



# The Rookery

SPRING 2024





# MEANINGFUL

# Work

As I write this, a chilly rain is falling outside my office window. Vernal pools across northwest Ohio are starting to fill with water. Soon we'll hear the songs of chorus frogs and spring peepers – signaling that it's once again time to pull on our muck boots to search for wildflowers emerging from the forest floor and migrating birds flitting about in the branches.

Springtime is always a reminder of just how special northwest Ohio's natural areas really are. Of how deserving of protection they are, not just for the plants and animals that depend on them... but for us too. And that's why conservation in our region is so important.

With your support, Black Swamp Conservancy has permanently protected 23,000 acres of our region's finest wetlands, woodlands, prairies and family farms. These lands sustain incredible biodiversity and they offer us healthy outdoor spaces to work, learn, relax and play. They also provide a wide variety of ecological goods and services; filtering our water, cleaning our air and producing our food.

Thank you for helping to make this work possible. Together we are making a difference in our community, now and for future generations.



With warm regards,

**Rob Krain**  
Executive Director





# FOR THE

# Birds

Amidst the urban hustle and bustle of Toledo's Point Place neighborhood there's still a place where the sounds of songbirds emanate from tall trees and amphibians breed in wetland pools on the forest floor. It's here that you'll find Webber Woods, Black Swamp Conservancy's newest nature preserve.

With funding from the Clean Ohio Greenspace Program, the Conservancy recently purchased this 15-acre woodland, our first preserve in the Toledo metro area.

For a relatively small property, Webber Woods has a lot of biological diversity. The bulk of the preserve contains Category 3 (very high quality) wooded wetlands, as seen in the photo here. However, the western edge of the site features sandy soils that indicate the location of a historic beach ridge. Well drained areas such as this tend to foster specialized plant species and distinct microhabitats.

Perhaps most significant is Webber Woods value as a haven for migratory birds. As the only sizeable remnant of natural habitat in the area, preservation of these woods - and the abundant food sources, safe resting spots and suitable nesting sites they provide - is critical to safeguarding bird species within this key migratory corridor.

*As is often the case, Webber Woods is a diamond in the rough.*

Over the years, a significant amount of dumping has occurred on the property and invasive plants have gained a foothold, outcompeting native species in some portions of the site. We are now working to clean things up, hauling out the refuse and removing non-native species.

Nonetheless, the Conservancy will be taking advantage of this prime birding habitat during spring migration. Our friend Jeremy Dominguez, ornithologist with the Toledo Zoo, will be leading a bird hike at Webber Woods on May 25th.

We hope you join us for this first look at the new preserve. Email Laura at [lrodriguez@blackswamp.org](mailto:lrodriguez@blackswamp.org) today to reserve your spot!





# Get Wild

## So Wild a Place

A benefit for:



# WITH US



Black Swamp Conservancy is excited to celebrate conservation in northwest Ohio with our annual fundraising event, So Wild a Place, on Saturday, June 15th at 5:30 pm.

The event will be held outdoors at West Side Montessori's Toledo campus and features Michigan-based roots artist Joshua Davis, a finalist on The Voice, dinner by Jimmy G's BBQ, an open bar, and live auction and raffle items.

Come show your support for the Conservancy while having a great evening out with friends, food and fantastic music!

Saturday

# June 15th

Festivities start at 5:30 PM



On the campus of *West Side Montessori*  
7115 W. Bancroft St., Toledo, OH

**TICKETS** available at [BlackSwamp.org](http://BlackSwamp.org)

JIMMY G'S  
BARBEQUE

OPEN BAR

MUSIC BY  
*Joshua  
Davis*



# TRANSFORMING *Our Landscape*

Have you ever looked at your backyard and imagined transforming it into something different? Something that would better meet your needs and provide you with new resources? Maybe a new pergola to provide protection over your patio? Or new shrubs and trees to provide shade and a place to watch birds? Maybe a gravel and stone downspout extension to move water where you want it, so it doesn't flood your basement and instead waters your rain garden?

When we plan the transformation of a new property from a flooded field into a natural habitat, we think about some of these same needs and resources. How can we provide protection to the soil, to prevent erosion? How can we provide resources that native wildlife need, like food, shade, or places to shelter? How can we help the water

move so that it prevents flooding upstream and creates natural wetlands and streams where they should be?

When we answer those (and many other) questions correctly, we can restore the land in a way that provides a suite of what we call ecological goods and services. There are many of them. So many! But they can generally be lumped into three big categories: Habitat; Clean Air & Water; and Access to Nature.

It's easy to see how land restoration provides vital Habitat for wildlife. A site that was a corn field or a golf course is changed to have wetland pools, native shrubs and grasses, so it's now a place that wildlife can live. The more diverse a set of habitats we restore, the more biodiversity our preserves can support. Less obvious,

perhaps, is how the location can cure the ills of habitat fragmentation. Many of our projects are along rivers and streams, areas that act as corridors for wildlife movement. What's left of northwest Ohio's wetlands and mature forests are fragmented across the landscape. Restoring wetlands and forests in strategic locations, we connect fragments together, making more resilient ecosystems.

**Clean Air & Water:** Restoring lands to forests helps reduce air pollution, as trees' leaves scrub pollution from the air as they use carbon dioxide and release oxygen. Restoring lands to wetlands cleans water by slowing down and collecting runoff and filtering it through native wetland plants. Land, wetland and stream restoration also reduces flooding, replenishes groundwater, and prevents erosion.

These Habitat and Water services are also important to the surrounding lands, not just the sites that we restore. Providing these services on our lands increases the resilience of nearby agricultural and natural lands.

**Public Access to Nature:** Land conservation provides people with outdoor recreation opportunities, the mental and physical health benefits of being in nature, and even food (and I'm not just talking pawpaws and morels... restoration increases pollinators that are crucial to many of the fruits and veggies we all eat).

At Black Swamp Conservancy we are tickled pink to be a part of something as cool and important as land restoration at so many of the nature preserves you know and love: Forrest Woods, Rotary Riverside, St Joseph River Floodplain, Clary-Boulee-McDonald, and more! We hope to see you out there, accessing the nature that your support has helped bring back.

**Melanie Coulter**  
Conservation Manager





# LEARNING

## *Landscapes*

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This year marks the launch of the Conservancy's educational outreach program, Learning Landscapes, which works to conserve land within walking distance of schools in our region and to support educators to use these field sites for outdoor learning with their students.

We're focused on outdoor learning because of the enormous impact it can have on kids. Research shows that outdoor learning increases students' physical, mental and social health, as well as their overall academic performance.

Importantly, outdoor learning also increases students' understanding of their natural and human communities, fostering not only a sense of place, but an ethic of care. Through Learning Landscapes,



we're excited to be a part of raising the next generation of active citizens who understand the importance of taking care of our shared landscape.

With Conservancy-protected properties adjacent to their K-12 campuses, we're kicking this initiative off through partnerships with Eastwood (Bell Woods / Pat & Clint Mauk's Prairie) and Otsego Local Schools (Fox-Shank Living Laboratory). Building relationships, this fall we went into the schools, shared program objectives, and asked the teachers to fill out a survey. We wanted to hear how the teachers feel about outdoor learning and to understand how best we can support them.

We're using this valuable feedback to develop ways to help teachers get their students outside. In August, we've planned a 2-day educator workshop where conservation presenters will share outdoor learning's best practices.

We've also submitted grant requests in hopes of creating a Learning Landscapes lending library at each school where classes can borrow backpacks outfitted with nature exploring tools and rain gear, as well as offering more teacher trainings and developing a volunteer program to provide teachers with additional adult help.

Your continued support will help us further create and expand these meaningful outdoor learning experiences for kids in our community. These experiences encourage kids to be curious, explore, discover, and learn with the feel of the sun on their faces and mud squishing under their boots.





# A PIECE OF THE *Puzzle*

Twenty-one years ago, Black Swamp Conservancy acquired its first owned nature preserve, with the purchase of 80 acres in Paulding County that would become known as Forrest Woods Nature Preserve.

Becoming the owner of this remnant of the Great Black Swamp was a huge step, which came with the responsibility of protecting this irreplaceable forested wetland, the section of Marie DeLarme Creek that flows through it, and over 650 species of plants and wildlife that call the property home. But the Conservancy wasn't satisfied with simply protecting this isolated piece of the Great Black Swamp; we wanted to expand it and help it be more resilient and connected. Over the

following decade, the Conservancy bought the farm fields around the forested wetland and restored those fields to wetlands and forests. As these restorations mature, they will increase the size of the forested wetland by 5 times! The restored natural areas on the perimeter of the historic wetland also serve as a buffer, protecting the original remnant of the Swamp from threats like invasive species and polluted water that can enter from nearby properties.

This initial decade of expansion and restoration increased the value, resiliency, and suite of ecosystem goods and services that Forrest Woods could provide. But we wanted to go one step further and use the preserve to address habitat fragmentation, by connecting it to other habitat remnants in the region. In 2016 and 2017, we bought land along the Maumee River. Rivers and streams and the habitat along their banks serve as important wildlife corridors. But even after acquiring two plots of land on either side of the Maumee River, very close to the original core of Forrest Woods, we were still missing a huge piece of the puzzle. There was a plot of land lying between the core of our preserve and the River that the Conservancy did not own... until now!

This spring the Conservancy will finally purchase the last piece of the puzzle, creating a 488-acre contiguous block of habitat, connecting Marie DeLarme Creek and our forested wetlands to the Maumee River. This map shows in orange the final puzzle piece. It contains 26 acres of mature forested Great Black Swamp remnant, which will now be protected forever. The new acquisition also contains 50 acres of farm and hay fields that we will restore to wetlands and forest, further expanding the size of this forested area, and creating a large direct connection that wildlife can use to move between the river and the creek.





As the weather gradually warms up, I'm eagerly preparing for the upcoming field season. While winter has been a time for planning and strategizing, the onset of spring indicates a flurry of activities as we gear up to tackle various conservation and land management activities.

As the Conservancy's land steward, my role revolves around safeguarding the health of ecosystems under our care. This encompasses a range of tasks, from removing invasive species to nurturing native plant populations. Through meticulous planning and strategic mapping, we aim to focus those efforts where invasive species pose the greatest threat, thus fostering the growth of native habitats crucial for wildlife conservation.

Fortunately, I'm not alone in this endeavor. This year we will be hosting a crew of seasonal AmeriCorps Stewardship Members through Appalachian Ohio Restore Corps (AORC) with Rural Action. This cohort of AmeriCorps Members play a vital role in the success of our natural lands.

What distinguishes our field crew is the invaluable hands-on experience and training they receive. In addition to practical experience in invasive and native plant identification and small motor maintenance, our partnership with AmeriCorps provides opportunities for professional development. Crew members attend various training sessions and workshops, enriching their expertise and expanding their network within the conservation community. This field season, the crew will also benefit from the expertise of Jeremy Dominquez, Ornithologist at the Toledo Zoo, and Jim Lemon, an expert in identifying rare dragonfly species, as they learn the basics of wildlife monitoring and identification. As a former field crew member with the Conservancy myself, I know firsthand just how enriching an experience this can be for a college student.



# NOTES FROM

# *the Field*

To be sure, field work is difficult. We work 10 hour days, doing mostly manual labor and often in the hot sun. But it's rewarding. With each task completed, each invasive species removed, and each native plant nurtured, we inch closer to our vision of thriving, resilient ecosystems for generations to come.



*Scarlett Rice*

**Scarlett Rice  
Land Steward**



# ANOTHER PIECE OF *Catawba Island Saved!*

Nestled along the picturesque shores of Lake Erie's West Harbor, between quickly growing residential areas and commercial developments, lies the West Harbor Preserve—an undeveloped 12-acre parcel featuring farm and floodplain landscapes. With its expansive 1,500 feet of shoreline and three acres of forested riparian buffer, this sanctuary serves as essential habitat, acting as a natural filter to safeguard the lake from run-off originating from adjacent agricultural fields and commercial areas.

Historically, this property was a vineyard for the local wine industry, today it is the Park District of Ottawa County's first public park.

The Park District was created in 1992, with a mission to connect, enhance, and protect the natural, scenic, environmental and cultural resources of Ottawa County. However, just in the past several years, they've passed an operating levy and hired staff members for the first time.

Our donation of this land to the Park District in December has established their first property and will facilitate the expansion of access to resources that they can provide to their communities. Over the next several years, they have ambitious plans to begin improvements and restoration of this property, which will include a parking area, a kayak and canoe launch, trails, and open-air picnic shelters.

West Harbor Preserve was a part of a 31-acre acquisition to protect land in perpetuity on Catawba Island. Thanks to funding from the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund, the purchase of two unique properties was made possible. Of these, the Conservancy will be retaining a 19-acre wooded area that will be managed as a bird and wildlife refuge. The increasing development pressure on Catawba Island and along coastal Lake Erie makes preservation of properties like these essential to protect the delicate ecosystems of Catawba.

West Harbor joins similar projects to this one where Black Swamp Conservancy has acquired important lands, placed conservation easements on them, and then donated the land to local entities to manage for public use. Partnering with organizations including Catawba Island Township, Danbury Township, Sandusky County Park District, and Wood County Park District and Bowling Green City Parks has created beloved parks open to the community to enjoy, while users can be satisfied that the preserves are protected forever.



# PADDLE & *Groove*

We've got a great new way for you to enjoy a summer evening in Toledo!

Black Swamp Conservancy is launching a new concert series on the Maumee River. One Wednesday per month from July through September, we'll board a band onto a pontoon boat and take off down the river, playing all the way.

The events will take place from 5:30 – 7:30 pm. Those wanting to join in on the fun can rent kayaks from Maumee Tackle for \$45, or bring their own boats for \$15.

**July 24<sup>th</sup>**      **Shamarr Allen**  
New Orleans trumpet player without boundaries

**Aug 14<sup>th</sup>**      **Charlie Millard Band**  
Keyboard-driven powerhouse trio from northern Michigan

**Sept 11<sup>th</sup>**      **Ben Gage Band**  
Original folk-rock music from Cleveland

**Visit:**  
[BlackSwamp.org/Paddle&Groove](https://BlackSwamp.org/Paddle&Groove)  
to pre-register and reserve your kayak today.





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

**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 fox kit photograph and back cover a yellow warbler 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**

SPRING 2024

or Current Resident



FIND US ONLINE AT [BlackSwamp.org](http://BlackSwamp.org)

