



# The Rookery

SPRING 2021



*photo credit: Grant Cummings*



# DURING CHALLENGES

## *Press On*

Despite last year's challenges, the Conservancy team pressed on. We permanently protected six new conservation properties and completed four major stream and wetland restoration projects.

And – we are keeping that momentum going. This issue of *The Rookery* highlights three new restoration initiatives now getting underway, and our largest conservation project to-date – one that will preserve more than 1,100 acres of coastal marsh and more than a mile of Lake Erie shoreline.

With restrictions loosening and things beginning to open back up, we're excited to once again be able to enjoy the natural wonder of northwest Ohio together. The Conservancy is now planning nature walks, kayak paddles and other opportunities to connect with our community and the outdoors.

We recently launched a new and updated website at [BlackSwamp.org](http://BlackSwamp.org). There you can explore the public properties we protect throughout northwest Ohio and stay up to date on events and volunteer experiences. While you're there, scroll down to the bottom of the page to find links to our social channels and sign up for our email newsletter.



I hope to have a chance to spend some time with you on one of our protected properties soon!

Stay well,



**Rob Krain**  
Executive Director



# *Nature*

The Dr. Robert L. Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve on Catawba Island is well on its way to becoming a new, special resource for nature lovers. The 40-acre lakeshore property on West Harbor has been Conservancy property since 2019. Since then, we've been working with our management partners at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge to restore wildlife habitat, and create a natural space for the community to enjoy.

This will be a preserve that invites guests in to wander and explore. A mowed walking path loops through an 8-acre shortgrass prairie and pollinator meadow and along undeveloped Lake Erie shoreline. Rustic visitor amenities including a gravel parking area have been added. Thanks to a grant secured by the Friends of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, we will be installing an ADA-compliant kayak launch later this year. This will be one of the few places where people who use wheelchairs will have easy access to paddle the waters of Lake Erie. The preserve is on the Mainland Trail of the Lake Erie Islands Water Trails.

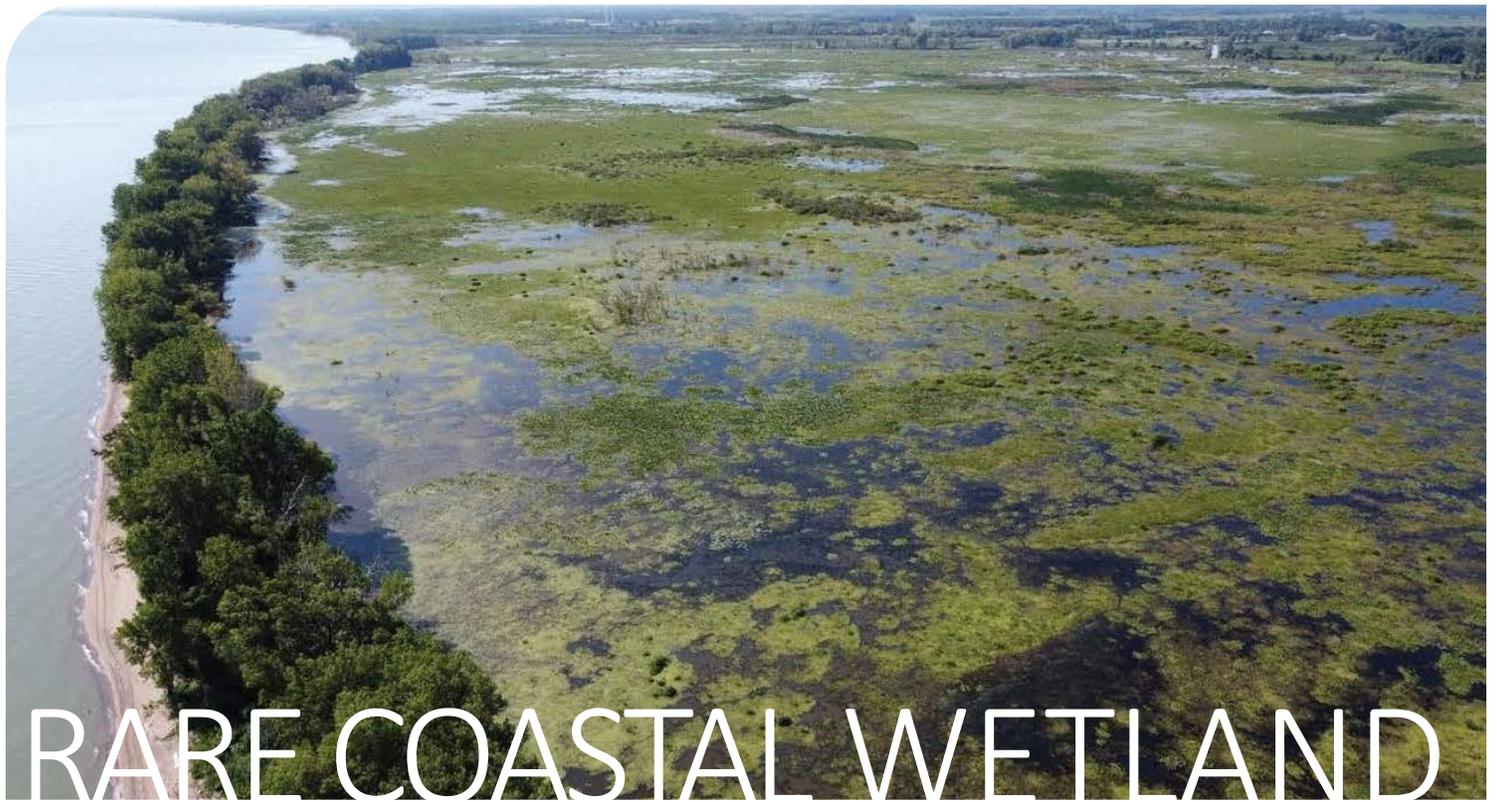
“This beautiful property has great conservation value,” said Melanie Coulter, conservation manager of the Black Swamp Conservancy. “We are developing shoreline and scrub-shrub habitat that will provide for migratory birds (and birders), and protect important wildlife habitat year-round.”

The property has a diversity of land uses with the meadow providing habitat for butterflies, bees and other pollinators, acres of open woodlands, and the littoral zone or nearshore area.

Rob Krain, executive director, added, “Any opportunity to preserve shoreline on Catawba Island is a special one. Open spaces in this area face a great deal of development pressure. If they aren't conserved now they will likely be lost forever.”

There will be a soft opening of the preserve on July 17 for the Nehls family and partners in the project. It will be open to the public after that date. Public access will be available from dawn to dusk.





# RARE COASTAL WETLAND TO BE PRESERVED



Exploring the newest and largest Conservancy project, it's easy to imagine Ohio's first residents enjoying this pristine and beautiful region. A narrow, sandy beach on Lake Erie's coastline extends as far as we can see. On an early spring day, we hear migratory warblers singing in a strand of trees that make a boundary between the beach and the expanse of wetlands. The wetlands are wide and gleaming with a rich, earthy scent, dotted with hummocks and full of life.

This remarkable property is the Toussaint Shooting Club, and it is a very rare and valuable new conservation project for Black Swamp Conservancy. With more than 1,100 acres of coastal marsh on more than a mile of Lake Erie shoreline, this property is the second longest stretch of undeveloped shoreline left unprotected on Lake Erie. But even these impressive numbers don't tell the whole story.

As we walk the site to gather data for the Baseline Documentation Report, I notice nests of both ospreys and bald eagles. These fish-eating raptors compete for resources and do not co-colonize. That they are both nesting and thriving here shows the value of a large property and illustrates that it is prime habitat. Beaver dams are also apparent in the marsh – another sign of a healthy ecosystem.

Preserving this property safeguards this home for migrating birds that are passing through, and for seasonal birds that nest and reproduce here. There are 41 endangered and threatened plants and animals that have been recorded here, including wading birds like the cattle egret and snowy egret, American bittern, black-crowned night heron, and the majestic sand hill crane, which can have a wingspan of seven feet. Swimming birds include the trumpeter swan and green-winged teal. In addition to the bald eagles and ospreys, the property is home to the endangered northern harrier.

The large amount of contiguous marsh on the lakeshore is vital to efforts to restore the waters of Lake Erie. Marshes like this allow pollutants to filter through the soil where they are naturally treated. The broad wetlands also capture and retain sediment that may be carrying phosphorus and other nutrients, which we know contribute to the overgrowth of harmful and sometimes dangerous algae. In a healthy, functional marsh, these nutrients become biomass and are incorporated by the habitat. Rusha Creek and the Toussaint River run through the Toussaint Marsh. These waterways carry stormwater and agricultural runoff, and the marsh acts as a natural filter for those waters. The marshland also serves as a buffer during storms, holding water to prevent flooding and erosion.



This property would be valuable to the health of Lake Erie all by itself, but it is part of a much larger protected lake habitat region. It is adjacent to the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and close to Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge, Magee Marsh, Howard Marsh, and Maumee Bay State Park – all together totaling more than six thousand acres. The entire region is a growing ecotourism destination for birders and fishermen, helping to fuel our local economy.



*“It is a privilege to be working with the Toussaint Shooting Club to permanently preserve their spectacular property. The ecological value of this site cannot be overstated.”*

– Elisabeth Anderson, Conservation Associate, Black Swamp Conservancy



This spring and summer, we're putting final touches on four landscape-scale restoration projects and beginning three new ones.

The four projects nearing completion are St. Joseph River Farm & Floodplain Preserve, St. Joseph Confluence Preserve, Red Horse Bend Preserve, and Forder Bridge Floodplain Reconnection. In all of these projects, we have been able to return critical lands back to natural habitats and improve water quality.

Both of the St. Joseph projects are located in Williams County and include the development of wetlands, upland forest, and floodplain forest. Red Horse Bend, on the Sandusky River, includes a wetland-upland complex and establishes a hydrologic connection to the river. The Forder Bridge project created a series of "treatment chain" wetlands along a restored creek. This property is also an official launch point for the Maumee River Water Trail.

These four sites are already holding stormwater and providing improved habitat. Spring peepers and chorus frogs are busy (and noisy) in the vernal pools, native plants are sending deep roots to stabilize soils and take up nutrients. And our team is now wrapping up the planting of more

than 18,000 trees across the four projects. Forested land is more than a group of trees – it's a community that develops and grows and invites diverse new life.

Water quality research is underway to monitor the benefits of these projects and better inform future efforts. A team of scientists from across the state, known as the Lake Erie Aquatic Research Network (LEARN), are conducting studies on these and other restoration projects.

As these four projects come to a close, critical restoration efforts on three new sites are just beginning.

### **WOLF CREEK FLOODPLAIN**

is 162 acres along Wolf Creek, a tributary of Sandusky Scenic River. We are working on this project in partnership with our friends at the Seneca County Park District, and the area will eventually become a public park. One-third of the property features streamside forest that includes freshwater forested/shrub wetlands, the other two-thirds will be restored to natural habitat. The site has great potential for wetland and floodplain restoration, and we are excited to begin engineering and design work.

### **THE WEISGERBER-POHLMANN NATURE PRESERVE**

The eight children of Mary and Neil Pohlmann agreed that their parents would have wanted this property on the Tiffin River to be preserved and protected. A daughter, Ann Pohlmann said, "Creating the preserve is very much a tribute to how they lived their lives — connected to both their love of family and each other, and their love and stewardship for all they felt connected to in their time on earth. We sincerely hope those 75 acres return some of the wilds back to our northwest Ohio area, in loving memory, and with benefit to all."

The land had been in the family for generations, some of it long ago enrolled in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program and planted with native trees. A small area of the land was farmed by an uncle, though it frequently flooded. The Conservancy recently purchased the property, and now this area will find new value as functional floodplain and wetlands. Seasonal flooding will now renew the wetlands and support more native plants. This conversion reduces erosion and the subsequent influx of sediment into the Tiffin River, improving streamside habitat and water quality.

Ann said that she and her family gathered butternuts and black walnuts from the woodlot in the fall. Their mother made grape vine wreaths decorated with bittersweet. During the Conservancy's initial review of the property, we found an existing stable woodland community with very few non-native plants and a wide variety of sedges, which merit further investigation. The property contains nearly a mile of the Tiffin River corridor.

We are grateful to the Weisgerber-Pohlmann family for choosing to work with the Conservancy to protect and enhance their property, and we are honored to name this preserve for the family.

## MAUMEE RIVER FLOODPLAIN



has significant value due to its location and for historic and recreational reasons.

This recently purchased property is 57 acres near Napoleon, with more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of Maumee River shoreline. It is part of a larger corridor of natural lands, located just upstream from the North Turkeyfoot Wildlife Area and within a few miles of the Henry-Wood Sportsmans Alliance Preserve, which we helped establish and permanently protect. Remnants of the historic Erie Canal are found along the northern portion of the property and include a section of the state-wide Buckeye trail along the old towpath. Our work here will restore functioning floodplains and wetlands on the property, expanding wildlife habitat and improving water quality.

All of these projects have been made possible with support from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources through the new H2Ohio program. We are grateful for Governor DeWine for championing this initiative, which is substantially accelerating the pace of conservation and restoration of natural habitats in the western Lake Erie Basin.



*Flooding on the Weisgerber-Pohlmann Nature Preserve*



*Maumee River Floodplain*



*Wolf Creek Floodplain*



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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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