



# *The* **Rookery**

FALL 2018





# LOOKING AHEAD AFTER

From the kitchen table of what is today the 577 Foundation in Perrysburg, Virginia Secor Stranahan and a group of community members concerned by unplanned development in northwest Ohio created Black Swamp Conservancy.

Now, 25 years later, 17,300 acres of land has been protected forever, and 15 public parks and nature preserves have been established. Today, we are out in front of the conservation community, pushing the definition of what a land trust is and what value it can provide to our community.

Our ecological restoration efforts are a response to community needs. Here in northwest Ohio, our wildlife populations are constrained by habitat fragmentation and our regional water quality is in desperate need of the ecological services that wetlands and other natural habitats

provide. Leading large scale habitat restoration projects is not typical land trust work, but we are proud to be not only protecting the best of what is left, but to also be actively improving conditions in our region.

Most recently, we have been building a new approach to farmland preservation with the Black Swamp Food and Farm Initiative, a holistic approach that addresses social, environmental and economic issues in our community. The initiative aims to remove barriers to land access for new and beginning farmers, uses our prime farmland soils to grow food for local consumption, and insists that farming is done in an ecologically sustainable manner that respects our land, air and water resources.



## 25 yrs

Where Black Swamp Conservancy is today is the result of the collective effort of a great many people. Whether it's a current or past staff member working in the conservation trenches 40+ hours per week, a trustee active in the organization's vision and governance, a committee member lending experience and expertise, a partner we collaborate with, or a donor helping to ensure we have the resources needed to carry out our mission, our "community" makes our success possible. Thank you for making us who we are today. We are excited to think of what the next 25 years will bring.



# HABITAT RESTORATION

## Continues in Northwest Ohio

The Conservancy continues to work not only to protect the best of our remaining natural resources, but also to improve the region by restoring some of the habitats that have been lost. Designs have just been completed on two restoration projects, and we have secured Great Lakes Restoration Initiative\* funding to complete them in 2019.

Work continues at Forrest Woods Nature Preserve, where we will be restoring a new tract of land that was purchased in 2017. This property contains 40 acres of bottomland along about a mile of the Maumee River. This restoration project will return the property, which experiences flooding in high water events, back to a functioning floodplain with seasonal wetlands. An eroded stream on the property will also be repaired as part of this restoration. In the past three years, we have restored 192 acres of cropland surrounding the preserve back to natural cover (including this coming work) –

expanding habitat on-site from 175 acres to 367 acres. This work is critical to ensuring the longevity of the 40 rare, threatened and endangered species known to inhabit Forrest Woods.

Earlier on this property, we began reforestation of the area with our Earth Day weekend planting of 1,000 trees. The trees, donated by several area Rotary clubs, help to stabilize the soil along the floodplain. These projects will transform the area, with expanded habitat for birds, animals and fish, and woodland to reduce the amounts of nutrients and sediments entering the Maumee.

Just north of Bowling Green is Carter Historic Farm, a property donated to the community by the late Lyle and Sally Loomis almost 20 years ago. The land was given to Wood County Park District with a conservation easement held by Black Swamp Conservancy to ensure its permanent protection. Today, Carter

\*This project was financed in part or totally through a grant from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Environmental Protection Agency with Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Funding.



Historic Farm is a working depression-era farm and cultural history museum. Twenty acres on the “back end” of the property will be returned to the forested wetlands typical of the Historic Great Black Swamp. The restoration area sits parallel to a drainage ditch and will serve to accept runoff water from the farm and filter out pollutants before they are able to enter the waterway.

This will be a demonstration site where visitors can see a working wetland up close, and learn about agricultural conservation.





# Saving a *Magical, Critical Spot*

## ON THE TRAIL



At 226-acres, the Little Auglaize Wildlife Reserve in Paulding County was a rare find. This property is one of a few remaining large tracts of unprotected natural habitat in northwest Ohio, and even features a mile and a half of frontage along the river.

The land was farmed 30 years ago, but in the 1990s, the landowner started restoring wetlands and native plant communities on the property. The Reserve has been designated a sensitive species area, where we've found pheasants, chorus frogs, painted turtles, river otters and Indiana bats (a federally endangered species). Surveys of the area have identified 48 species of birds, many on the Ohio Special Interest, Priority Species (Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region) and Ohio and Federal Threatened lists.

The property's southern border is near the intersection of the North Country National Scenic Trail of the National Park Service, and the 1,444-mile Buckeye Trail. The Buckeye Trail circles the state, and has a frequent presence near Conservancy properties in northwest Ohio - including several of our protected farms in Sandusky County and the Conservancy's Homestead office property (a campsite for the Trail). The Trail also connects our preserved land to others across the state, including those held by our friends at Appalachia Ohio Alliance, Arc of Appalachia and the Tecumseh Land Trust, among others.

With funding from the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Fund and The Conservation Fund's Ohio Forested Habitat Fund\*, we will be able to acquire this property and protect it in perpetuity. Once invasive species have been eradicated, we will work to increase



forested habitat cover to enhance the river corridor wetland and upland ecosystems that filter water into the Little Auglaize River, Maumee River and Western Lake Erie. This will also improve and expand habitat for native species in the area.



\* These lands are being conserved, in part, by funding and technical assistance made available as mitigation for habitat impacts anticipated to arise through construction of Texas Eastern Transmission, LP's Access South, Adair Southwest and Lebanon Extension Projects and the Nexus Pipeline Project in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Conservation Fund.



We'll also be creating public outdoor recreation opportunities, such as hiking trails (including guided nature walks), birding, fishing, kayaking, hunting and other non-intensive activities, so that everyone can enjoy this special place.

# Building FUTURE Environmentalists

There is almost nothing as special as witnessing a child discovering something new outside: a praying mantis perched on a leaf, the changing sights in a vegetable garden, a young Great Blue Heron flying overhead. Every outdoor interaction offers a chance for teaching them about our native species and the importance of conservation, and we are always looking for additional opportunities to provide outdoor educational experiences.

In 2018, the Conservancy invited families outside to take a walk and read a book. The Story Walk program encourages literacy, physical activity and community involvement, by mounting the pages of a book on outdoor panels along a walking trail or path. Families not only read the book and take a walk, but there are also activities for them to complete together along the way.

The book, "From Caterpillar to Butterfly," by Deborah Heiligman, was first presented on the grounds of the 577 Foundation in Perrysburg, in conjunction with their Monarch Metamorphosis program this summer. This combination allowed kids to learn about and actually



see caterpillars becoming butterflies. That book, as well as "A Seed is Sleepy," by Diana Hutts Aston, and "A River," by Marc Martin, were also placed at River Cliff Park in Fremont, Creek Bend Farm near Fremont and at the Sugar Ridge Prairie in Pemberville through the summer and fall.

We also taught young people the art and construction of the seed bomb during several events this summer. Made of clay, earth and seeds, Seed Bombs are tossed into spots and help replant areas that are hard to get to. Their construction protects them from excess heat, wind and hungry birds, until they're able to germinate and take root. Using native wildflower seeds - many from our Sugar Ridge Prairie - we helped kids and their parents create seed bombs at the Community Day at Schedel Arboretum and Gardens, the Way Library's summer reading program kick-off and at the Wildlife Festival at Toledo Botanical Garden.





# *Planting the Seeds*



## FOR NEW FARMERS

It's been 10 months since we launched the Black Swamp Food and Farm Initiative to pilot a new strategy for farmland preservation in Ohio. These past several months have been exciting, and we have built strong momentum for a program that could improve conditions for farmers, protect our water quality and create healthier communities in Ohio. Thank you to the Toledo Community Foundation and the Stranahan Foundation for believing in our vision and funding the first three years of our program.

The Food and Farm Initiative is being launched to address (1) the lack of support for farmers growing healthy food for local consumption, (2) the increasing age of farmers and lack of new farmers taking over for them, (3) the difficulties aspiring farmers face in accessing land, (4) critical health issues related to food insecurity

in Ohio, and (5) water quality and soil health issues due to nutrient loading and sediment loss. The initiative will also bolster local economies by growing food for sale at and creating jobs in local markets (farms, farmers' markets, grocery stores, restaurants, etc.).

Our initial focus has been on laying a foundation for this ambitious program. We formed a committee of agricultural producers and advisers, lawyers, estate planners, business executives/mentors and conservation professionals. Along with our permanent committee members, we also had several established, small scale farmers lend their expertise and advice.

We have researched similar programs and met with the handful of land trusts working on these programs to see what lessons they had learned. Then, in

early August we released a request for applications that asked people interested in farming to reach out to help us determine the needs of aspiring farmers in our region. We have had an exciting response to this RFP, showing that a program like ours might provide people the help they need to get back to the land.

Our next step is to find farms for this network of aspiring farmers. Over the next few months we hope to acquire our first farms, so if you or someone you know is aware of land available or landowners who might be interested helping aspiring farmers get their start, let us know.



# Notes from the Field

Melanie Coulter, Stewardship Specialist

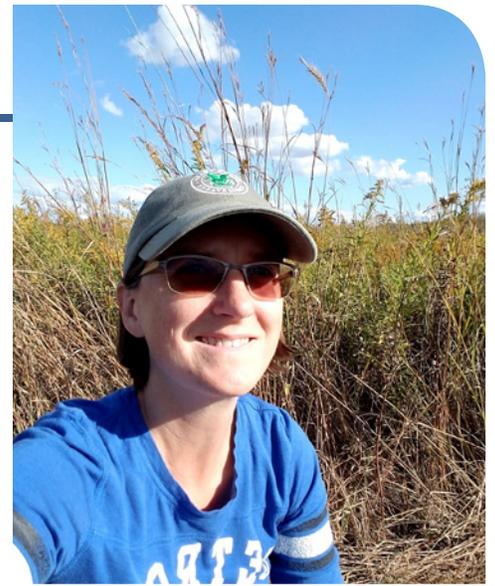
“If you build it, they will come” is a mantra you might hear a lot if you hang out with conservation professionals like me and the others who work on habitat restoration in northwest Ohio.

***What we're saying is, "If you (re)build a piece of habitat, the native wildlife and insects and plants that need that kind of habitat will come."***

And some of them will come very quickly! For example, at Forrest Woods Nature Preserve in the winter of 2016, two recently farmed fields were re-built into wetlands and then planted with native

wetland plants in Spring 2017. Then, in Spring 2018, just one year later, our interns from BGSU & UT were testing the water quality in the new wetlands, and they found frogs! Lots and lots of frogs, in the form of froglets ... the tiny, adorable frogs that have just lost their tadpole tails and hopped onto dry land for the first time. Over the course of the season, we found wood frogs, Northern leopard frogs, gray tree frogs and American toads using the new wetlands. They came to these new wetlands fast! The wetland plants planted the spring before had just barely started to grow, but it was enough for our frogs. And our dragonflies and crayfish and even Solitary Sandpipers ... all wetland-dependent species that found our new wetlands right away.

Now, we are aiming for similar success by restoring almost 40 acres of farmed bottomland along the Maumee River to native streamside forest with seasonal wetlands. Wish us luck!



## Thank you!

Stay Swampy my friends,



*Melanie Coulter*

Please Support Black Swamp Conservancy

Tuesday, November 27

#GIVINGTUESDAYNWO



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**Clean Water, Good Food, Wild Places**

**At Black Swamp Conservancy...**

We take direct action to permanently preserve northwest Ohio's natural habitats and family farms for the benefit of future generations. By protecting our valuable land and water resources we are supporting healthy communities with strong, sustainable economies. Our work ensures the diverse habitats of our region will be protected for generations and that our children and their children will forever be able to enjoy this special place.

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*Our front cover features a river otter, photographed by Ian Adams.*

Your support helps to protect and restore northwest Ohio's rivers and streams, providing critical habitat for wildlife.



*The*  
**Rookery**  
FALL 2018

or Current Resident

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