and to access it, city workers must bring a huge truck with a giant vacuum unit close to five above-ground concrete maintenance "manholes." Unfortunately, the preserve's trails were too steep and narrow for the truck, requiring that something bigger be constructed.

Turning this potential problem into opportunity, we realized the wider, more gently sloped trail needed by the vac truck could also provide better accessibility for the whole community. SWMLC strongly believes that everyone should be able to enjoy nature's benefits, and we knew that Bow's trails were too hilly and eroded for some folks to safely navigate.

So, working with OCBA Landscape Architects, the generous support of donors John and Maureen Lewandowski, and a grant from the Irving S. Gilmore Foundation, we came up with a plan that balances the City's legal requirements, community needs, and the lightest possible impact on nature. The project began in Fall 2024 with tree and brush removal, carefully routing the trail around the big beautiful oaks and hickories and only removing non-native or fast-growing species like Tree of Heaven, black locust, and box elders.

The rough-cut trail rested over the winter and work picked up again in April once the ground firmed up. We closed the preserve and our friends at Generation III Excavating began next steps: compacting the trail so it could support the weight of the heavy sewage maintenance machines, creating mild grades to keep silt from eroding into the stream and wetland, and laying down a durable crushed limestone surface.

But they had barely started before the project came to a screeching halt. One night, someone smashed cab windows and graffitied seven machines parked in the preserve lot, including a bulldozer, mini-excavator, roller, two dump carts, and a track loader. Gen III had to file insurance claims, clean, and repair the equipment – and once the work resumed, SWMLC paid to have private security protect the job site for the rest of the project.

The misguided 'environmentalists' spray-painted slogans like "Save Trees," "Love Mother Earth," and "Nature is Always Open" and – despite our anger – we understood the sense of outrage that comes from seeing earth-moving machinery descend on a beloved natural area. But we were disappointed the vandals didn't try harder to understand what was happening by either reading posted signage, going to our website, or contacting us directly. Though we filed a police report, the culprits have not been caught.

Generation III Excavating

MAY 2011 Vandals plugged the sewer access, causing raw sewage to flow into the wetland.

MAY 2011 City workers cleared the blockage.

APRIL 2020 Mitch stands on the access cover in this still from SWMLC's video *Nature in the City, 50 years of Earth Day*

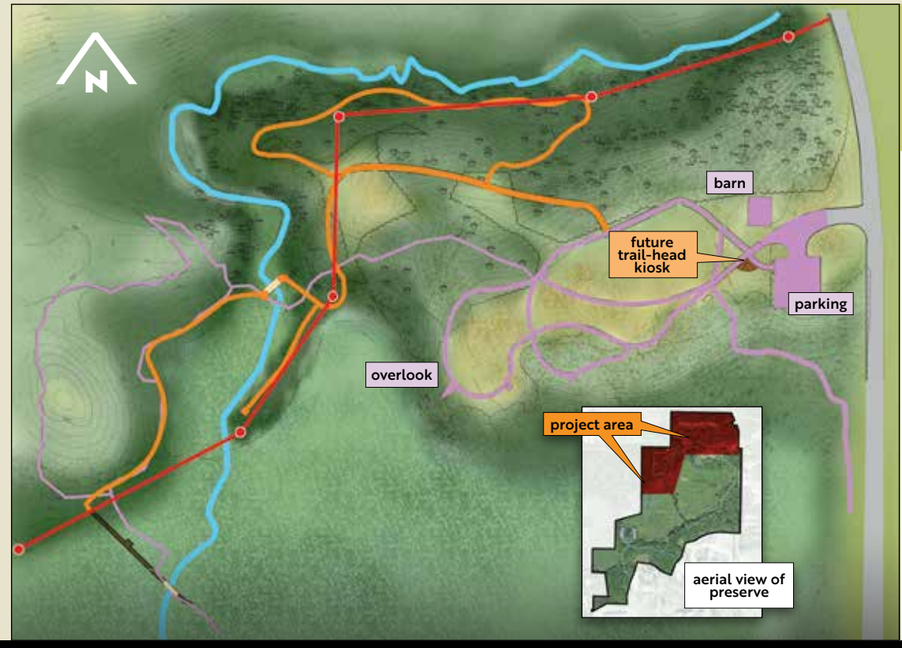
JUNE 2025 Same cover, good to go and easy to access for future maintenance.

SWMLC posted the vandalism story on social media and it ironically raised awareness for our organization: the post reached nearly 65,000 Facebook accounts and was viewed more than 162,000 times within just five days after local news outlets shared it!

With no further incidents, we reopened the preserve this past June. The new trails are lovely! They're wide and inviting, with gentle switchbacks that make slopes more gradual, and have a fine limestone surface that is more welcoming to mobility devices and strollers while reducing erosion troubles. Though this section of trail has lost its rustic flavor, more people can now get farther into the preserve to enjoy Spring Valley Creek and the wetlands. And in a win-win, heavy utility equipment can now reach the sewer lines to perform their septic sucking services (aka maintenance) without damaging the habitat.

There's still more to do before we call the project complete . . . in the future, we plan to replace a section of boardwalk, install stronger bridges that provide ways for people to get near the water without destroying the banks, and build a new trailhead kiosk that welcomes visitors to this serene sanctuary hidden inside the city.

Your support of our core mission to protect, restore, and care for vital lands and waters for people and wildlife – now and for generations to come – is what enables projects like this to happen. THANK YOU!



Bow in the Clouds just got

B I G G E R !

Read about the Robertson Addition on the next page!

TRAIL & INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATES AT BOW IN THE CLOUDS PRESERVE

- existing trails and infrastructure
- new trails
- new boardwalk
- new bridges
- Spring Valley Creek
- sewer line
- sewer access covers

Making a Good Thing Better

The Robertson Addition to Bow in the Clouds Preserve

Keto Gyekis

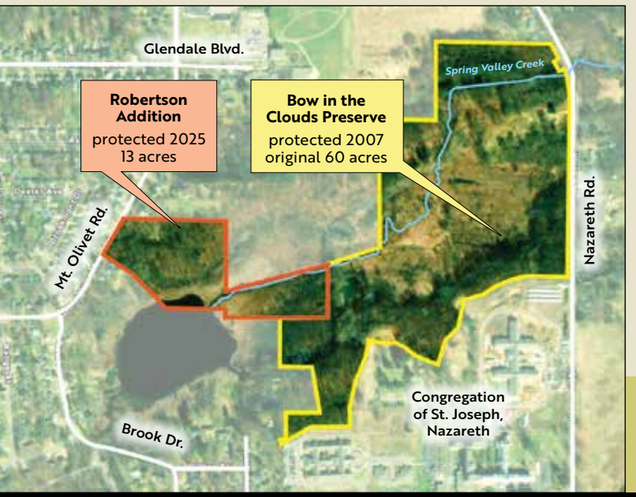
There's satisfaction when that missing piece fits into the puzzle – the link between the snowy mountain and the neon-blue lake, or the one that connects the old red barn to the golden hayfield. It's kind of like that when SWMLC conserves a parcel that's next to one we've already conserved: the essential piece that joins two separate parcels into one large protected natural area.

Thanks to land owners Phil and Ellen Robertson, who deeply discounted the purchase price of their property, SWMLC recently protected nearly 13 acres adjacent to Bow in the Clouds Preserve, creating almost 73 acres of protected urban wetlands and uplands, a tranquil place for both people and wildlife within the city limits of Kalamazoo. Like Sister Virginia (Ginny) Jones and the other members of the Congregation of St. Joseph, Nazareth, who generously donated the original 60-acre Bow in the Clouds parcel to SWMLC back in 2007, the Robertson's were delighted to know their property will now be protected forever.

The Robertson Addition is adjacent to Bow in the Clouds' western edge and extends protection of the Spring Valley Creek corridor to nearly half a mile between busy Nazareth and Mount Olivet Roads. Like many urban natural areas that have been surrounded by neighborhoods for decades, it has its share of invasive plant species. But it also provides much-needed habitat for many kinds of plants and animals in an area that's already densely occupied by humans – nesting places for marsh wrens, open water for migrating ducks, hidden nooks for blue lobelia and swamp milkweed, hunting posts for hawks, tall treetops for warblers, wet meadows for sun loving Joe-pye weed, and dense cover for shy critters like mink and water snakes.

It improves habitat for people, too. Located entirely within a Wellhead Protection Area that supplies Kalamazoo residents with clean drinking water, the Robertson Addition includes 545 feet of frontage on 10-acre Averill Lake and 851 feet of frontage on Spring Valley Creek. It also has four acres of uplands where mature oaks and brushy shrubs keep soil and other pollutants from spilling down the steep slopes into the lake and stream.

Thank you, Phil and Ellen, for adding another piece to this beautiful puzzle started by Sister Ginny and the Congregation of St. Joseph, Nazareth – a picture of healthy urban green space that benefits both people and wildlife!



PLEASE NOTE: Due to lack of parking and the generally wet nature of the property, SWMLC currently has no plans to create a trail system at the Robertson Addition.

THE LAND NEEDS FIRE

The learning continues: Collaborative Burn Week

Collin Klute

The land needs fire. Prairie and savanna habitats used to stay open because fires would burn through every couple of years and were so common that plants adapted to it, growing thick fireproof bark, or sending down deep roots that stay alive even when the top gets frazzled.

Indigenous people know this and historically used fire to keep these habitats open and healthy. But settlers didn't understand fire in the same way – they only saw the potential damage it could do and so they put a stop to it. In fact, we've been so good at preventing fires for so long that we've let those open places become overgrown with trees and shrubs. Many of the animals that depend on open habitats – like meadowlarks, green snakes, and box turtles – are in trouble.

Now we better understand how much the land needs fire and conservation groups all around the world are using it to care for the land. But, like any powerful tool, one must learn how to be smart and safe when using it – and no better way to learn than hands-on training.

Recently, the Michigan Prescribed Fire Council (MPFC) gathered a large group of women and men – both students and professionals – at Fort Custer Training Center near Augusta for the first ever Collaborative Burn Week. They learned the science, technique, and common sense behind safe and effective prescribed burns through a robust training schedule that included simulations, classroom instruction provided by the DNR, equipment handling, skills-building, and working with live fire. They participated in prescribed burns at several different properties and were coached by experienced burn bosses and professionals.

Strong partnerships were forged with fire that week and, from all reports, it was both exhausting and very fun. Of course, SWMLC Stewardship and Fire Manager Dave Brown (MPFC Vice-Chair) and our Stewardship Crew were deep in the heart of it all – training like this increases our staff's ability to use prescribed fire safely, effectively, and more often. Extra shout out to SWMLC board member Michele Richards, an experienced and well-respected burn leader who was a driving force at the training.

Collin Klute

There's a lot of science and technique behind prescribed fire! Learn how and why SWMLC uses it as a land managment tool on our website:

www.swmlc.org/what-happened

www.swmlc.org/the-past-is-our-lesson

www.swmlc.org/a-shy-smile

For more info about the Michigan Prescribed Fire Council, visit their website: www.firecouncil.org

Donations • June 2 – September 30, 2025 Thank you!

The following contributions were made by those who want to be sure there will still be healthy natural places for future generations of people and wildlife. We're grateful to walk this conservation path with you . . . your financial support is crucial to our work and we couldn't do it without you!

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS!

A complete list of all 2025 members will be printed in the Summer 2026 issue of *Protecting Nature*.

Mitchell's Satyr Butterfly ($1000+)

Christine L. Flagler
Frances Little

Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake ($500+)

Carl Landwehr

Cerulean Warbler ($250+)

Nathan Dierlam

Spotted Turtle ($100+)

John Anderson
Aaron Bigler
Allison Nicole Deschaine
Joseph and Lonnie Heywood
Allen Pierce
Marsha Skidmore
Michael and Beverly Smith
Nathan Ward
Jordan Weeks
Michele and Jim Wensel
Sally Ykimoff

Little Brown Bat ($50+)

Linda M. Ahlberg
Han Jacobs Meadway
Rebecca Plichta
Kenneth K. Wood

GIFTS BEYOND MEMBERSHIP

Memorials

In memory of Marilyn Case
Andrea Boughton
Terry Cook
Valerie F. Reed
Jon and Mary Schmidt
Judy Schmidt
Jeff Tourangeau
Robert and Beverly Zalewski

In memory of Mike Champagne
Janet and John Schuster

In memory of Joyce Daley
Denise and James Kouba

In memory of Marilyn Doolittle
Linda Kelly
Kimberly N. Sanford

In memory of Ronald Johnson
The Meadows of Three Rivers Condominium Association
Chris and Dawn Snow
Lois Weed

In memory of Paul and Joyce Kline
Kathy Brueck
Phillip and Tama Kline
Matthew Langholtz
James and Elena Meadows
Charlotte Putney
Thomas and Tina Wenzel

In memory of Dr. Edward William Lean
Cutting and Cutting, PC
Diane Earles
Jeanne L. Fielder
Scott and Sonya Flick
Laura Hamann
Cynthia and Jeffrey Mount
Elizabeth and Douglas Peot
Emily Robbins
Michael and Judith Ross
Mary Ellen Smith
Trevor Smith
Virginia Walton
Leah Wiser

In memory of William F. Martin
Tracy Heming-Littwin
David King
Nancy Susan Scheidt
Kevin O. Ransford Family:
Mary Kay Ransford Simpson, Q of M '72
Maureen Ransford Sweeney, Q of M '75
Kevin Michael Ransford, Q of M '76
Thomas Patrick Ransford, Q of M '82
Ann Marie Ransford Doyle, Q of M '84
Dringi Verbeten

In memory of Paul Olexia
Kalman and Becky Csia
Carolyn Hornev
Melanie J. Perry
Katy Takahashi

In memory of Deborah Redman
Sherry Kocek

In memory of Eric Tooman
Jack and Barbara Ballema
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Engineered Plastic Services
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Lester Tooman and Anne Dingman
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Honor Gifts

Bud and Judi Baldwin
In honor of Woody Boudeman's 85th birthday

Nanette and Jack Keiser
In honor of Patti Chipman's 90th Birthday

Allan R. Lareau
In honor of my friend Bruce Shurtz

Pamela and Lee Larson
In honor of the Fen Photo Booth and best shot of a star-nosed mole we've ever seen

Pamela and Lee Larson
In honor of Kevin Haight's hat

Robert and Joyce Leppard
In honor of the Trekkers

LVM Capital Management
In honor of Lee and Gerry Tregerman

Additional Donations

Audubon Society of Kalamazoo
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Katrina Cribbins
Cathy Doan
Patricia Hesch
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The Burdick-Thorne Foundation
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Matching Gifts

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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 by typing: ***www.swmlc.org/membership***

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 Kristy Brooks at 269-324-1600 x309 or email her at kbrooks@swmlc.org.

If we have accidentally omitted your name, or you find an error, we apologize! Please call Erin Decker at 269-324-1600 x308 so we can correct the mistake.

Thank you to the more than 160 people who came to SWMLC's Annual Members' Meeting back in July! As always, we enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and welcoming new ones to the group, knowing we all share a passion for protecting nature in this corner of the planet. Your curiosity and enthusiasm keep our fires lit!

Thanks also to our host, Edward Lowe Foundation and their helpful staff, who graciously welcomed us to their impressive facility.

And a big thank you to these sponsors for helping make the event possible!

Holiday gifts that spread the word!

raise awareness with SWMLC-themed gifts

T-SHIRTS • We've got sweet box turtle and new sassy great horned owl shirts in a soft cotton-blend that comes in a bunch of earthy colors, in sizes small to double-extra-large.

BEANIES • Keep your head cozy with a knit cap featuring an embroidered SWMLC fern leaf logo. One size fits all in orange, navy, and gray.

BASEBALL CAPS • A wardrobe essential! Good quality, sturdy, size-adjustable, 100% cotton and (best of all!) they feature our embroidered logo in front. Available in five colors.

TOTES • Eco-friendly fabric bags that fold into a compact shape – great stocking stuffers!

MAGNETS • Spread the word - and what a thrill when you see one in traffic!

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS • Honor someone's love for nature with a SWMLC gift membership.

TO ORDER • shop the secure SWMLC webstore by using this QR code OR follow the SWMLC Swag prompts under the "Give" tab in our website's menu (www.swmlc.org).

Please place your order soon! We will do our best to get items to you in time for the holidays!

Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD's) and Gifts from Donor Advised Funds (DAF's)

Are you 70 ½ years old?

If so, you may need to take a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your retirement account in the form of a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). You can donate up to $100,000 per year to one or more charities through a QCD, and those distributions will be excluded from your taxable income. **SWMLC is eternally grateful to receive QCD's in any amount, and they are becoming a more and more important part of supporting our conservation work!**

Donor Advised Funds (DAF's) are another great way to make an impact! DAF's have significant tax benefits and, as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, donations to SWMLC are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. **If you have or are planning on directing a gift to SWMLC from your DAF, please let us know so that we can thank you!**

Aaron Kortenhoven

protecting nature

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PLEASE JOIN OR RENEW TODAY . . . DETAILS ON PAGE 8

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN LAND CONSERVANCY

stewardship volunteer

WEEKDAY WORKDAYS

If you enjoy working outdoors and have a few hours to spare for a meaningful cause, SWMLC's weekly volunteer-driven stewardship workdays might be a good fit. No special tools, strengths, or skills needed - just enthusiasm! And no commitments either . . . come when you can or feel like it, you will always be welcome!

Want to give it a try? Check our website for weekly updates:
www.swmlc.org/weekly-outdoor-stewardship

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