

# THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY



Fall 2011

*Preserve Today, Ensure Tomorrow*

Issue 54

## *First Trail Loop at Riverview Natural Area Opened*

More than 60 friends and community leaders joined The Little Forks Conservancy on a soggy September day to celebrate the dedication of Riverview Natural Area.

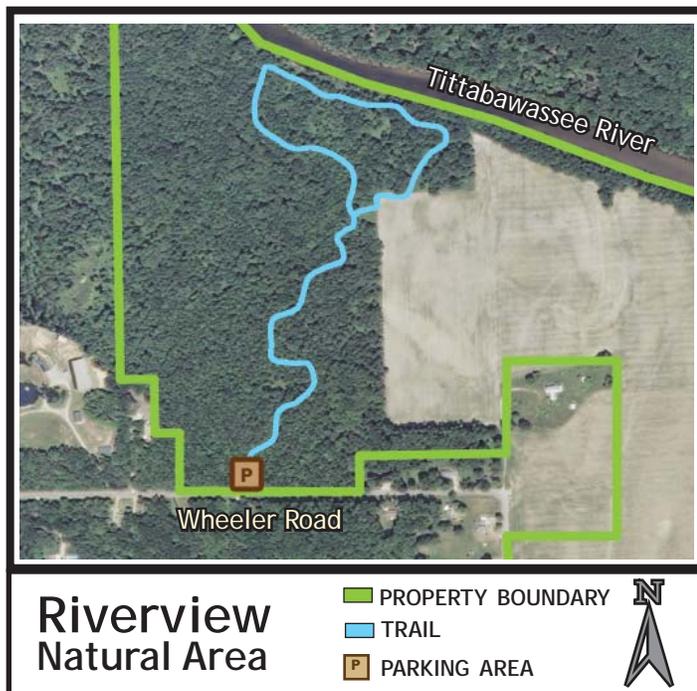
The dedication was the culmination of over three years of work to protect and prepare the 419-acre nature preserve.

The dedication ceremony also unveiled the work of several community

groups and volunteers who helped prepare the property for its first visitors over the summer. A new trail has been created thanks to Conservancy volunteers and volunteers from Chippewa Nature Center and the Arnold Center. Local scouts from Boy Scout Troop #763 installed barriers at the parking area and 65 feet of boardwalk along the new trail. Interpretive



*Past and present Board Members joined representatives of the Midland Area Chamber of Commerce for the ribbon cutting to open Riverview Natural Area to the public.*



signs discussing important natural features of the property were designed by graphic design students at Central Michigan University.

In his remarks at the ceremony, former Board President Geoffry Kusch said, "I think the most important thing about protecting it is that we now have something in perpetuity that we need to find way in which to share it and get the young people who are coming along in this community

to understand what is here, to see what is here, and, as you all know, it is only five minutes from Downtown."

The Conservancy would like to thank the following individuals who helped make the dedication a tremendous success: Margaret Clark, Fred Hubert, Randy Kursinsky, Alan and Deb Mead, Dennis Pilaske, and Ellie Schroeder.

For more information or directions to Riverview, visit [www.littleforks.org](http://www.littleforks.org).

### **OUR MISSION:**

*The Little Forks Conservancy permanently protects land with natural and cultural resources that add to the quality of life in our community.*



## From the Director: Reflecting on a Successful Year; Looking Ahead to '12



As we move closer to the end of the year it is inevitable for us to reflect on our successes.

The first was the donation of a conservation easement that protects 40 acres of land in Homer Township with more than 4,400 feet of frontage on the Pine River. The conservation easement was a decision by the Hubert Family and was a culmination of years of consideration and drafting of the right language in the agreement satisfactory to both the landowner and the Conservancy. When projects such as this are completed it is both a joy and relief for all parties involved.

As with all conservation projects that the Little Forks Conservancy completes, it is not the end of our involvement with the landowner, it is a continuation of our relationship that was built during the negotiation process. The Huberts continue to own and manage the property, now

protected by a perpetual conservation easement. We will inspect the property once each year to ensure the terms of the agreement, voluntarily reached, are followed.

This summer, we inspected all 23 properties on which the Conservancy holds a conservation easement. When it is all said and done, we are currently logging about 200 hours of time monitoring and reporting on our completed projects. Monitoring will continue to take more and more time each year because it is our intent to complete more projects.

Also this summer, following the final grant award from the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation to complete the fundraising for the Riverview Natural Area, we completed our initial trail from the parking area along Wheeler Road to the high bank along the Tittabawassee River. It was a pleasant surprise to see more than 60 hearty souls join us in the rain for the dedication of the preserve in September.

And, as we approach the year end, our land protection team is racing to complete two conservation easements along the Cedar River in Gladwin County. If we are able to close on



*Guided hikes, like the one pictured above with Chippewa Nature Center's Karen Breternitz, are one of many educational activities the Conservancy does every year.*

both projects we will add another 1,500 feet of river shoreline under our care, even if it is simply by monitoring it each and every year going forward.

As we look ahead now to 2012, and set our work plan and budget, it is looking like a year full of new opportunities. We will seek to grow our new Sustainers Circle of donors. We will announce a new challenge grant to grow membership that is tied into our 15th year of operations. We anxiously await a decision on a grant request that could result in another mile of protection along the Cedar River in Gladwin County.

We will fix several erosion sites at the Riverview Natural Area and find a way to link the trails of the northern parcel to the new trail recently built. We will monitor 24, possibly 26

conservation easements. And we will offer several guided hike opportunities to explore our preserves outside of the opportunities to explore these areas on your own.

Following a typical winter hibernation period we are ready to bring back the Green Tie Gala. We have moved it to Saturday, April 21, closer to Earth Day as we seek to celebrate the wonder and glory of the great outdoors and have some fun as we prepare for the much anticipated spring and summer. So mark your calendars now and plan on joining us for a great celebration!

Don't forget to stop by the office on December 8 for our holiday open house, hosted by the Conservancy Board of Directors. Have a great end of the year and a great start to 2012!

## Project Partners

### -1999-

- Don Blades, 274 acres

### -2000-

- Hugh & Eileen Starks, 40 acres
- Borys & Lubo Zura, 44 acres

### -2001-

- William H. Meek, 75 acres
- Glenn & Carol Sanford, 20 acres

### -2003-

- Ceo Bauer, 236 acres
- The Midland Area Community Foundation, 41.5 acres
- Nancy Steiner, 9.8 acres

### -2004-

- Phil & Janet Hehnlín, 5 acres
- Dr. Kyung-Sik Ahn, 31 acres
- Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, 39 acres
- George & Sue Lane, 191 acres

### -2005-

- Ceo Bauer, 78 acres
- Scott & Kathryn Whalen, 119 acres

### -2006-

- Blanche Stark, 79 acres
- Shellenbarger Land Company, 80 acres

### -2007-

- David & Anna Spencer, 154.5 acres
- Norman & Patricia Engel, 190 acres
- George & Sue Lane, 80 acres
- Robert & Susan Piesko, 140 acres
- Richard & Kathy Shellenbarger, 73.4 acres
- Jon & Elizabeth Ringelberg, 70 acres
- Gerald & Pamela Schmiedicke, 80 acres
- Elizabeth Levi, 8.5 acres

### -2008-

- Robin & Ardith Arbury, 219 acres
- L. Charles Christensen, 200 acres

### -2010-

- Robert & Cheryl Duda, 24 acres
- Michael and Kathy Helmick, 30 acres

### -2011-

- The Hubert Family, 40 acres

## Cedar River Watershed Management Plan Approved

Over the past two years, the Conservancy and University of Michigan-Flint along with many organizations and individuals in Gladwin and Clare Counties have been hard at work updating the Cedar River Watershed Management Plan. The revised plan was recently approved by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ).

Watershed management plans identify impairments in the watershed and create a plan to address them in order to improve the water quality of a community's rivers, lakes and streams. The revision was required to meet new standards that have been put in place since the original plan was created in 2001. "The plan is a guidebook for helping improve and protect the water

quality of the region," said Conservancy Land Protection Specialist Elan Lipschitz. "The plan belongs to the whole community, which is why we strove to include the input of as many partners as possible."

The Conservancy and University of Michigan-Flint hosted several meetings and presentations to raise awareness of the watershed management plan update and gather insights into the Cedar River Watershed.

From these discussions and visits to several locations within the watershed, the plan was developed to address the issues facing the watershed. The plan identified the increased need to permanently protect land within the watershed as well as limiting livestock in the rivers and streams,

preventing sediment from county roads entering the waterways, and educating landowners on maintenance of their septic systems.

The Conservancy's work to improve and protect the water quality of the Cedar River Watershed does not stop here. The Conservancy is continuing to participate in implementing the plan as part of the Cedar River Watershed Steering Committee.

"The establishment of the Cedar River Watershed Steering Committee is encouraging for the long-term health of the watershed and its residents," added Elan. "The collaboration has lead to a continued focus to improve the watershed by implementing this watershed management plan."



**SATURDAY, APRIL 21 • 7 P.M.**  
**HOLIDAY INN • MIDLAND**

## Feel like you've missed something?

Don't worry, you didn't miss the Green Tie Gala. We moved the date!

Get ready to bid on an exciting collection of outdoor experience and nature-based art!

We're preparing to bring you the next Green Tie Gala to celebrate Earth Day 2012.

## ***Boy Scouts Lead Stewardship Projects at Conservancy Preserves***

It takes the work of many people to prepare our preserves for visitors. Over the summer, we were assisted by troops.

Boy Scouts from Troop #763 lead several projects to make Riverview Natural Area and the Averill Preserve more user-friendly.

Tyler Grady worked with the Conservancy to install a boardwalk at Riverview Natural Area as part of his Eagle Scout project. Tyler and his volunteers first cleared the trail by trimming vegetation and removing fallen trees. Conservancy staff members Elan Lipschitz and Joelle Ferguson joined Tyler, his parents and volunteers from his troop on a beautiful Saturday to

install a 60-foot boardwalk so visitors could cross a wetland on the property. By placing boardwalks on our trail, it limits impacts on the wetland while at the same time helping keep our visitors' feet dry. The Conservancy still has four additional boardwalks to place along our new trail which leads from the parking lot to the Tittabawassee River. Please contact our office if you would like to help out with one of these projects in the future.

Nathan Foura also lead a project for the Conservancy at Riverview Natural Area. Nathan led volunteers from his troop to install a safety barrier along the parking area. Nathan and his volunteers



Photo provided by Tyler Grady

placed 21 square posts around the north and east side of our parking area. These posts provide a safety barrier keeping cars on the parking lot.

Finally, Jake Straub and a handful of scouts have helped maintain the trails at the Averill Preserve by keeping them mowed

and cleared of vegetation. Jake is no stranger to the Conservancy's preserves. As part of his Eagle Scout project in 2009, he constructed benches for the Little Forks Conservancy's properties.

If you would like to volunteer at our preserves, contact our office.

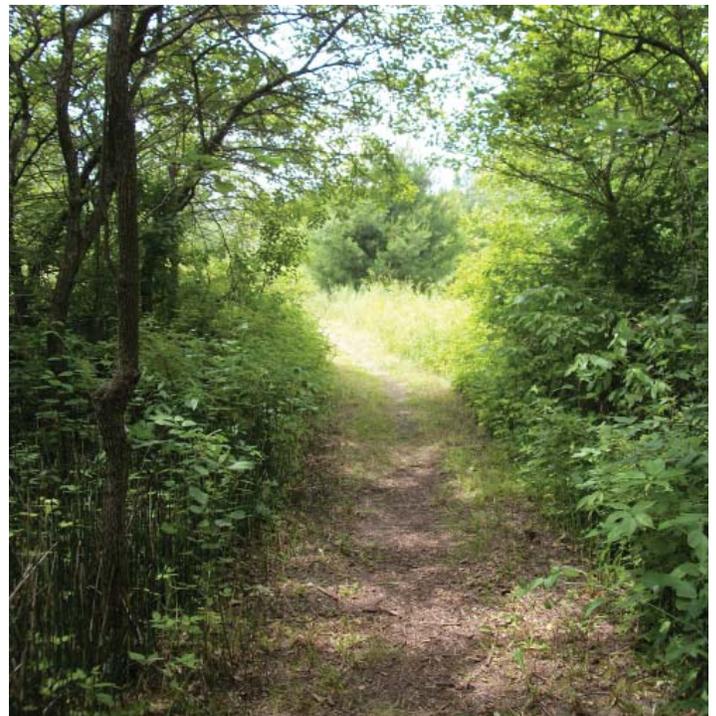
## ***Invasive Species Removal and Other Projects at Averill Preserve***

The Conservancy continues our work to improve the Averill Preserve. This summer, volunteers have spent countless hours helping to maintain the trails, remove invasive species, and plant and maintain native vegetation.

Ed Elliott and Glenn Sanford continue to be the backbone of our Averill Stewardship Team. One of their goals is to help the overlook area remain a mix of grasses and wildflowers. This has involved removing a

variety of invasive species such as spotted knapweed and woody vegetation.

Also this year, the planting box at the overlook was planted with native vegetation. Our invasive species removal program goes into the fall, depending on the weather. Generally, our crew is out there most Tuesday afternoons from 1:30 to 3:30. Please call our office if you would like more details on becoming a member of our Averill Tuesday Afternoon Team.



## ***Sustainers Circle: Recognizing Critical Support***

Since being founded in 1996, the Conservancy has been very fortunate to have the support of a number of dedicated leaders. These individuals have given their time, money and knowledge to grow the organization.

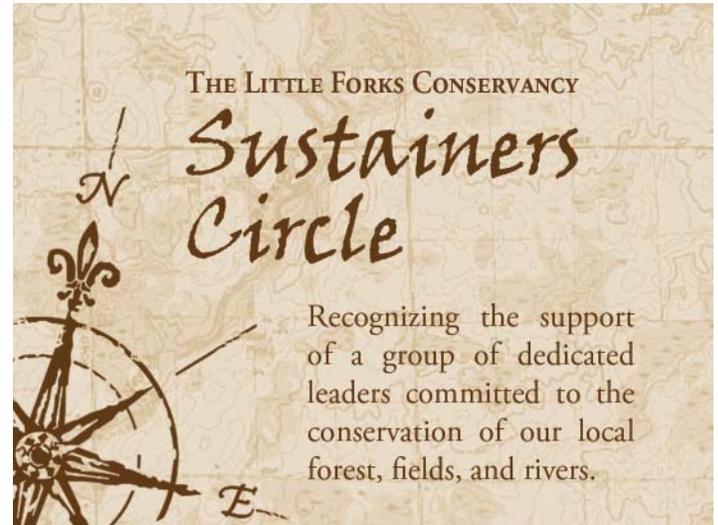
The Conservancy is very grateful for the continued support of these individuals and has established the Sustainers Circle to recognize donors who make an annual contribution of \$500 or more to the Operating Fund.

Donors who join the Sustainers Circle will be recognized in

publications and at events. The Conservancy is also planning to host two special events next year specifically for Sustainers Circle members.

“The Board of Directors is very pleased to recognize the generous contributions of these individuals,” said Board President Eric Brubaker. “Their support allows us to strategically protect lands that provide the most benefit to our community – today and forever.”

Qualifying gifts to the Sustainers Circle must be made only to the Operating Fund and may be a one-time gift or a



pledge of multiple gifts totaling \$500 or more. For this program, gifts that are matched by another organization to total \$500 or more will not be included. Donors who

wish to remain anonymous may notate it on their gift, but will still receive notice of events.

To join the Sustainers Circle or learn more, contact our office.

## ***New Program for Landowners: Sustainable Lands Partner Program***

This past summer, the Little Forks Conservancy kicked off our Sustainable Lands Partner Program. Our newest program is designed be a first step for landowners interested in conserving their land. Landowners who enroll in this program are recognized for sustainably managing the natural resources of their land.

Based on the response from the pilot program in the Cedar River watershed, the Conservancy is expanding the program to our entire service area.

“We were encouraged by the number of landowners outside of the Cedar River watershed who contacted

us about this program,” said Elan Lipschitz, the Conservancy’s land protection specialist.

Through the program, the Conservancy creates a voluntary, “handshake” partnership with landowners who are conserving lands that are primarily forest, fields or wetlands and are managed to protect those natural resources.

As part of the Sustainable Lands Partner program, the Conservancy honors these landowners who are taking steps to conserve the natural resources on their property.

“It is very exciting to offer this new program



that recognizes landowners who are doing good things on their land,” Elan commented.

Landowners who qualify for the program will receive a certificate of participation, a sign for their home or property, invitations to stewardship workshops designed for Sustainable Lands partners, and a natural resources report for their land prepared by

Conservancy staff.

The agreement is non-binding and landowners can leave the program at any time.

Funding for the pilot program was generously provided by the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN).

For more information about this program or to learn if your land qualifies, contact our office at (989) 835-4886.

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## *Farewells and Greetings for Conservancy Board*

At the May Board meeting, Glenn Sanford and Geof Kusch retired from the Board of Directors. Glenn and Geof were dedicated leaders on the Conservancy's Board.

Glenn co-founded the Tuesday Afternoon Stewardship Team with former board member Edward Elliott. He continues to be active in land stewardship and we are tremendously grateful for the great work Glenn and Ed do at the Averill Preserve.

Geof served as the Conservancy's president during two of the largest projects in our history – the acquisition of Riverview Natural Area and our application for accreditation. Geof and

his wife, Jenifer, have since relocated to Port Huron to be close to their grandchildren.

Also at that meeting, the Conservancy welcomed Kathy Brooks, Greg Dardas and Steve Scott to the Board of Directors.

Kathy is a realtor at RE/MAX of Midland. Kathy earned her bachelor's degree in Business Management and Organizational Development from Spring Arbor University. She also serves as an Associates Council Member and Home & Garden Show Committee Member for the Midland Homebuilders Association.

Greg, a neurologist, earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in biology at Michigan State

University. He has lived in Michigan all his life except for four years when doing his neurology residency at Ohio State University. He currently has a neurology practice in Midland.

Steve is currently an agent at Leuter Insurance Group specializing in both business and personal lines and life insurance. He graduated from Alma College with a bachelor degree in both Business Administration and Political Science. He also serves as a member of the Mid Michigan Home Care Board of Directors and is the chairman of the Finance Committee.

In October, Maureen Craig stepped down from the Board of Directors following her relocation to Kentucky. Maureen

dutifully fulfilled her board responsibilities by staying in touch with the Conservancy via e-mail and calling in to the Board meetings until a replacement could be found. We appreciate her dedication.

Also at that meeting, the Conservancy welcomed Jon DeGroot to the Board of Directors. Jon currently serves as the S&T Director for Business and Technology Incubator for Dow Corning Corporation. He earned his bachelor's degree at Iowa State University and his doctorate in chemical engineering from the University of Minnesota.

We give a warm welcome to Kathy, Greg, Steve and Jon and look forward to working with them.

## *Foundation Awards Operating Grant*

The Little Forks Conservancy is pleased to be the recipient of a \$30,000 grant from the Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation. The grant will be used for general operating support in 2012.

"We are truly grateful for the long-term support of the Gerstacker Foundation," said Douglas L. Koop, the Conservancy's executive director. "Their support demonstrates that protecting our environment is of critical

importance to our community."

The Conservancy relies on contributions from individuals, foundations and corporations to operate our land conservation programs. Gifts to the Conservancy's operating fund provide landowners with the resources and tools they need to permanently protect their land to benefit our community.

For more information, please contact our office.

### **Tax Credit for Endowment Gifts Expiring**

**This is the last year for you to receive a tax credit for your contribution to The Little Forks Conservancy Endowment Fund.**

**As part of the tax reform bill passed by the state legislature in May, the Michigan Community Foundation Tax Credit will end on January 1, 2012.**

**You may still take advantage of the Michigan Community Foundation Tax Credit through the end of this year.**

## On the Land: The Seasons Are Changing, Still Much To Discover

*This is the first in a series of stories about Riverview Natural Area by Greg Dardas, a Conservancy board member. To read the complete story or other posts, visit our website at [www.littleforks.org](http://www.littleforks.org).*

Giving up summer is not easy for me. In my mind, summer represents unstructured time, light clothing, warmth, “no school” and all sorts of warm, fuzzy features. This hike helped me to accept the inevitability of autumn, and its essential role in the cycle of life in our area.

As a fellow who spends more time than he'd prefer breathing air pumped through a furnace and under fluorescent lights, the moment I step into the woods at Riverview I rejoice in the cool atmosphere, imbued with the fragrances of autumn. Light is filtered between gently swaying branches and leaves fluttering and making their final descents. The ground has a “give” to it, almost a hollow feel, which comes from untold seasons of organic decay and rebirth.

Within a few hundred feet from the parking lot I forget the affairs of the day back in civilization, among my tie-wearing brethren and I feel instantly reunited with a more rustic frame of mind. I follow the well-marked trail as it winds slowly further into several types of terrain. There are open meadows, tunnels walled and roofed

by deciduous trees. Giant evergreens are interspersed with it all, each providing a slow, steady supply of needles to the soft ground. I'm particularly fond of walking over a deep pack of decomposing pine needles. When I think of how many years of needles are underneath my feet as I walk along, I gain a special sense of the passage of time.



Whereas spring is the time of planting for humans, autumn is the time of planting for nature. The withering flowers signify maturing seeds which drop near the sites of their formation or are scattered by the wind, animals or other means to insert their DNA into the future. It gave me

a comforting feeling to reflect upon this in the silence of the moment.

In a way, the withering flowers, while not at their best aesthetically, seemed



even more beautiful to me when viewed in the light of connection with future generations.

Mushrooms are all around, some more conspicuous than others. There are as many varieties as I care to spend time seeking out beneath little leaf piles, against the bases of trees and under rotting vegetation. Supporting my camera against the ground so I could forego the flash in the dim light I grabbed a few macro shots of some of the more prominent or exotic species. I promise

myself for the umpteenth time that I will spend the rest of the fall and winter learning my ‘shrooms well enough so next year I might be able to gather

a few of the edible ones.

I liked lying on the ground so much that when I was done shooting the ‘shrooms I just set aside the camera and laid flat against

the ground, feeling the vibrations of the Earth beneath my chest, abdomen and limbs. If I weren't out there alone, I might not have taken the time to do this, at least not for so long. Having spent nearly all my supine time on a mattress or on the carpeted living room floor, there's something particularly inviting and cozy about lying spread out like that upon the forest floor. Sure there are little insects and maybe a spider or two that might decide to climb aboard, but, for the moment anyway, that idea doesn't bother me in the least. I'm in their domain, and only for a while.

*To continue reading, visit [www.littleforks.org](http://www.littleforks.org).*



The Little Forks Conservancy  
105 Post Street  
Midland, MI 48640



## save the date!

### **Holiday Open House**

*Thursday, December 8 • 4 to 7 p.m.*  
You are invited to join us at our office, 105 Post Street in Midland, to celebrate the holiday season! Stop in between 4 and 7 p.m. for snacks and refreshments. Parking is available behind the former Post Street School.



### **Snowshoe Hikes**

*Tuesday, January 31 & Tuesday, February 14  
4 to 5:30 p.m.*

Join Elan Lipschitz and Chippewa Nature Center's Dennis Pilaske for a snowshoe hike as we follow the new trail loop from the parking area to the high banks along the Tittabawasee River. We will meet at the Conservancy's parking lot on Wheeler Road. Both hikes are free and open to the public. To borrow a pair of snowshoes, please call (989) 631-0830.



### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### STAFF

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