



The **Rookery**

FALL 2024





DEEPENING & BROADENING



Conservation

As the summer sun melts away to brisk fall mornings, I am reminded that the world around us is constantly in motion. Soon the bright green leaves on the trees will give way to brilliant crimson, yellow and orange. The prairie grasses will fade to a golden hue as cattails puff out and release their seed. Thousands of swallows will swarm the sky as waterbirds swim the pools of marshes, a last refuge before their fall migration. Just as sure as the sun sets and the moon rises, seasons change and so do we.

Thanks to your support, Black Swamp Conservancy has made possible many positive changes in northwest Ohio. Over the past decade, the Conservancy has grown tremendously, almost doubling the amount of land we protect forever. Thousands of acres of land and miles of riverfront have been preserved -- from the shore of Lake Erie to the furthest reaches of the watershed.

We've added ecological restoration work to our toolkit, converting strategically targeted lands across the region back to natural habitats and drainage ditches back to free flowing streams. And, we are ramping up our educational efforts by working to enable local teachers to spend more class time outdoors with experiential learning.

With more land to tend to, increased ecological goals and more outreach and education, the Conservancy team has grown and the community benefits of our work impact are deepening and broadening.

Thank you for your help in making conservation possible in northwest Ohio. We truly could not accomplish all of this without your support.



With warm regards,

Rob Krain
Executive Director



A DECADE OF

Change

It's been ten years since the 2014 water crisis and though our drinking water is safe, Lake Erie remains green. Toxic algal blooms are far from a thing of the past and addressing them continues to be a driving force to the work that we do everyday at the

Conservancy. Though the lake remains green, doom and gloom has not settled onto our shores. Restoration efforts in Toledo are taking off with the help of many different organizations, people are rallying for their lake, and land is being restored and protected near the mouth of the Maumee River and lake shores. These are all important steps in addressing the toxic scums that bubble against the shoreline each summer, but if one were to take a step back and look at the whole picture, it would be easy

The Maumee River watershed drains a total of 8,316 square miles of land in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana and consists of multiple different rivers and tributaries. With such a large swath of land, all restoration efforts cannot be simply focused at lake level. The Conservancy is taking restoration efforts further -- we work from the shore of Lake Erie to the furthest reaches of the watershed. To nip the problem at the source, we are working to intercept phosphorus and other pollutants before they reach our tributaries and rivers. The stories within this newsletter are just a glimpse of the change we have been working towards for more than a decade. With focused projects on land upstream of the lake, targeted invasive species removal and native ecosystem conservation, increased education and outreach initiatives, and new and strengthening partnerships and grants, the Conservancy is focusing on our water, our land and our community to usher in lasting change for the future of our region.



to see that simply focusing efforts at the mouth of the Maumee River isn't enough—the water doesn't simply enter the lake at the bay. The Maumee River doesn't just end just outside of Toledo. It stretches and curls for over 130 miles and serves as a direct pathway for sediment and nutrients in the largest watershed of the Great Lakes.

"Undeniably, the water quality issues that Toledo and the surrounding areas face are directly tied to a changing landscape. The drainage of the historic Great Black Swamp, increased population and development, changes in the agriculture industry and shifting weather patterns in the area has created a perfect storm for nutrients to flow into our waterways unimpeded and blossom into larger-than-normal toxic algal blooms. Just as change helped cause the algal blooms, change is needed across the land to tackle the prevalent water crisis at Lake Erie's shores."





PROPELLING FUTURE

Generations

We are thrilled to announce an upcoming scholarship for the 2024-2025 school year—the Dr. Donald R. Knepper Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship has been funded in perpetuity by an estate gift to the Conservancy by Dr. Knepper and will be administered in partnership with the Sandusky County Community Foundations (SCCF).

Don Knepper was a well-loved member of our community. His life's work was as a veterinarian, providing excellent care and treatment for the fur covered family members. Dr. Knepper strived to do right by his animal patients and their family, but he did not only work to protect and care for the animals he treated—he also turned his attention to the land and the future generations that may walk upon it. Don held a deep seeded passion for conservation of his rural heritage. He put this passion into

action by permanently protecting his family's farm in Gibsonburg so that it may forever grow food, provide habitat for wildlife and serve as a cultural heritage site for the betterment of future generations. This scholarship will help those future generations continue to protect and enhance our landscape as they traverse their own path in the environmental field.

We are incredibly pleased to be able to offer this scholarship. With every step forward in supporting education, we are able to help foster an opportunity for students to pursue a fulfilling career and play an active role in the land that they love. It is exciting to be a part of supporting the current generation as they in turn will one day take the reins and responsibility of stewarding our landscape. Until then and beyond, we will continue to support students who understand the importance of taking care of the land beneath our feet.

About the Scholarship

The scholarship will award \$1,000 per year to an incoming college freshman graduating from a high school located in any county of Black Swamp Conservancy's service area and will be renewable by eligible scholars for a maximum of four years. To be eligible for renewal, the scholar must maintain a 3.0 GPA and remain in a program related to the Conservancy's mission. In addition to the \$1,000, scholars will receive four free tickets to the Black Swamp Conservancy's annual fundraising event and are eligible (but not obligated) for a spot on the Black Swamp Conservancy's paid seasonal field crew during summer breaks.

The scholarship will be available for application this January through the SCCF's scholarship page. The scholarship is currently open to donations through the SCCF.



DEVELOPING A

Sense of Place

"What does this place mean to you?"

It's a powerful question, rooted deep within ourselves and our feelings surrounding it. When you think about a favorite place, what is the first thing that comes to mind? Perhaps you remember a stretch of stream where your grandfather used to take you fishing. Maybe a sparkling pool and sugary sweet memories of funnel cakes and fair rides brings forward passing memories of summertime youth in your hometown. Or perhaps it's the smell of turning over the soil in the community garden.

When we think of places that may hold meaning to us, we often engage our memories, senses and feelings regarding the place. The way we feel about a place can be good, bad, or neutral. Regardless of their context, our feelings, experiences and memories often decide how we feel about a

place and determine how we interact with it. This represents our bond and attachment to a specific location or place. These attachments and bonds determine what is referred to in many outdoor education pedagogy as a sense of place. Sense of place is powerful; it fosters a connection between ourselves and the world around us, propelling us to act and care for the places we care about the most.

Developing and fostering a sense of place is at the heart of outdoor learning. With generous support from the Bill Rowles Youth Foundation and the Ohio Environmental Education Fund, the Conservancy held a 2-day Outdoor Learning K-12 Educator Retreat on August 8th & 9th at the Conservancy's Homestead. Joining us under the bright summer sun, teachers from all different backgrounds learned

more about what it means to bring education to the outdoors and foster a sense of curiosity to look more closely at the world around them. By empowering local teachers with a robust toolkit and support system, we are striving not only to foster a sense of place within their students, but also the teachers themselves.

Educators that care for the land and feel empowered to teach their students to do the same are critical for conservation efforts. Teachers help usher in the new generation as they learn how to navigate the world around them. By supporting our teachers and providing the tools they need with programs like Learning Landscapes, we are playing an active part in fostering our next generation of land stewards, scientists, environmental educators, policymakers and beyond.

This workshop served as a foundation for the path the Conservancy has just begun to create. Much like any work that goes into conservation, education takes time to build. It is a labor of patience, creativity and most importantly, trust. This workshop may be one the first steps in building those needed relationships, but just as the first steps of a child, it has made a lasting impact on our teachers. "This has been the most powerful training that I have ever been a part of in 30 years of teaching," said one participant.

A community isn't built in a day, a true sense of place isn't developed in an hour. With your continued support, we are building a sturdy path for everyone to walk on as they set out on their journey to learn about the world around them.





This summer marks the launch of the Conservancy’s concert series, Paddle & Groove. A first of its kind in the Toledo area, the series is a no holds barred approach to a traditional outdoor concert. Instead of settling for a riverside performance, the Conservancy aimed to bring something new and exciting to Downtown Toledo—a performance on the Great Maumee River with the attendees in kayaks.

The first Paddle & Groove saw nearly 70 people on the water, paddling—and sometimes even dancing—to jazzy tunes by musical artist Shamarr Allen & the Underdaws who traveled all the way from New Orleans to play on the unique stage that is the river. Fuelled by the momentum from the first event, the second concert, helmed by the one and only Charlie Millard Band, brought even more people to the Maumee as 120 boats filled the river to enjoy a night of music on the water.

The intersection of nature and art resonated through these events, accentuated by the smooth, rich and eccentric notes by Shamarr’s trumpet

and Charlie’s keyboard as they played to lively audiences. Paddle & Groove is just one of many projects in the Conservancy’s repertoire that bridges the intersection of the natural world and the arts. It was exactly what we set it out to be: a night of fun, good music, and importantly, a way for people to connect directly with our great natural resource, the Maumee River.

Not just a night to have fun (though there is so much fun to be had) Paddle & Groove is a nod to the mission we work towards everyday: permanently preserving and improving northwest Ohio’s natural habitats for the benefit of current and future generations.

There is a lot of wonderful work happening these days in downtown Toledo, and it’s all very easy to see when you’re right in the thick of it, but there’s a lot of hard work happening upstream from our team that isn’t as apparent.

“Our work at Black Swamp Conservancy flows through downtown Toledo in the Maumee River every day,” says director, Rob Krain. From

the deep-set prairie roots, to seasonal wetlands in shaded woods, to the babbling brooks and winding creeks, the land we restore and protect upstream is reflected in the eb and flow of the Maumee. We are an important part of the whole working towards improving the water quality of the Maumee River and Lake Erie.

What happens on the land directly affects the water that flows from it. Out in the fields, in the streams and small watersheds the Conservancy is bolstering natural habitats that work to clean our water before it hits the Maumee and provide cleaner drinking water and better recreational opportunities.

While there is still much work to be done, Paddle & Groove is a celebration of the work that’s been accomplished and an effort to better connect people to the Mighty Maumee. The river has always been a lifeline for the area and it will continue to be. Protecting and cherishing it now is critical to ensure that future generations are given even better fresh water experiences than we have had.

Photograph courtesy of Christy Frank



UPCOMING EVENTS

Nature Hikes

Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve
Port Clinton, OH | October 5th | 2:00p-3:00p

Join Ida Rupp Library for an outdoor adventure! Laura Rodriguez from the Black Swamp Conservancy will provide a guided nature walk at Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve. Plan to walk about a mile and wear comfortable shoes. No registration required. Children under 8 must be accompanied by an adult.

To register and for directions, please email lrodriguez@blackswamp.org.

The Laskey Family Nature Preserve
Henry County, OH | October 6 | 11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Join Greg Carson, President of the Henry-Wood Sportsman’s Alliance (HWSA), on a walking tour of The Laskey Family Nature Preserve (99.13 acres), which is protected forever by the Conservancy through a conservation easement. Come and learn more about this special preserve along the Maumee River and HWSA’s in-progress restoration projects designed to expand habitat for native wildlife, improve water quality in northwest Ohio, and provide the public with access to nature.

Volunteer Stewardship Days

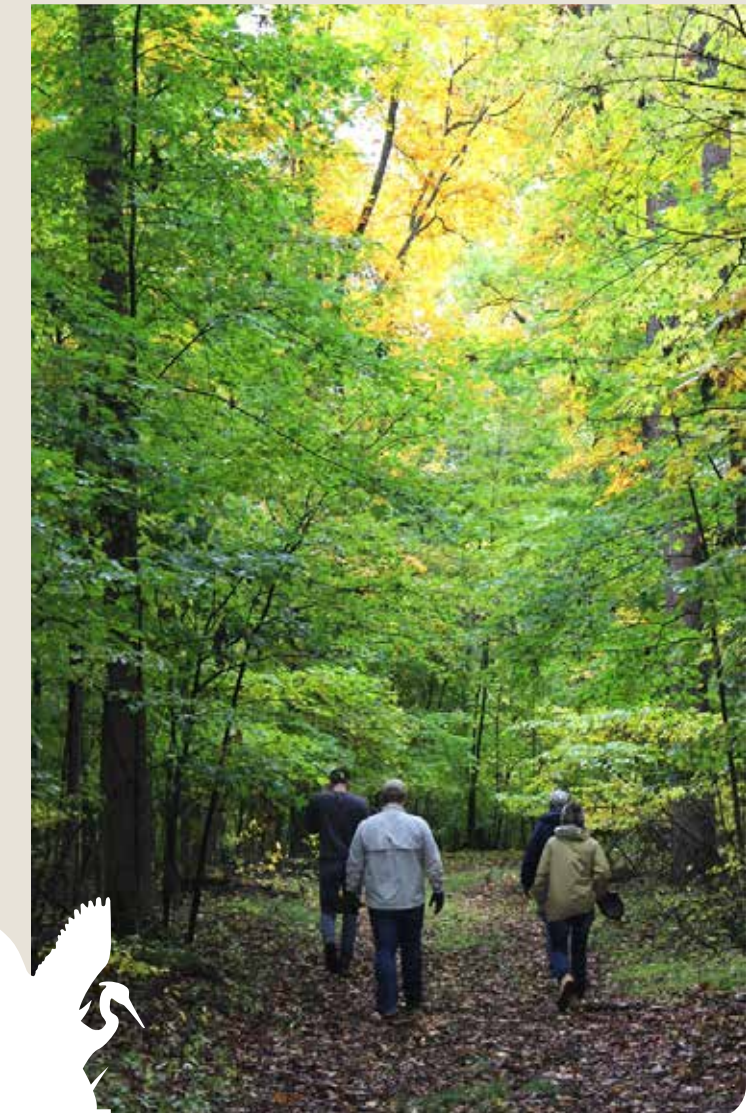
Water’s Edge Preserve
Fremont, OH | October 12th | 9:30a-12:30p & 1:00p-3:30p

Help cut and treat volunteer sycamore trees to improve wildlife habitat and prevent invasions into our restored prairie. There are two volunteer time slots available; attend one or both!

Water’s Edge Preserve
Fremont, OH | November 9th | 12:30p-3:30p
Help cut and treat non-native shrubs to improve wildlife habitat and prevent invasions into our restoration fields.

Mauk’s Prairie
Pemberville, OH | December 14th | 12:30-3:30
Help cut and treat volunteer shrubs to improve wildlife habitat and prevent invasions into our restored prairie.

For more information on volunteering and to register, reach out to Laura Rodriguez, Events and Education Manager, at lrodriguez@blackswamp.org. Volunteer activities are open to groups.





RESTORING

Wetlands

Restoring land back to the way it was before it was a crop field, before it was a golf course or the footings for structure, can feel as though it is a work of fiction or a work of art. You can almost imagine the guiding hand of the author as the ground begins to rumble, dirt churning under large mechanical hands as the land begins to undergo change as far as the eye can see. As water begins to seep back into dips and crevices of the landscape, the artist then comes in with their paintbrush, dotting the land with budding wildflowers and sprouting trees as the conductor readies the chorus frogs.

But this work isn't a work of fiction. It's detailed engineering plans, maps, and timelines poured over by many people from different backgrounds and expertise. It is real, land moving work that the Conservancy has been focused on for over the past decade. Since 2014, the Conservancy has restored or is currently working restoring more than 900 acres of land and three miles of naturalized waterways.

One such project is our largest project to date; the 100 acre restoration of the 160 acre Clary-Boulee-McDonald Nature Preserve in Seneca County. Standing on the ground before

restoration took place, it was easy for us to imagine the wetland it once was. Though covered in soybeans, the field that stretched out before us had lower, wetter areas even with the drainage tiles below the field. With gentle landscapes defined by naturally shaped boundaries, our team could easily imagine vernal pools and croaking frogs. We knew that with just a little restoration and the removal of drainage tiles, this would be a thriving wetland once again.

Restoring 100 acres of land is a herculean feat. Despite the tens of thousands of acres we protect, we are still a small non-profit made up of a lean and mighty team. Good conservation work rarely occurs in a vacuum. Often, there are a number of dedicated partners involved in a project and this site was no different.



This restoration effort was funded by grants from H2Ohio and One Tree Planted, and was completed in partnership with EnviroScience Engineering, RiverReach Construction and Seneca County Parks..

Even with the help of an environmental contractor, this was still no easy job. Moving a land changing 49,500 cubic yards of soil (about 74,000 tons), RiverReach Construction, who has done hundreds of these types of projects over the past 30 years, admitted, "This is the most dirt we've ever moved in one job." Restoration work on this scale is special, but this project itself was even more special in the fact that it is adjacent to a large swath of existing forested habitat in the floodplain along Wolf Creek. By completing restoration work on both sides of the creek, we created a huge expansion of existing forest along the creek. These creek and riverside habitats are crucial corridors for wildlife movement. The larger patches of habitat we can create and protect, the more robust native wildlife populations will be.

Wildlife habitat is an important consideration when it comes to deciding how to approach a restoration project. Another critical wetland restoration project we recently tackled sits on the convergence of the east and west branch of the St. Joseph River. Now an extensive complex of high-quality wetlands, the St. Joseph River was once a frequently flooded farm field. Just as with Clary-Boulee-McDonald, the land spoke of a time where it was a rich natural wetland.

A gentle valley weaved through the center of the property, once home to a stream that flowed unimpeded. As the site was cleared and drained to allow it to be farmed, the stream waters were carried away by drainage tiles, redirected under the stream bed which had long been filled and flattened by plowing. Simply restoring the streambed, however, was not all that was in the cards for this property.

Like Wolf Creek, this site was home to a large patch of high quality forested wetland. By taking in consideration of the entire site, we knew that if we expanded the habitat beyond just restoring the stream bed, we could boost wildlife populations, increase flood control, and increase nutrient pollution removal for the entire surrounding area, not just on the site. Restoration is not always simply returning land to just how it originally was. In light of the landscape changes that have occurred in our region, sometimes innovation is critical in our restoration work, considering how we can not only restore a specific property but also accept and treat water and nutrients from surrounding lands that remain in production

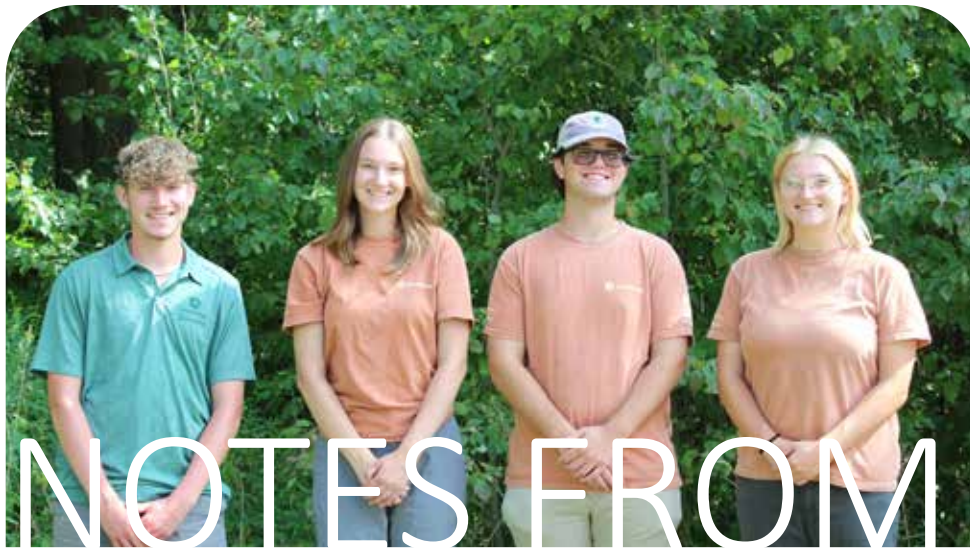
The restored stream was designed with a central "hub" wetland that collects all water from the uphill part of the property. The water collects in the hub wetland, having nutrient pollution filtered out by capture of sediments and interaction with wetland plants. Once the hub wetland is full enough, the water spills out in three different directions, where it flows through small meandering streams and into other smaller wetlands. This gives all the water coming into our property multiple "treatments" for nutrient

pollution—from winding, rocky streams that remove nitrogen and by settling and filtering through two or three different wetlands, which help remove phosphorus.

Our restorative work is always striving to find a balance between innovative, natural and continued use of the land. The St. Joseph River Confluence Preserve is a project that highlights all three. Not only did we expand upon the natural habitat that was previously there, this project is a part of the Conservancy's Food & Farm Initiative. The Food & Farm Initiative is designed to provide land access to new and beginning farmers, while safeguarding our waterways by balancing cropland with natural habitats, requiring ecologically-responsible practices. Part of the property is an organic alfalfa field, leased by a young farmer and surrounded by the natural filtration we restored.

Having these natural habitats and wetlands along Wolf Creek and St. Joseph River helps naturally filter runoff from the neighboring farms and fields, making the water entering our waterways much cleaner than it was before. These projects in the upper watershed have a direct impact on the water quality of the streams and tributaries that eventually feed into the lake. Wetlands are a natural filtration system that help capture excess nutrients that get carried into our water systems as water travels across the land. Excess nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorus, in the water are the leading factor to the increase in algae that cause the toxic algal blooms in Lake Erie.





As the Conservancy's land steward, my primary responsibility is to manage and restore natural landscapes. When we think of restoration, often we think of the earth moving, land transforming work done when we first restore a natural area. Restoration, however, doesn't stop after the last tree and wildflower is planted. Fresh, disturbed soil is a hot-bed for invasive species, most of which will take advantage of newly restored areas to try and survive and outcompete the native species we work hard to re-establish. An important part of my job is ensuring their ecological health is maintained over time, so that our restored natural areas don't become overrun by invasive species.

One focus of my work revolves around riparian zones, which are areas of land adjacent to rivers, streams, and other bodies of water. These zones are crucial for maintaining water quality as they serve as natural buffers, stabilizing soil, filtering pollutants, and providing essential habitats for wildlife. The Conservancy safeguards over 6.75 miles of riparian zones along major waterways in northwest Ohio, including the Sandusky, Maumee, Auglaize, Tiffin and St. Joseph's Rivers. However, the ecological health of these streamside habitats is often jeopardized by the presence of invasive species such as honeysuckle and reed canary grass.

Invasive species pose a substantial threat, rapidly overtaking these areas and forming dense monocultures that outcompete native vegetation. Unlike native plants, which typically have deep and varied root systems, invasive species tend to have shallow roots. These shallow root systems are far less effective at preventing erosion and filtering pollutants, leading to an increase in sediment and harmful substances entering water bodies. This degradation of water quality not only harms aquatic ecosystems but also diminishes the overall health of these streamside habitats.

To combat the spread of invasive species in riparian zones, my field crew and I employ a systematic and targeted approach. For honeysuckle, we begin with cutting the plants close to the ground to stop their spread, followed by the application of targeted herbicide to the stumps to prevent regrowth. Reed canary grass, which spreads both through seeds and underground rhizomes, requires a different strategy. We utilize a combination of mechanical removal and carefully timed herbicide applications to ensure effective eradication while minimizing any adverse effects on surrounding native plants.



Field

Once invasive species are successfully removed, native plants naturally begin to reclaim their place in the ecosystem. These native species, with their deeper and more diverse root systems, are significantly more effective at stabilizing soil, reducing erosion, and filtering pollutants before they reach the water. This restoration of native vegetation not only enhances water quality but also bolsters the overall biodiversity and resilience of streamside zones. As native plants reestablish themselves, they create more stable and complex ecosystems, which supports a wider variety of wildlife.

The work of managing and restoring streamside zones is essential for the long-term health of our natural landscapes. By focusing on the removal of invasive species and promoting the growth of native plants, we not only protect water quality but also ensure that these vital ecosystems continue to thrive. As a land steward, I am committed to this ongoing work, knowing that every effort we make today will yield lasting benefits for the future.





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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 back cover features a northern flicker 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 2024

or Current Resident



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