

ISSUE 76

WINTER/SPRING

PROTECT IMPROVE LEAD INSPIRE



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Greg Yankee

As nearly all of you will know, this April marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Among the many things that have changed in those five decades is the rise of the local land conservation movement. A few national and international environmental nonprofits existed prior to 1970, but nearly every single organization like The Little Forks Conservancy – whether protecting hundreds of thousands of ranchland acres, a town green in New England, or natural areas in the Tittabawassee River watershed – was founded after the first Earth Day. It is difficult to think of a movement that better embodies thinking globally while acting locally than the work of land conservancies.

In this newsletter, you will see evidence of that legacy of Earth Day: while working on projects that permanently protect riverfront acres in our service area, we also seek to inspire the next generation with a vision of the importance of conservation and how local and seemingly unimportant actions have an impact on the largest watershed - Saginaw Bay - in the Great Lakes. More and more, people want to know what they can do to make a difference. Isn't it great to be able to have an answer? Learn about tree health in our Summer Stewardship Series, volunteer for a work project at one of our preserves, become a team leader for our stream sampling efforts in the Cedar River, find out more about our Conservation@Home program: these are just a few of the options that we at Little Forks will be happy to tell you more about.

In 1870, a century before. Gaylord Nelson and others helped start Earth Day, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that one of society's profoundest illusions was that "the present hour is not the critical, decisive hour." His proposed solution? "Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year."

Thank you for your support of our work and we look forward to seeing you soon!

WELCOME SHELBY!

A warm welcome to our new Huron Pines AmeriCorps member, Shelby Cain! Shelby grew up right here in Midland and recently graduated from Saginaw Valley State University with a bachelor's in biology and a minor in chemistry. We asked Shelby what has her most excited about serving with Little Forks:

"While serving, I hope to utilize the skills I gained during school and hope to learn as much as I can from the staff at Little Forks. I am interested in conservation, wildlife biology, and ecology. I think that Little Forks' mission to improve and protect the land around us is extremely important. Also, I am looking forward to taking part in their community outreach initiatives. Getting the community involved and teaching others about the importance of conservation is very exciting to me.



I want to make a difference in the world around me and I feel that my time at Little Forks Conservancy will help me achieve that goal."

We are excited to have Shelby on board and look forward to seeing all that she accomplishes during her service with Little Forks.

VOLUNTEER WORKDAYS

There is no shortage of work to be done when improving a natural area for habitat and recreation. This year we have identified Riverview Natural Area and Averill Preserve as focus areas for some weekly workdays.

The Averill Preserve has a volume of invasive plants such as Autumn Olive, Buckthorn and Honeysuckle! We'll be forming an Invasive Plant Patrol to take place at 10am every Wednesday starting May 6 to cut woody invasive species through July. Riverview contains four miles of trail that could use some extra

care and attention to make them drier and more sustainable. Starting July 14th through August, we will be out there every Tuesday at 1pm working to improve the trail system.

We understand that weekdays are often quite busy so in April we will start Third Saturday Workdays at 10am – location and project will be announced monthly. Subscribe to our monthly emails or follow us on Facebook to get more details.

2019 IN NUMBERS

234 VOLUNTEERS = 782 HOURS

MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT OF OUR PRESERVES AND NATURAL AREAS

MICHIGAN LAND AND STEWARDSHIP

Little Forks was honored to host the annual Michigan Land and Stewardship Gathering at Whiting Forest of Dow Gardens this past November to discuss and learn about critical topics in land and stewardship. Originally formed by a few members from northern Michigan land trusts as a working group over a decade ago, it has since grown to reach out to land protection and stewardship practitioners from conservancies throughout Michigan.

Dow Gardens was gracious enough to provide an amazing meeting space and a tour of the canopy walk led by Chuck Martin, Little Forks' President and Whiting Forest grounds manager. The group was very interested in the technical specifications of the canopy walk, usage and even asphalt maintenance. In addition, our statewide association Heart of Lakes provided a healthy lunch for all participants.

"This group of conservation professionals has become a group of people I'd call my friends. It's evolved as we have all changed and grown. The honest and open sharing of skills, ideas, and new opportunities is always refreshing and leaves me happy to be part of it. Seeing Whiting Forest and getting a guided tour was an amazing treat -- I hope to bring my family there for exploration soon! My thanks to Little Forks and Elan and Sara for hosting us" commented Heather Huffstutler, Land Protection Director at Huron Pines.

Shaun Howard, Project Manager at The Nature Conservancy and Midland native, provided an overview of their climate resiliency planning and how this might affect the future management of preserve and conservation easement properties. Information on this tool can be found at conservationgateway.org. This was followed by Justin Heslinga, Stewardship Director for Land Conservancy of West Michigan on how they implemented the climate resiliency planning tool to determine land protection priorities in their service area. Justin also gave an overview of some of the land management projects they are working on including wetland and native grass restorations.

"Aside from a great learning opportunity, it was also an opportunity to showcase a little of what Midland has to offer" commented Elan Lipschitz, Director of Land Conservation. "We look forward to joining our peers at the next gathering in 2020 in Southwest Michigan."




↑ 30 VOLUNTEERS
120 HOURS SPENT

MONITORING THE HEALTH OF THE CEDAR RIVER WATERSHED



↗ 5350 INDIVIDUALS
SPENT TIME HIKING OUR TRAILS



OUR WORK WOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT YOU!

We have access to our natural environments through 5 nature preserves thanks to you. We are able to help private landowners protect their land thanks to you. We are able to inspire new generations through stewardship and education to promote the conservation of mid-Michigan's land and water thanks to you.

We thank you for choosing to protect, improve and provide access to these natural environments for generations to come. We hope Little Forks continues to receive your generous support.

You can donate with the enclosed envelope or online.



STEWARDSHIP SERIES

Our Stewardship Series provides opportunities to the community to learn more about a variety of topics! In an effort to create stewards of the Earth, and in recognition of the different topics that people will be excited by, we have a few options described below.

CARING FOR YOUR TREES

April 23 - 6PM

Identify trees on your property and manage their health through care and prevention of diseases, pests and other invasive species affecting tree health in our region.

FOSTERING WILDLIFE HABITATS

May 21 - 6PM

Learn the where's, when's, why's, and how's of creating spaces for our native ecosystems to thrive in urban and rural settings.

INVASIVE PLANTS HIDING ON YOUR LAND

June 25 - 6PM

Make a difference in the environment by managing the invasive plants hiding in plain sight on your property.

Visit our website for registration details.



ALL WORKSHOPS
HOSTED IN THE
COMMUNITY ROOM
AT GRACE A. DOW
MEMORIAL LIBRARY.



GADML

PROGRAMMING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

What a whirlwind six months it has been! Andrea wanted to sit down and catch everyone up on how our community programming is coming along this year, in addition to the end of 2019.

Our Nature/Nurture program has remained a constant and beloved staple in the lives of the teens we serve. Connecting underserved youth to nature to learn the healing power and solace it can provide is just one of the important components of this three-year-strong program. When aligned with learning core conservation values, how to be a part of one's community, and using safety measures that empower and strengthen the connection to the land, it's no wonder that we have become known for our innovative and diverse work in the land trust world.

This became evident after the Land Trust Alliance's Rally in Raleigh conference in October of last year. Andrea had the opportunity to give a ninety minute seminar on inclusive programming for teens, highlighting the work at schools like ACEA, Windover, and the Midland County Juvenile Care Center. The feedback was phenomenal, and we hope to continue to spread the word about important work such as this.

Andrea has recently had the opportunity to become a routine guest-lecturer in an Oxford International Baccalaureate class called Environmental Systems in Societies at both Midland High and H.H. Dow High Schools. This class has straightforward connections to conservation work, and we are thrilled to be lending our first-hand knowledge to future conservationists in public high school settings.

We don't keep our programming to youth-only however! If you have questions about how to build conservation-friendly practices in your own yards, Andrea and our new Huron Pines AmeriCorps member Shelby can help you through our Conservation@Home program. If you would like to learn more about conservation as a landowner, Sara's Stewardship Series may be perfect for you!

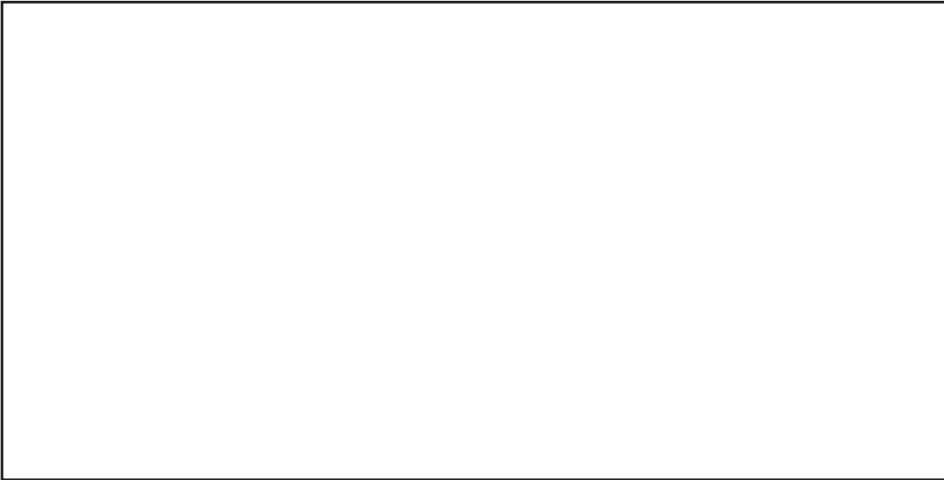
Andrea is also happy to come speak to groups about Little Forks and our traditional conservation work, in addition to our dynamic programming. Any way you slice it, Little Forks has something exciting and engaging for you to partake in.







THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY
105 POST STREET
MIDLAND, MI 48640



The Little Forks Conservancy permanently protects and improves natural environments in Mid-Michigan by leading and inspiring actions that conserve vital habitats and waterways for the benefit of our entire community.

Since 1996, we've protected over 3,966 acres of land, 19 miles of shoreline, and 10 miles of trails.

We strive to have places in nature that inspire connections and communities, serve as a healing and educational space, and allow all ages and abilities access to nature - now and for future generations to come.

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The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.