

# Thumb Land Conservancy News

## 2023 December 07

### Dottie Craig

**March 2, 1931 - October 16, 2023**  
**By TLC Executive Director Bill Collins**

On October 16, our senior Executive Board Member, Dorothy "Dottie" Craig, passed away at the age of 92. She was a special member of the TLC Board and is missed. She loved having all of us together and generously made her home available for many of our board meetings, lunch cookouts during our spring stewardship in the Dead End Woods Sanctuary, and our first TLC annual meeting.



TLC Board Member Dottie Craig (right) with Co-Historian Linda Lang in the Winningham Room of The Village Club in Bloomfield Hills on October 13, 2023. Photo by Bill Collins.

I first met Dottie in 2008 while flagging wetland boundaries and conducting a botanical survey with TLC Board Member Dan Rhein, of our soon-to-be established Dead End Woods Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot. Dottie lived at the dead end of Wilson Drive, right next to the preserve, and took quite an interest in the woods and our work. She especially loved all of the wild animals that visited her backyard, or that she could watch out her window in the adjacent woods. In 2009, she asked to host our cookouts in her yard during our spring stewardship of the Dead End Woods Sanctuary. She then invited us to use her house for board meetings. Soon after, we invited her to join the TLC board. Dottie had health issues and couldn't easily travel to most of our board meetings which we held near Yale at the time, but she finally joined the board in 2013.

Knowing how much Dottie loved animals, in 2012, Cheryl and I took her to Summer Wind Farms exotic animal sanctuary near Melvin. We also visited a few Amish stores in the area. About this time she gave us her cat "Pumpkin" who liked to follow me in the fields as I worked, but sadly disappeared a few years later. Dottie told us that she felt quite isolated in Fort Gratiot until she got to know us. It was our pleasure to have her company and we wish we could have gotten her out more.

Dottie hosted our first annual meeting in May of 2014 at her house, during which Mike Connell of The Times Herald gave a presentation in her dining room on the history of Native Americans in our region. We later watched a slide show about natural areas of the Thumb in her garden shed. This was the spring after our first "polar vortex" winter. It was still cold for May but we were all happy that we survived the winter and were together with the prospect of spring's arrival. Dottie also contributed financially to the TLC, particularly toward stewardship of the Dead End Woods Sanctuary, printing of our first TLC brochure, and in 2016, purchase of the historic rail station in North Street.



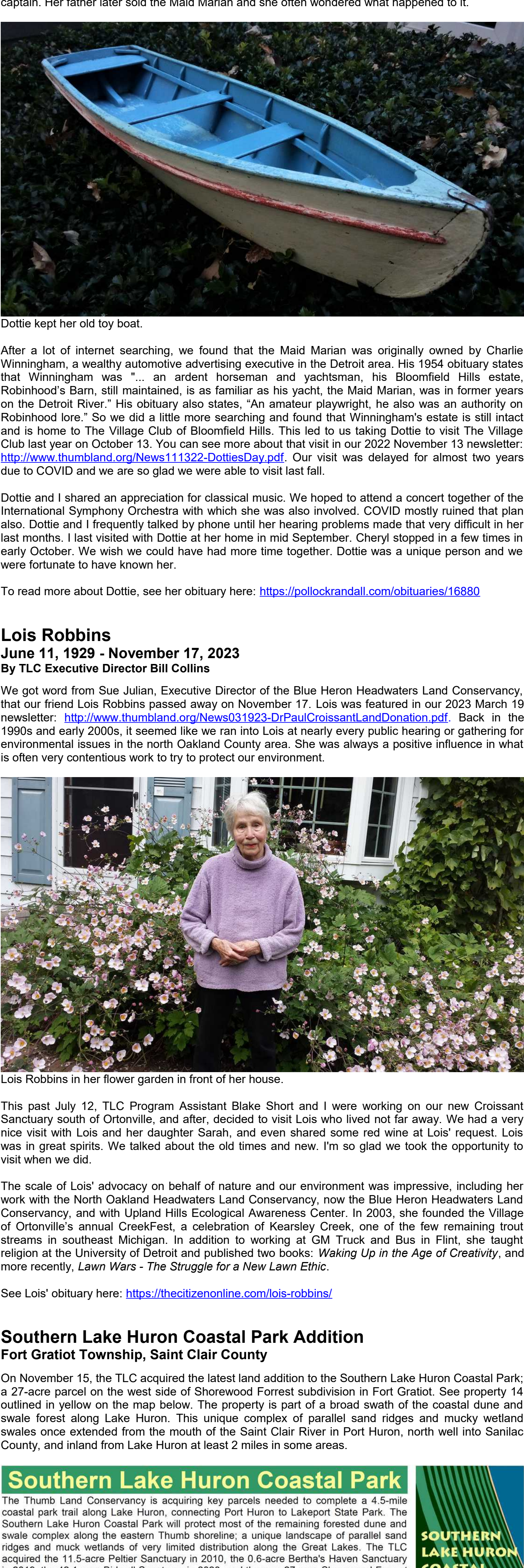
The Dead End Woods Sanctuary on 2018 May 12, only about 30 feet north of Dottie's house. We watched Wood Ducks here many times from Dottie's dining room. Photo by Bill Collins.

It was always very pleasant to meet at Dottie's house and she loved to host our events, particularly our spring work days and our winter board meetings which were usually near Christmas. Unfortunately, COVID put an end to our events at her house, especially out of concern for her health. We talked about a Christmas or New Year gathering last year but it didn't happen. We are thankful that we were able to take her to The Village Club in Bloomfield Hills last fall to visit the former estate of the original owner of her father's ship, the "Maid Marian". I think this was the pinnacle of our time together. We even took her on a tour of the grounds of Cranbrook Institute while we were down there.

We all loved Dottie's stories, which she had many. Years ago, Dottie and her husband owned a pet store in Parma, Ohio which was very popular with local kids. At that time, she had a full-grown pet alligator that would crawl up from their basement to the kitchen when it was hungry. Her cat would often sit on top of the alligator with no trouble. Dottie's favorite pets were skunks. Of course, she loved all of the wild animals in her backyard next to the Dead End Woods. She told us all about her early life on Grosse Ile where her parents owned a large farm that was used to supply the military during World War II. Dottie's family had a sense of community responsibility. In 1970, her parents donated land and a building which became the Grosse Ile Community and Youth Center.

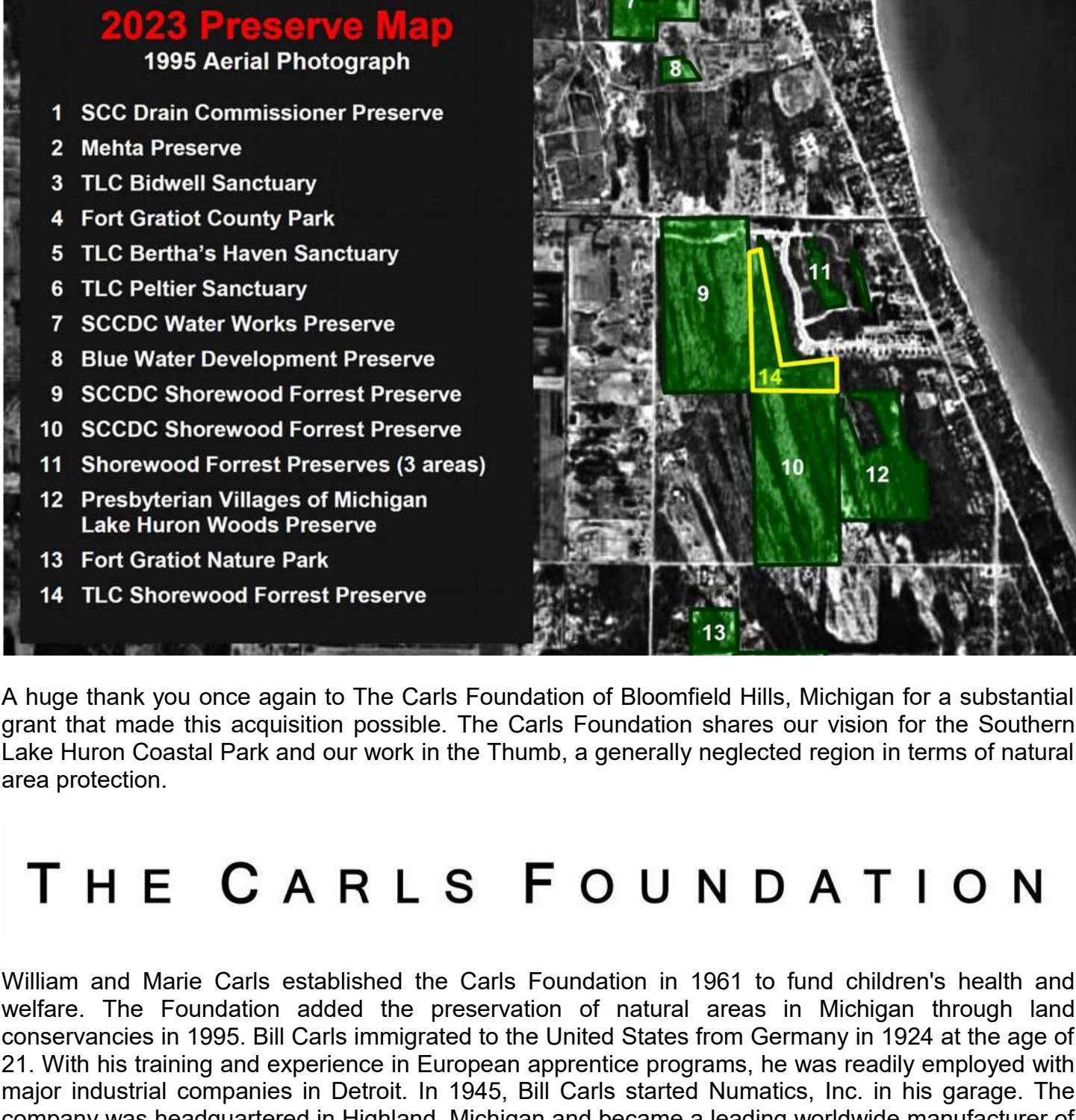


Dottie, her favorite Macaw parrot, and pet shop were featured in the Cleveland Plain Dealer in 1961.



Dottie and her skunks in the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Dottie told us that her father once owned a yacht named the "Maid Marian", a well known vessel on the Detroit River. Dottie and her family loved cruising the yacht on the river and out on Lake Erie, Lake Saint Clair, and Lake Huron, at least once making a voyage up to the Georgian Bay. She even had a little toy boat they towed behind the Maid Marian, hand-made especially for Dottie by a ship captain. Her father later sold the Maid Marian and she often wondered what happened to it.



Dottie kept her old toy boat.

After a lot of internet searching, we found that the Maid Marian was originally owned by Charlie Winningham, a wealthy automotive advertising executive in the Detroit area. His 1954 obituary states that Winningham was "... an ardent horseman and yachtsman, his Bloomfield Hills estate, Robinhood's Barn, still maintained, is as familiar as his yacht, the Maid Marian, was in former years on the Detroit River." His obituary also states, "An amateur playwright, he also was an authority on Robinhood lore." So we did a little more searching and found that Winningham's estate is still intact and is home to The Village Club of Bloomfield Hills. This led to us taking Dottie to visit The Village Club last year on October 13. You can see more about that visit in our 2022 November 13 newsletter: <http://www.thumbland.org/News111322-DottiesDay.pdf>. Our visit was delayed for almost two years due to COVID and we are so glad we were able to visit last fall.

Dottie and I shared an appreciation for classical music. We hoped to attend a concert together of the International Symphony Orchestra with which she was also involved. COVID mostly ruined that plan also. Dottie and I frequently talked by phone until her hearing problems made it very difficult in her last months. I last visited with Dottie at her home in mid September. Cheryl stopped in a few times in early October. We wish we could have had more time together. Dottie was a unique person and we were fortunate to have known her.

To read more about Dottie, see her obituary here: <https://pollockrandall.com/obituaries/16880>

### Lois Robbins

**June 11, 1929 - November 17, 2023**  
**By TLC Executive Director Bill Collins**

We got word from Sue Julian, Executive Director of the Blue Heron Headwaters Land Conservancy, that our friend Lois Robbins passed away on November 17. Lois was featured in our 2023 March 19 newsletter: <http://www.thumbland.org/News031923-DrPaulCroissantandDonation.pdf>. Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, it seemed like we ran into Lois at nearly every public hearing or gathering for environmental issues in the north Oakland County area. She was always a positive influence in what is often very contentious work to try to protect our environment.



Lois Robbins in her flower garden in front of her house.

This past July 12, TLC Program Assistant Blake Short and I were working on our new Croissant Sanctuary south of Ortonville, and after, decided to visit Lois who lived not far away. We had a very nice visit with Lois and her daughter Sarah, and even shared some red wine at Lois' request. Lois was in great spirits. We talked about the old times and new. I'm so glad we took the opportunity to visit when we did.

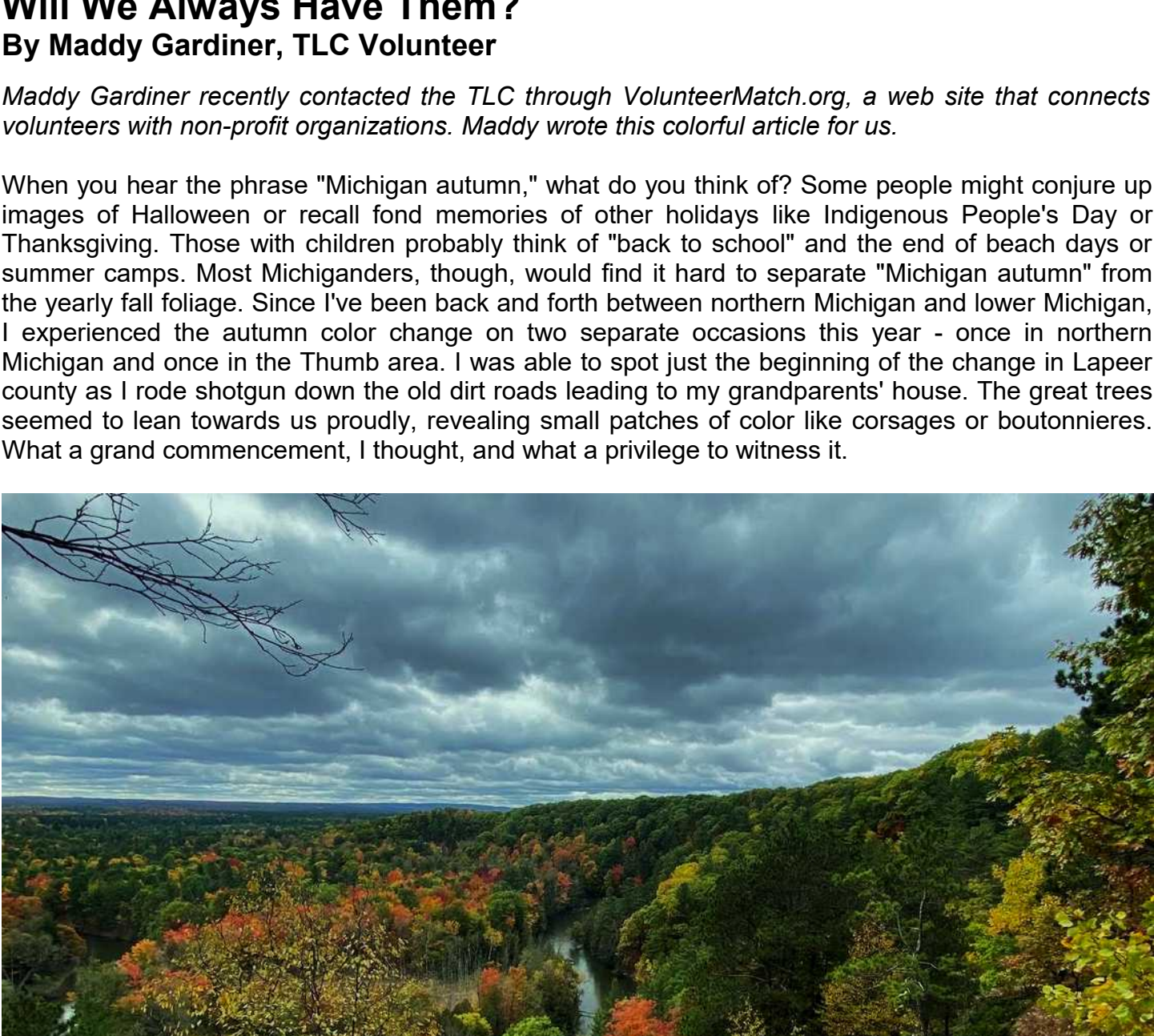
The scale of Lois' advocacy on behalf of nature and our environment was impressive, including her work with the North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy, now the Blue Heron Headwaters Land Conservancy, and with Upland Hills Ecological Awareness Center. In 2003, she founded the Village of Ortonville's annual CreekFest, a celebration of Kearsley Creek, one of the few remaining trout streams in southeast Michigan. In addition to working at GM Truck and Bus in Flint, she taught religion at the University of Detroit and published two books: *Waking Up in the Age of Creativity*, and more recently, *Lawn Wars - The Struggle for a New Lawn Ethic*.

See Lois' obituary here: <https://thecitizenonline.com/lois-robbins/>

### Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Addition

**Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County**

On November 15, the TLC acquired the latest land addition to the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park; a 27-acre parcel on the west side of Shorewood Forrest subdivision in Fort Gratiot. See property 14 outlined in yellow on the map below. The property is part of a broad swath of the coastal dune and swale forest along Lake Huron. This unique complex of parallel sand ridges and mucky wetland swales once extended from the mouth of the Saint Clair River in Port Huron, north well into Sanilac County, and inland from Lake Huron at least 2 miles in some areas.



A huge thank you once again to The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan for a substantial grant that made this acquisition possible. The Carls Foundation shares our vision for the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park and our work in the Thumb, a generally neglected region in terms of natural area protection.

## THE CARLS FOUNDATION

William and Marie Carls established the Carls Foundation in 1961 to fund children's health and welfare. The Foundation added the preservation of natural areas in Michigan through land conservancies in 1995. Bill Carls immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1924 at the age of 21. With his training and experience in European apprentice programs, he was readily employed with major industrial companies in Detroit. In 1945, Bill Carls started Numatics, Inc. in his garage. The company was headquartered in Highland, Michigan and became a leading worldwide manufacturer of industrial air valves. They had a plant in Sandusky, Michigan for many years. The Carls Foundation has funded many land preservation projects throughout Michigan and in our region where few other foundations have. A local project includes the Michigan Nature Association's Sharon Rose Leonati Memorial Nature Sanctuary in Kimball Township with a large population of Michigan Endangered Painted Trillium. The Carls Foundation has also funded the Six Rivers Land Conservancy in their efforts to acquire large parts of Anchor Bay Woods in New Baltimore adjacent to our Gerrits Sanctuary in Ira Township.

The new Shorewood Forrest parcel was important to acquire in part because it allows the only likely trail connection between the two adjacent 80-acre Shorewood Forrest parcels. About half of these two 80-acre parcels has been preserved by Saint Clair County as mitigation for permitted impacts to State-regulated wetland. With this new acquisition, we can begin planning a 1-mile section of an unpaired wilderness-like coastal trail from near the Fort Gratiot Nature Park south of Carrigan Road, north through one of the largest forest tracts in the area. This alone will be a significant public asset. It's exciting to think what the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park will eventually be.

### Croissant Sanctuary

**Brandon Township, Oakland County**

Our newest property acquisition wouldn't have happened quite so easily had we not received a 10-acre property donation on the south side of Ortonville from Dr. Paul Croissant this past February. He gave us the property with the intention that we would potentially sell it to fund other projects. We also assured him that we would preserve most of it and name it in his honor. We thank Dr. Croissant for his generosity and also for helping us follow-up on a few property issues that have come up since.

In September, we sold about 2.7 acres of M-15 commercial property based on the Croissant property to RBF Construction, a small commercial development company franchise in Flint. In a round-about way, we have to thank Flint Surveying and Engineering for introducing us to RBF a few years ago. RBF Vice President, Brett Jory, and his father Al Jory, have been a pleasure to work with. If there is any question as to their connection with nature, consider that RBF stands for "Rather Be Fishing".

Brett, who is a civil and environmental engineer, says, "RBF Construction is happy to contribute to the efforts the Thumb Land Conservancy is making towards the preservation of Michigan's natural habitat. Private development has caused a lot of environmental harm over the years, so it's very satisfying to be part of a project where economic and environmental goals are aligned. Our objective is to create buildable property while improving the quality of adjacent wetlands through our treatment of stormwater runoff and expansion of the existing wetland boundary on the portion of property that isn't commercially viable."

We will continue to coordinate with RBF on their development of the M-15 frontage and in harvesting invasive Black Locust trees from the site, which are very rot-resistant and make great posts for signs and other structures that will be very useful to the TLC.



Commercial frontage on Croissant property sold along M-15 south of Ortonville. Google Street View.

### Consumers Energy Foundation Grant

**Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park**

On November 17, the TLC received great news from the Consumers Energy Foundation. They have awarded the TLC another substantial grant to acquire more land in our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project area. This grant will allow us to protect even more of the coastal dune and swale forest along Lake Huron. In 2020, the Consumers Energy Foundation gave the TLC a large grant that helped us to acquire our Bidwell Sanctuary in Burtchville Township. We sincerely thank the Consumers Energy Foundation for sharing our vision and for again supporting our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project.



With our recent acquisition of the 27-acre Shorewood Forrest parcel on November 15, we can begin routing 1 mile of the coastal trail from the Fort Gratiot Nature Park, north through one of the largest forest tracts in the area. This alone will be a significant public asset. We have completed nearly an additional half-mile trail on our Bidwell Sanctuary, and south of that, there is another approximately half-mile trail established on our Petter Sanctuary and adjacent Water Works Preserve.

The latest Consumers Energy Foundation grant will help us acquire unprotected properties to fill the gap from Fort Gratiot north, and to route an unpaired wilderness-like coastal trail up to Lakeport State Park. With the next acquisition, the TLC will be very close to completing the most important connections and land protection needed to make the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park a regional attraction.

The Consumers Energy Foundation is the charitable arm of Consumers Energy, Michigan's largest energy provider. The Consumers Energy Foundation enables communities to thrive and grow by investing in what's most important to Michigan – its people, our planet and Michigan's prosperity. In 2022, the Consumers Energy Foundation, Consumers Energy, its employees and retirees contributed more than \$18.5 million to Michigan nonprofits. For more information about the Consumers Energy Foundation, visit [www.ConsumersEnergy.com/foundation](http://www.ConsumersEnergy.com/foundation).

### The Beauty of Fall Colors in the North -

### By Maddy Gardiner, TLC Volunteer

Maddy Gardiner recently contacted the TLC through VolunteerMatch.org, a web site that connects volunteers with non-profit organizations. Maddy wrote this colorful article for us.

When you hear the phrase "Michigan autumn," what do you think of? Some people might conjure up images of Halloween or recall fond memories of other holidays like Indigenous People's Day or Thanksgiving. Those with children probably think of "back to school" and the end of beach days or summer camps. Most Michiganders, though, would find it hard to separate "Michigan autumn" from the yearly fall foliage. Since I've been back and forth between northern Michigan and lower Michigan, I experienced the autumn color change on two separate occasions this year – once in northern Michigan and once in the Thumb area. I was able to spot just the beginning of the change in Lapeer county as I rode shotgun down the old dirt roads leading to my grandparents' house. The great trees seemed to lead towards us proudly, revealing small patches of color like corsages or boutonnieres. What a grand commencement, I thought, and what a privilege to witness it.



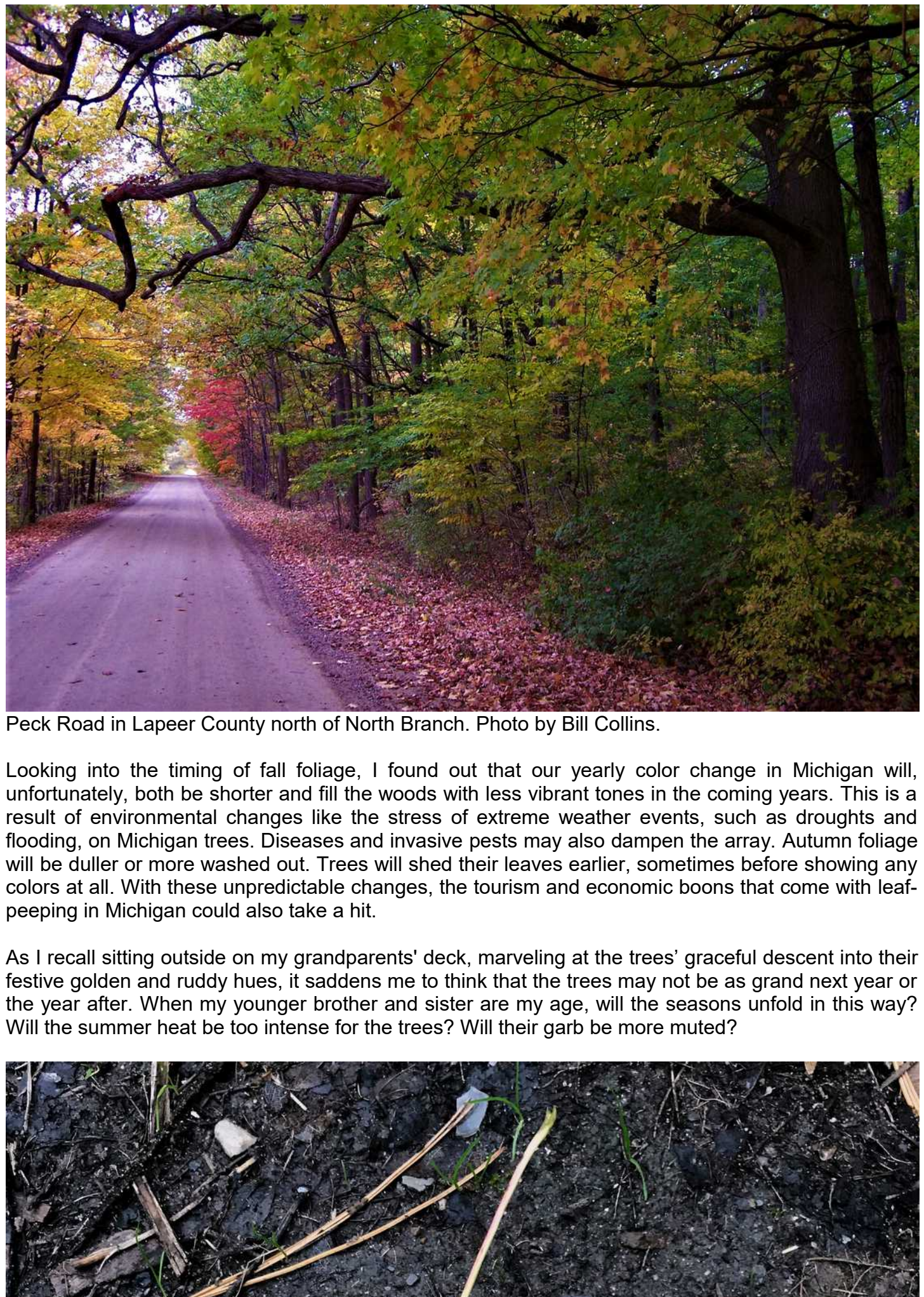
Overlooking the Manistee River in Greenwood Township, Wexford County in mid October. Photo by Maddy Gardiner.

In Upper Michigan, I saw the colors in full tilt. They sprawled out across Traverse City, changing cool bodies of green into ruby-reds and burnt orange. For me, it's a carnival. Like many in the area, I took long walks with friends and snapped photos with the forest in the background. When I returned to the Lapeer area just recently, the colors were already waning and I lamented that the display hadn't lasted a bit longer or started a bit sooner.



Walking Murphy on the outskirts of Traverse City in late October. Photo by Maddy Gardiner.

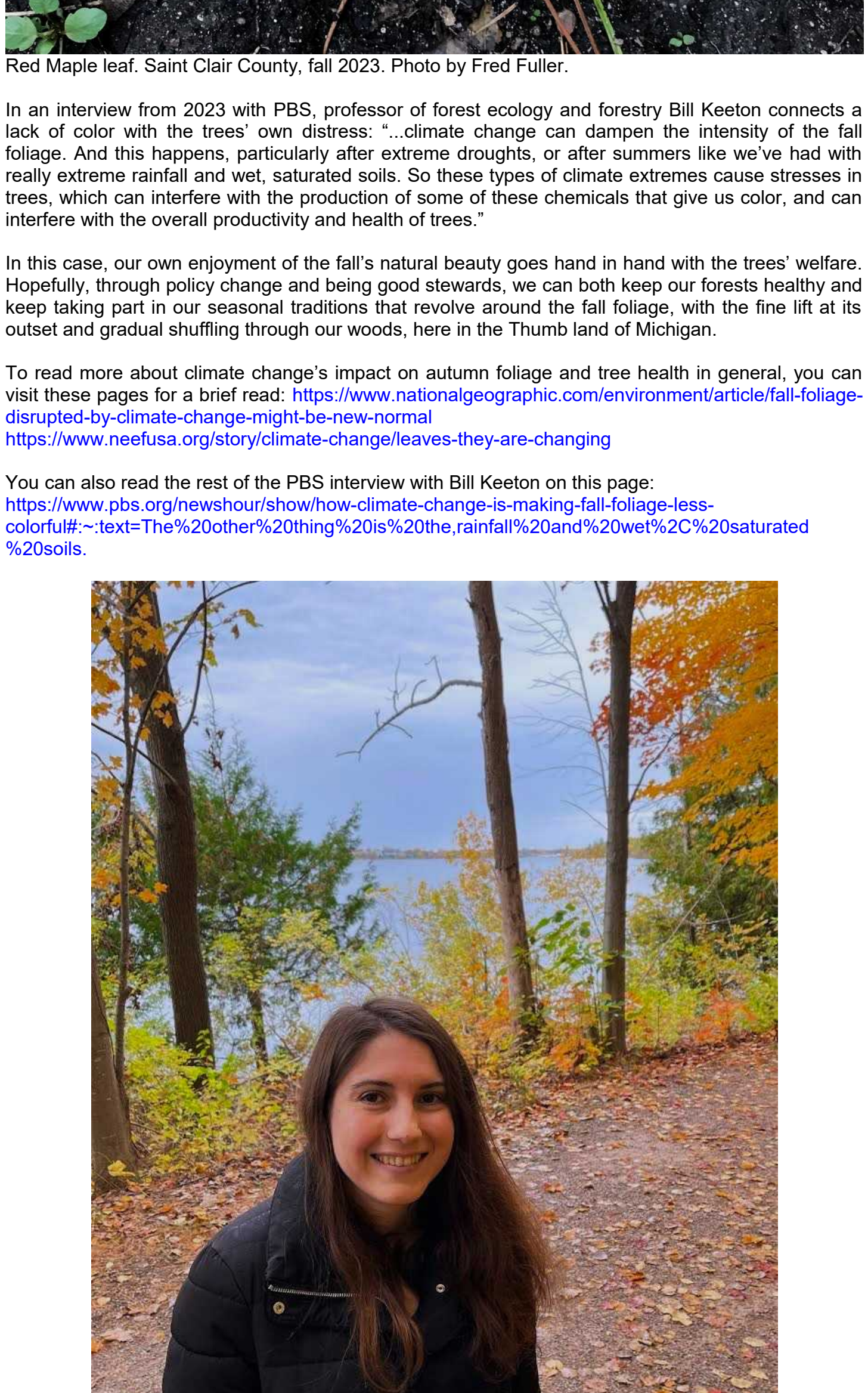




Peck Road in Lapeer County north of North Branch. Photo by Bill Collins.

Looking into the timing of fall foliage, I found out that our yearly color change in Michigan will, unfortunately, both be shorter and fill the woods with less vibrant tones in the coming years. This is a result of environmental changes like the stress of extreme weather events, such as droughts and flooding, on Michigan trees. Diseases and invasive pests may also dampen the array. Autumn foliage will be duller or more washed out. Trees will shed their leaves earlier, sometimes before showing any colors at all. With these unpredictable changes, the tourism and economic boons that come with leaf-peeping in Michigan could also take a hit.

As I recall sitting outside on my grandparents' deck, marveling at the trees' graceful descent into their festive golden and ruddy hues, it saddens me to think that the trees may not be as grand next year or the year after. When my younger brother and sister are my age, will the seasons unfold in this way? Will the summer heat be too intense for the trees? Will their garb be more muted?



Red Maple leaf. Saint Clair County, fall 2023. Photo by Fred Fuller.

In an interview from 2023 with PBS, professor of forest ecology and forestry Bill Keeton connects a lack of color with the trees' own distress: "...climate change can dampen the intensity of the fall foliage. And this happens, particularly after extreme droughts, or after summers like we've had with really extreme rainfall and wet, saturated soils. So these types of climate extremes cause stresses in trees, which can interfere with the production of some of these chemicals that give us color, and can interfere with the overall productivity and health of trees."

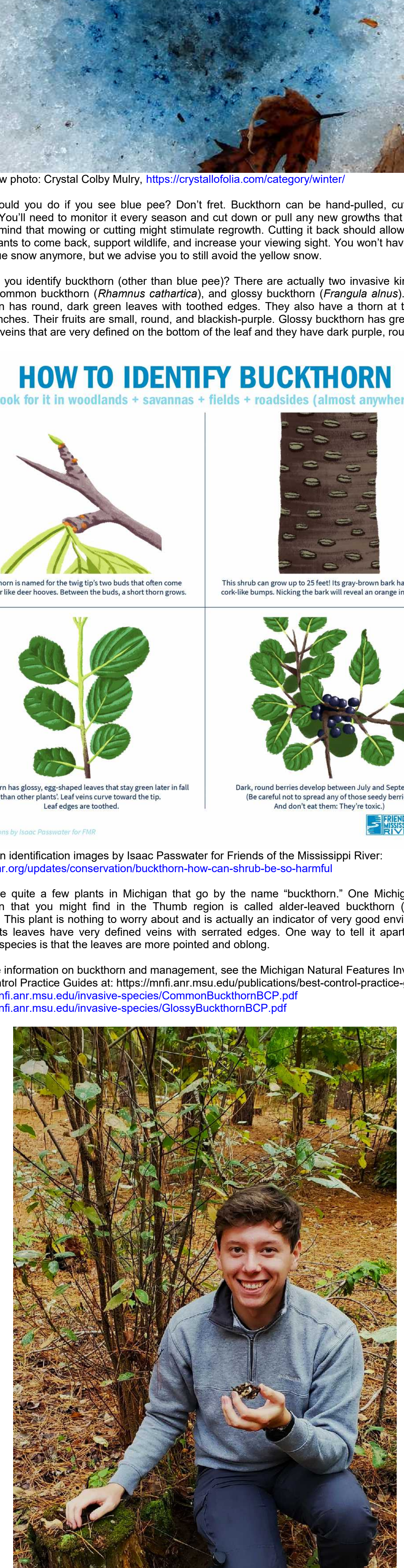
In this case, our own enjoyment of the fall's natural beauty goes hand in hand with the trees' welfare. Hopefully, through policy change and being good stewards, we can both keep our forests healthy and keep taking part in our seasonal traditions that revolve around the fall foliage, with the fine lift at its outset and gradual shuffling through our woods, here in the Thumb land of Michigan.

To read more about climate change's impact on autumn foliage and tree health in general, you can visit these pages for a brief read: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/fall-foliage-disrupted-by-climate-change-might-be-new-normal>

<https://www.neefusa.org/story/climate-change/leaves-they-are-changing>

You can also read the rest of the PBS interview with Bill Keeton on this page:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-climate-change-is-making-fall-foliage-less-colorful#:~:text=The%20other%20thing%20is%20the,rainfall%20and%20wet%2C%20saturated%20soils>



TLC volunteer Maddy Gardiner

Maddy Gardiner spends her time traveling between North Branch and Traverse City, Michigan where she substitute teaches for the Traverse Area School District. Her free time is mostly taken up by volunteer work, exploring local areas and nearby cities, and creative writing. She became interested in nature-writing after taking an ecocriticism class and a few nature-oriented writing classes during her undergraduate at Northern Michigan University. She is also starting a blog about sea and lake life, which piqued her interest after working a number of years as a lighthouse tour guide and museum docent on Lake Superior.

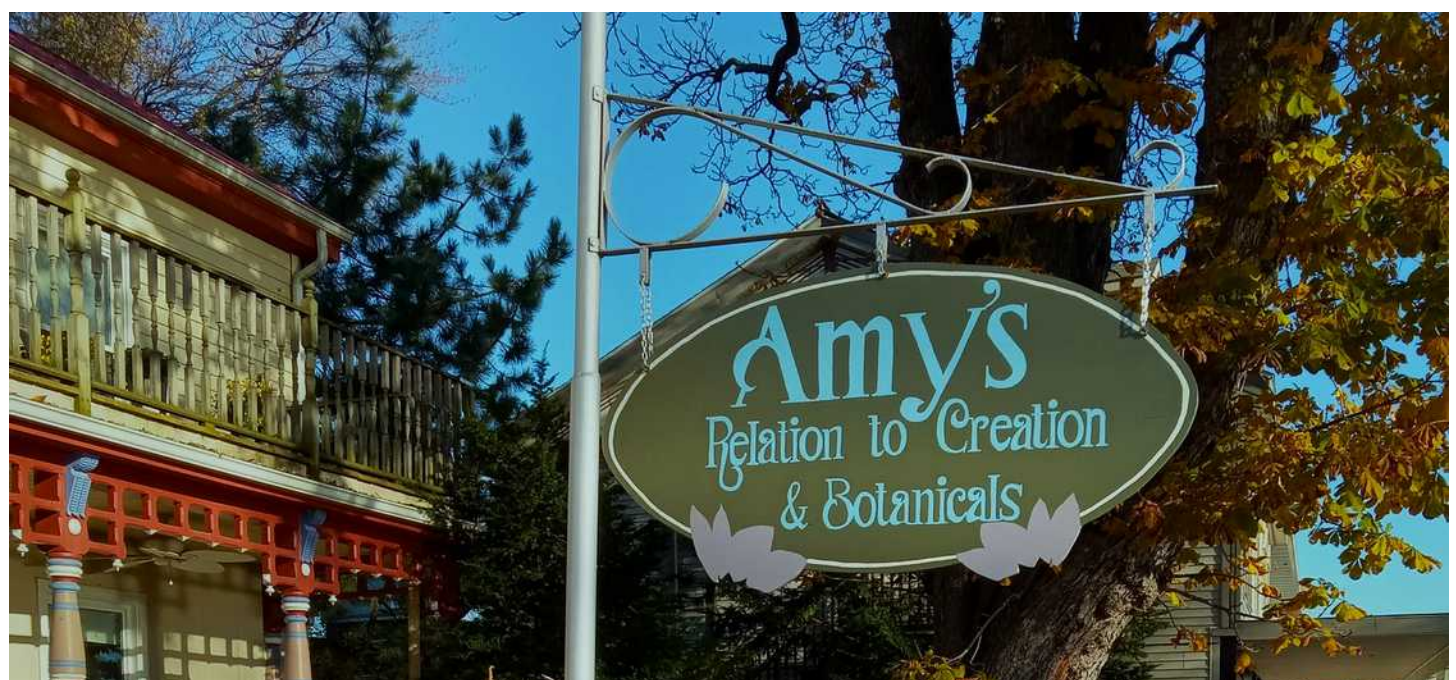
## Don't Eat the Yellow Snow. Don't Eat the Blue Snow Either.

By Lance McCarty, TLC Volunteer

Lance McCarty recently contacted the TLC looking for work between other land protection employment. As winter possibly sets in, and maybe we get more snow, Lance tells us about a different kind of color.

We all know not to eat the yellow snow, but sometimes, the snow can be as winxend window cleaner. There is a common invasive plant called buckthorn that could be found in your backyard and spots of blue snow might be an indicator that you have buckthorn nearby. Buckthorn is an aggressive woody shrub that forms dense thickets that block sight, hinder mobility, reduce habitat, and reduce food for wildlife.

In the dead of winter, deer, rabbits, and other animals that are on the search for food sometimes find themselves desperate with few native food sources around, and buckthorn is available. When animals resort to eating buckthorn, a compound in buckthorn bark turns their pee blue.



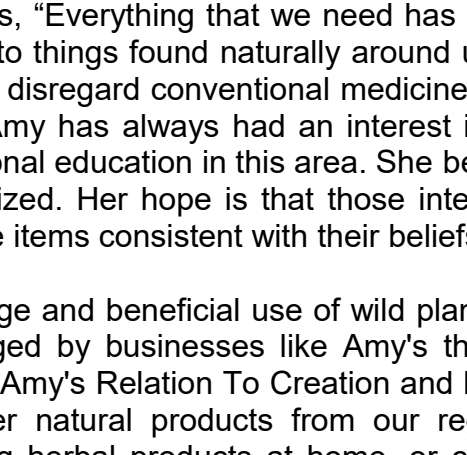
Blue snow photo: Crystal Colby Mulry, <https://crystallofolia.com/category/winter/>

What should you do if you see blue pee? Don't fret. Buckthorn can be hand-pulled, cut back, or mowed. You'll need to monitor it every season and cut down or pull any new growths that come up. Keep in mind that mowing or cutting might stimulate regrowth. Cutting it back should allow Michigan native plants to come back, support wildlife, and increase your viewing sight. You won't have to worry about blue snow anymore, but we advise you to still avoid the yellow snow.

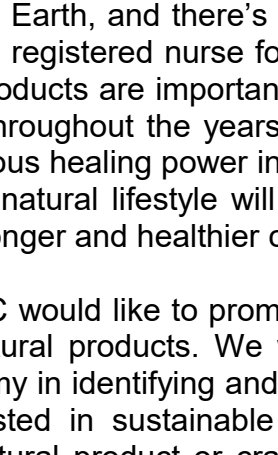
How can you identify buckthorn (other than blue pee)? There are actually two invasive kinds in our region; common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), and glossy buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*). Common buckthorn has round, dark green leaves with toothed edges. They also have a thorn at the end of their branches. Their fruits are small, round, and blackish-purple. Glossy buckthorn has green leaves with leaf veins that are very defined on the bottom of the leaf and they have dark purple, round fruits.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY BUCKTHORN

Look for it in woodlands + savannas + fields + roadsides (almost anywhere)



Buckthorn is named for the twig tip's two buds that often come together like deer hooves. Between the buds, a short thorn grows.



This shrub can grow up to 25 feet! Its gray-brown bark has flakes or cork-like bumps. Nicking the bark will reveal an orange inner tissue.



Buckthorn has glossy, egg-shaped leaves that stay green later in fall than other plants'. Leaf veins curve toward the tip. Leaf edges are toothed.



Dark, round berries develop between July and September. (Be careful not to spread any of those seedy berries! And don't eat them: They're toxic.)

Illustrations by Isaac Passwater for FMR



Buckthorn identification images by Isaac Passwater for Friends of the Mississippi River:

<https://fmr.org/updates/conservation/buckthorn-how-can-shrub-be-so-harmful>

There are quite a few plants in Michigan that go by the name "buckthorn." One Michigan native buckthorn that you might find in the Thumb region is called alder-leaved buckthorn (*Rhamnus alnifolia*). This plant is nothing to worry about and is actually an indicator of very good environmental quality. Its leaves have very defined veins with serrated edges. One way to tell it apart from the invasive species is that the leaves are more pointed and oblong.

For more information on buckthorn and management, see the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, Best Control Practice Guides at: <https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/publications/best-control-practice-guides>

<https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/invasive-species/CommonBuckthornBCP.pdf>

<https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/invasive-species/GlossyBuckthornBCP.pdf>



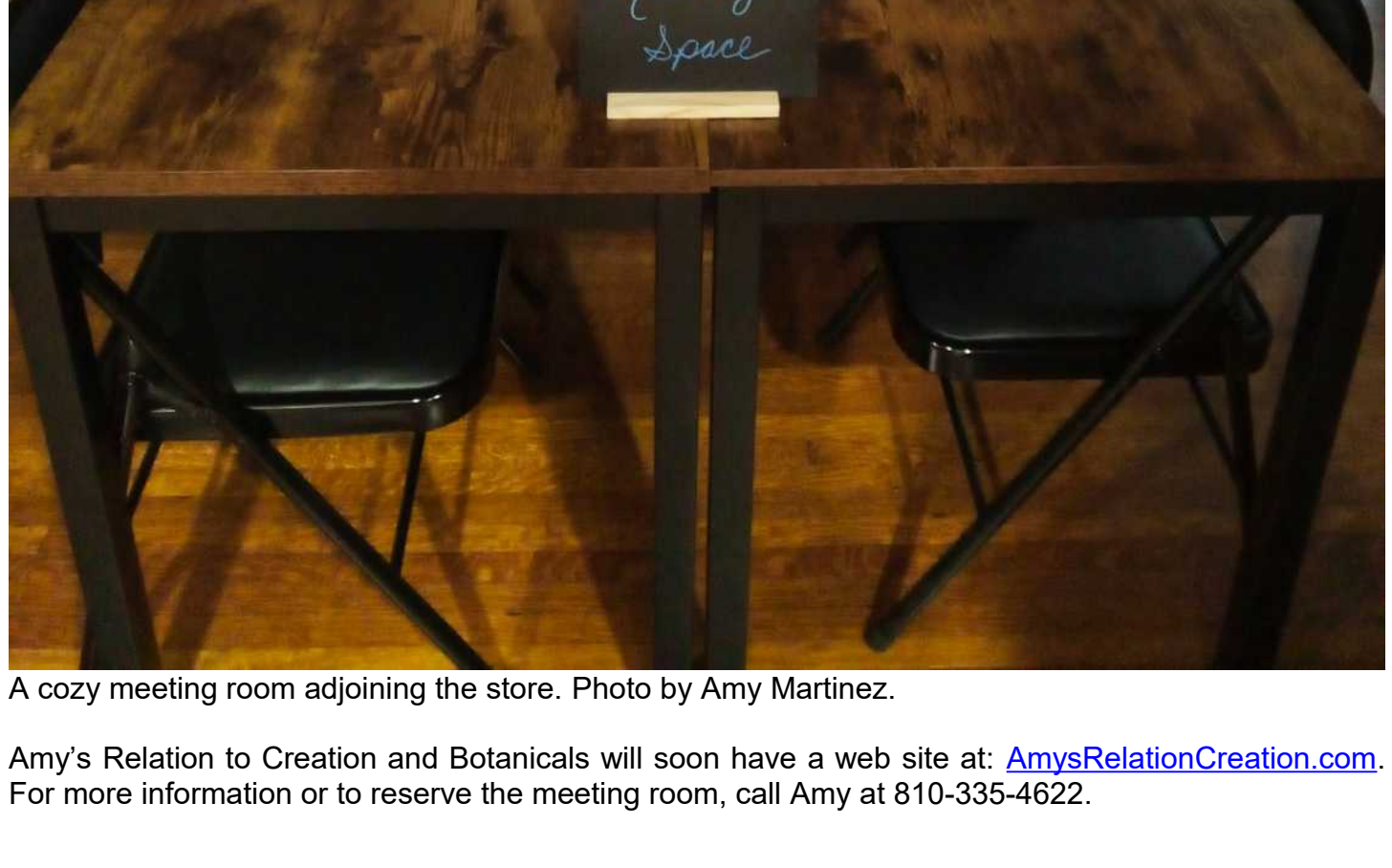
TLC volunteer Lance McCarty holding a piece of heterobasidium root disease fungus in a Red Pine plantation near Gaylord, Michigan.

Lance McCarty has a passion for plants and has been working with people and invasive species all over Michigan. He graduated with a degree in environmental science with a biology focus from Eastern Michigan University. Most recently, he has been educating folks on how to reduce the spread of invasive species and how to identify invasive species that threaten our state, like spotted lanternfly.

## Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals

Marine City

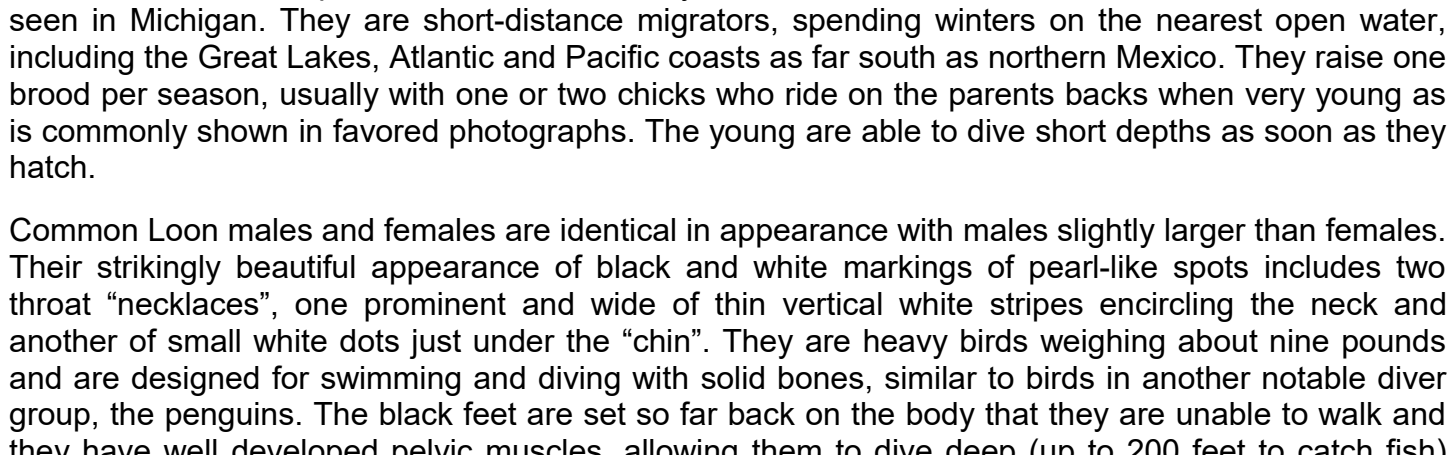
A unique family-owned and operated botanical store recently opened in Marine City - Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals, located at 256 South Water Street in a nicely restored old home now serving as a commercial space less than a block from the Saint Clair River. A variety of natural products are available including teas, coffees, utensils, dried herbs, live plants, herbal tinctures, essential oils, salves, and many other medicinal, wellness, personal care, and cleaning products. Owner, Amy Martinez, is expanding her offering with things like natural makeup, medicinal silver, honey, maple syrup, and more products from local artisans and crafters. She is also seeking collectors who can source locally-collected herbs and other natural items. An article in The Times Herald about Amy's new store caught our attention because of her focus on natural, largely unprocessed herbal products and sourcing of local natural materials, something we need more of.



Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals store front in Marine City. Photo by Amy Martinez.

Amy says, "Everything that we need has been provided for us on Earth, and there's so many health benefits to things found naturally around us". Having worked as a registered nurse for 13 years, she does not disregard conventional medicine, but believes natural products are important to support our health. Amy has always had an interest in natural healing and throughout the years, continued her professional education in this area. She believes there is tremendous healing power in nature and it is underutilized. Her hope is that those interested in living a more natural lifestyle will find a place to purchase items consistent with their beliefs and help to build a stronger and healthier community.

Knowledge and beneficial use of wild plants is something the TLC would like to promote and we are encouraged by businesses like Amy's that focuses on local natural products. We will continue to promote Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals and assist Amy in identifying and sourcing herbs and other natural products from our region. If you are interested in sustainable wild-collecting, producing herbal products at home, or can offer some other natural product or craft, here is your chance to supply a local business.



Windmill Hill Farm raw natural wildflower honey from Crosswell. Photo by Amy Martinez.

Owner Amy Martinez, has has set forth important guiding standards for Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals that benefit our environment, other local businesses, and the general welfare and sustainability of our local community: **Natural Ingredients** - All products should have natural ingredients and be as indigenous as possible to our location; **Eco-Friendly Packaging** - Packaging should be made with natural ingredients such as paper, metal, or glass; **Locally Sourced** - Products should be made as local as possible in order to support other small business owners and artisans; **Good Morals** - Companies should have morals aligning with harvesting sustainably and supporting our environment in a healthy manner.

Amy's Relation to Creation and Botanicals is open from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM Tuesday through Saturday. In addition to the store, Amy also offers a meeting room available for rent for small groups, monthly presentations, wellness consultations, and tutoring for nursing students. Amy also plans to use the meeting room for presentations about various health topics. On Sundays, there is a Bible study from 9:00 to 10:00 AM.



A cozy meeting room adjoining the store. Photo by Amy Martinez.

Amy's Relation to Creation and Botanicals will soon have a web site at: [AmysRelationCreation.com](https://AmysRelationCreation.com). For more information or to reserve the meeting room, call Amy at 810-335-4622.

## The Tale of the Loon's Necklace

By Tom Dennis



Common Loon, *Gavia immer*

Common Loons are not commonly seen in the Blue Water area during the summer months however, having just returned from a long boating trip to Isle Royale National Park on Lake Superior, this beautiful waterfowl and its ethereal song is on my mind. If you're tempted now you can take a five-hour drive and find them in north country lakes or bide your time and catch one migrating south in November or December along the St. Clair River.

Common Loons nest on quiet lakes and large ponds north of 48 degrees latitude, preferring those with islands where they build their nest on the water's edge hopefully out of range of egg eating predators such as raccoons and mink. They are loyal to breeding sites as long as the waters are clean, clear and abundant with fish and, the shoreline is undeveloped. The genus name *Gavia* is the Latin name for an unidentified sea bird and the specific *immer* is related to the Swedish immer, the blackened ashes of a fire (referring to the Loon's dark plumage).

There are five loon species worldwide but only the Common Loon and Red-throated Loon can be seen in Michigan. They are short-distance migrators, spending winters on the nearest open water, including the Great Lakes, Atlantic and Pacific coasts as far south as northern Mexico. They raise one brood per season, usually with one or two chicks who ride on the parents backs when very young as is commonly shown in favored photographs. The young are able to dive short depths as soon as they hatch.

Common Loon males and females are identical in appearance with males slightly larger than females. Their strikingly beautiful appearance of black and white markings of pearl-like spots includes two throat "necklaces", one prominent and wide of thin vertical white stripes encircling the neck and another of small white dots just under the "chin". They are heavy birds weighing about nine pounds and are designed for swimming and diving with solid bones, similar to birds in another notable diver group, the penguins. The black feet are set so far back on the body that they are unable to walk and they have well developed pelvic muscles, allowing them to dive deep (up to 200 feet to catch fish) and maneuver extremely well for the chase. They must run long-distance on the water to achieve



flight and therefore they are limited to waters having a “runway” of a few hundred yards. They sit very low in the water, often with only the head showing. They have dagger-like bill that is used to catch food and is also a formidable defense weapon.

The songs include the wail, tremolo, yodel, and hoot, all of which are communicate a distinct message and the loons are most vocal at dusk, dawn, and throughout the night. The wail is a long call of up to three notes and is often compared to and confused with a wolf’s howl. It is used to communicate location with other family members. The tremolo call, sometimes referred to as the “laughing” call, is characterized by its short, wavering quality and is used to communicate location while flying and distress with the call intensified according to the level of discomfort with the situation. The yodel is a long and complex call made only by males to establish and maintain territories and this call is slightly altered when a new tenant wins the territory, distinguishing the bird from the previous owner. Listen to a loon here: <https://freesound.org/embed/sound/iframe/39339/simple/large/>

Common Loons are well loved by mankind and their song is often used in movies to denote secluded natural settings and suspense. They are the state bird of Minnesota and the Provincial bird of Ontario. They are also the subject of children’s novels, movies and songs and are prominent in many Native American tales. The tale of the loon’s necklace was handed down in many versions by Pacific Coast tribes. Although they are not listed as a threatened species, the birds are adversely affected by habitat development (destruction) and pollution so we can all help them thrive by using our water resources with respect for the natural environment and by protecting pristine lands from development.



You can learn more about birds and nature by attending Blue Water Audubon meetings. Check the Blue Water Audubon Society Facebook page for the latest meeting details, local bird sightings, discussions, and events. Be sure to “friend” us!

Tom Dennis is a resident of Fort Gratiot where he and Laurie Melms Dennis, his wife of 51 years, tend to their bird and butterfly friendly gardens. He is a speaker and free-lance writer, passionate birder, advanced master gardener, creation scientist, and naturalist, with degrees from Michigan State University in Zoology and Biology. Tom is an active member of Blue Water Audubon Society, Master Gardeners of St. Clair County, Port Huron Civic Theater, Ross Bible Church, Tapestry Garden Club, Blueways of St. Clair, and is a steward of the Blue Water Riverwalk with Friends of the St. Clair River.

## You Got The Power Save Nature Any Place! Sustain Native Animals & Plants!

This year, we have highlighted restoration of nature on private land, citizen efforts in their neighborhoods, and programs like Homegrown National Park, National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat, and the TLC Naturehood registry. For more information, see our previous newsletters.

As winter draws nigh, do everything you can to support native wildlife through the lean months. Providing food is most helpful, especially for birds during the coldest temperatures. Providing drinking water throughout the winter is also very important when most surface water is normally frozen.

One of the best and easiest things you can do, or could have done, is simply leave the leaves. Here again are a few articles from the National Wildlife Federation on what you can do, or not do, in the fall to make your yard more beautiful, provide a source of medicinal plants, and help a variety of animals get through the winter:

National Leave The Leaves Month  
<https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/About/National-Initiatives/Leave-the-Leaves-Month>

Forget Fall Cleanup! Autumn Gardening Tips To Help Pollinators  
<https://www.nwf.org/Home/Magazines/National-Wildlife/2023/Fall/Gardening/Fall-Gardening-Tips-Pollinators>

Seven Species That Need You To Leave The Leaves  
<https://blog.nwf.org/2023/10/seven-species-that-need-you-to-leave-the-leaves/>

While the world is distracted by the selfish money part of land ownership, there can be a quiet and benevolent aspect of owning land. You have the power to help restore nature, to support native species, to improve our air, water, soil, and climate, and to benefit all of humanity, now and for generations to come, all right where you live. Every little piece of land matters now, whether it serves as habitat for native species year-round or is just a stop-over for transients. If you have a lot of land, you can have even more impact. Even if you don't own land but have a few flower pots or a small patch of dirt at your disposal, you will surely benefit a few of our beleaguered pollinators. Besides that, there is a lot to be said for adding a little beauty to our world.

## TLC Winter Stewardship

If you want to work on any of these projects, let us know.

Date	Activity	Location
December - February	park entrance and trail work	Bidwell Sanctuary
December - February	Black Locust removal	Tranquil Ridge Sanctuary
December - February	Black Locust removal	Croissant Sanctuary
December - February	clean-up	North Street Station

## Clyde Historical Society and TLC-CHS Heritage Event

The Clyde Historical Society meets on the third Thursday of each month. The next meeting is not until March 21 at 6:30 pm at the Ruby Lions Club Hall located at 4535 Brott Road in Ruby. The Clyde Historical Society promotes history education and preservation in Clyde Township.

For more information, see the Clyde Historical Society Facebook page at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481890455361159/>

The TLC is planning a natural heritage event for next spring with the Clyde Historical Society. There are no definite plans yet, but we envision an exhibition combining local history and local natural history, or in other words, our natural heritage. Various participants will be invited with a focus on what makes our region unique, interesting, and important from both a historical and natural perspective. We have a lot going for us here in the Thumb and Blue Water Area with some fascinating stories if you do a little digging. If you want to help or exhibit, let us know.

## Ecology News

If you have any ecologically oriented news articles you'd like to share, please e-mail them to us and they could be included in a future newsletter. There is so much news these days, most of it bad, that we have limited articles mostly to those specific to our region. The commentary here is solely the expression of TLC Executive Director Bill Collins.

**Whitmer Signs Energy Bills To Make Michigan Use Clean Energy By 2040**  
No doubt we need renewable energy, but not at the expense of eliminating local control. The new laws remove authority from communities to review large-scale wind and solar projects. This sets a bad precedent. They are coming for local sand and gravel mining review next.  
<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/whitmer-signs-energy-bills-make-michigan-use-clean-energy-2040>

**Milkweed Not To Be Considered Noxious Weed**  
A recently passed bill will prevent milkweed and other species in the genus Asclepias from being classified as noxious weeds. Most noxious weed lists need serious revision. Several species are not really weeds and many highly invasive species are still allowed.  
<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2023-2024/billanalysis/House/pdf/2023-HLA-4857-F34622DE.pdf>  
<https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2023/10/milkweed-is-not-a-weed-michigan-may-make-that-state-law.html>

**Gone Nearly A Century, Michigan Anglers Can Again Catch Arctic Grayling**  
Imagine how great it must be to see Grayling in Michigan streams again.  
<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/gone-nearly-century-michigan-anglers-can-again-catch-arctic-grayling>

**Feral Goldfish Are Menacing Great Lakes: We’re Going To Need A Bigger Bowl**  
These things are huge, but not unmanageable, yet.  
<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/feral-goldfish-are-menacing-great-lakes-were-going-need-bigger-bowl>

**In Antler-Obsessed Michigan, The State Begs Hunters To Shoot More Does**  
Eastern White-tailed Deer are extremely destructive to our native forests. Hard to believe that deer hunting has declined so much in 30 years. It may be time to bring back commercial hunting while also supporting more predators.  
<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/antler-obsessed-michigan-state-begs-hunters-shoot-more-does>

**Microplastics Found In Clouds Could Affect Weather And Global Temperatures**  
Like PFAS, PFOS, and other organofluorine compounds, microplastics are beyond what you may have imagined.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/nov/16/microplastic-pollution-changing-weather-climate>

**How The Climate Crisis Is Affecting Breeding Birds**  
Southern species are expanding while northern species are being restricted.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2023/nov/16/how-the-climate-crisis-is-affecting-breeding-birds>

**For Birds, Earlier Springtime Means Fewer Young**  
Breeding is out-of-sync with food sources, meaning that eventually, many species will need to keep moving north, but into completely different vegetative zones. Will birds of the central deciduous forest make it in boreal habitats in Canada?  
<https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2023/for-birds-earlier-springtime-means-fewer-young>

**Climate Change Is Harming Michigan Hunting And Fishing, Groups Warn Lawmakers**  
Just as Arctic Grayling are being restored, Michigan streams may become too warm to support them.  
<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/climate-change-harming-michigan-hunting-and-fishing-groups-warn>

**As Rain Patterns Evolve In Michigan, Farmers Adjust To Droughts And Deluges**  
If this past summer is an indication of things to come, it will be very difficult to adjust.  
<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/rain-patterns-evolve-michigan-farmers-adjust-droughts-and-deluges>

**‘No Normal Seasons Any More’: Seed Farmers Struggle Amid The Climate Crisis**  
It has become difficult to even maintain a garden, let alone keep every variety going and collect seed.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/16/seed-farmers-climate-change>

**Plants’ Ability To Fight Climate Change Is Weakening**  
Saying that plants need carbon dioxide to grow, so more is better, is like saying that people need water, so we should drop them in the middle of Lake Huron.  
[msutoday.msu.edu/news/2023/plants-ability-to-fight-climate-change-weakening](https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2023/plants-ability-to-fight-climate-change-weakening)

**Plants Could Make Air Pollution Worse On A Warming Planet**  
We can’t afford to have oaks and poplars emitting isoprene any longer, so time to get rid of them all. Does anyone remember the 1972 film “Silent Running”?  
<https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2023/plants-could-make-air-pollution-worse>

**Agricultural Conservation Practices And The Impact On The Great Lakes**  
It can’t be all of those tiled fields.  
[msutoday.msu.edu/news/2023/research-agricultural-conservation-practices-reduce-environmental-impact-great-lakes](https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2023/research-agricultural-conservation-practices-reduce-environmental-impact-great-lakes)

**MSU Research Shows Emerald Ash Borer Threatening Tree Species Vital To Indigenous Cultures**  
Vital to all of us, but what a shame that ancient cultural crafts and knowledge may be lost.  
<https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2023/msu-research-shows-emerald-ash-borer-threatening-tree-species-vital-to-indigenous-cultures>

**Michigan DNR Warns Residents To Squish Invasive Lanternflies**  
After what is expected to be a mild winter, really look for Lanternflies and other pests this spring.  
<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/michigan-dnr-warns-residents-squish-invasive-lanternflies>

**Michigan Sees Another Year Of Double-Digit Growth For Outdoor Industry**  
And yet, the TLC has not received any response from the outdoor industry, the Michigan Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry, nor Heart of the Lakes to simply discuss support for our projects, like the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.  
<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/michigan-sees-another-year-double-digit-growth-outdoor-industry>

## Help Fund The TLC With CARS

Like many non-profit organizations these days, you can now support the TLC by donating old vehicles through CARS - Charitable Adult Rides and Services. CARS donates 70% of the net income from all vehicle donations to their non-profit partners such as the TLC.



Depending on your tax situation, your vehicle may be more valuable as an itemized deduction than the income you might get by selling it. Not only do you avoid the hassle of advertising and dealing with potential buyers, but you don't need to get the vehicle in running condition. CARS accepts any vehicle, driveable or not.

To donate, see our donation page at: <https://careasy.org/nonprofit/thumb-land-conservancy>

Or call 855-500-7433

## TLC Membership

With your membership, the TLC is better enabled to protect important natural areas in our region. We offer two membership levels: Individual and Family \$40, and Business \$200. Members will receive our e-mail news. Membership is also available in trade for volunteer help. You can also make donations in honor or memory of someone or something. For donations of \$100 or more, your name will be listed on our web site. For larger donations, please contact us for details. Make checks payable to “Thumb Land Conservancy”. Mail checks and forms to: Thumb Land Conservancy, 4975 Maple Valley Road, Marlette, Michigan 48453. Make sure you provide us with your mailing address and e-mail address. Providing a phone number is optional but helpful. You can also make donations through the Square link on our web site at: [ThumbLand.org](https://ThumbLand.org)

