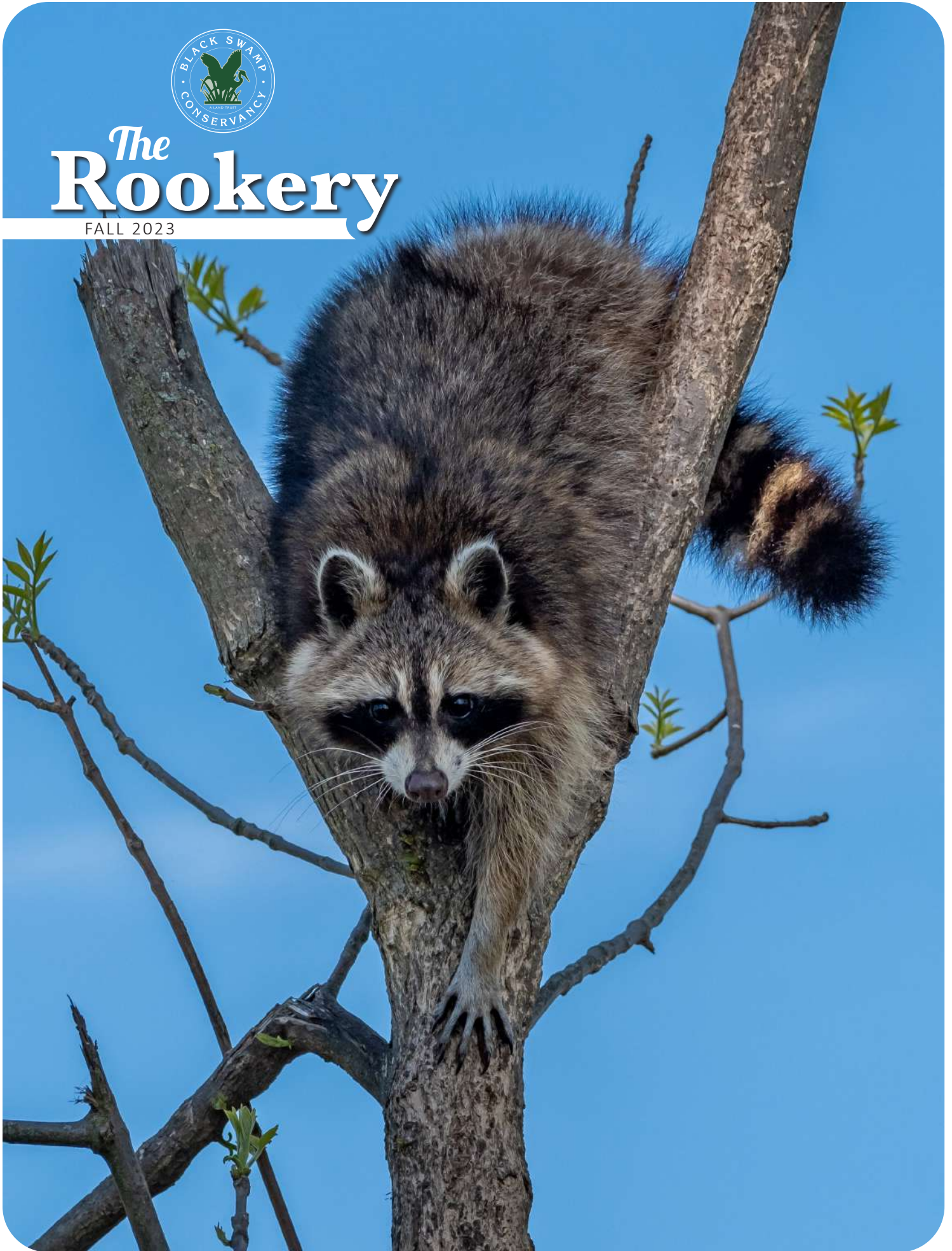




# The Rookery

FALL 2023





# NATURE

## *Knows*

One of the most rewarding parts of the work we do at Black Swamp Conservancy is seeing the biodiversity that thrives in the remnant habitats we protect and watching as wildlife moves into the habitats that we restore.

During a recent visit to the Rotary Riverside Preserve - a project we completed just last year - the air was alive with birdsong emanating from the mature forested wetlands on the property. Unbeknownst to them, this small band of woods that has long served as a vital stopover habitat for the migratory species is now protected forever and will grow outward to the Maumee River as the trees we planted mature. With familiar croaks and gentle splashes, frogs leapt into the new wetland pools that were dug on my approach. Walking around the preserve, I marveled at the countless tadpoles darting through these pools that now dot the once flood-prone farm field.

Undertaking expansive restoration projects like this demands years of dedication, but gradually, we see tangible progress toward our overarching goals: enhancing water

quality and bolstering species diversity. Nature, it seems, recognizes earnest efforts, offering us immediate, discernible rewards in the earliest stages.

As the crisp fall weather rolls in, we're nearing completion on several even newer restoration projects that support cleaner water and air in northwest Ohio and provide us with wild spaces to explore. We're now lining up exciting new property acquisitions to protect and restore over the next few years.

Words alone cannot express our gratitude for your continued support that is so crucial to this work, but nature herself joins us, her appreciation whispered through leaves rustling in the wind, wise owls calling from the trees and waves lapping against the lakeshore.

Stay well,



**Rob Krain**  
**Executive Director**





# SCOUTING FOR

Black Swamp Conservancy and Scouting make natural partners. We both value good citizenship, enjoy spending time outdoors, and want to leave an area better than we found it. We're grateful to some Scout troops that bring their energy and mission to our field work days. Recently, we are proud to have partnered with the Scouts working toward their Eagle Scout rank.

To reach the highest rank in Scouting, Scouts are required to perform a capstone service project that benefits their community. Sophia D'Amore is a high school senior at Eastwood in Wood County who fulfilled the long list of requirements to become an Eagle Scout this year. She chose to design and build a bird and wildlife blind at Pat and Clint Mauk's Prairie. The installation, which includes two benches to encourage people to linger, will help the Black Swamp Conservancy with education & outreach, connect visitors with nature, and strengthen community among wildlife watchers.

One of D'Amore's requirements was to show leadership through her service project. She designed the blind and benches to be built by a team, and then solicited volunteer Scouts, family and friends to join her in the construction. Their work has increased accessibility to nature and encouraged more people to spend time in our preserves.

We want to thank Sophia and other Scouts who have made welcome contributions to the properties we protect. Carter Nofziger constructed campsites at Water's Edge on the Sandusky River, and Elliot Bloom is now working to improve the fire pit at our Homestead office.

The Conservancy has a long wish list of projects that are well-suited to service projects. For any Scout or other community members looking for ideas, please email Executive Director **Rob Krain** at [director@blackswamp.org](mailto:director@blackswamp.org) or call **419.833.1025**, and we can match your interests to one of our needs.



## *Service Projects?*



# OTSEGO



Students at Otsego Schools used to look out their classroom windows and see a bean field. Now they see a new immersive outdoor classroom that they and their teachers had a hand in designing. The sixteen acres now include wet forest, vernal wetlands, and wet and dry meadows with Tontogany Creek running through it. The space is a permanent extension of the classrooms.

The heirs of the Fox and Shank families first thought to sell their land, which is across the street from the schools, for commercial development. But conversation with the Black Swamp Conservancy led to a unique educational opportunity. Otsego's grade school and high school teachers worked with a land design team to create beautiful, useful, green spaces that students can enjoy and learn from. Students added their wish list (berries! more water features!) and then helped to design interpretive signs and plant some of the trees on the site. After more than a year of broad collaboration, the restoration was completed, and the Black Swamp Conservancy, Otsego Schools and our partners at Ohio Department of Natural Resources H2Ohio program held a ribbon cutting ceremony on October 2, 2023.

That same week, earth science teachers began using the stream for water quality testing, an effort that will continue throughout the year. Nearby, a High School ecology class roamed the prairie identifying and collecting insects.

Art students will be able to access a variety of changing views and natural objects right outside the classroom door. The Future Farmers of America will cultivate some acres and learn the valuable intersections of agriculture and natural habitats coexisting to provide healthier soil and water. Otsego Schools' Superintendent Kevin O'Shea emphasized that benefits extend far beyond the school day. "This living laboratory will foster a deep appreciation for the natural world, enabling our students to develop a strong sense of environmental stewardship."

For teachers and students alike, this natural area will be a refuge – a serene and inspiring place to relax and recharge. The area is also open to the public during non-school hours. Spending time in nature is known to relieve anxiety and depression for people of all ages.

Superintendent O'Shea said the partnerships that brought the project together will continue to grow. "We envision partnerships with researchers, conservationists, and community leaders, leading to inspiring projects and initiatives that benefit both the wetland and the broader ecosystem." A partnership with Bowling Green State University to share data and research is already in the works.

The Fox-Shank/Otsego collaboration is the first project of its kind for the Conservancy. "This was a unique initiative for us to protect and conserve property while also directly linking that land to formal education," said Conservancy Executive Director Rob Krain. "The enthusiastic partnership with Otsego Schools means that while we improve water quality and build habitat, we will be building a new generation of stewards of our environment. We hope to replicate this project with other schools in northwest Ohio."



# SCHOOLS TAKES OVER *Outdoor Classroom*



# IT TAKES A

# VILLAGE

## *Little Auglaize Restoration Coming Together*

The story of how a couple hundred acres on the Little Auglaize River came to be purchased and permanently protected by the Black Swamp Conservancy is the meandering story of land use in northwest Ohio.

Like most of the tillable land in our region, the property was once wild land – part of the historic Great Black Swamp. In the late 1800s, most of the property was cleared and drained for agricultural use, with a nice tree lot on the edge of the land set aside for firewood and personal hunting. Then, a neighbor purchased the land about 20 years ago and worked to make it more welcoming to deer, pheasants and other wildlife. The one-time farm field was seeded with trees including acorns and hickory nuts from the old standing woods. Wet spots in the farm fields were purposely dug out and designed to collect rainwater and runoff, making wetland pools in the springtime and holding water year-round. After some years as a passive hunting spot, the land came up for sale again, and a conservation-minded neighbor suggested the Conservancy consider purchasing it for permanent conservation.

In 2018, Conservancy staff visited the property, saw the young trees and wildflowers that were established in the old farm field, and walked the shady mature woods full of birds and other wildlife. Some of the wildlife identified then are sensitive species including the endangered Indiana bat and the river otter. Dozens of species of dragonflies dart along the banks of the river and wet meadows nearby.

Because the land was partially returned to a natural state already, and because the Little Auglaize is a tributary of the Maumee River by way of the Auglaize, we recognized this property as important to the goal of clean drinking water for people and natural spaces for wildlife. We purchased the 266 acres of the Little Auglaize Wildlife Reserve in 2019 and got to work putting together a package of grants to enhance the property's natural qualities.

Our grant partners are from national and State agencies. Together, we'll ensure that the property provides maximum natural infrastructure benefits – that the wetlands hold and filter water, capture excess nutrients that might flow in from nearby farm fields, and provide food and refuge for bees, dragonflies, butterflies and other pollinators.

With the funding assured, work is now underway to finish the restoration. The plan falls into two strategies:

- Improve the number and diversity of native plants
- Restore the part of the stream that had been ditched

The native planting is underway. Plants native to northwest Ohio have deep roots that hold soil in place. They thrive in our four-season environment and provide food and habitat for local bees and butterflies.

Restoring the ditched part of the stream is the last piece of the work of restoration. We are starting on a design to let the water return to a more wandering path. The design will reduce erosion, increase the amount of water held on the property, slow the flow of water to allow trees and shrubs to drink from it and grow.

The preserve is open to limited public access for hiking and wildlife observation with a permit required. Contact **Melanie Coulter** at [mcoulter@blackswamp.org](mailto:mcoulter@blackswamp.org) for permission to visit the Little Auglaize Wildlife Reserve.





# A NEW WETLAND ON *Marie DeLarme*

What was once a small eight-acre hayfield is a newly restored wetland tucked away in Forrest Woods in Paulding County. It is quietly holding and filtering water, naturally converting excess fertilizer into native plants, and making a home for frogs, toads, newts, and birds. The parcel is an important restoration project because of its location adjacent to the Maumee River with water wandering through a floodplain of the Marie DeLarme Creek. The area is a rare remnant of the Great Black Swamp which once covered much of northwest Ohio with forested wetlands and marsh.

Work on the plot was completed in the spring of 2023 and Conservancy staff are pleased to see it working the way it was planned to, like it did when the Swamp was broad and dense. Melanie Coulter, Black Swamp Conservancy's Conservation Manager, visited the area recently. "I watched surface water coming from the creek into the floodplain. And, just like we planned, the rainwater spread out and ran down a grassy hill, filling the pools that we designed." The grass slows

the water flow which prevents erosion. The pools hold water on the land where it slowly percolates into the soil. Frogs and amphibians love the temporary pools which are isolated from egg-eating predators and make excellent spring mating spots. One of the pools kept a little water all through the dry part of the summer, showing that the water table is high, perfect for the wet meadow that has been planted.

During the earth-moving part of the project, workers found a few drainage tiles that no one knew were there. When the area was farmed, those tiles piped rainwater straight into the river, making the field dry enough to plow but delivering excess fertilizers to the river where eventually they fed harmful algae in Lake Erie. Workers opened up the tiles, allowing water to stay on the land longer. Now, excess nutrients are taken up by the native plants which have been established in the areas by the river. Drinking water for thousands is protected by wetlands like this.

With the important earth-moving and planting work complete, the parcel will be monitored by the Conservancy's stewardship team. They will continue to watch for invasive plants and encourage the natives.

This area is not open to public access because of the importance of the burgeoning habitat, however, a nearby sign at the Forrest Woods Nature Preserve (north parking lot) on CR 73 describes the project and directs people to a similar restoration area nearby that is more established and open for nature lovers.

Conservation Manager Melanie Coulter said, "***Frogs settle into these pools so quickly it almost makes you believe in spontaneous generation.***"

Baby wood froglets like these are already in the spring pools in the newly restored floodplain and wetlands of Marie DeLarme creek. They likely hopped over from existing wetlands.





# “FLOWING FORWARD”

## *Telling the Black Swamp Conservancy Story*

Mud-thick boots, cold farmers, an adze chopping holes for tiny trees in a huge field. These are memorable images from “Flowing Forward,” a new film by Christy Frank and Alex Goetz of Running Wild Media that follows one recent restoration project of the Black Swamp Conservancy to tell the larger story of the history and mission of the Conservancy.

Frank and her team filmed a Conservancy project along Wolf Creek in Seneca County from the purchase of a farm field to final planting of a large reconstructed wetland habitat. Watching the finished 15-minute documentary, viewers will learn how managing water in one farm field has an impact on drinking water for thousands of people. Along the way, viewers will learn some history of the Black Swamp region, how and why local people created the Conservancy, and about the ethics and science that drive our operations.

Christy Frank found creating the documentary hard but rewarding. “It was challenging subject matter, in that having land itself as a character can be difficult to portray,” she said, but the film shows that character as one capable of change. It starts as a flat cornfield that, by the end, becomes a dynamic environment of wetlands, woodlands and meadow. Water flowing through the land is allowed time to rest on the site and leave behind nutrients and sediment that would otherwise reach Lake Erie and fuel harmful algal blooms.

Frank added, “I hope our film shows the value of what Black Swamp Conservancy is providing to the region and how, as we learn more, we have the ability to improve the way we interact with our environments.”

Frank and Goetz are local filmmakers with national and international experience. Their work has appeared in outlets including National Geographic WILD, BBC, PBS Nature, and CBS Sunday Morning. “Flowing Forward” was funded by a grant from Land Trust Alliance.

***“We are very grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Christy and Alex,”*** said Executive Director, Rob Krain.

***“They are phenomenally talented, conservation-focused filmmakers who call Toledo home. Their excitement to tell this local story and generous rate for doing so made it possible.”***





# Notes From the Field

## KEEPING OUR PROMISES

One of the responsibilities of the Conservancy is to maintain the properties under our protection and work to improve their health and ecological function. This requires planning and hard work.

Scarlet Rice joined the team in early 2023 as our full-time Land Steward. Prior to that, she spent a year with us as a seasonal crew member and intern. She monitors the properties under our protection and directs the work of our summer crew. Their biggest job in the summer of 2023 was caring for our 393-acre Forrest Woods Nature Preserve and, in particular, Forder Bridge River Access Site. The team treated about three-quarters of the acres in the preserve, going to war with Canada thistle and common teasel. These plants are aggressive and really thrive in restoration fields, especially in the Paulding clay basin. It takes a helping hand to get our native species to shoulder out these weeds and become established.

In the spring and early summer, before most of the native plants are growing, the team treats two-year teasels with targeted herbicide. The ones they don't get early will bolt up, growing taller than our 5-foot land steward. These will be cut down – sometime two or three times – before the seed head is established. In the fall, the team looks to the ground for the flat rosettes that are first-year teasels. These get the targeted herbicide treatment. For protection, the team works in long sleeves and gloves with safety glasses even in the hottest weather. They add hard hats and chaps when using weed whackers and other mechanical equipment.

In the winter, Scarlet works with just one part-time intern, and their focus shifts to woody invasive plants in forested areas. In our region, it's mostly bush honeysuckle and autumn olive. These are cut off at the base and a targeted dot of herbicide goes on the cut stump.

Scarlet and her crew also work on improving infrastructure at our preserves. This year they installed signs, built benches, installed gates, and set up a wildlife camera trap to track species occurrences. Rice said her crew “starts out being strangers, from all kinds of backgrounds, but we become good friends when we work together in the heat.”

While we are fortunate to have grant opportunities to protect and restore property, there are few programs that help to fund the ongoing maintenance of our preserves. Your donation supports this essential work. Give a gift today at [blackswamp.org/donate](https://blackswamp.org/donate)





Meridith Beck loved her lakeside community of Port Clinton and protected it with passion and energy. Her neighbors and the greater community of environmentalists have lost a champion with her recent passing at the age of 82, but her life is evidence that one person with a vision can make a big difference.

After a career in public health, Meridith and her husband, Bill, retired in 1994 to the home they built in Port Clinton. That's when her advocacy for the environment became a full-time mission.

She was eager to protect land on Catawba Island to share the outdoor lakeshore experiences she had had growing up. But there was no park district that could lead the effort. So, she helped form one. She rallied friends and the community

to organize the Catawba Island Park Board and helped direct its mission for ten fruitful years. During her tenure, she was the catalyst for creating the Cedar Meadow Nature Preserve. It was Meridith who first reached out to the Black Swamp Conservancy to explore ways to protect the 62-acre parcel. It was, at the time of purchase in 2005, the largest remaining parcel of land available for preservation on Catawba. The Conservancy worked with Meridith and the Catawba Island Township to find, apply for, and win the grants needed for the township to purchase the land.

She had a vision for the new preserve and made it happen. She did not want the natural habitats to become ball fields or host a lot of buildings, so she vigorously advocated to keep any development

required for public access very light and unobtrusive. Her vision resulted in a naturally diverse area of forest, meadow, and wetland that shelters migrating birds, is home to shorebirds and raptors, and provides habitat for toads and frogs, mammals, and pollinators of all kinds. She got her hands dirty, too. Well into her 70s, Meridith could be found out in the preserve pulling invasive garlic mustard and cutting down honeysuckle. For a mild-mannered person, Meridith could be quite persuasive. If you were a friend or neighbor, you were probably wrangled into joining her for fieldwork.

We are awed by people like Meridith who live their passions in their everyday life. And we are honored to help her continue her service after her death.



# NOW

## *Is The Best Time*

It's never too early to start your estate planning. Contact your financial and legal advisors to learn more about planned giving strategies that could provide your family with income and tax benefits during your lifetime. Start your research at [blackswamp.org/plan](http://blackswamp.org/plan), then contact Executive Director **Rob Krain** at [director@blackswamp.org](mailto:director@blackswamp.org) or **419-833-1025** to discuss options that interest you.

Thank you again for all you do to protect our land and water in northwest Ohio, today and for future generations.

# *Legacy*

Meridith left a generous gift to the Conservancy in her final estate plans that is allowing us to tackle some much-needed deferred maintenance. This includes replacing some old and obsolete computer equipment, upgrading some land management tools and running electric service to our barn so that the crew can fully utilize it as a work area. We've also invested some of the gift in our operational endowment fund, ensuring that Meridith's legacy will strengthen the perpetual promises that Black Swamp Conservancy makes to protect our land and water resources forever.

We hope that more of our supporters will consider investing in the future of northwest Ohio with a planned gift to the Conservancy. It is one of the most effective ways to support conservation now and in the future.

Meridith made a cash donation, but your planned gift can take many other forms, such as a direct gift of land, stocks or other assets. Whatever form your planned gift takes, it will create a legacy for you and your family that supports healthy habitat and clean water forever.





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**At Black Swamp Conservancy...**

We take direct action to permanently preserve and improve northwest Ohio's natural habitats and family farms for the benefit of current and future generations. By protecting our valuable land and water resources, we support healthy communities with strong, sustainable economies. Our work ensures that the diverse habitats of our region will be protected for future 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 raccoon photograph courtesy of Emma Barrasso*

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



**The Rookery**

FALL 2023

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