

Thumb Land Conservancy NEWS

April 15, 2018

TLC March Board Meeting

The TLC held our first quarter board meeting at the home of board member Dorothy Craig in Fort Gratiot, next to our Dead End Woods Sanctuary. Thank you yet again Dottie for being a wonderful hostess. Our special guest was a resident about a half-mile north of the Dead End Woods. We discussed the recent forest clearing by a farmer on a 90-acre parcel adjoining him and his neighbors, and how the TLC can help. It is encouraging to know there are local residents who care about the natural areas around them. Among other business, the TLC voted to join Heart of the Lakes (heartofthelakes.org), a group that represents conservancies throughout the Great Lakes region and was quite helpful to the TLC in our property tax conflict with Ira Township regarding the Gerrits Sanctuary near New Baltimore. We ultimately prevailed in that frivolous waste of time and effort when the Michigan Tax Tribunal ruled in favor of the TLC in 2013.

Deerfield Wind Energy Preserve Stewardship Huron Township, Huron County

Cutting of invasive Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose continued at the Deerfield Preserve in March. The family of Joe Mindelli, who lease the preserve for deer hunting, were out a few weekends ago cutting in the south and west of the preserve. Joe helped us cut barberry back in November also. As soon as weather is conducive, we'll be back out burning the cut barberry stems. We will provide notification of work days soon.

Super Kmart and Sam's Club Stewardship Port Huron Township, Saint Clair County

Port Huron Township Fire Chief, Craig Miller, informed us that they will attempt to burn invasive Reed or Phragmites on the Super Kmart and Sam's Club preserve near the end of April, pending weather. You may recall that we tried a burn during an unusually warm period last February, but because the air temperature never exceeded 40 F degrees that day, we were unable to get a good burn. As of today, we still don't have a date, but will provide notification as soon as possible.

Friends of Beard's Hills Clean-up - April 21 Port Huron State Game Area Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

Friends of Beard's Hills is conducting their annual clean-up in the Port Huron State Game Area on Saturday April 21. Participants will meet at 9:00 AM at the MDNR field office at 6181 Lapeer Road, on the south side of Lapeer Road east of Taylor Road. From there, they will split into teams and disperse to areas throughout the PHSGA. You should bring drinking water and be prepared for weather. Gloves are highly suggested for picking up litter. For more information, contact Nathaniel Curtis at dnrcleanupguy@gmail.com.

Saint Clair County Earth Fair - April 27 and 28
Goodells County Park
Wales Township, Saint Clair County

The Saint Clair County Earth Fair (earthdayfair.com) is Friday April 27 and Saturday April 28 from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM at Goodells County Park. The TLC will be at our same spot as last year, at the north end of the Middle Barn, next to the Clyde Historical Society (facebook.com/groups/1481890455361159/). Famous Port Huron botanist, Charles K. Dodge, otherwise answering to the name of Fred Fuller, will return once again to enlighten the public with his wealth of knowledge and wisdom. Please let us know if you are interested in sitting at our table to pass out materials and answer questions. Contact us at 810-346-2584 or mail@ThumbLand.org if interested.

Garlic Mustard Pull - May 12
Dead End Woods Sanctuary
Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

The TLC will conduct our annual Garlic Mustard pull in the Dead End Woods Sanctuary on Saturday May 12. We will meet at the dead end of Wilson Drive at 10:00 AM. All are welcome to come out and help. You will get to know invasive Garlic Mustard extremely well and learn about native forest plants. We have made great progress along the south boundary of the Dead End Woods, but the east and north sides of the sanctuary still need a lot of work. The TLC will provide lunch as usual. Jimmy Rankin's Meat Market on Lapeer Road in Port Huron Township (jimrankinmeats.com) is donating hotdogs again this year. You should bring drinking water and be prepared for weather. Gloves are not needed, but hats are suggested. Mosquitoes are rarely a problem this early in May. Please RSVP at 810-346-2584 or e-mail mail@ThumbLand.org.

Garlic Mustard Pulls – May 26
Port Huron State Game Area
Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

The TLC will conduct our second annual Garlic Mustard pull in the Port Huron State Game Area on Saturday May 26. All are welcome to come out and help. Not only will you learn about native plants, but this is a nice opportunity to enjoy the beautiful forest of the Black River valley. We will meet at 10:00 AM at the Ford Road gate, at the intersection of Abbottsford Road, just southeast of Ruby. If you arrive after 10:00 AM, you should be able to drive up the Ford Road trail to a plowed field where other vehicles will be parked. Our work area is east of the field, down in the forest along the Black River. Weather permitting, we will be there until about 4:00 PM. Saint Clair County Pheasants Forever (pheasantsforeverstclaircounty.com) is helping us again this year with bottled water and supplies. Jimmy Rankin's Meat Market on Lapeer Road in

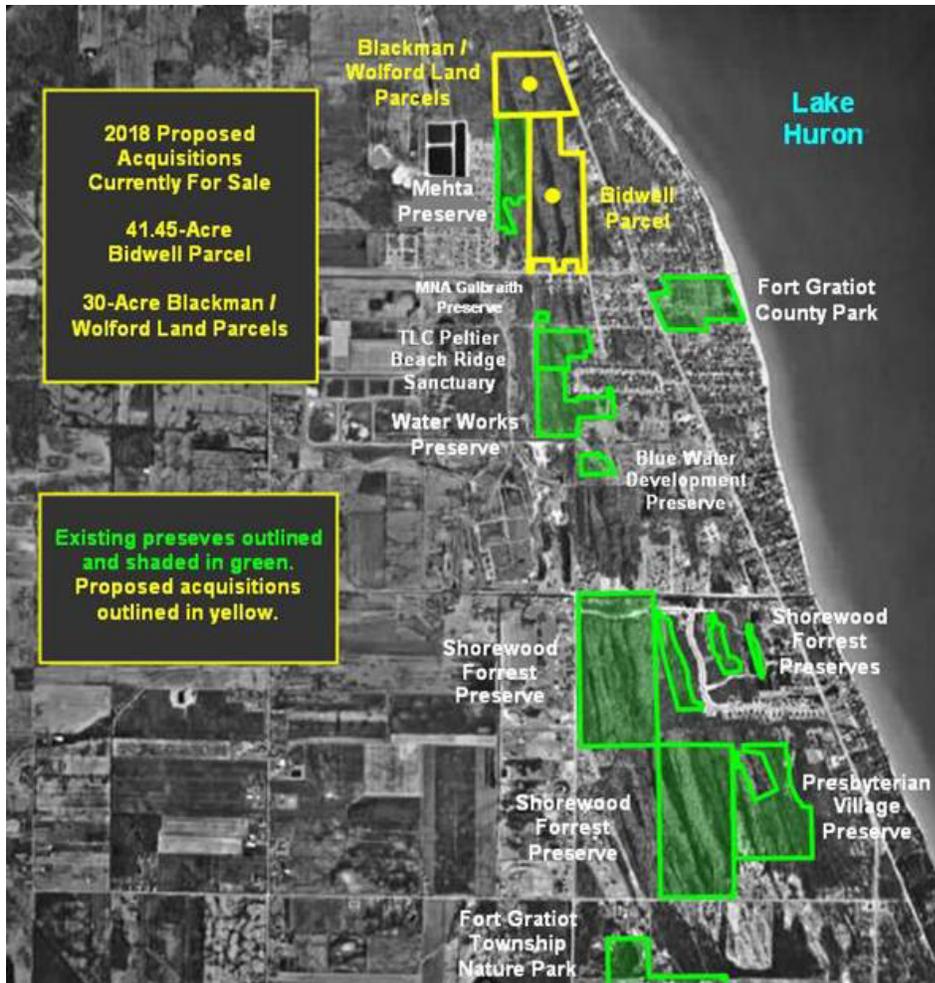
Port Huron Township (jimrankinmeats.com) is donating hotdogs for lunch again this year also. You should be prepared for weather and insects as usual. Hats are highly suggested because of mosquitoes and deer flies, although they were not a problem even last June, but midge flies are likely in the Black River valley in mid-May. Please RSVP at 810-346-2584 or e-mail mail@ThumbLand.org.

Historic North Street Station Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

We will soon start work on the North Street property again. If you can help financially, we really could use your donation. We still need to pay for the property acquisition, which was covered by a private loan of about \$11,000. We also need money for materials, but we are hopeful the bulk will be donated. After we finish work on the main roof, we expect to schedule work days through the summer. Contact us at 810-346-2584 or mail@ThumbLand.org if interested.

Beach Ridge and Swale Project Burtchville Township, Saint Clair County

The TLC is attempting to work with various partners to protect key properties that would complete an approximately 4.5-mile corridor on the beach ridge landscape connecting Port Huron to Lakeport State Park. Two properties are currently for sale that are important pieces of a future coastal park; the 41-acre Bidwell parcel and 30-acre Wolford Land parcel as shown in yellow on the 1995 aerial photograph below. Existing protected lands are shown in green. The Bidwell and Wolford Land parcels are some of the best remaining examples of the beach ridge and swale landscape remaining in Saint Clair County. Note the dark wetland swales which show very well on the 1995 aerial photo.



The beach ridge and swale landscape is a very unique formation of parallel sand ridges and muck wetlands, that were deposited from about 4,500 years ago as high post-glacial lake levels receded as the new St. Clair River outlet down-cut rapidly. The landscape contains a unique forest community with uncommon species found in few other parts of Michigan, including: Purple-flowering Raspberry, known from only seven Michigan counties and the Lower Peninsula equivalent of the Upper Peninsula Thimbleberry; Yellow Lady-slipper orchid, infrequently found in muck and sand wetlands; the Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, whose primary range is in the west-central US but found occasionally in Michigan dunes and other open sand habitats; and a great abundance of migratory birds, including many uncommon and rare warblers. What remains of the landscape in Fort Gratiot and Burtchville is the only occurrence from Ohio up to the tip of the Thumb where there is a similar formation at Port Crescent and Sleeper State Parks and along parts of Saginaw Bay.



Purple-flowering Raspberry on the Presbyterian Villages Lake Huron Woods preserve in Fort Gratiot.



Yellow Lady-slipper orchid on the Shorewood Forrest preserve in Fort Gratiot.



Eastern Hog-nosed Snake near the TLC Peltier Beach Ridge Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot.



Magnolia Warbler on the Shorewood Forrest preserve in Fort Gratiot.

Being a linear landscape, the coastal beach ridge and swale forest is naturally suited as a greenway corridor. A proposed walking and biking trail would traverse the entire park from Port Huron north to Lakeport State Park, providing an excellent opportunity for interpretive signage describing the landscape, geology, and natural community. We believe the park would be a significant destination for birders as the coastal forest is a major corridor for migratory birds moving up and down along Lake Huron. When completed and with some promotion, this coastal park could attract birders on a level similar to Point Pelee National Park in Ontario.

Are you interested in helping with this project? If so, please contact us at 810-346-2584 or mail@ThumbLand.org.

Ecology News

More Forest Clearing – The most important environmental news is often local. It's no surprise there has been yet more forest clearing in our region. The latest in Saint Clair County is about 30 acres of beach ridge and swale forest in Burtchville Township along the east side of M-25, just north of Metcalf Road. This is right across from the Bidwell and Wolford Land parcels we are hoping to protect. It's a real shame, not only because of the resulting habitat degradation, but because clear-cutting is often used to off-set the purchase price and taxes before speculators move on to their next victim. Where have we seen this before? Lots of places where short-term owners care for nothing more than to make a few bucks. Some of you may remember the guy who clear-cut the forest south of the Horizon Outlet mall in Kimball Township about 10 years ago while making all kinds of noise about development. Was he incapable, or did he never have plans other than cashing-in on the trees? To be clear, I support real and sustainable forestry, but hit-and-run clear-cutters are something else. Cutting every tree on a residential-zoned parcel suggests the owner isn't planning residential development, and couldn't care less about the quality of future development. Sometimes owners think they can dry-up forested wetland by cutting all the trees. But I have news for owners of beach ridge and swale acreage. Mature trees can pull out hundreds of gallons of groundwater from sandy soils on an average summer day. This process is known as transpiration, drawing water from the roots, up the trunk, and out the leaves. Cut all the trees on wetland in sandy soils and the site will become wetter.



View southeast of clear-cut parcel from M-25.

Kind of the same thing seems to be happening with the 90-acre swamp forest in Fort Gratiot Township that we discussed at our last TLC meeting. This woods is located along the north side of Krafft Road between State and Campbell Roads. The forest is, or was, a beautiful complex of

northern and southern flora with distinct tip-up mounds, providing excellent habitat for Michigan Endangered Painted Trillium, which has been found on this site. In this case, the motives are less clear. The owners are long-time farmers who bought the property a few years ago. Surely, they must be aware of United States Department of Agriculture restrictions on farming in wetland, and that if they proceed without approval, they risk losing all of their USDA subsidies and crop insurance coverage that most farmers in our region participate in. With commodity prices at historic lows and the prospects of a trade war with China targeting soybeans and other crops, is it really worth it to clear-cut 90 acres, sell the logs only for wood chip value as I'm told, pull all the stumps and then try to farm it? Again, if they were serious about a quality residential development, would they cut every tree? Do they think they're going to dry-up about 80 acres of wetland on sandy soils with a perched water table above solid lakeplain clay about 10 feet or less below the ground surface? With about 80 acres of wetland and lots of upland north up to Keewahdin Road, all owned by the same farmers, the USDA and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality are very unlikely to approve farming or any significant residential development on the 90-acre parcel. This one doesn't make much sense, unless again, all they care about is making a few bucks. It seems our few remaining natural areas all too often bear the cost of a landowner's short-sighted financial decisions. Thing is, all of this adds up and we are all paying the cost through the continued degradation of our common environment.

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