



The Rookery

FALL 2021



*photographed by
Angelo Wollenbecker*



COOLER TEMPERATURES & SPLASHES OF

Color

As temperatures grow cooler and the leaves begin throwing splashes of color across the landscape, I'm reminded that fall is as important a season of change as spring. It is a time for reflection and planning – of appreciating all that has been accomplished and anticipating the good things to come.

Our Board of Trustees has been working on strategic planning recently. As part of that process, we have spent a good deal of time looking back at the past while envisioning our priorities for the next five years. We've had conversations with many of our dedicated supporters and partners to learn more about what inspires them about Black Swamp Conservancy's work and where we can do even better.

I recently compiled some data from the past five years...a few highlights include:

- Permanently protecting 4,900 acres of northwest Ohio's finest wetlands, woodlands, prairies and family farms
- Creating or expanding 13 public parks and nature preserves
- Completing 8 large habitat restoration projects that improved 550 acres of land, revitalized more than two miles of streams and planted more than 40,000 trees
- Launching numerous community partnerships with other conservation organizations, arts organizations and educational institutions to connect more people to our local environment
- Achieving accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation

We are proud of what we have been able to accomplish and hope that you are, too. Your support is what makes this work possible.



We also know that this is no time to rest on our laurels. There is so much important conservation work yet to be done, and with your help we'll continue to make a difference today – and for the future of northwest Ohio.



Stay well,



Rob Krain
Executive Director



Innovative Partnership



WILL CREATE LIVING LABORATORY

The Conservancy's newest conservation project will protect a parcel of land that was threatened by development and, instead, create a living laboratory for students at Otsego schools to explore and supplement their classroom learning.

The related Shank and Fox families have owned the 16-acre property across the street from Otsego K-12 schools for generations. When they first thought to sell it, the family assumed the land's highest use would be a residential subdivision. Then they started to learn more about the value of the land as a natural space and educational resource.

Rob, executive director of the Black Swamp Conservancy, was invited out to walk the property. He saw a lot of potential in a small package – both for the land and for a unique partnership. We engaged our partners at ODNR and began discussions with the school district and the local community. The result is an agreement that will transfer the property to the Conservancy for habitat restoration, and then permanently to Otsego Schools for use as an outdoor classroom.

The property, which is bound on the northeast by the main branch of Tontogany Creek, drains to the Maumee River near Missionary Island Wildlife Area at Grand Rapids. This location along the creek means that restoration will have an impact on the water quality of the Maumee River and ultimately Lake Erie.

Realtor Steve Powell represents the family and says that they are excited about the conservation legacy they are helping to create. While the family knows they won't make as much money as they would if they had sold to a builder, they are very pleased to be creating a permanent natural asset for the school.

For their part, the school staff and faculty are already envisioning using the property for biological science classes as well as art and writing classes. They also plan to retain up to an acre for the Future Farmers of America, which will help to demonstrate to students the mutually beneficial relationship that agriculture can have with the health of the soil and downstream water quality.



Forthcoming restoration plans will be developed collectively with Otsego Schools, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Conservancy. Discussions are just getting underway.





BUILDING
A NEW

NATURE PRESERVE

IN 
*Seneca
County*

A new, large restoration initiative on a major tributary of the Sandusky River will soon become Seneca County's latest park, a wholly natural area.

The Conservancy recently purchased the Clary-Boulee-McDonald Nature Preserve, 160 contiguous acres of land (one-quarter mile by one-quarter mile) in several separate transactions. Wolf Creek meanders through the center of the property, with 60 acres of mature streamside forest along its banks. The other 100 acres have been farmed and will be restored to natural habitats. Our restoration plans will add about 45 acres of valuable wetlands to the site, as well as woodlands and meadows on the higher ground.

Wolf Creek and its existing streamside forest will be the heart of restoration. This is one of the few stretches of stream in northwest Ohio that remains unchannelized and in a natural state with streambed riffles and very little undercutting of its banks. Along the stream, we'll expand a relatively mature swath of quality habitat.

We begin envisioning the future of our restoration projects by trying to determine the land's historic conditions. This includes assessments of the property's specific topography, hydrology and plant communities.

Our review of the Clary-Boulee-McDonald Nature Preserve shows how this land handled water before it was drained for farming. We can see relic wetland benches where waters would rise and stand during seasonally wet weather. We also noted natural floodplain channels and swales that held water for long periods of time. While drainage tiles and ditching have made the land dry enough to farm, the property's wetlands will be readily restored with a little encouragement, starting with disabling the drainage tiles.

This huge drainage area gives us the opportunity to capture and treat a vast amount of nutrient-rich floodwaters that will pass through our wetland. Much of the surrounding landscape is agricultural, and the runoff water carries phosphorus and other nutrients.



One reason this property shows such potential for improving water quality is that it interacts with drainage from a 64-square-mile area.



Our goal is to hold the water onsite and give it time to naturally infiltrate into the soil. To do this, we will enhance the historic floodways and wetlands and re-connect them to Wolf Creek. Low berms and swales will help to pond water allowing native vegetation to incorporate nutrients and other pollutants.

The higher land will be restored to riparian woodland. We will plant thousands of hardwood trees – hickory, oak, hackberry, and buckeye for example – to buffer the wetlands. We'll also plant several acres of wildflower meadows that will provide for bees, dragonflies, and other pollinators.

Restoration should be complete by the fall of 2022, after which the Conservancy will gift the property to Seneca County Parks and maintain a conservation agreement over the land, ensuring its permanent protection.

Sarah Betts, executive director of the Seneca County Park District, said that the project will advance local planning efforts. “Our community plan calls for more natural areas and more spaces for public land access. Water quality improvement is also a major priority addressed by this project.”

This exciting project is funded through the H2Ohio program.





A COMMUNITY VISION *for Conservation*

Our protected properties offer respite space, and we explore those natural lands with all of our senses: watching the colors turning in the trees and seeing birds on the wing, listening to the chatter of squirrels and chipmunks busy collecting nuts, and breathing in the fresh air that carries the rich scents of woods, soils and water.

The old adage goes “a picture is worth a thousand words.” When it comes to land conservation though, a picture is worth even more. We want to share the joy and tell the stories of northwest Ohio’s protected properties and invite everyone to be part of the natural world every day.

The Arts Commission is a valued partner that has helped to bring the story of water conservation and environmental justice to streets of urban Toledo. The Conservancy worked with The Arts Commission and local artists Graphite Design + Build to create two large outdoor murals. Both displays tell the story of how plants are part of the water cycle, taking up water through deep thirsty roots, creating flowers and seeds, and making a living landscape that supports life above and below the soil. The murals show many of

the native birds, reptiles, and pollinators supported by this cycle.

Our goal was to create art installations as an approachable, attractive way to share the message of land conservation and protection of natural resources. Our friend Ryan Bunch, communications and outreach coordinator for The Arts Commission, saw that those ideas would fit with the preferences of neighbors who had been discussing issues of clean water and environmental justice, and secured a grant to make the murals possible.

One mural is at 18th and Adams in the uptown district of Toledo, adjacent to a large rain garden at Uptown Green. The other is at Harry Kessler Park in East Toledo at 328 Main Street, a shady pocket park with brick paving and small flower plots. Neighborhood art is one way to bring nature and the appreciation of natural spaces into a built environment that can sometimes seem disconnected. We remind our neighbors that nature supports all the things we value about the world: clean water and air, health and scenic beauty. We hope to work with the Arts Commission on more of these

nature-themed murals and are planning on installing the next one in Toledo’s Junction neighborhood.

For people who explore the Conservancy’s protected lands first-hand, we are adding new experiences to make their visits more meaningful and transferable.

At Pat & Clink Mauk’s Prairie on the Conservancy’s homestead property, we’ve added storytelling to the outdoor experience with the installation of 24 permanent story panels. A walk can now become a richer, educational experience that families will remember. We have selected stories that complement the natural surroundings and the Conservancy mission. Stories will show the value of land that is preserved for the benefit of everyone, encourage exploration with information about animals that might be nearby, or native plants that may be found. Parents and teachers are invited to bring children of all ages to enjoy the trail from dawn to dusk. Raising the next generation of environmental stewards starts with early exposure to natural spaces.

Pat & Clint Mauk’s Prairie is at 4825 Sugar Ridge Road, Pemberville. The one-mile public walk is on mown paths, accessible to people using strollers or wheelchairs. StoryTrail was made possible

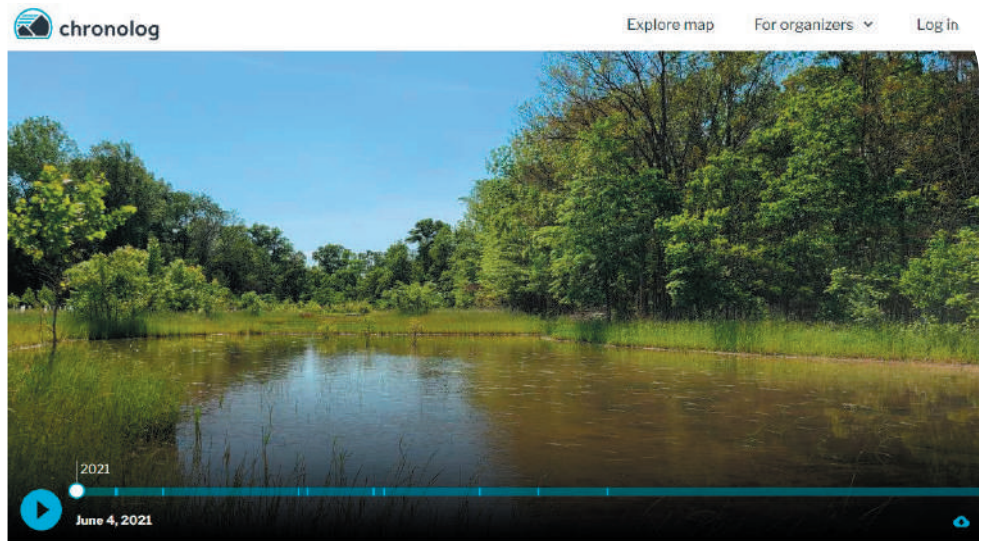
by Seed-To-The-Sower, a donor-advised fund of the Greater Toledo Community Foundation.

We're also telling a visual story of time travel with Chronolog – a collaboration photography project happening at sites around the world and at a dozen Conservancy properties, including Pat & Clint Mauk's Prairie. Chronolog invites private citizens to contribute images to time-lapse videos in areas where Conservancy stewards are eager to see conservation in action. Photos from throughout the year are stitched together so people can watch the seasons roll through protected properties and see the recovery of our restoration sites.

Chronolog camera stands are posted in strategic locations. Visitors are encouraged to prop their phones in the supplied bracket and snap a photo at every visit. Instructions on the stand tell you how to email your photo to Chronolog. The company will then connect your photo to others and add to a time-lapse video. Everyone who contributes an image will get a link to the Chronolog website and access to all location videos. See the locations of Black Swamp Conservancy Chronolog stands and view current videos at <https://www.chronolog.io/project/BSC>.

The Conservancy's Executive Director Rob Krain said "Watching a time lapse of a landscape at different times of the year is just captivating. We learn a lot, but it's also another way for people to appreciate and share these rare and valuable landscapes that are protected from development."

The log for Pat & Clint Mauk's Prairie (4825 Sugar Ridge Road, Pemberville), shows the spectacular blooming of a broad field of wildflowers. The camera location at Forrest Woods Nature Preserve (off CR 24 east of Antwerp) is focused on a wetland restoration area. The vantage point at Carter Historic Farm (northeast of Bowling Green in Wood County) will show the continued growth of trees and shrubs planted as part of wetland restoration project on a part of this living history site. See blackswamp.org for accessibility details and be part of this project to document some of northwest Ohio's special places.





A PLACE FOR

There is a secluded area in rural Hancock County where the Blanchard River winds in its long-worn path. Nut trees and white pines stand in quiet watch, as they have for hundreds of years, providing shelter to owls, woodpeckers, a wide range of amphibians, and other wildlife. The Blanchard River Nature Preserve is left to them. Humans are allowed in to share the shade on a hot day, or to quietly watch what nature is up to. But this is first and foremost a peaceful place for wildlife.

The 64 acres of the preserve include more than a mile of the meandering Blanchard River. It wanders the lowlands of its floodplain acres, swelling with the rain and snowmelt and sinking low during times of drought. Places to hold water are critical to the environmental health our region. A floodplain allows water to naturally sink into the earth, absorbing and making use of nutrients that would otherwise find their way to Lake Erie. In the Blanchard River Nature Preserve, the wetlands support a riot of early flowers that carpet the land in the spring. The area surrounding the preserve is highly agricultural and the floodplain captures excess nutrients that can flow off fields and farms. Retained rainwater also

recharges the seasonal vernal pools in the preserve creating ideal habitat for chorus frogs, leopard frogs, spring peepers and other amphibians.

There are no paved trails in the preserve, but a few rustic paths provide access to the curious visitor. When the river rises up, intrepid paddlers can access the Blanchard River Water Trail. The water trail is 37.6 miles long and the Blanchard River Nature Preserve is the most upstream access point at river mile 84.1. The water trail has many scenic rewards as it flows north and then west through forested riverbanks. The observant kayaker or wader at the Blanchard River Nature Preserve access point might see some rare mussels in the riverbed or notice the mudball chimneys on the stream banks that show crayfish are at work. The preserve is home to endangered mussels including the round pigtoe and purple lilliput and the northern crayfish, which is listed as a species of special concern. In the forested area, the property includes a small collection of slow-growing rock elm trees, which can live for 300 years and grow to 100 feet.

There is a world of contrast in this preserve. Sharing the property with sponge-like wetlands full of water-loving plants is an unusual dry habitat called an alvar – places where bedrock is exposed for most or part of the year. In the United States, alvars are only found in the Great Lakes region, but they're rare even here. Because there is little to no soil in an alvar, plants found here are like those found on prairie grasslands cling to the rock and survive with little water.

The Conservancy purchased the land in 2013 and gifted the property to the Hancock County Park District while retaining the conservation agreement, so it will never be developed. While some of the Conservancy's preserved areas are also places for recreation and education, the Blanchard River Nature Preserve will remain a refuge, a place of quiet, of age-old rhythms of the seasons.

The Blanchard River Nature Preserve is at 22006 Co Rd 17 near the community of Forest. There is a small parking area. Visitation is limited to boating and fishing via a primitive river access site, and hiking, birdwatching, and nature photography along a quiet walkway to the river's edge.





Quiet Immersion in Nature

... this is first and foremost a peaceful place for wildlife.





RESTORING HABITAT ON THE *Tiffin River*

To the north of Defiance, the Tiffin River winds its way through small towns and fertile farmlands before joining the Maumee River and flowing to Lake Erie. As the river approaches the community of Evansport, along the Defiance and Williams County line, sits one of Black Swamp Conservancy's newest nature preserves, the Weisgerber-Pohlmann Nature Preserve.

At 75-acres, the property stretches nearly a mile of riverbank and contains a mixture of young and mature forest, emergent wetlands, scrub-shrub habitat and agricultural land. After generations of caring for this special place, the eight children of Neil and Mary Pohlmann chose to sell their family's land to Black Swamp Conservancy this past March, in order to ensure its permanent protection and lasting legacy.

The property slopes down about ten feet from its wooded highlands to the farmland located at lower elevations. Seasonal high flow from the river tends to overtop the banks of the Tiffin River and flood the property's agricultural areas. This flooding makes the property marginal for farming purposes and well suited for habitat restoration that can positively affect water quality.

Purchase and restoration of the property was made possible with funding from the H2Ohio program through Ohio Department of Natural Resources. We are now completing site assessment and engineering work with a goal of completing restoration activities by next fall.

We see a special opportunity on the forested uplands, which already includes maples, black walnut, and butternut trees. We will add more trees to expand the woods and, by connecting the river and wetlands better, we think the site will be ideal for the creation of vernal pool wetlands. Much of this important habitat has been lost throughout the region, and restoring it provides critical breeding space for frogs and other amphibians.

The slope will be planted with water-loving shrubs to prevent erosion and hold soil in place. Throughout the site, we'll grade berms and stream banks to allow the entire site to better take on and store flood waters at different elevations. In the area that has historically been farmed, we'll remove drainage tiles to allow water to spread out naturally across the site. This will reconnect the Tiffin River to the area, and we expect to be able to more than triple the size of the wetlands.





Notes From the Field



Freya Berntson, Land Steward

“Excited” barely captures how I felt when the Conservancy invited me to join them as their first full-time, field-based staff member. I was being offered an opportunity to become part of a team working toward goals that I find incredibly important: land protection and preservation. Not only that, I would also be working in an ecologically unique region that has undergone incredible land use changes and is subject to pressures from numerous invasive plant species. You bet I signed on!

Prior to joining the Conservancy, I developed my understanding of land stewardship by volunteering and working for other land trusts and conservation organizations in the Midwest that perform similar work. I found land stewardship to be so important to achieving ecological goals that I returned to school to earn a Master of Natural Resource Stewardship degree. Today, I get to apply that knowledge and my previous experience to identifying, evaluating, planning and performing stewardship needs on the preserves that the Conservancy owns.

You may be wondering, as my friends and family often do, what exactly it is I do. The Land Steward, as implied by the name, stewards the land. Stewardship is simply the act of taking care of something. In the case of my position, I do this in a very hands (and eyes) on way. That might mean driving a tractor with a mower deck through stands of invasive teasel, broadcasting seed to jumpstart native plant communities, hiking with a backpack sprayer in search of non-native Canada thistle, working a prescribed burn, or simply picking up litter. Stewardship is inherently a group effort, and I feel grateful for the team I get to work with at Black Swamp Conservancy. In addition to the phenomenal support of the other staff members, I spent this past summer in the field with an ambitious team of college students serving as seasonal interns. If you have recently driven by one of the Conservancy’s preserves and noticed a handful of people hard at work trekking through shoulder high vegetation, equipment in-hand, that was the crew!

Taking care of the land means guiding its recovery and development through problem solving, adjusting, adapting, and learning. The combination of pressures from land use alterations, invasive species introductions, and climate change create an ever-present challenge to restored lands.

Stewardship is an indispensable part of achieving and maintaining healthy natural ecosystems for the plants and animals that live there, as well as for ourselves. The human element in the work that BSC does is essential, I am quite proud to be a part of it.

Freya will be leading volunteer days on Conservancy properties at least once per month throughout the year. If you’d like to roll up your sleeves and help her in caring for the land, please sign up at <https://blackswamp.org/volunteer-with-black-swamp-conservancy>, or call our office at 419-833-1025.





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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 white tailed deer, photographed by Angelo Wollenbecker.

Your support helps to protect and restore northwest Ohio's land and water resources, providing critical habitat for wildlife.



The Rookery

FALL 2021

or Current Resident



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