

The Un-developers: Groos Family Vision Turns Tired Farm Into a Preserve

Even from the seat of his bicycle, Tom Groos knew this was a deal he couldn't pass by.

There it lay, overgrown with dusty weeds along a dirt road deep in the Barry State Game Area. It was a 65-acre small farm, complete with a meager, abandoned house and an ancient log cabin that tilted toward ruin. Then there was the land itself — rocky, tired out, gully prone and unprofitable for row crops. And the creek that ran through it? Warm, muddy, clogged with silt and generally a toxic menace to the trout stream into which it emptied.

In short, it was exactly what Groos had been looking for.

“All I could think was, ‘Gee wouldn't it be great if we could purchase this?’” said Groos, an avid biker with a vacation home on nearby Gun Lake.

Despite the property's flaws, Groos saw a spark of potential that no conventional farmer, realtor or banker ever would. And he could see it because he and his family aren't conventional developers. They're actually un-developers.



Hidden Pond Preserve in its fourth year of restoration. Photo by Nate Fuller.

They've bought and restored native habitat on several parcels of land within the Barry State Game Area. It's part of their charitable commitment to a place the Groos family has long called home.

Yet the vacant farm on Otis Lake Road that caught Groos' eye called for quick action.

“When I called the owner, I learned there were plans to build up to 10 houses there,” he said. “This was 2005, during the free and easy mortgage boom. They were building everywhere in the woods of Barry County.”

Groos intervened with an offer that saved the farm from an onslaught of survey stakes and earth movers. But for the next phase he needed to undo 140 years or so of heavy-handed human history.

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For that, Groos turned to the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Together, they developed a multi-year restoration plan that's already taken firm root. In December 2010, as they've done with other "un-development" projects, the Groos family donated the land to SWMLC as a public preserve.

"It's a 67-acre parcel, but because it's surrounded by state land, its ecological footprint is much larger than that," said Nate Fuller, SWMLC's conservation and stewardship director.

"If this was developed, they'd have to carve out a buffer zone to restrict firearm use near the houses. That's why we're eager to purchase private inholdings like this one. If all these were built out, they'd reduce the huntable land in the Barry State Game Area by up to 30 percent."

And as Fuller explained, the impact of residential housing does more than limit firearm use. The increased traffic, yard lights, lawn chemicals, cats, dogs and other trappings of modern life all take a disproportionate toll on the natural landscape.

But at the new Hidden Pond Preserve, the real story isn't about what could've been. It's about how quickly nature can rebound given the right care and stewardship.

To see it firsthand, I toured the property with Dave Coleman, Tom Groos' brother-in-law. Since Groos lives in Connecticut, Coleman manages much of the family's conservation work.

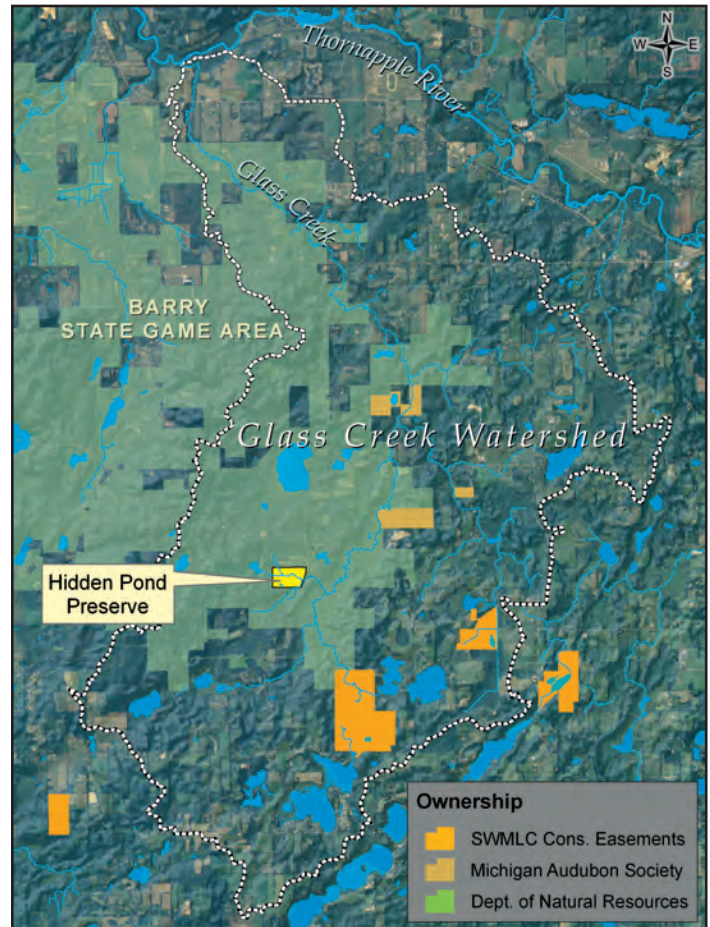
"Right over there," he said, pointing to a patch of freshly sprouted grass, "is where the old farmhouse stood." The only reminders were a remnant lilac bush and a Japanese maple.

Also relocated from the property was a 20,000 square-foot pole barn. It was still functional, but on a remote nature preserve, a big empty structure can be a magnet for mischief and wind damage.

With the buildings gone, restoration efforts have focused on the stream corridor, the hilly uplands, and oak savanna.

The stream itself had suffered dearly during its years of service to the farm.

At its upper end, a man-made berm had cut off the influx of spring-fed water from a wetland. Along its lower course, the stream's curves had been dredged out to straighten its flow. By the farmhouse, the stream was dammed to form a shallow pond that watered ducks and livestock.



The Barry SGA Conservation Plan identified Glass Creek as one of the most important conservation targets in the region. Hidden Pond Preserve protects one of the few private inholdings within the SGA as well as an important tributary to Glass Creek.

Map by Nate Fuller.

At times, the stream was even harnessed for a task that could've come straight from the annals of Greek mythology — a la Hercules' clean-up of the Augean stables.

"I'm not sure how," Coleman said, "but they'd reroute the creek through the barn to flush all the manure downstream."

A Conservation Vision for the State Game Area

Hidden Pond Preserve exists within one of the five priority conservation areas identified in the Barry State Game Area (SGA) *Conservation Plan* — the Barry SGA inholdings. Development pressure is high within and along the edges of the Barry SGA, threatened by residential and commercial growth that can severely impact the capacity of the Barry SGA to support recreation and wildlife.

SWMLC partnered with federal, state, and local agencies and nonprofit organizations to create the *Conservation Plan* in 2009. The goal of the plan is to increase protected land that has the greatest benefit for the Barry SGA. Protecting Hidden Pond Preserve helps us to accomplish that goal.

Already, much of this damage has been undone. Last summer a DNR bulldozer tore out the berm to help raise the stream's water level. The banks will be re-sloped to form a gentle floodplain that will deter soil erosion from the high ground.

Near the former home site, a load of fieldstone has stabilized the shoreline. And where the stream passes under Otis Lake Road, a new, egg-shaped culvert allows for a more natural current flow. The old round culvert — much like a giant spigot — dropped water from a height of three feet and made upstream fish migration impossible.

So could the now cooler, deeper, cleaner stream someday harbor a trout population? That's possible, say DNR biologists, since it empties into Glass Creek, a certified trout stream.

Meanwhile, the upland acreage has been reseeded with prairie plants and grasses. Dense stands of big bluestem and little bluestem, sprinkled with splashes of purple coneflower and black-

eyed Susan, now thrive amid the decayed corn and soybean stubble.

The biggest surprise of all, however, has been the near-miraculous appearance of a one-acre pond. It occupies a saddle between two hills, about 50 yards uphill from the stream.

In the early 1900s, farmers had hand-dug trenches here for drain tiles (a real-life Herculean labor) that were up to 10 feet deep. The tiles siphoned off enough water to make the land tillable, yet a stubborn damp patch remained. And there in the miry clay, a bounty of native seeds lay patiently dormant, like a time capsule from the long-ago wetland.

"I've had friends who pulled drain tiles from old fields and had wetlands pop up," Fuller said. "But I had no idea it would turn into this.

"Within two months, we had enough water for frogs. By spring the pond was black with clouds of tadpoles. We didn't plant anything but now there's three species of lily pads, a dozen sedges,

rushes and pond weeds. You see herons, turtles and dragonflies."

As for the pond's depth, Fuller knows it's at least arm-pit deep. That's how far he waded in before a resident snapping turtle made him beat a hasty retreat.

All of which couldn't make Tom Groos happier that he climbed off his bicycle on that summer day in 2005.

"To see this land come back within five years, it's like playing God in slow motion," he said, from his office in New York City. "More than anything, it's that sense of rejuvenation that I love about this work. If we just give nature a chance, this proves that it can come back from all the bad stuff that man does to it."

— Tom Springer

Tom Springer is a former board member. He is the author of *Looking for Hickories*, a collection of essays about the people and wild landscapes of southwest Michigan. Tom resides in Three Rivers with his wife and two daughters.

<p>2006: Prescribed burn in remnant savanna. Cut invasive shrubs. 15 acres sown into prairie/savanna native plant mix.</p>	<p>2007: Continued removal of invasive shrubs. Thinned tree lines. Removed drain tiles from wet spot on hill top. Sowed an additional 15 acres into native plants.</p>	<p>2008: Sowed the remaining field into native prairie mix after pulling drain tiles. Cleared tree line separating planting from adjacent DNR fields. Continued invasive shrub removal.</p>	<p>2009: Barns, house, and other structures removed. Small dams removed from stream. Culvert replaced under road to improve stream flow.</p>	<p>2010: DNR removed earthen berm/dam to restore natural flow from head-water springs to stream. Prescribed burn on entire property. Adjacent DNR fields sown into complimentary prairie mixture.</p>	<p>2011: Prescribed burning to continue. Stream restoration to continue — to "un-ditch" portions of the stream to create more natural flows.</p>

Hidden Pond Revealed

Rarely does a restoration project provide such a satisfying response in such a short amount of time. The old farm had been worked by the same family since they purchased it from the state, shortly after arriving in the United States in the mid-1800s. It was not an easy decision to sell the

the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. On the top of the hill, Bob pointed out a wet spot that they never could get dry enough to sow into a crop. Underneath the soil is a small basin of clay. He explained that his great grandfather and his grandfather had dug a trench and put in a drain tile to keep



What was once a cornfield with a wet, unplowable area . . .

property, but Bob Wilcox was pleased to know that not only could the land be kept undeveloped, he could play an active role in its restoration. Bob is the last of the family in the area and was happy to be able to continue working his family's land, but in a brand new way.

The initial management focused on converting 45 acres of tilled soil into prairie and savanna plantings. A schedule was set to convert 15 acres per year into native grasses and wildflowers. Bob sowed the seed himself, planting the final crops on the land.

Autumn olive was a concern, and Bob was hired to clear it from tree lines to help prevent it from spreading into the new plantings. He also knew where every drain tile was on the property and, prior to planting each field, he would have the drains pulled out to restore a more natural hydrology to the fields.

In the fall of 2007, prior to the sowing and drain tile removal of the second field, I walked the site with Bob, Tom Groos, Dave Coleman (the current owners at the time), and Mark Bishop of

it dry enough to plant. I looked up from the bottom of the bowl and commented on the effort it would have taken to accomplish this. To which Bob simply replied, "They weren't afraid of hard work." It was obvious that their work ethic had not been lost over the generations.

We were back at the site the following May to see what removing that old drain tile had accomplished and were astounded at the transformation. What had been a damp spot of old farm field was now a sizeable pond. A pair of ornery Canada geese honked at the intrusion to their new favorite nesting site. A spotted sandpiper scurried along the shore, where dark clouds of tadpoles swarmed in the shallows.

In three growing seasons, that old patch of farm field has grown into a rich little pond. All sorts of wetland vegetation have appeared, either surviving for many decades as dormant seeds or arriving on duck feet. Lily pads, spatterdock, rushes, sedges, and many more grow in and

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. . . is now Hidden Pond revealed, surrounded by a field of native plants and serving as habitat for many creatures. Photos by Nate Fuller.

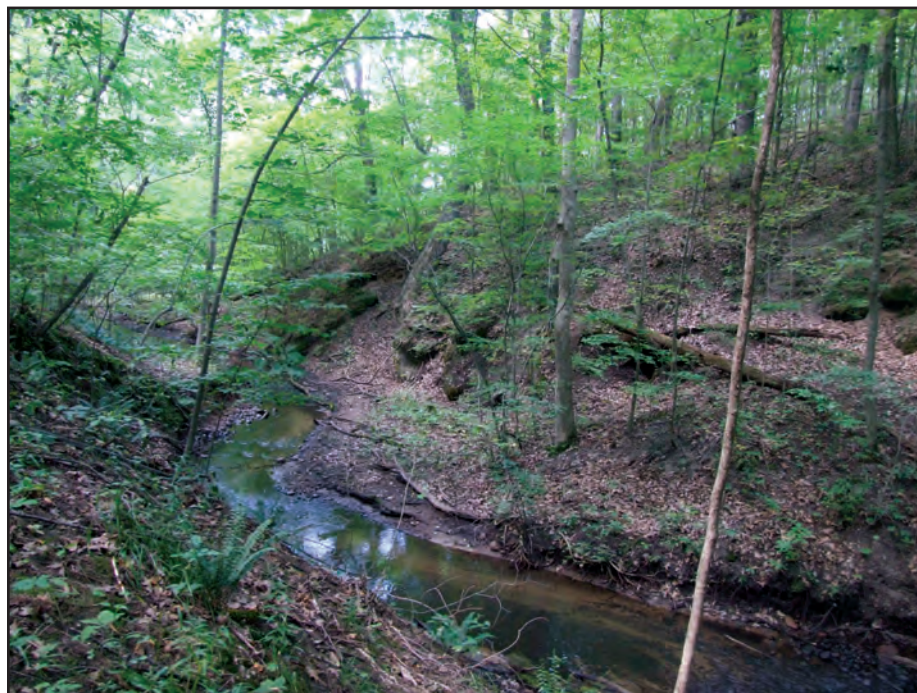
Are There Really Caves?

Nick and Claire Wolterstorff placed a conservation easement on their beautiful 80-acre private property on Guernsey Lake Road, a state-designated Natural Beauty Road. In the process of completing this transaction, SWMLC had the opportunity to name the creek that runs through the property and to learn about a special feature of the creek.

The Wolterstorff land is stunning, with many dramatic topographical features. The main trail through the property winds down the hill, through the 70-foot-tall, cathedral-canopy, oak-hickory forest, past pocket wetlands teeming with life, and ends at the Cave Creek corridor. The scenery changes with the passing seasons, starting with a carpet of spring ephemerals, giving way to a diverse variety of summer ferns (including Christmas, lady, sensitive, cinnamon, royal, wood, maidenhair and more), changing to a rainbow of autumn foliage that is eventually covered by the snow before the spring ephemerals pop through the ground once again.

Traversing the property is a cool, crystal-clear, spring-fed creek which meanders and babbles along the rocky bottom. The origin of the name, as rumor has it, comes from two larger caves at the headwaters of the creek that were dynamited shut for safety reasons. Along the north bank of the creek are many smaller caves that have been studied by a Michigan State University geologist. Geologically, Michigan went through many periods of glaciation, and the geologist believes there are two places in Michigan that were not glaciated — one of these is Cave Creek.

Cave Creek begins as several small wetlands on the west side of Norris Road and flows west through the Wolterstorff property. It then flows downstream into Tamarack Lake and into Fish Lake, where the banks are protected by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources & Environment. Protecting this property creates a corridor of conserved land that gives wildlife plenty of room to roam as they



The caves that give Cave Creek its name can be seen along the leaf-strewn upper bank of this photo, appearing as dark spots just below fallen trees. Photo by Emily Wilke.

compete for one of the many caves to call home.

Although the stream is locally known as Cave Creek, we discovered that this small creek which flows through the Wolterstorff property actually had no official name. We couldn't find a name on any map, so we contacted Rose Anger, Barry County's GIS technician, who confirmed that the creek did not have a name. Rose filled out the application, gave us a brief rundown of the process on how to officially name a creek, and connected us with someone at the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in Reston, Virginia.

After learning about the naming process, we started by contacting Jennifer Goy, Orangeville Township clerk, to suggest officially naming the creek and secured the township's support at their April 6, 2010, meeting. Then, working with county administrator Mike Brown, we presented the idea for review and approval by the Barry County commissioners, who endorsed the name at their July 20, 2010, meeting.

The proposed name was then approved by the Michigan Geographic Names Authority. The application was forwarded to the Department of the Interior, where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs — through the three tribal groups in Barry County: Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi — reviewed and supported the proposed name. Finally, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names voted in favor of naming this unnamed creek, Cave Creek, on December 9, 2010.

So, after a lengthy eight-month process of governmental review and approval at local, county, state, and federal levels, what was once just casually known as . . . is now officially and *nationally* known as . . . Cave Creek.

The Wolterstorff property is one of the special places that makes Barry County unique, and SWMLC has been pleased to work with Nick and Claire to protect it forever.

— Emily E. Wilke

Sandra Kuhn “Gets It Done”

Calhoun conservation easements protect Rice Creek, prime soils, and prairie habitat

This past July, landowner Sandra Kuhn’s long-range vision for her two properties in Marengo Township, Calhoun County, finally became a reality. Through SWMLC, Sandra protected the land she had purchased for that very reason, forever preserving significant soil and water resources from adverse uses. Her properties encompass 42 and 20 acres in a rural area just north of the community of Marshall and I-94 corridor.

The bulk of the 42-acre property has been restored to prairie over the years and features a nine-acre section of riparian forest along Rice Creek, a DNR-designated cold water fishery which cuts across the property’s northwest corner. This property was protected with a con-

servation easement and named after the original owners, the Potter family.

ties into Chaplan Lake through a series of seeps and springs before draining into Rice Creek.

Kuhn, now retired, taught third through sixth grade for 35 years with Marshall Public Schools and currently serves as a trustee for Marengo Township. She worked as a realtor for several years to augment her teaching career and, at that time, received some simple wisdom from a fellow realtor while searching the market for a home purchase herself. “Buy some land. We can always make new houses but we can’t make more land.” Those words ultimately helped her channel her appreciation for nature into action and purchase two rural properties to enjoy and eventually protect. “It made me think about how precious our land is, and I decided I

wanted some farmland.”

Sandra purchased the properties from Marilyn Case, who founded the Calhoun County chapter of Wild Ones and had secured contracts to restore prairie and additional wildlife habitat on the 42-acre

property. The Calhoun County chapter of Pheasants Forever had conferred the title “Conservationist of the Year” upon Case in 2004, and she was named Conservationist of the Year the following year by the Calhoun Conservation

District for her lifetime commitment to conservation.

Building upon what Case began, Kuhn preserved a large prairie wild-flower plot that Case planted, featuring white wild indigo, blue wild indigo, wild quinine, black eyed Susan, compass plant, and cup plant. Kuhn took great pleasure in the abundance of pheasant, quail, and other wildlife on her newly acquired property and saw immense value in re-enrolling in two habitat restoration programs — the Conservation Reserve Program through the Farm Service Agency and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program through the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

These programs provided Sandra with the cost-share assistance to continue the planting and occasional burning of prairie grasses, such as switch grass and big and little blue stem, and the enhancement of seasonally wet meadow and forest habitat along the open space fringe. The result was sustained and newly created habitat for prairie birds such as bobolinks and field sparrows and countless butterflies, not to mention deer and other small terrestrial and aquatic animals.

A longtime supporter of various conservation organizations, Sandra discovered that there was a regional land trust in her area from an article she read in the Battle Creek Enquirer celebrating a SWMLC conservation project. She witnessed two nearby farms become subdivided during generational transfers. Fearing that her land could ultimately become a development, Sandra acted on her original intent for her land and reached out to SWMLC to begin the process of placing conservation ease-

continued next page



Sandra Kuhn smiles for the photographer, Nate Fuller, after conserving her land.

ments on her properties. “I wanted to get it done. It was time.”

She speaks very fondly of an initial visit from former staff member Pete DeBoer and current land protection team members Becky Csia, Ken Kirton, and Russ Schipper. “A special thank you goes to them. It was such an enjoyable visit, and they were the first people that could relate to my enthusiasm for conserving this property.” Among other discoveries on that visit, Schipper happened upon a rare woodland wildflower, the green dragon, or *Arisaema dracontium*, in Sandra’s floodplain forest.

A few days after signing the conservation easements, it finally sunk in that her properties were protected. Kuhn wrote an email to SWMLC expressing how very relieved she was. Her words of wisdom to other landowners: “We have to protect what we have. It was easy . . . I got it done.”

— Geoffrey D. Cripe



A lovely view of Rice Creek as it winds through a corner of the Potter Conservation Easement property. Photo by Lucas Westcott.

Hidden Pond Revealed *(continued from page 4)*

around the pond. At least five different species of frogs now use the pond. Blue-winged teal, wood ducks, hooded mergansers, and bufflehead have all been witnessed using the pond along with their more common mallard cousins.

That little pond’s resurgence has been an inspiration to all those involved in the restoration of this property. Ecological restoration is a job for the patient. Our successes are typically subtle and slow in the making. Standing out on the hilltop, watching the dragonflies patrol the cattails as frogs croak from the lily pads and ducklings scurry along after their mother, one can’t help but get a sense that this little pond has



*The tadpoles wriggling in this shot are just a small sampling of the **hundreds of thousands of tadpoles** that appeared within months of removing drain tiles at Hidden Pond Preserve. Photo by Nate Fuller.*

been waiting for over a hundred years to express itself, and it didn’t waste its time doing so.

As the restoration plan was being developed, the property had a number of working names, including the Wilcox Farm, Lester Lord’s Place, and the Otis Lake Road Property. The pond provided such an inspiration, it was natural to name the property after it.

With this generous gift of the Groos family, Hidden Pond Preserve will remain a testament to the healing power of restoration.

—Nate Fuller

Planning for the Future: SWMLC Seeks Accreditation

Protecting a property forever is a huge commitment, but it's one that SWMLC has made on almost 100 properties across southwest Michigan. How you manage, grow, and maintain an organization to support these commitments in an indefinite future is a big challenge, and one that is shared by all land trusts.

In 2008, the Land Trust Alliance — a national conservation group that trains land trusts in best practices — established the Land Trust Accreditation Commission to help land trusts across the country ensure that their organizations are well prepared for future challenges and are built to stand the tests of time. This fall SWMLC will strengthen our commitment to conservation by applying for accreditation.

The Commission uses over 25 different “indicator practices” as standards for assessing what an applicant land trust does well or needs to improve on. The accreditation process involves a review of every aspect of a land trust's operations, including its policies, procedures, long-term management strategies, fundraising and finances, and record-keeping, as well as the details of the actual conservation projects it undertakes. This approach helps familiarize land trusts of all sizes with the latest and most widely accepted practices in the field. This benefits individual land trusts by keeping them abreast of the often fast-changing landscape of land trust law, regulation, and stewardship, while assuring that the growing land

trust movement is built on a strong footing.

Accreditation not only helps land trusts meet their land protection goals, it helps ensure the strength of the tools land trusts have to protect land.

“Believe it or not, the quality of work done by other land trusts in our region, and across the country, impacts SWMLC's ability to effectively complete conservation projects here in southwest Michigan,” says SWMLC executive director Peter Ter Louw. “Individual land trusts are part of a larger community, so if a land trust is doing substandard conservation work, any legal challenges to their work have the potential to undermine the credibility of other community members, as well as the strength of the legal and financial tools we use to protect our lands in perpetuity.”

Accreditation creates a uniform standard of practice across the community and provides an easy way for members outside the land trust community — such as prospective members, donors, and partners — to clearly distinguish between those organizations who meet the highest standards and those that do not.

Despite receiving several accolades for excellence in the last year, including the Land Trust Alliance National Land Trust Excellence Award, our board president, Larry Edris, noted that accreditation will help make SWMLC an even stronger organization.

“When you are involved in a broad diversity of conservation projects, it can

be really easy for the staff and board members to get focused on

the near term,” says Edris. “The accreditation process has provided us with an opportunity to step back and look at the big picture. We are systematically reviewing our operations with an eye toward where we want to take the organization and how we plan to get there.”

Given the Commission's comprehensive standards, it's no surprise that accreditation is a lengthy process. SWMLC began taking preliminary steps in spring of 2009 and, since the fall of 2010, SWMLC land protection assistant Lucas Westcott has been working with staff, volunteers, and board members to compile the materials for the August 2011 pre-application and the November 2011 application.

Pete Ter Louw summed up the value of accreditation by saying, “We have been able to do some really great conservation work over the last 20 years to help protect the character and ecological integrity of southwest Michigan. Becoming an accredited land conservancy will help us improve SWMLC as an organization in our capacity to do more and will strengthen us for the future.”

— Lucas Westcott

Accreditation Public Comment Period

You can be involved in our accreditation process by submitting comments during the official public comment period, which will follow our pre-application in late summer. If you are interested in reviewing and commenting on our accreditation, look for an update on our web site at www.SWMLC.org.



Upcoming Workdays

Registration is requested so that we have enough refreshments and tools for everyone. Please call Wynn Jones at the SWMLC office (269-324-1600) to register, join the carpool, or to get directions by the Thursday before the workday.

Restoration of the Creation at Bow in the Clouds Preserve Saturday, April 23, 9 a.m. to Noon

There will be a little something for everyone at Bow in the Clouds Preserve the day after Earth Day. There's no reason not to bring the whole family to this workday. We'll be building bridges and boardwalks, pulling garlic mustard, and sowing native plant seeds. This is a great opportunity to get out and show your appreciation for nature.

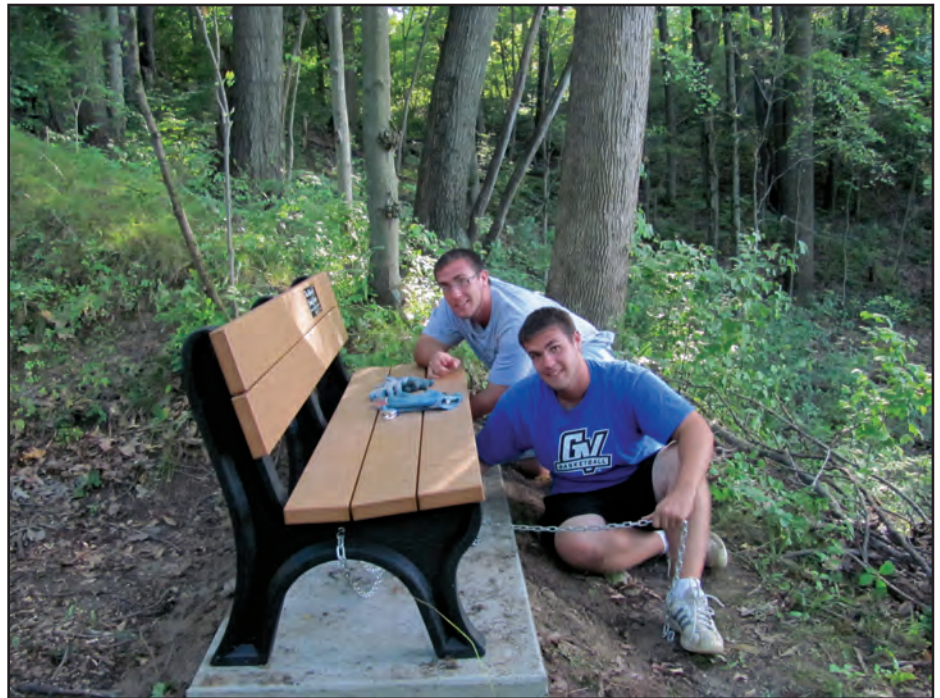
Bring: Work gloves. Waterproof boots might be a good idea if you want to help repair the boardwalks. SWMLC will provide building materials and refreshments.

Pull, Plant, and Appreciate at Chipman Preserve Saturday, May 14, 9 a.m. to Noon

The wild lupine will be in bloom at Chipman Preserve . . . as will the garlic mustard. Don't worry, it won't all be just weeding. We'll also be transplanting wildflowers from a propagation garden into the preserve! Time will be set aside to walk and appreciate the displays of lupine that have grown from just a couple patches and now spread throughout the preserve because of our volunteers' restoration efforts.

Bring: Work gloves. SWMLC will provide refreshments.

Carpool 8:15 a.m. from SWMLC office at 6851 S. Sprinkle Rd. in Portage



Connor Brueck, foreground, Eagle Scout applicant from Troop 414, Three Rivers, helps install a bench in memory of Judy Johnson at Coon Hollow Preserve, assisted by his brother Evan. The bench was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Houts, Three Rivers. Photo by Ron Johnson.

Wau-Ke-Na, William Erby Smith Preserve

Saturday, June 11, 9 a.m. to Noon

The bobolinks and meadowlarks are among the showiest of the grassland birds that will be back on territory at Wau-Ke-Na. Some selective thinning of shrubs and small trees here and there will offer them better breeding habitat and give their young a better shot at evading the raccoons, opossums, and skunks! Between the original 30 acres of plantings and the additional 50 acres, there should be plenty of opportunities to find an interesting variety of birds this time of year.

Bring: Binoculars and work gloves. SWMLC will provide refreshments.

Carpool 7:30 a.m. from the Park & Ride at I-94 and Oakland Dr.

For more workday and training opportunities as they are scheduled, visit us on Facebook and on our web site at www.SWMLC.org.

Wednesday Volunteer Opportunities

Are weekdays better than weekends for you? If so, join our weekday volunteer group — the Wednesday Workday Warriors — as they begin their ninth season.

Every week finds them at a different preserve doing whatever needs to be done . . . from posting signs and marking boundaries to planting seeds and native plants or pulling garlic mustard.

Last year, 29 volunteer warriors worked from April through November and tackled 17 preserves, including three new ones.

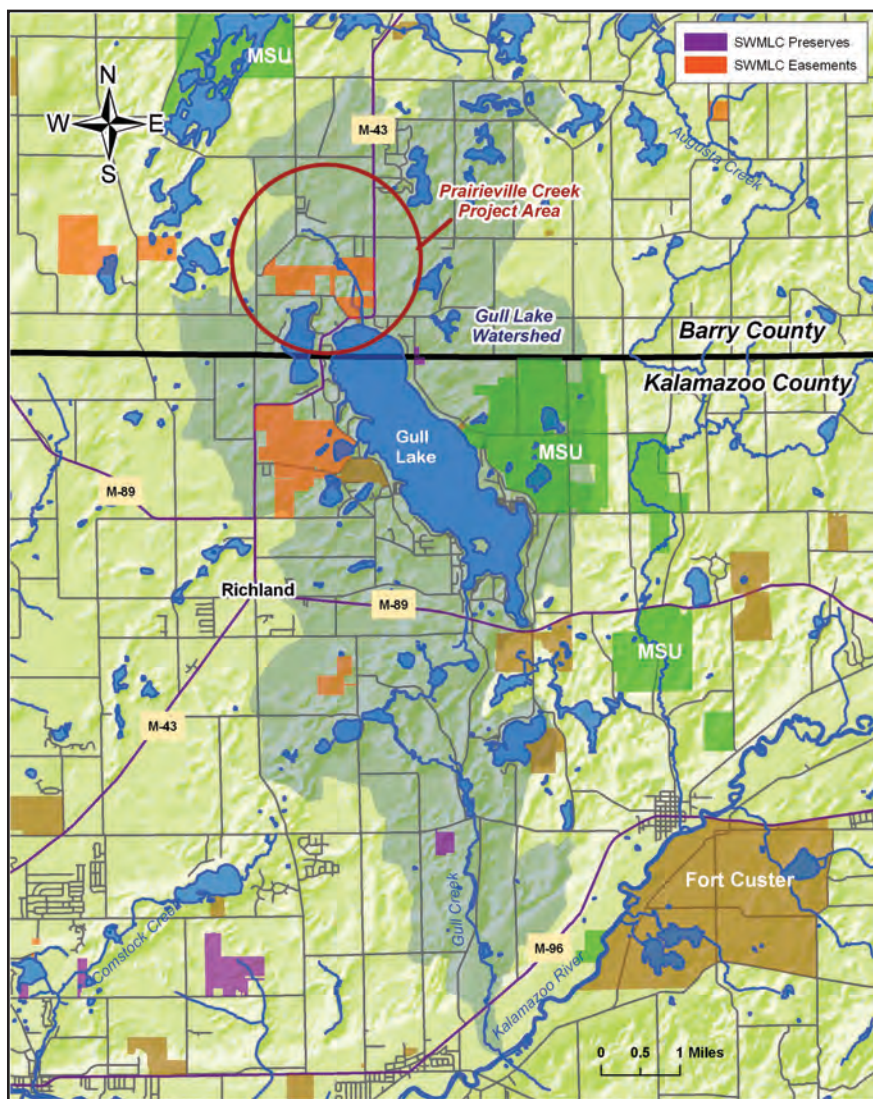
If you want to hang out on nature preserves with dedicated, hard-working individuals — and have fun while learning something at the same time — contact Wynn at the office to be added to the email list. Call 269-324-1600 or email wynnjones@swmlc.org.

Pure Michigan, Protected Prairieville Creek Ensures

In late December, Jim and Alice Fish conserved their land to help protect Gull Lake’s main source of cool, clean stream water for generations to come. The Fishes signed a conservation easement that protects 183 acres along Prairieville Creek, the sixth and final

neighbors. We all know how crucial this stream is to the water quality of Gull Lake.”

The small creek begins as a prairie fen above Hickory Road. It flows two miles and parallels M-43 before it empties into Gull Lake.



This map shows conserved land in the Gull Lake watershed and highlights Prairieville Creek on the north end of the lake.

transaction of a project that began in 2008. Funded by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the effort safeguards water quality and wildlife habitat along the stream, which flows into the north end of Gull Lake.

“Conserving this creek has been my long-time dream,” said Jim Fish, a retired dairy farmer in Prairieville Township. “It’s something we began more than 20 years ago with several other concerned

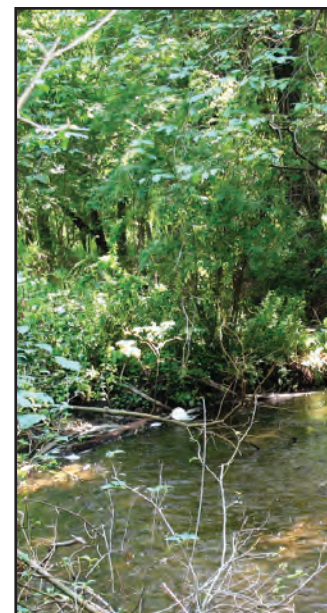
Gull Lake is the second largest lake in southwest Michigan and has the greatest fish diversity of any inland lake in the entire state. Annually, the creek furnishes 60% of the lake’s stream flow and 20% of its water supply. The creek’s streamside habitat features a variety of emergent wetlands, shrub wetlands, and forested floodplains. A 30-acre natural impoundment, known as Mud Lake, sprawls across the creek’s midsection and gives sanctuary to a diversity of wildlife. The creek also serves as Gull Lake’s only cold water fish spawning area and offers winter habitat for large numbers of waterfowl.

“Conserving this my long-time dream.”

The project was initiated in 2008 by the Four Townships Water Resources Council. After SWMLC joined in, the MDEQ awarded a \$500,000 matching grant to protect 170 acres through four conservation easements around the Mud Lake section of Prairieville Creek. The grant dollars also allowed the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council to create a watershed management plan for the Four Townships region.

The interest and support of landowners within the creek’s watershed exceeded all expectations. SWMLC was able to protect 310 acres and more than 6,000 feet of frontage on Prairieville Creek and Mud Lake — nearly double the original conservation goal.

Riparian areas — the naturally wooded or grassy areas near waterways — serve an invaluable purpose. As buffers, they help trap nutrients and runoff that would otherwise contribute to pollution and algae bloom in streams and lakes. It is estimated that protecting this land through conservation easements has the potential to prevent pollutant loading into Gull Lake by 39 tons of



View of Prairieville Creek along property protected through a conservation easement.

Gull Lake Style: Creeks Clean, Abundant Water Supply

sediment per year, 183 lbs. of total phosphorus per year, and 1,583 lbs. of total nitrogen per year. If these landowners had not been willing to conserve their land, this higher level of pollutants could have been realized.

“Permanently protecting riparian forests through conservation easements is an effective management practice in preventing nutrients from entering streams and lakes,” stated Julia Kirkwood, MDNRE. “In watersheds identified by the MDEQ as high quality, permanent protection measures, such as a conservation easement, are a priority.”

**creek has been
am.”**

— Jim Fish

husband, Don (13 acres); Jim and Alice Fish (13-acre and 183-acre properties); and Craig Shumaker (40 acres along the creek’s lower section, just north of the township park). The total value of land protected through the conservation easements was \$1,168,500. Of this, SWMLC purchased \$548,700 in development rights and received in value, through donated conservation easements, \$619,800.

“It was wonderful to work with so many conservation-minded landowners,” said Emily Wilke, SWMLC’s director of land protection. “Their forward thinking will leave a legacy of water quality that will greatly benefit the future residents of Gull Lake.”



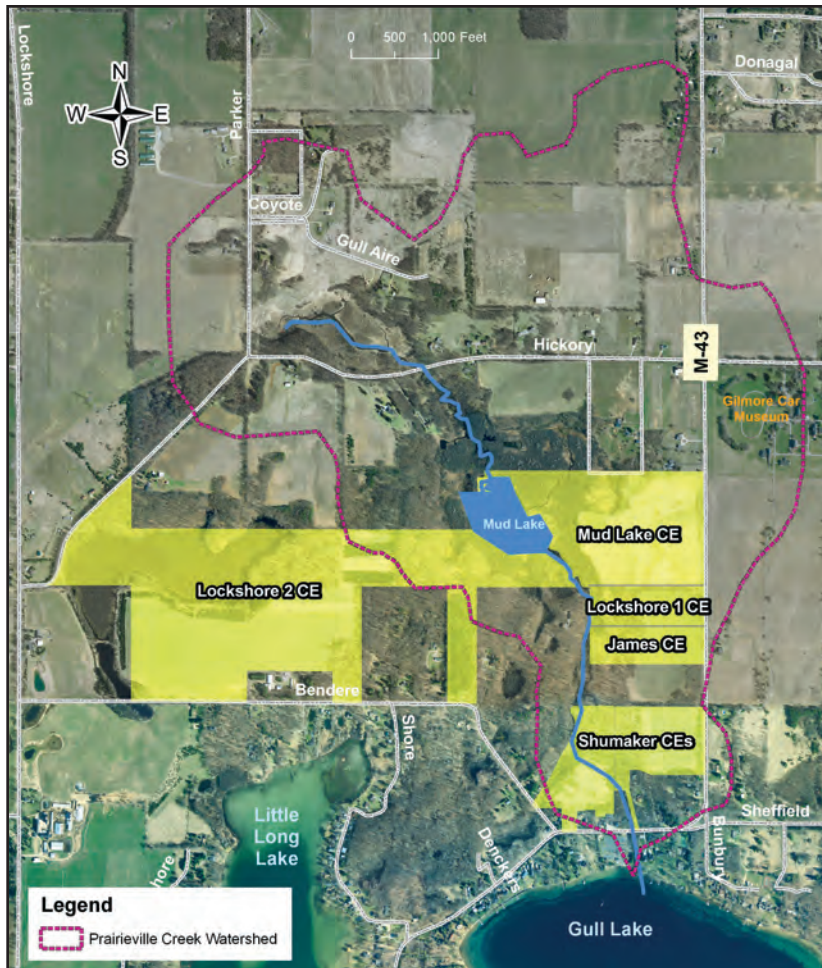
ing the edge of Craig Shumaker’s
conservation easement.

Landowners who took part in the project included Woody Boudeman and Martha Vander Molen (60 acres along Mud Lake); Jerre James and her late

husband, Don (13 acres); Jim and Alice Fish (13-acre and 183-acre properties); and Craig Shumaker (40 acres along the creek’s lower section, just north of the township park). The total value of land protected through the conservation easements was \$1,168,500. Of this, SWMLC purchased \$548,700 in development rights and received in value, through donated conservation easements, \$619,800.

“We also want to thank our partner organizations — the Four Townships Water Resources Council (FTWRC), Gull Lake Quality Organization, Kellogg Biological Station, and Kalamazoo River Watershed Council. We couldn’t have met our goals, much less exceed them, without their help.”

Another related success was MDEQ’s approval of the Four Townships Area Watershed Management Plan in October 2010.



This map highlights the land protected through conservation easements along Prairieville Creek before the creek flows into Gull Lake.

The document, developed by Jeff Spoelstra, coordinator for the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council, meets the criteria of the U.S. EPA’s Nine Element Watershed Plan.

The plan includes stakeholder input and 10 years of FTWRC project results, which include a natural features inventory, water quality monitoring, and a list of future projects. Based on the plan’s goals, FTWRC, SWMLC, and other partners can now pursue grants that will further improve water quality in the region.

“The project’s grant-funded portion may be over, but we’re not done protecting Prairieville Creek,” Wilke said. “We will be seeking other opportunities to protect water quality and wildlife habitat along the north end of Gull Lake and in the Gull Lake watershed.”

To read the *Prairieville Creek Watershed Conservation Plan*, visit our web site at www.SWMLC.org.

— Peter D. Ter Louw
Maps and photo by Emily E. Wilke.

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Welcome and Thank You to Our New
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Thanks also to all who renewed their membership, supported us through their United Way program, or contributed to our annual campaign, year-end appeal, and other fundraisers.

Our sincere apologies for any omissions.

Leadership Contributions

The people and organizations listed below made significant contributions to support SWMLC's program, land acquisition, stewardship, monitoring, and endowment funds. We thank them for their generosity and support.
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Matching Gifts

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

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Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
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Greater Kalamazoo United Way
Pfizer Foundation United Way
United Way of Battle Creek

Business Supporters

Erbelli's provided pizzas and Erbbie bread for a volunteer recognition event.
Joseph R. Gesmundo/Greenspire underwrote refreshments for our annual meeting/conservation celebration.

Gifts

Donations were made in honor of:

Nate Geisler and Carrie Berger
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Jennifer and Daniel Meyer
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Jen Fitzgerald Bomba
A friend who brings the gift of laughter to all of us
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Geoffrey Cripe and Peter Ter Louw
For courage, dedication, and leadership in the cause of conservation
by Jim Coury

In-Kind Contributions

Jonathan Morgan donated framed original photographs.

David Sheldon donated a copy of Hanes' *Flora of Kalamazoo County* for our library.

Honorariums

In appreciation for a program given by Geoffrey Cripe, an honorarium was donated by the *South Haven Garden Club*

Memorial Contributions

The following gifts were made in memory or remembrance of:

Eric C. Allen

Loved the beaches and dunes of southwest Michigan
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The mom who gave Jen her laughter
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Deloris J. Good, sister of David Graber
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by Lawrence J. Sehy

William Welsch
Fenn Valley Vineyards
by Ken and Marlena Kirton
SWMLC board and staff

Sylvia A. Wong

As we were going to press with this newsletter, we learned about the March 10, 2011, passing of Sylvia Wong. Sylvia, along with her late husband, Dr. Lawrence Wong, donated Hidden Marsh Sanctuary to SWMLC in 1998. We extend our deepest condolences to Sylvia's family at this sad time.

Remembering Lucy Patrick

Lucile Beeghly Patrick passed away peacefully on November 5, 2010 at the age of 96. Lucy's passing leaves a hole in our lives, and we are saddened by the loss of her physical presence.

Lucy was one of SWMLC's very first members and a perennially cheerful and self-effacing volunteer. Many of us spent time around a bulk mailing table stuffing envelopes while enjoying animated, always-interesting conversations with Lucy.

Long-time friend and former SWMLC board secretary, Tacie Draznin, had this to say: "When I remember Lucy, I remember the ways in which she let her life speak . . . manifesting her care for other human beings and for the natural world . . . her pleasure in conversation and in the written

word . . . her eager curiosity . . . her sense of wonder and her readily shared delight in life."

Lucy especially loved her solar home in rural Barry County — a place of light and peace, Tacie remembers — eventually moving to a retirement community in Kalamazoo as she grew increasingly frail.

Upon Lucy's death, SWMLC learned of a sizeable annuity gift she had left us from her estate. Her generous gift will support our mission and conservation goals.

SWMLC is grateful to Lucy for living a life of conservation and environmental stewardship. Her legacy will allow us to care for what she cherished in life, long after she has been gone.

J.A. Woollam Foundation \$15,000 Challenge Grant a Success!

SWMLC is grateful to all those who participated in helping us meet the Woollam Foundation Challenge Grant during 2010. Your generosity and participation helped us raise more than \$17,000 through the renewing of lapsed memberships, increasing your giving level, and giving gifts over \$500.

The challenge was especially helpful in reconnecting us with former donors and in motivating major donors and current and past board members to increase their giving.

Thank you!

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in the donor's giving amounts. We apologize for any omissions.

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 Sky Suydam
 Leo A. and DeVon F. Swiat
 Larry Syndergaard
 Donald T. and Linda Szeszycki
 Dana Buoscio and John Szewczyk
 Robert Tatina
 Jacquelyn V. Taylor
 Jane Ter Louw
 Gordon and Carol Terry
 Timon Tesar
 Donald and Elisabeth Thall
 Judith A. Thomas
 Mark Thompson
 Claren Schweitzer and
 Tom Thornburg
 Gerald Tilmann
 Andrea Tobochnik
 Mr. and Mrs. Winship A. Todd
 Lynwood and Joan Topp
 Henry and Martha Towne
 Michelle and Chris Tracy
 Jean Tsao
 Nick and Nancy Tuit
 Roger and Jeanne Turner
 Dale and Emma Turton
 Roger and Carole Ulrich
 Christine Valentine
 Elizabeth Van Ark
 Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Van Zoeren
 Carol VandenBerg
 Bradley A. Vauter
 Radha and Karen Vemuri
 William and Carol Venema
 Alfons and Joan Verwilt
 Benjamin Viemeister
 Lawrence and Susan Vihtelic
 Alison Village
 Louis A. Villaire
 Nancy A. Virgilio
 Kyle Vonk, DDS
 Nils Vos
 John P. Vrbancic
 Douglas and Karen Wagner
 William Wagner
 Joe and Holly Walls
 Marjorie Walls
 C. Glen Walter and Edite Balks
 Walter, M.D.
 Jim and Barbara Walters
 James and Sheila Ware
 Bruce Wechsler
 Clifford and Margaret Welsch
 Glenn and Nancy Wengert
 Richard and Susan Westin
 William P. Westrate
 Donald Wheat
 Sean T. Whelan
 Bonnie L. White
 Charles J. Wiclaw
 Martha Otto Wilczynski
 Wild Ones – Calhoun County
 Emily and Brook Wilke
 Delaina and Terry Wilkin
 Rosemary C. Willey
 Bruce and Jeannie Williams
 R. J. and Donalee Williams
 Mr. and Mrs. Robert F. Williams
 Mark Winkel
 Brian W. Winne
 Elizabeth J. Winther
 Gerald L. Wisner
 Glenn and Carrie Woodard
 Rachel L. Woodard
 Diane D. Worden
 Michael Wozniak
 Patricia Wright-Flessner
 Jonathan Wuepper
 George Yeager
 Laurie M. Young
 Steve Youngs
 Don and Sally Zenas
 Amanda and Peter Ziemkowski
 Joel and Ann Zieve
 Anonymous

2010 Year-End Report

In 2010, SWMLC completed eight land protection projects in four counties, protecting a total of 541 acres. The year's highlights include the purchase of Spirit Springs Sanctuary, the completion of the Prairieville Creek watershed project, implementing the Barry State Game Area conservation plan, and a collaborative park project with Casco Township to protect Lake Michigan bluffs.

In late May, SWMLC acquired Spirit Springs Sanctuary in Marcellus Township, Cass County, a 123-acre preserve which protects critical wetlands, identified in the Rocky River Watershed planning project, nesting habitat for wood ducks and mallards, and migratory habitat for ducks and warblers.

During the summer, we worked with landowner Sandra Kuhn to protect her 42-acre property along Rice Creek in Marengo Township, Calhoun County, with a conservation easement. In early fall, SWMLC assisted Casco Township in Allegan County with purchasing the Stefan Trust property on Lake Michigan. This nine-acre parcel with 300 feet of lake frontage is now a natural area township park.

The three-year, MDEQ-funded Prairieville Creek watershed project is now complete, protecting 310 acres of floodplain forests, wetlands, and upland through six conservation easements, three of which were signed this past fall. This southern Barry County stream flows into the north end of Gull Lake, and this conservation work will help protect Gull Lake's water quality.

At year end, SWMLC completed two projects identified in priority conservation areas in the Barry State Game Area (SGA) conservation plan. The 77-acre Wolterstorff conservation easement on Guernsey Lake Road protects a segment of Cave Creek adjacent to the Fish Lake section of the SGA, and the 67-acre Hidden Pond Preserve, a gift from R.T.

Groos LLC, permanently protects an inholding surrounded entirely by the SGA.

Also of note is SWMLC's new role as court-appointed special trustee to oversee the state of Michigan's Warren Woods and Warren Dunes (natural area) state parks. Our involvement ensures that these two exceptional and beloved natural areas will remain forever open to the public.

SWMLC's stewardship program received a big bump with the awarding of a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service state wildlife grant to support prairie fen and savanna habitat restoration work at nine sites that contain species of special concern, such as the Mitchell's satyr butterfly and eastern massasauga rattlesnake. With additional support from the Kalamazoo Community Foundation and the Fetzer Institute, SWMLC has undertaken a massive invasive species and restoration project at Bow in the Clouds Preserve in Kalamazoo.

Along the lakeshore, SWMLC worked with private landowners to eliminate invasive species and at Wau-Ke-Na Preserve to restore the lakeplain prairie with funding from the Save our Great Lakes program, a two-year collaborative initiative among all of the land conservancies that work along Lake Michigan.

SWMLC also worked along the lakeshore to do "early detection and rapid response," eradicating new and small infestations of invasive species such as kudzu, phragmites grass, Japanese knotweed, and Oriental bittersweet.

SWMLC volunteers provided great support in both the field and office. The Wednesday Workday Warriors and weekend stewardship program conducted over 40 workdays at nearly 20 preserves. Volunteers supported professional crews with prescribed fire on 164 acres at several preserves, including the first ever at Carter Lake Preserve in Barry County. The Stewardship Team concluded its five-year update of conservation and management priorities of all SWMLC preserves. This has led to a big push to review, update, and create management plans for all 40 preserves.

And, of course, SWMLC's stewardship and land protection programs were nationally recognized with the Land Trust Alliance's 2010 Land Trust Excellence Award for our strength in collaboration. SWMLC received over a dozen letters of support from private and public conservation partners, not including the official nomination from the Stewardship Network. It is a credit to the founders of SWMLC, our dedicated volunteers, and our committed staff who have created an organizational culture that encourages working with others to achieve common goals.

— Peter D. Ter Louw

Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Revenue

Membership Dues (6%)	\$ 44,944
Contributions (36%)	\$ 279,956
Grants (45%)	\$ 346,354
Investment Income (12%)	\$ 95,404
Special Events and Other Income (1%)	\$ 9,749
Total Support and Revenue	\$ 776,407

Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Expenses

Program Services (68%)	\$ 379,975
Grants (18%)	\$ 97,652
Management and Fundraising (14%)	\$ 79,151
Total Operating Expenses	\$ 556,778
Additions to Designated Funds	\$ 219,629
Total Expenses and Additions to Designated Funds	\$ 776,407

20 Years of Conservation in Southwest Michigan

As we work our way into 2011, it is important to recognize that this October, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy will celebrate 20 years as an incorporated land conservancy protecting the natural, cultural, and scenic resources of southwest Michigan.

Many of you may remember the first meeting of interested citizens at the Portage Public Library where the idea was proposed and endorsed to create a nonprofit land trust, organized and managed by a group of committed volunteers willing to endure the challenges of a brand new conservation organization.

Now, 20 years later, we have protected almost 9,000 acres, 2,200 of which are in 40 preserves that we own and many which are publicly accessible. Our staff has grown to six full-time and two part-time employees who work with volunteers in all nine counties . . . volunteers who assist us with conservation planning, land protection, and stewardship projects . . . volunteers who are integral to the achievement and success of our work. And SWMLC's work is nationally respected and recognized, having received the 2010 Land Trust Alliance National Land Trust Excellence Award.

However, there is always room for improvement, and we are always focused on strengthening the organization. To that end, we have been working with Development for Conservation LLC to improve our fundraising processes and with Murdoch Marketing to update how we communicate our message.

Funding to accomplish these objectives was provided by a grant through Achieving Conservation Excellence (ACE), a collaborative partnership between the Land Trust Alliance and Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy. The ACE program provides Michigan land conservancies with training, technical assistance, consultation, and other support needed to be well-positioned for accreditation, achieve permanence, and become more effective in protecting land now and into the future.

As a result of working with Murdoch Marketing, we are increasing our internet presence and how we share information by introducing a new, more interactive website (to be launched soon) and through our current Facebook page.

But the most noticeable change we've made has been to our logo. Murdoch suggested we incorporate our

often-used acronym, SWMLC, into the design. During meetings we discussed the breadth and depth of our work within many diverse watersheds, and they suggested we integrate water into our logo by adding wavy blue lines.

But the really interesting thing about the change in our logo is that the original design of the SWMLC logo, created by Robert Traverse, had four bars at the bottom to balance the text below the fern fronds. Those four bars included two wavy lines which represented the watersheds that are today as much a part of land protection as the land itself. Murdoch Marketing reintroduced a wavy line, this time above our full name, rather than below, to recognize the strong focus of water in our conservation work. We've now come full circle from Mr. Traverse's original design to our "new" logo which incorporates Mr. Traverse's original conception.

Twenty years ago, in 1991, a few concerned local residents made it their mission to begin work to protect southwest Michigan by creating SWMLC. They filed incorporation papers, elected a board of directors, and found a talented artist to create a graphic presence. Twenty years later, in 2011, we are stronger than ever because of their

strength and commitment.

As former SWMLC president, Frank D. Ballo, wrote in observance of our ten-year anniversary, an anniversary "presents wonderful opportunities to celebrate, to look back from where we've come, to look at where we are today, and to look down the road toward our future."

Frank's eloquent words still resonate today, ten years later.

— Peter D. Ter Louw



Our original logo, designed by Robert Traverse and used for 20 years, is on the left. Our new logo, designed by Murdoch Marketing, is on the right.

Board of Directors

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George E. Burgoyne, Jr., *Vice-President*
Mary L. Houser, *Treasurer*
Philip Micklin, *Secretary*

Brian Bosgraaf
Dave Coleman
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Randy Counterman
Assistant Land Steward

Geoffrey D. Cripe
Land Protection Specialist

Nate Fuller
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Wynn Harris Jones
*Administrative Assistant; Web site
and Social Media*

Pamela Weaver Larson
Communications Director; Landscapes

Emily E. Wilke
Director of Land Protection

Southwest Michigan Land
Conservancy, Inc., is a nonprofit
corporation (FEIN 38-3038708;
MICS 10463).

For more information:

Write: SWMLC

6851 S. Sprinkle Rd.

Portage, MI 49002-9708

Call: (269) 324-1600

Fax: (269) 324-9760

E-mail: ConserveLand@SWMLC.org

Website: www.SWMLC.org



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*Notice anything different
about our "look"?
Check out our new logo!
See page 19 for details.*

\$15,000 Woollam Challenge Issued for 2011

The J.A. Woollam Foundation has issued another \$15,000 challenge to SWMLC during 2011. This new challenge will function as last year's and will match all new memberships, all lapsed memberships, any increase in membership level, and any donation greater than \$500.

Now is the time to make every dollar count! If you're not yet a member, please consider becoming a member in 2011. If you're already a member and can afford to give at the next level, please do so. Your support helps us fulfill our mission of permanently protecting the natural, historic, and scenic landscapes to ensure the health and quality of life for the people of southwest Michigan.

Thank you!