



The Thumb Naturalist

Journal of the Thumb Land Conservancy

Supporting nature and naturalists of Michigan's Thumb region
and adjacent Ontario

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Contents

- *The Thumb Naturalist October Special Fundraising Edition*
- 1. • *The Carls Foundation TLC Capacity Grant*
- 2. • *The New Touma Family Sanctuary*
- 3. • *The Touma Family*
- 4. • *Save Sibley Prairie Coalition*
- 5. • *Nicky Marcot, Rhizome*
- 6. • *Lakeside Cemetery Tour*
- *Morley Sanctuary Restoration and Development*
- *Utility Poles Donation*
- *The Stompening*
- *Teddy's Excellent Adventures*
- *From the Desk of the ED*
- *Remembering John Kennedy*
- *Amy's Relation to Creation Botanicals*
- *Wildlife Thrown Away*
- *TLC Winter Stewardship*
- *Clyde Historical Society*
- *Support the TLC*

In the closing months of 2025 and new year of 2026, the Thumb Land Conservancy focused on fundraising to increase our long-term ability to pay stewardship staff. Thanks to a match grant of \$100,000 from The Carls Foundation, we will be able to accomplish this goal if we can raise the full \$100,000 match by June of 2027.

On October 28, the TLC acquired a new preserve; the 31.62-acre Touma Family Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot, a critical connection for our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. The Touma family are great supporters of the TLC.

This past summer, the TLC joined the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, a group of several environmental organizations working to protect 440 acres of the well known Sibley Prairie complex south of Detroit in Brownstown Township.

Not long after the TLC was awarded The Carls Foundation match grant, we got acquainted with Nicky Marcot of Rhizome Services through our work on Sibley Prairie. We soon contracted her services as a development director.

On September 27, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins gave a presentation at the grave site of Port Huron botanist Charles K. Dodge and his wife Millie for the annual Lakeside Cemetery Tour of the Saint Clair County Genealogy and History Society.

On October 9, the TLC met with Bangor Township officials to discuss development of a nature park on the Morley Sanctuary and adjacent Bangor Township park land. If all goes to plan, the two parks will become one larger park of 140 acres.

Lansing Community College donated about 20 used utility poles to the TLC, to be used for structures in the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. Xtreme Powerline Construction of Port Huron hauled the poles at no charge.

To begin the new year, TLC Volunteer Extraordinaire Connie Neese led "The Stompening" on our Cunningham Connector Sanctuary. Everyone had a good time stompening out invasive Phragmites in preparation for spadening.

The TLC did a lot more since our previous issues of The Thumb Naturalist. You can read some of it in this issue. If you are interested in submitting anything for The Thumb Naturalist or have questions, please e-mail or call.

Bill Collins, Executive Director
Thumb Land Conservancy



The Thumb Naturalist

October Special Fundraising Edition

If you didn't see it, the TLC issued a Special Fundraising Edition of The Thumb Naturalist in October. This was motivated largely by the \$100,000 match grant awarded by The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan to help the TLC build the capacity and future sustainability of our organization.

The Thumb Naturalist will still focus on TLC projects, nature education, and outdoor recreation. You may have noticed that we have a new format also. Instead of sending everyone a PDF file or pasting the newsletter directly into an e-mail message and hoping the formatting doesn't go crazy, we are now using a free program from our on-line donation platform Givebutter.com. We changed to Givebutter because it has more functions for non-profit organizations like us.

All of this came about because of our new contract Development Director, Nicky Marcot of

Rhizome Services. She has been a great help. Not only has she helped us apply for grants, contact potential funders, design a new fundraising package and brochure, but has pushed us to finally update our web site, which hopefully is on its way soon. More about Nicky later.



Yellow Lady-slipper orchid

The Carls Foundation

TLC Capacity Match Grant

The TLC was informed on June 20 that we have been awarded a capacity match grant of \$100,000 from The Carls Foundation of Bloomfield Hills to help fund TLC worker pay. We won't get any of the money until we raise at least \$50,000 by this coming June. We then have until June of 2027 to raise an additional \$50,000. For every dollar donated by TLC supporters in our region, The Carls Foundation will donate another dollar, up to \$100,000. If we are successful, the TLC will have raised a total of \$200,000 by June of 2027, which will help

THE CARLS FOUNDATION

ensure that we are able to continue paying our workers for several years.

Attracting this generous match grant from The Carls Foundation reflects how far the TLC has come from our founding in 2008. We have proven that we can take on major preserve acquisitions and steward them. But in the past few years, the TLC has greatly increased its preserve acreage, and also our preserve range; from Anchor Bay to Saginaw Bay, Burtchville to Ortonville. and a few places between.

We also have very ambitious goals for future land protection, public outdoor recreation, and education. For the past two years, we have been able to support a small but dedicated team thanks in no small part to our sustaining donors.

As a reminder, due to funding limitations, except for limited contract work, we did not pay anyone from our founding in 2008 until 2024. The TLC Executive Director is not paid and no one receives a salary. With a substantial donation in 2024 from the estate of Dottie Craig, our beloved senior Board Member who passed away in late 2023, we began paying a small group of workers at \$20 per hour. Among our newest workers are Program and Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley, Stewardship Assistant Jason Sawyer, and Stewardship Assistant Jake Defrain. Their work has increased our capacity and resulted in great progress in stewarding our preserves. But of course, our thanks also goes out to our Super Volunteer Connie Neese and her crew for their work on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast and Cunningham Connector sanctuaries, TLC Member and contractor Darrin Koester of Koester Maintenance and Building Repair in Fort Gratiot, and also TLC Board Member Dan Rhein for all of his hard work on the Loznak and Bidwell sanctuaries.

A huge thank you once again to The Carls Foundation and especially Executive Director Elizabeth Stieg for this TLC capacity match grant. The Carls Foundation shares our vision for the Thumb, a generally neglected region in terms of natural area protection and public outdoor recreation opportunities.

The TLC really needs your help to ensure that the organization is able to continue operating and fulfilling our long-term mission. Please consider a



Former TLC Board Member Dottie Craig at The Village Club in Bloomfield Hills. 2022 October 13.

generous donation to the TLC to help us match The Carls Foundation challenge grant. For every dollar you give, The Carls Foundation will give the TLC another dollar.

If you've been reading our newsletters and annual reports, you know that the TLC is all about preserve acquisition and stewardship to protect our natural areas and provide opportunities for outdoor public recreation. The TLC is a volunteer-driven organization focused almost entirely on land protection and stewardship, with virtually no money spent on administration.

As we seek to expand our capacity to steward our preserves and acquire new land, please consider supporting us! The TLC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity. All donations are tax-deductible. Donations can be made through the Givebutter link on our website: ThumbLand.org. We also accept checks written to "Thumb Land Conservancy" and mailed to our address below. Please include your mailing address and your e-mail address and/or phone number.

The New Touma Family Sanctuary

Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

Our new 31.62-acre Touma Family Sanctuary is located north of Brace Road at Parker Road in Fort Gratiot. It is critical to connecting the north and south sections of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park, and to routing the coastal walking trail that would connect the Shorewood Forrest sanctuaries with the Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner Water Works Preserve and TLC Peltier Sanctuary to the north. Without acquiring the Touma Family Sanctuary, extending the coastal trail through this area may have been impossible as the TLC made purchase offers on adjacent parcels to the east without success.

On 2025 July 09, the TLC received a signed purchase agreement for the property granting us one year of fundraising time while the owner could continue to list and market the property. In mid September the seller's agent informed us that

they had a better offer, giving us 45 days to close or withdraw our offer. For lack of successful fundraising, we made use of a private loan and closed on the property on October 29.

The Touma Family Sanctuary is located on the western most dune ridge of the dune and swale complex in Saint Clair County, part of the same ridge that runs southeast to near the Blue Water Bridges and upon which Lakeside Cemetery and Saint Mary's Cemetery in Port Huron are located. Much of this large dune ridge on the Touma Family Sanctuary was mined for sand decades ago, but most of it remains intact, consisting of a mix of sparsely vegetated dune-like open sand, and wooded shrub thickets with Black Oak and what appear to be Hill's Oak hybrids with strong Scarlet Oak characteristics unique to the Port Huron area. This is the site where, several years ago, TLC Member Ray Peltier pulled a large Eastern Hognose Snake from its burrow in the main sand ridge, the photograph of which the TLC has used numerous times in promoting the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. As old ground disturbance took the sand ridge on this sanctuary back to more open conditions that existed centuries ago, it will be interesting to explore to see what might be remnant here.

Most of the Touma Family Sanctuary consists of dune and swale forest except open areas on the highest sand ridge and two man-made ponds, one near the center of the parcel and the other at the north end of the parcel adjacent to the Galbraith Drain which flows directly to Lake Huron. The preserve consists generally of about 13 acres of southern swamp forest wetland swales, about 10 acres of mesic to dry-mesic southern forest upland and ridges, about 6.5



acres of sparsely vegetated open sand, and about 2 acres of ponds and marshy edges. Dominant vegetation is typical of the dune and swale forest in this region, the canopy consisting largely of Silver Maple, Eastern Cottonwood, and American Elm, with Green Ash, Black Ash, and other associated understory species of sandy muck wetland swales. The upland sand ridges are dominated largely by Black Oak, possibly Hill's Oak, Red Oak, Black Cherry, Big-tooth Aspen, and other associated understory species of dry-mesic to mesic sand. The primary invasive weed on the parcel is Reed – *Phragmites australis* subspecies *australis* with about 10%, or about 1.5 acre, of coverage concentrated around the ponds and adjacent wetland. Invasive shrubs on the parcel are moderate, with about 10%, or about 1.5 acre, of coverage by Common Privet - *Ligustrum vulgare*, Tartarian Honeysuckle - *Lonicera tatarica*, Japanese Barberry - *Berberis thunbergii*, Asiatic Bittersweet - *Celastrus orbiculatus* and Garlic Mustard - *Alliaria petiolata*.

The Touma Family

Our supporters are obviously very important to the continued work of the Thumb Land Conservancy, and not all of them are local, at least not in recent years. Bess Touma, her sister Chris Powell, and Chris's husband, Bern Smith, live in Washington DC. Chris and Bess grew up in Port Huron on Lake Huron. Their father, Dr. George C. Touma, the son of Lebanese immigrants, was a local dentist and lived his entire life in Port Huron until he passed away in 1998. He raised his family of five children on the lake that he loved, and they happily spent their childhood swimming, sailing and growing to know and love the Lake Huron environment.

Bess's and Chris's brother, Mike Touma, who passed away in March of 2025, turned his love for Lake Huron into a successful career as a naval architect in Washington DC. Mike's wife Patsi was born and raised in Gaylord, Michigan, but also grew to love Port Huron. They would often

The previous owner of the Touma Family Sanctuary dug extensive ditches that drain wetland swales to the adjacent Galbraith Drain. Multiple field tile lines were likely installed to drain additional wetland in an attempt to create deer habitat. As part of site restoration, ditches will be filled and tile lines cut and blocked. This drainage appears to have substantially diminished wetland hydrology across the sanctuary and likely decreased the total wetland size. Restoration of surface water and shallow ground water retention in the wetland swales will improve water quality discharging to the Galbraith Drain which flows directly to Lake Huron less than 1 mile to the east. This will help alleviate down-stream flooding, help restore the wetland macro-invertebrate populations which serve as the base of the food chain, and will improve habitat suitability for amphibians, reptiles, birds, small mammals, and other wildlife inhabiting the dune and swale complex on the Touma Family Sanctuary.



Left to right: Bern Smith, Chris Powell, and Bess Touma.

vacation there with their children Andy, Laurie and Kevin. Two of the Touma sisters carried their love of the outdoors with them as they moved west of the Rockies. Carol lives in Oceanside, California with her husband Don. Lucy, lives in Park City, Utah with her husband Chris and daughters Catherine and Natalie.

Now living in Washington DC, Bess, Chris, and her husband Bern, are birders, outdoor enthusiasts, and involved in local and national conservation issues. Chris retired as Chief of Staff of the National Park Service. Bess manages the planned giving program for the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, California. Bern is retired from a career in property restoration in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has been involved with building public trails and provided the TLC with advice and references to help with our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park Trail.

Bess, Chris, and Bern are avid supporters of the TLC, having first learned about our work in 2020 through an article in the Port Huron Times Herald about our Bidwell Sanctuary acquisition and Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park project. They were immediately attracted to the work of the TLC and contacted us for more information. After a few phone discussions with TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, they made the decision to financially support the conservancy.

The Touma family stays current on what is happening in the Port Huron area and visits from time-to-time for family gatherings, as they did this past August when ten family members and friends joined eight TLC staff, board members, and volunteers for a walk on our new Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot where they saw first-hand the important natural features being protected by the TLC. The tour pointed out the importance of the dune and swale complex of forested ridges and wetlands that run parallel just west of Lake Huron. Since their childhood was focused on the lake, Bess and Chris were not

intimately familiar with this more inland, unique, and important natural area. Having the opportunity to walk on it and learn from the TLC deepened their commitment to the conservancy.

After our walk on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary, we were joined by a few more people and had a nice opportunity to meet for lunch at a house on Lake Huron where we shared stories and discussed various TLC projects and issues. It was there that the Touma family pledged a substantial donation to the TLC; this in addition to their already generous donations. At the same time, the TLC was in the process of acquiring the new 31.62-acre parcel on the north side of Brace Road; a critical part of our Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. Because of the generosity and encouragement of Bess, Chris, and Bern, the TLC Executive Board chose to honor them by naming our new preserve the "Touma Family Sanctuary".



Left to right: Bess Touma and Chris Powell sitting on the White Bench at the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary. Photograph by Bill Collins.



Left to right: Dave Ladensack, Monica Bannigan, Jake Defrain, Laurie Touma, Bern Smith in back, Patricia Touma in front of Bern, Joyce Savage, Bill Savage, Teddy Wiley, Bess Touma in front of Teddy, Bob Eppley behind Teddy, Connie Neese, Audrey Eppley, Dan Rhein, Travis Jodway, Blake Short, and Chris Powell.

Although the Toumas no longer live in Michigan, preserving the remaining parcels of dune and swale forest along Lake Huron is in their hearts. They know that as more people discover this wonderful area, development will increase, and the time to preserve these natural places will have passed. In their words, they are proud to be a part of the TLC, an effective and impactful organization, and look forward to working together to protect the natural heritage of Michigan's Thumb region. The family is grateful to have the Touma Family Sanctuary named in their honor. They hope residents and visitors will enjoy and appreciate the Touma Family Sanctuary and will also support the work of the TLC. They look forward to future trips where they will spend time enjoying the solace of this sanctuary and seeing first-hand which birds, frogs, snakes and rare plant species are calling the area home. The TLC truly appreciates the support and enthusiasm of the Touma family.

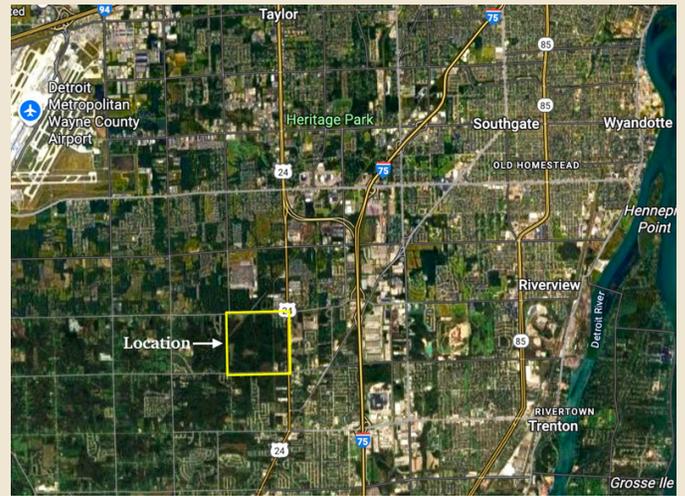
Save Sibley Prairie Coalition

This past summer, long-time friend and colleague in land protection, Jack Smiley, informed the TLC that 440 acres of the well known Sibley Prairie south of Detroit was soon to be auctioned. The TLC joined the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, a group of several environmental organizations, in an effort to protect this imperiled natural area. The coalition includes The Michigan Botanical Society, Ducks Unlimited, Friends of the Rouge, Legacy Land Conservancy, Detroit Bird Alliance, Michigan Land Conservancy, Sierra Club Southeast Michigan Group, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Wayne County Conservation District, and the Thumb Land Conservancy, among other groups and individuals.

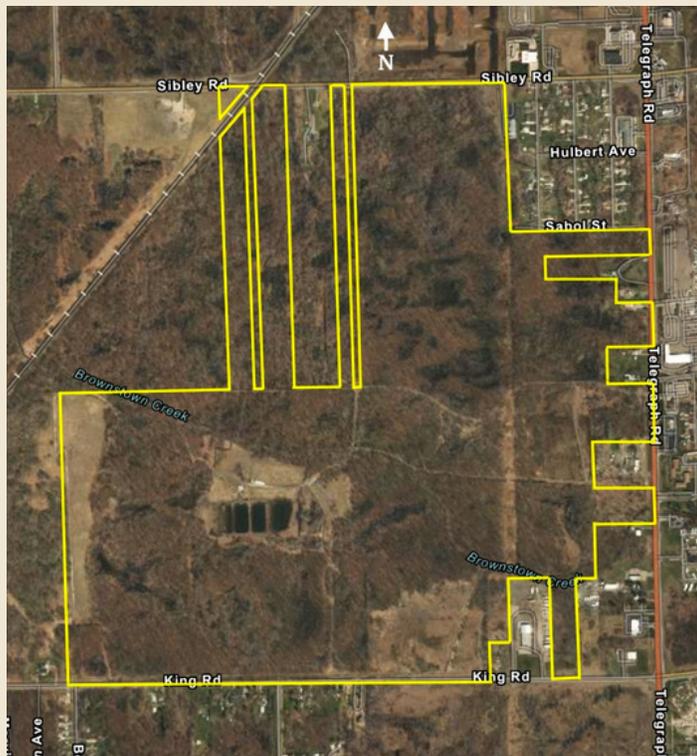
Back in the late 1980s, at the suggestion of Michigan Nature Association founder Bertha Daubendiek, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, first got acquainted with Jack Smiley, who was then President of the Detroit Audubon Society. Jack later went on to found the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, and most recently, the Michigan Land Conservancy. First as private ecological consultants, and later as members of the Michigan Nature Association, Bill and TLC President Cheryl Collins, briefly assisted Jack on a few protection projects in the 1990s and early 2000s, including an effort to oppose a large residential development on Sibley Prairie.

The 440 acres of Sibley Prairie we are now trying to protect are located along the south side of Sibley Road in Brownstown Township, Wayne County, Michigan. The prairie is historically part of a much larger lakeplain complex that covered much of the lakeplain south of Detroit and Downriver through northern Ohio.

The remaining Sibley Prairie complex is located largely between Sibley, Telegraph, King, and Inkster roads, just 4 miles southeast of Detroit Metropolitan Airport. It is Michigan's largest and highest quality lakeplain prairie remnant; a rich mosaic of forest, wetland, and prairie. Less than 1% of the original extent of Michigan's lakeplain prairie remains today. [Here](#) is a map link showing the location of the 440-acre Sibley Prairie property.



If the public would like to experience what parts of the Detroit area were like before most of it was developed, Sibley Prairie is it; an irreplaceable natural heritage for us, future generations, and the many wonderful and increasingly rare species that occur in few other places of the world. Look at an aerial photograph and you'll see that Sibley Prairie is located in one of the largest patches of green remaining at the south edge of metro Detroit. At nearly one square mile, Sibley Prairie is part of the biggest lakeplain prairie and savanna complex remaining in Michigan, but only a small piece of its former approximately 25 square-mile area.



Sibley Prairie parcel map from SaveSibleyPrairie.org.

As the last glacier receded, meltwaters deposited vast flat expanses of deep clay around the margins of the early Great Lakes. As water levels dropped, large parts of the lakeplain clay were left covered by sandy soils; a mix of ancient beaches, dunes, and meltwater flow deposits in broad channels. This varied landscape of shallow sands over thick clay is where lakeplain prairie and lakeplain oak openings, or savannas, developed and thrived for millennia.



Left: Remnant lakeplain prairie in western Marysville, Michigan showing Marsh Blazing-star (tall spikes prior to flowering), Wild-bergamot, and Black-eyed Susan. The landowner cut the entire area one day after this photo was taken. Right: Marsh Blazing-star in remnant lakeplain prairie in western Marysville, Michigan. Photographs by Teddy Wiley.

Sand ridges or knolls support oak-dominated savanna, known as oak openings, also covered by hickory, ash, sassafras, maple, cherry, serviceberry, hawthorn, dogwood, hazelnut, sumac, huckleberry, blueberry, Sweetfern, Bearberry, as well as forbs and grasses from the adjoining prairie. This prairie and savanna landscape was used by indigenous people for trails, settlements, and as a source of nuts, berries, and other food and fiber plants.

Included in the complex are the unique wet-mesic flatwoods of southeast Michigan, dominated by several species of oak, including Michigan Special Concern Shumard's Oak, the uncommon Shellbark Hickory, Michigan Threatened Pumpkin Ash, and Michigan Endangered Black Cottonwood, with an understory of Hornbeam, Hop-hornbeam, Prickly-ash, arrow-wood, Spicebush, Riverbank Grape, Poison Ivy, and typically a sparse ground layer of woodland forbs and sedges.

Originally, lakeplain prairie covered very little of Michigan, totaling not quite 158,000 acres, or about 245 square miles; only about 0.4% of the land area of the entire state as estimated by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory using General Land Office notes from the first Michigan surveys in the 1800s. Unfortunately, most prairies in Michigan were first to be drained and cropped because the need for tree clearing was minimal and the ground was rich. Today, only about 1,250 acres of lakeplain prairie remains, or just 0.8% of the original acreage. In other words, 99.2% of the lakeplain prairie in Michigan has been destroyed in roughly the past 200 years. As such, lakeplain prairie is considered critically imperiled in Michigan and essentially on a global basis. Is it not high time to protect every piece that remains?



Sullivant's Milkweed in remnant lakeplain prairie in western Marysville, Michigan. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Sibley Prairie has been well-known to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Natural Features Inventory, conservation groups, and ecologists for many years. Based on recorded occurrences maintained by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, the Sibley Prairie complex and vicinity supports at least one Michigan Endangered, six Michigan Threatened, and 16 Michigan Special Concern plant and animal species.

In addition, based on the plant community complex in general, many more rare species are possible. In just the past 25 years, at least 18 rare species that could occur on or near Sibley Prairie have increased in priority from Special Concern to Threatened, or Threatened to Endangered, indicating the increasingly imperiled status of these species and the natural communities that provide habitat.

Over 200 native plant species are recorded from the Sibley Prairie complex, most depending on lakeplain prairie habitat and occurring in few other locations in Michigan. The Michigan Natural Features Inventory identified Sibley Prairie as the highest quality lakeplain prairie remnant of 53 surveyed in Michigan. The Floristic Quality Index of Sibley Prairie is nearly 70 on a scale of 0 to 100, almost unheard of in southeast Michigan. Most natural areas in Michigan score between 20 and 40. Likewise, several uncommon and rare animal species are known from Sibley Prairie and the vicinity. Some are found only in a few locations in the southeast corner of the State, such as Michigan Threatened Duke's Skipper butterfly.



Duke's Skipper butterfly. Photograph by Ashley Cole-Wick. [Michigan Natural Features Inventory species abstract](#):

Rare and imperiled species that have either been observed and documented from Sibley Prairie or could occur there based on the plant communities, include the following:

US Endangered: Karner Blue butterfly, Northern Long-eared Bat, and Indiana Bat.

US Threatened: Monarch butterfly (proposed US Threatened), Prairie White-fringed Orchid, and Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake.

Michigan Endangered: Gattinger's Gerardia, Skinner's Gerardia, Short-eared Owl, Henslow's Sparrow, Round-seed Panic Grass, Lambda Snaggletooth snail, Downy Gentian, Prairie Vole, Indiana Bat, Prairie White-fringed Orchid, Black Cottonwood, King Rail, Few-flowered Nut-rush, and Barn Owl.



Sullivan's Milkweed in remnant lakeplain prairie in western Marysville, Michigan. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Michigan Threatened: Tall Green Milkweed, Purple Milkweed, Sullivan's Milkweed, Panicked Screwstem, Missouri Rock-cress, Fescue Sedge, Spotted Turtle, Least Shrew, White Lady-slipper orchid, Persius Duskywing butterfly, Upland Boneset, Tinted Spurge, Dukes' Skipper butterfly, Leafhopper, Pumpkin Ash, Downy Sunflower, Panicked Hawkweed, Short-fruited Rush, Vasey's Rush, Woodland Lettuce, Least Pinweed, Leggett's Pinweed, Virginia Flax, Northern Prostrate Clubmoss, Wing-stemmed Monkey-flower, Eastern Fox Snake, Culver's Root Borer, Silphium Borer moth, Karner Blue butterfly, Sand Cinquefoil, Maryland Meadow-beauty, Nettle Nut-rush, Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake, Atlantic Blue-eyed-grass, Eastern Box Turtle, and Virginia Spiderwort.

Michigan Special Concern: Grasshopper Sparrow, Hairy Angelica, Three-awned Grass, Cooper's Milk Vetch, Dusted Skipper butterfly, American Bittern, Richardson's Sedge, Northern Harrier, Leafhopper, Engelmann's Spike-rush, Blanding's Turtle, Whiskered Sunflower, Gentian-leaved St. John's-wort, Conobea, Furrowed Flax, Northern Appressed Bog Clubmoss, Bog Conehead Katydid, Red-faced Meadow Katydid, Delicate Meadow Katydid, Green Desert Grasshopper, Blazing-star Borer, Maritime Sunflower Borer, Wilson's Phalarope, Cross-leaved Milkwort, Shumard's Oak, Meadow-beauty, Tall Beak-rush, Tall Nut-rush, Prairie Warbler, Dickcissel, Prairie Dropseed, and Willow Aster.

Presumed Extirpated from Michigan: Chestnut Sedge, Violet Wood-sorrel, Sand Milkwort, Honey-flowered Solomon-seal, and Farwell's Blue-eyed-Grass.

Sibley Prairie was even possibly the location of the last endemic bison in Michigan. The bison was shot at the corner of Sibley and Allen roads in Brownstown Township in 1882 by landowner J.G. Carson and the hide still hangs at the Flatrock Historical Museum.

The 440-acre Sibley Prairie property is located within the MDNR acquisition boundaries of the Brownstown Prairie State Wildlife Area - the only State Wildlife Area in Wayne County. Protection of this property had long been a goal of the MDNR. Its addition would increase the Wildlife Area to nearly 500 acres, expanding much needed opportunities for public hunting, birdwatching, nature study, and outdoor recreation for metro Detroit residents. Protecting Sibley Prairie would also advance the MDNR's Public Land Strategy goals of acquiring land near population centers and expanding outdoor recreation where people live and work. Nowhere is that need greater than in Wayne County, Michigan's most populous county.

One of the few remaining natural areas bordering metro Detroit; a large, sustainable, and diverse native community complex; critically imperiled plant communities; habitat for many rare plant and animal species; thousands of years of indigenous occupation and management by the local Wyandotte and possibly Pottawatomi tribes;

extensive history of early Euro-American settlement; an abundance of vital ecosystem services provided; and opportunity for much-needed outdoor recreation land in the Detroit and Downriver area. If Sibley Prairie is not worth protecting, then we don't know what is.

As part of our contribution to the efforts of the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, the TLC donated \$5,000 toward the land purchase and paid for broadcast of a fundraising sponsorship on radio station WRCJ 90.9 FM in Detroit, which plays classical and jazz music. The sponsorship consisted of 65 30-second radio spots from November 24 through January 3. The recording can be heard [here](#).

For more information about the Sibley Prairie and to make a donation to the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, see the web site at: SaveSibleyPrairie.org or scan below.



**Help Save
Sibley Prairie!**



Within a few hundred feet of busy Telegraph Road, one could be surrounded by a magical garden of asters, goldenrods, lupine, ironweed, milkweeds, mountain mint, coreopsis, Indian plantain, prairie dock, lobelia, and many more, within a matrix of tall Indian grass, cord grass, and big bluestem. A gardener's delight, emulated in many of the most famous botanical gardens. Please help save this from the bulldozers!

To donate or for more information, go to:
SaveSibleyPrairie.org



Nicky Marcot, Rhizome Services

As mentioned earlier, the TLC joined the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, a group of several environmental organizations working to protect 440 acres of the well known Sibley Prairie complex south of Detroit. About that same time, the TLC was awarded The Carls Foundation capacity match grant and decided we needed to hire a professional development director to help us raise the matching funds. Through our work with the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition, we got acquainted with Nicky Marcot of Rhizome Services and soon after, contracted her to help the TLC. We have been working hard to keep up with her since.

Nicky Marcot is an environmental activist, free-lance strategist, home-school parent, and urban farmer, living on the west side of Detroit. Raised in the city, Nicky earned her BA in Secondary Education and English from University of Detroit Mercy in 2007, and MA in Linguistics from Wayne State University in 2014. Early in her career she worked as an educator in urban settings, focused on literacy. She then branched into grassroots nonprofit organizing work in a number of neighborhood based organizations centered around community revitalization, urban gardening and food security. Since 2018, deep concern for the environment has led her into environmental and conservation activism as a volunteer with Moms Clean Air Force and Michigan Climate Action Network, as well more recently, with Coalition for a Clean Rouge River and the Wayne County Conservation District.

In 2022 she began working as strategist for Sidewalk Detroit, leading infrastructural improvements, natural areas restoration and programming efforts in Detroit's third largest park - Eliza Howell. In 2025 she launched her



business, Rhizome Services, as a free-lance strategist for a number of regional environmental and conservation nonprofits.

Nicky is excited to be working with the TLC. While newer to conservation work, she is grateful for the opportunity TLC provides to learn more about land preservation in Michigan. She is contracted to support fundraising and development, drawing on a long background in nonprofit work—from early roles in educational literacy programs where she assisted with small-donor campaigns and grant funding, to securing foundation funding for grassroots organizations she helped to establish. Her more recent experience includes serving as grant writer and manager for Christ the King Service Corps in southeast Michigan, collaborating on successful corporate and foundation funding for Sidewalk Detroit's natural areas restoration work in Eliza Howell Park, and currently supporting the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition with small donor fundraising and donor communications.

So, if you get a call or e-mail from Nicky, now you know. With her help, the TLC is getting closer to completing the first phase of our match grant, but there is a long way to go. For more information, see RhizomeServices.com.

Lakeside Cemetery Tour

Saint Clair County Genealogy and History Society

On September 27, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins gave a brief presentation at the grave site of Port Huron botanist Charles K. Dodge and his wife Millie for the annual Lakeside Cemetery Tour conducted by the Saint Clair County Genealogy and History Society.

As many of our readers should know by now, Charles K. Dodge was a farm boy from Jackson, Michigan turned teacher, attorney, administrator, Deputy Collector of the United States Customs Office, and above all, a very accomplished botanist who resided in Port Huron from 1876 until his death in 1918. Dodge was one of the foremost botanists of our region during his time, having quite thoroughly botanized Saint Clair County, Lambton County, Ontario, the Thumb region, and later exploring much of Michigan's Lake Huron coastline, the Upper Peninsula, and southwest Michigan, along with some excursion out West. Among his many accomplishments, in 1900, Dodge compiled "*Flora of St. Clair County, Michigan and the Western Part of Lambton County, Ontario*". In 1911, Dodge wrote the "*Flora of the County*", Chapter V of "*Saint Clair County, Its History and Its People*" published by William Lee Jenks in 1912. In this publication, Dodge advocated for broad protection of nature and particularly, the Black River valley at the confluence of Mill Creek, what later became the Port Huron State Game Area. You can watch a video about Charles Dodge [here](#).

After the Lakeside Cemetery presentation, TLC Board Member and genealogist Fred Fuller cleared-up a mystery and fully uncovered a tragedy. Charles Dodge and Millie Burns married in 1897. Dodge was 53 and Millie was 24. Both Charles and Millie died in 1918, Millie about 7 months after Charles, at the age of only 45. The stated cause of death on her death certificate is "shock from falling into river". This was on October 16, 1918, when the river was not likely very cold. It appeared to be suicide due to grief of losing Charles. Fred was able to verify this by finding various newspaper articles and other documents. So, there is now an added layer to the story Charles and Millie Dodge; one of love, grief, and tragedy that one would never guess looking at their humble grave stones. Well, at least Charles got a lot of great botanizing in before they left this world. We can hope that they are eternally together again in a peaceful and floristic paradise.



Grave stones of Charles and Millie Dodge at Lakeside Cemetery in Port Huron. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary

Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County

Work continued on our 80-acre Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary through the summer and fall of 2025. Earlier in the season, important discoveries were made on the preserve when the work crew found several Yellow Lady-slipper orchids, expected in the dune and swale forest complex, but none-the-less, good to see. Deer take a heavy toll on orchids as they often nip off the leaves and flowers. The crew also encountered a small grove of mature Northern White-cedar or Arbor Vitae in a low area near the center of the 80-acre preserve, named "The Grove" by Connie and crew. These trees are undoubtedly descended from the original plant community of the dune and swale complex, much of it cedar swamp prior to Euro-American settlement. While cutting invasive shrubs in early May, Teddy caught the flash of yellow on a turtle in the adjacent swale. In true form, he jumped in the water and caught a Blanding's Turtle, a Michigan Special Concern species. While Blanding's Turtle is widespread in Michigan, the number of recorded occurrences is somewhat low. Blanding's Turtle is an exciting find for the Shorewood Forrest Sanctuary, indicating there are likely more.

As if a Cedar Grove wasn't enough, while botanizing on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary, TLC Board Member Blake Short found an approximately 12-inch diameter Tamarack (or Larch) - *Larix laricina* along the same ridge bottom as The Grove. There was no doubt that this Tamarack tree was descended from the original plant community of the dune and swale complex. The story of this tree was full of surprises. The tree was in rough shape,

with several holes drilled out by a Pileated Woodpecker or two, and with what may have been pest damage. As if sensing this true senior citizen needed help, a Northern White-cedar tree grew up against the west side of the Tamarack, seemingly to help hold it up.

We searched the preserve, but the old Tamarack appeared to be truly, the "Lone Larix". Seeing that the tree was clearly in its final years, we wanted to propagate it by cuttings and seed. Problem was that all of the live branches and seed cones were at least 40 feet up. In late July, Teddy found a small live branch on the ground that had broken off in a storm. We quickly made about 20 cuttings, applied rooting compound, stuck them in a pot of moist soil, and placed the pot inside a plastic bag held up by small wire arches. The branch even had a small immature cone, but maybe it was late enough in the season to get seed, so we left it on the branch and stuck the end in water.



Tamarack cuttings in mini hoop house. Photograph by Bill Collins.

We waited until early September when we got an Amish crew with a 30-foot ladder and a branch pruner that extended up to about 15 feet with a pvc pipe addition, hoping to knock down seed cones and cut a few branches of nearby trees to decrease the shade. Turned out John Troyer couldn't reach any branches from the other trees, and even when he climbed a little above the ladder top and reached up with the pruner, he was barely able to touch a few branches with cones and knocked a few to the ground. The crew collected about 20 cones total. We also had the crew cut down a Silver Maple and a small Black Cherry nearby to increase the sunlight, hoping to improve conditions for the Tamarack to maybe get a few more years of better growth and cones.



Collecting Tamarack seed cones. Left to right: Ora Yoder, John Troyer just down from the top of the ladder, Teddy Wiley, and Joseph Yoder. Photograph by Bill Collins.

Returning the next day to work on the sanctuary, to his shock, Teddy found that the Tamarack tree had fallen over! We knew it was in bad shape but didn't think it was that bad.

The last Tamarack tree known in the entire Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park was no longer; a species that likely covered much of the wetland swales just a few hundred years ago. But, there were two good things about it falling over. Most importantly, had the tree fallen the previous day, John Troyer might be dead. Also, it was as though the tree threw itself down for us, saying, "OK. You guys apparently aren't good enough to get up to my top, so I'll make it easy for you." It was perfect timing for the seed cones, but bad timing for cuttings, and it meant that we now had just one shot to propagate this tree rather than multiple years.

So, we immediately collected all the seed cones we could find, ending up with about 100 in total, and cut most of the live branches from the tree to make more cuttings. The seed cones were kept for drying in paper bags until November and December when we crushed the cones to extract the seed and sowed them on a mixture of potting soil and moss. These are kept outside to undergo natural stratification, and we hope for seedlings in the spring.

After the tree fell, we spent the next 4 days making what seemed like about a thousand cuttings; so many that a lot were left in various containers of water and plastic bags, some with moist potting soil, some refrigerated, and some not. We even had several branches left outside in a bucket of water yet to be cut. As success rates for Tamarack cuttings made in the fall are quite dismal, we wanted to try a variety of methods and timing in hopes that at least a few might take root. But, given the huge number of cuttings we made, the variation in methods and extended time was more out of necessity.

Since that time, a very few, like maybe just 2 or 3, appeared to have rooted and sprouted new needles. Almost all other cuttings turned dull green and then dark brown. Interestingly, a few batches that were placed in a refrigerator, and as a result, kept in total darkness for a few weeks before they were potted, developed the bright golden brown needles characteristic of Tamarack in the late fall before they drop off. Perhaps this meant that the cuttings entered a natural dormant state that might improve chances of rooting in the spring.

As mentioned in the July Thumb Naturalist, TLC Board Member Blake Short started a botanical inventory of the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in June. He found or confirmed 92 native plant species, several with high coefficients of conservatism, or in other words, characteristic of mature remnants of the original plant community. These included: Tufted Loosestrife, Large-leaved Shinleaf, Swamp Goldenrod, Doll's-eyes Baneberry, Red Baneberry, Long-awned Wood Grass, Gay-wings, Alder-leaved Buckthorn, and Wood-betony. We need to give Teddy credit for finding Alder-leaved Buckthorn, Wood-betony, and a few others first. Undoubtedly, all of these species are descended from the original vegetation of the dune and swale complex.

As usual this spring, the Shorewood Forest Sanctuary was full of migratory birds, particularly warblers. On a brief walk through the preserve, we heard at least 10 different bird species calling, several being warblers. Likewise, in the fall, many of these same birds stop over in the dune and swale forest on their way back south.



Tamarack cuttings with new growth. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

The TLC again thanks the Consumers Energy Foundation, our sole funder for the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary acquisition. We also thank Saint Clair County Drain Commissioner Bob Wiley for working with us to ensure this significant area of dune and swale forest remains protected and part of the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.

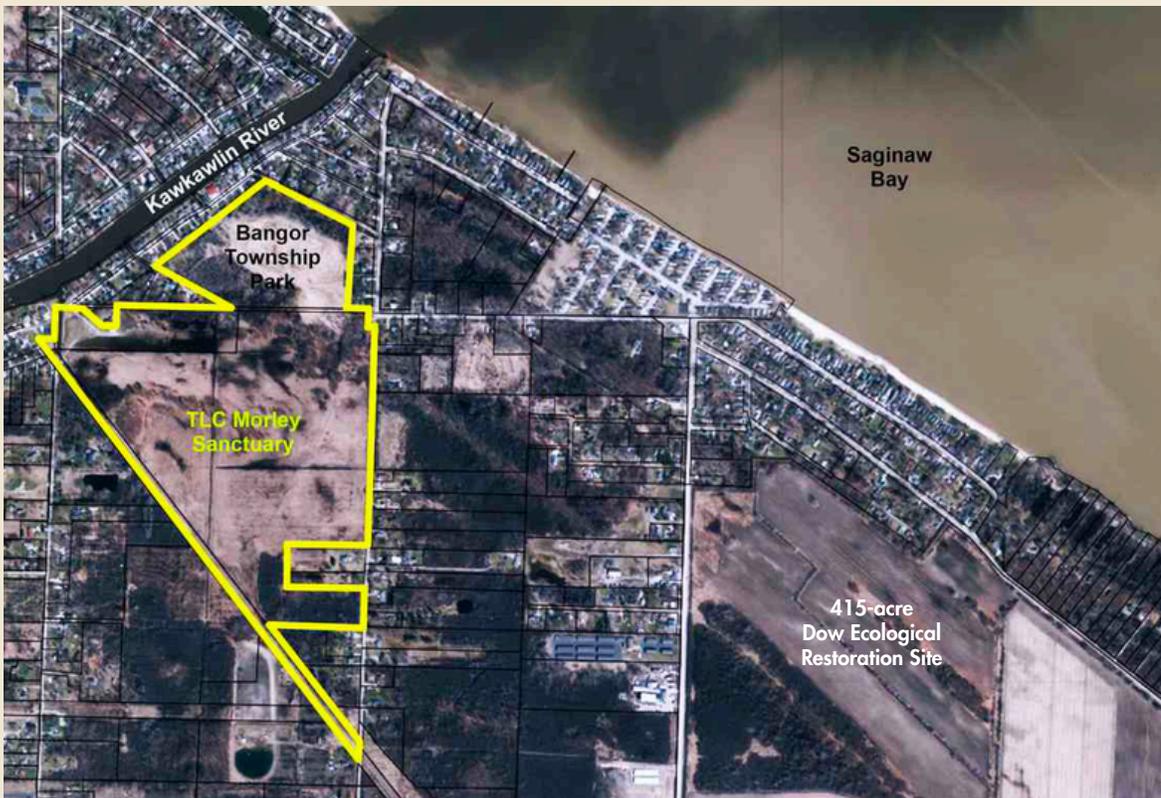
Morley Sanctuary Restoration and Development

Bangor Township, Bay County

On October 9, the TLC met with Bangor Township officials to discuss cooperative development of a nature park on the Morley Sanctuary and adjacent Bangor Township park property. In attendance were Township Building and Zoning Official Tim Mark, Township Trustee and Parks and Recreation Chair Tracy Gilles Koch, TLC Executive Director Bill Collins, TLC President Cheryl Collins, and TLC Board Member Fred Fuller. After review of plans from the TLC and the Township, it was determined that the main park entrance will be on the Township park land on the north side of the Morley Sanctuary where they have generously offered to develop a parking area, toilets, and other facilities that will service both their park and the adjacent Morley Sanctuary. Essentially, the two properties will become one larger park. The TLC could not have asked for better. Together, the 27-acre Township park and the 113-acre Morley Sanctuary will provide the

public with a 140-acre natural recreation area along the Kawkawlin River, less than a third of a mile inland from the Saginaw Bay, and all very accessible by road and a public rail trail.

The TLC is now in the process of assisting Bangor Township with a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant application for park development. We are also working on a permit application to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy to impact a small amount of State-regulated wetland for a foot trail on the Morley Sanctuary. Ducks Unlimited has completed an elevation survey of the Morley Sanctuary and drafted a wetland restoration plan for the lakeplain prairie to block ditches and cut field tiles. Restoration of the site will be coordinated with Ducks Unlimited and the US Fish and Wildlife Service through their Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.



Combined TLC Morley Sanctuary and Bangor Township Park outlined in yellow. The Kawkawlin River is just a few hundred feet north, connected by the Corbin Drain channel at the northwest corner. Saginaw bay is only about 1/3 mile to the northeast. The 415-acre Dow Ecological Restoration property is shown 1/2 mile to the east. The Saginaw River mouth is 1.5 mile east. Bay Area Fetch GIS, app.fetchgis.com

Bay Area Community Foundation

On May 13, the TLC was awarded a grant of \$20,000 from the Bay Area Community Foundation to begin development of the proposed nature park facilities at the Morley Sanctuary. This was one of the largest grants the foundation has awarded in their history and will be a great help in developing the Morley Sanctuary as a recreational and educational asset for the community and Bay area visitors. The TLC again thanks the Bay Area Community Foundation for their generous grant.

The TLC thanks all partners involved with this project, including: Ducks Unlimited for funding the property acquisition and planning the wetland restoration with the US Fish and Wildlife Service; the Bay Area Community Foundation for their generous park development funding; and not least, Bangor Township for working with us and making this project even better than we hoped.

The TLC used a private loan of \$195,000, in addition to our Wetland Conservation Program grant, to acquire the Morley Sanctuary. We are currently fundraising to repay that loan. Please consider a generous donation to the TLC. If you've been reading our newsletters and annual reports, you know that the TLC is all about land acquisition and preservation in a region where very few others are. The TLC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity.

All donations are tax-deductible. Donations can be made through the Givebutter link on our website: [Thumbland.org](https://www.thumbland.org). We also accept checks written to "Thumb Land Conservancy" and mailed to our address below. Please include your mailing address and your e-mail address and/or phone number.

Utility Poles

Lansing Community College and Xtreme Powerline Construction



This past summer, the Lineworker Program of Lansing Community College in Lansing, Michigan, donated about 20 used utility poles to the TLC, to be used for constructing various park structures for the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. The poles shown to the left will be used to construct an information kiosk, a small water pump shelter, and two small pavilions.

Left: The utility poles at the Bidwell Sanctuary entrance. Photograph by Teddy Wiley.

Utility poles were harder to come by than we thought. At the advice of Hydrolake, Inc., a utility pole supplier in northern Michigan, we contacted Lansing Community College. They regularly replace worn utility poles used at their West Campus for a line worker training program. Our thanks to Lansing Community College for their donation, which has allowed the TLC to make progress on park infrastructure.

In a surprise gesture of generosity, Xtreme Powerline Construction of Port Huron, Michigan volunteered to haul the utility poles from Lansing Community College to their Port Huron facility and then to two TLC preserves in Fort Gratiot and Burtchville in the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. They did this free-of-charge without the TLC asking. The TLC thanks Xtreme Powerline Construction President, Scott Sheldon, along with Sammy Clark and driver Scott Howe.

First Annual TLC New Year's Day Stompening Launches a New Season of Restoration

Cunningham Connector Sanctuary, Fort Gratiot Township, Saint Clair County By Connie Neese, TLC Volunteer

The TLC purchased the new Cunningham Connector Sanctuary along the south side of Carrigan Road in January of 2025 from the estate of Shirley Cunningham. This 5-acre parcel is a crucial link between the Fort Gratiot Park trail system and the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park. The southern portion of the property is wooded dune and swale forest, but the north end of the property, the former location of a residence, has dense coverage of invasive Reed – *Phragmites australis*, subspecies *australis*.



Stompening the Phrag on New Year's Day. The TLC Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary is in the background, north of Carrigan Road. Photographer: Jacinda Santora. Dogs: Cricket and Blue.

The Stompening

The TLC welcomed the new year with boots, energy, and a shared commitment to restoring native habitat during our first annual New Year's Day Stompening. About a dozen volunteers gathered on a crisp winter morning to flatten a large stand of invasive Phragmites Reed, preparing the site for the next phase of restoration work.

Hot coffee and hot chocolate kept spirits high as volunteers spent two hours stomping down the tall, dense stems. While stomping does not kill Phragmites, it is an essential first step in our long-term, chemical-free restoration strategy. By flattening the reed in winter, we open the site for summer spading, a manual control method developed by Lynn Short of Ontario, Canada. Spading involves cutting the reed stems just below the soil surface, which prevents the plant

from sending energy back to its underground rhizomes. Over time, repeated spading weakens the stand.

This summer, we will combine Short's spading protocol with the Joan Bradley Method of ecological restoration. Bradley's approach focuses on working outward from areas where native plants are already present. By spading Phragmites away from existing native vegetation, we protect the strongest native footholds and allow them to expand naturally. Because cutting or spading in early spring can stimulate Phragmites to produce additional shoots, our work will begin later in the season when the plant is more vulnerable. More information about Lynn Short and her methods can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Volunteers at the Stompening were careful to look for and flag young native trees and shrubs hidden inside the Phragmites patch so they can be protected during summer spading. Knocking down the Phragmites gives these young plants more sunlight in winter and early spring before the shoots grow tall again.

Not all of last year's flagged tree saplings survived, and this loss highlights the challenges native plants face inside dense Phragmites stands. Phragmites releases chemicals from its rhizomes that inhibit the roots of neighboring plants, a process known as allelopathy. Young trees with small root systems are especially vulnerable to this chemical pressure. Each year of spading reduces the strength of

the rhizomes and the amount of allelopathic chemicals they produce, improving conditions for native plants over time.

The restoration work completed in 2025 is already showing results. The area that was most heavily spaded last summer has now been cleared and converted into the new parking area. The Stompening marked the beginning of another year of hands-on restoration, community involvement, and steady progress. The TLC is grateful to everyone who came out to help with our first annual Stompening, including Lisa Powell, Jim Frank, Bonnie Landschoot, Tim, Erica Harmon, Dan Danner, Irene Hill, Patrick, Katrina Mason, and Jacinda Santora. Your footsteps are the foundation for the work ahead, and together we are making a real difference.

The TLC again thanks Connie Neese for her leadership of continued stewardship on the Southern Lake Huron Coastal Park.



Left to right: Connie Neese, Lisa Powell, Jim Frank, Bonnie Landschoot, Tim Boudreau, Erica Harmon, Dan Danner, Irene Hill, Patrick, Katrina Mason. Photographer: Jacinda Santora. Dogs: Cricket and Blue.

Teddy's Excellent Adventures (With Bill On The Phone)

By TLC Program & Stewardship Director Teddy Wiley

Well folks, it's here; the most boring time of the new year, when nature's most charismatic creatures lay at rest for the arrival of spring. And it's currently when I need to get very creative with my schedule, because if I don't, spring arrives with a few extra pounds that I did not ask for.

In the fall, I traveled around the Blue Water area to collect prairie seeds for our Loznak Sanctuary in Marysville. Towards the end of that journey, I had an entire fridge worth of prairie seeds. Usually, if you have a small jar of seeds stored correctly, there isn't much pressure to get them sown right away. So, you can feel safe keeping them in the fridge for a while, usually a few years. But with a batch as big as the one I had, I didn't want to go through the routine, and take up all the space in my fridge, to cold-stratify all of that seed to break dormancy for spring germination. Many native seeds need



My prairie seed stash, ready to dash. Photographs by Teddy Wiley.

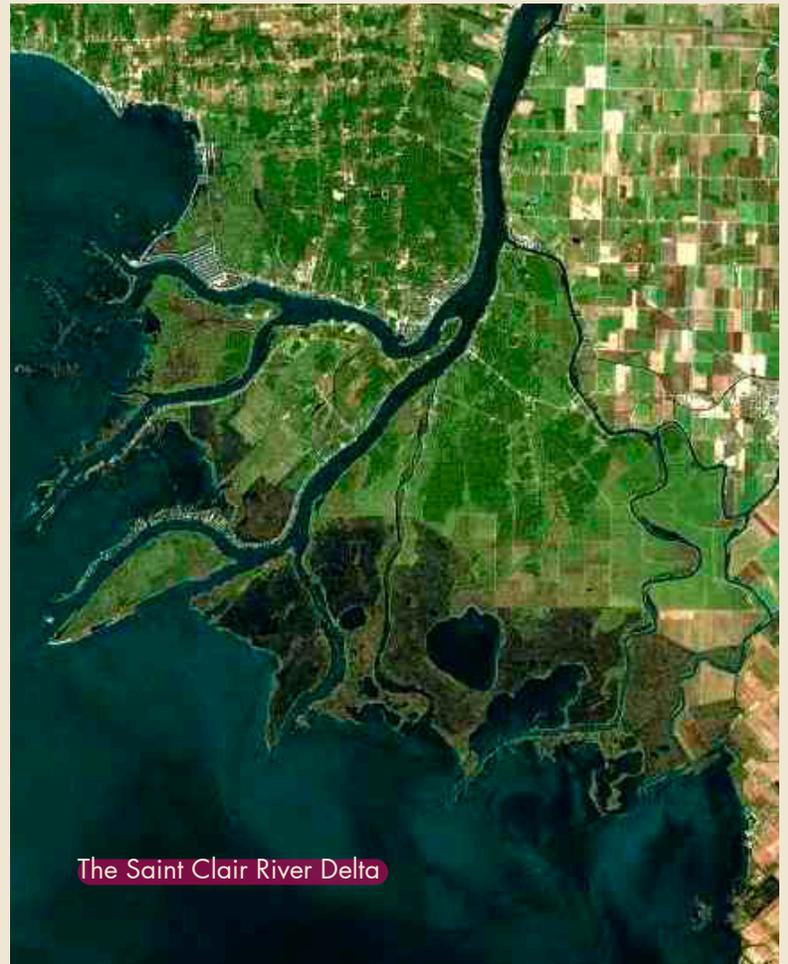


Me with Marsh Blazing-star I discovered in Marysville this past summer.

stratification, or cold moist conditions, followed by warm, moist conditions to germinate in the spring. You can do it in a fridge, but much easier to let nature do it for you. Thankfully, the first days of January were mild and sunny, allowing the snow to melt and expose the ground. It only took an hour to seed almost every corner of the Loznak Sanctuary. Hopefully, if I played my cards right, this spring at the Loznak Sanctuary will be its most vibrant.

While I was sowing, I had time to reflect on another important prairie near and dear to me; that being the lakeplain prairie of St. John's Marsh down in Clay Township.

It wasn't long after that I made a trip down there to further reflect on the progress of our Ramsar initiative for the St. Clair River Delta. At the time of writing this, it has been a full year since the Thumb Land Conservancy assisted me in launching this project. Since then, we have gathered 38 letters of support from concerned citizens, local government, and organizations like the Michigan Natural Features Inventory. Never did I think we would make it this far and get this much support from so many people! So, on a personal note, I would like to thank everyone who was willing to write a support letter for this initiative to designate the St. Clair River Delta as a wetland of international significance, and as a result, create more funding opportunities to control invasive weeds and restore the ecosystem. Your support is what makes movements like this possible, and more importantly, successful. But there is much more work to be done, and thankfully I've made some friends along the way to help. One of them is Dillon Wagner, a student at Michigan State University, who has the same love for the Delta as me. He is currently helping me push through the more difficult processes of this movement. So, without him, this would be a lot more difficult. As this movement moves forward, you will hear back from me quite often with updates!



By the way, [here's](#) a video I made out on St. John's Marsh about a month ago and [here's](#) another video I made earlier about Chinquapin Oaks

From the Desk of the ED

By TLC Executive Director Bill Collins

Have you ever wondered about the work of an executive director of a land conservancy? Well, me neither. But just for the record, it's usually far from being outside enjoying nature. About 90% of the work is administrative, meaning lots of time on the computer. I helped with Garlic Mustard removal this spring, spent an inordinate amount of time working with Teddy and Jake this

fall to make Tamarack cuttings, had a nice walk with the Touma family and friends on the Shorewood Forrest Southeast Sanctuary in August, and got out a few other times, but not much more on-preserve activities than that.

It's not easy for a relatively small conservancy like the TLC, trying to work in a tough fundraising region like the Thumb, with little funding opportunity for staff.

Earlier in the year, the bulk of my time was spent coordinating a few purchase offers and writing applications for land acquisition grants.

Thankfully, we have great real estate and legal assistance from Dave Ladensack of Summit Realty and Tim Lozen of Lozen Davidson and Kovar. By early fall, we've also had the help of Nicky Marcot of Rhizome Services for grant inquiries, applications, a new fundraising drive, printed materials, and improved on-line presence.

One of the joys of Conservancy World, beyond preparing our annual IRS return (maybe worse than if we were a for-profit company), is applying for yet another identification number. You might think that an EIN, or federal Employer Identification Number, would be good enough; but no. A distant memory now, but somewhere in our early years, the TLC was also assigned an identification number, or ID, by the Corporations, Securities and Commercial Licensing Bureau of the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, otherwise known as LARA. Then, sometime later, LARA changed her mind and decided we needed a CID, or Customer Identification Number. So, I guess we have been customers of LARA for the past several years, but I don't recall getting anything from her but a receipt for \$25 every time we file our annual report. This year we needed a UEID, or a Unique Entity Identification Number. I already knew the TLC is a unique entity, but didn't think we deserved a number for it. This time, instead of dealing with LARA, whom I've grown accustomed to, I had to deal with SAM. or System for Award Management.

Think Uncle Sam. This guy is more intimidating than LARA for sure. Not only is he federal, but SAM has an associate that you need to get past before you can deal with him, that being Login.gov. LOGIN is like a bouncer for SAM; one of those gatekeeper guys that will know everything about you and your activities before you get anywhere near SAM. No doubt that the TLC will get more numbers, user names, and passwords as the years go on.

This fall, I spent considerable time drafting a new conservation easement for our Croissant Sanctuary south of Ortonville. Conservation easements are legal agreements that require a lot of attention to detail and a comprehensive assessment and summary of the important conservation values of a site. As part of the conservation easement, legal descriptions, detailed mapping, and a baseline assessment report are all required. A typical conservation easement agreement, including exhibits, can be over 100 pages. But just compiling and writing these agreements is not enough.

They need to be negotiated with the landowner, which sometimes results in multiple revisions. Then, they need to be signed, notarized, and submitted to the register-of-deeds for recording. If written for a private landowner wanting to claim a local property tax and/or federal tax deduction, the fun may be just beginning as they may need assistance with land appraisal, local property tax board of review, federal forms, and general advice.

As our TLC web site is now over 15 years old, it's due for some major revisions and upgrades. You may have noticed that it's just a few steps above an AOL era site. Our web host, Jeff Ronan of LochanDe IT Services, has kept it going like a favorite old car. We started the update work about

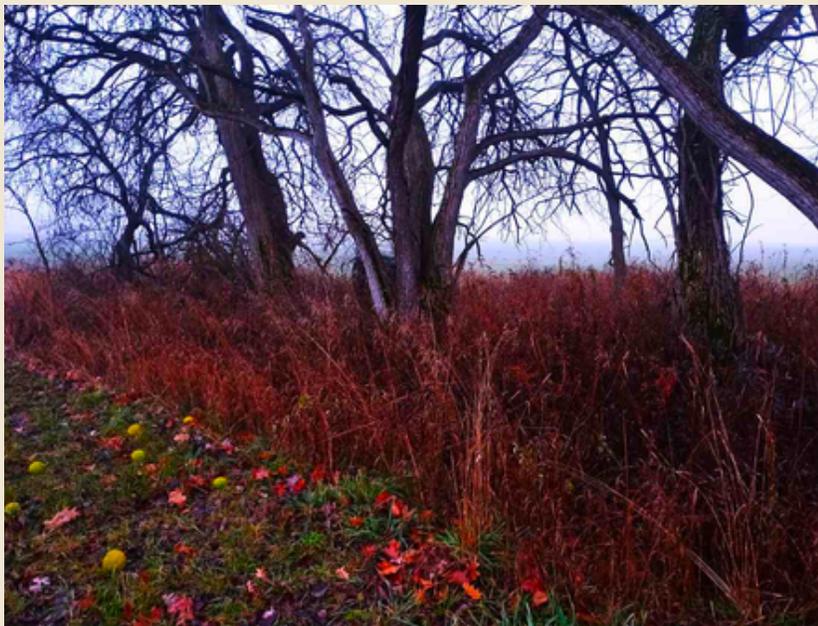
3 years ago, but have had to temporarily drop the effort to attend to other issues, like new preserve acquisition. But, with Nicky Marcot pushing us along, we all agree that the time is now to get our new and improved web site finished. We have planned a slightly new layout and I spent much of the fall and early winter drafting new text for every page. With several preserve acquisitions and new projects in recent years, a lot of updating of text and graphics is long over-due. We also have ideas that will make the new site more informative, interactive, and useful. If all goes well, expect a far more complete and functional TLC web site in the near future.

Our Development Director, Nicky Marcot, has taken the lead on producing new printed promotional materials for the TLC, including a business sponsorship packet and a new TLC brochure. Our last one is about 10 years old and quite dated. With this work goes even more writing, review, and proof-reading on my part. By the way, if you ever need great quality bulk printing at a discount for a non-profit organization, check out the Port Huron Area School District Print Shop. Gina at the Print Shop is very helpful and runs a tight ship. Thanks to Connie Neese for bringing this to our attention.

Of course, along the way, there are our quarterly TLC Executive Board meetings, too many checks to be written and mailed by our TLC President, The Thumb Naturalist to put together, reporting for grants and projects, and every December or January, it's time once again to start compiling the next TLC Annual Report. Then, before we know it, our next tax statement is due to the IRS. Most of you have only your personal tax return to deal with, but we get to do it twice, or maybe three times considering everything the IRS requires for the TLC return. Thank you once again to our accountant, Cathy Ravano, for making the process less painful.

I've left out about half of the other administrative things that I typically work on throughout the year. It's nice to see all of this work come to fruition once in a while when we close on a new preserve acquisition, or make a major gain in stewardship or park development, but it seems to happen too infrequently for the effort required.

You won't be surprised then, to know that once in a while I take a break and do something like collect Osage-orange fruits way out on Peck Road. It probably doesn't make a lot of sense. That's fine.



Remembering John Kennedy

By TLC Executive Director Bill Collins

Our community lost a friend and humble advocate when John Kennedy passed away in late January. I first got acquainted with John in October of 2020 when the TLC participated in an indigenous naming ceremony for our preserves, hosted by the Blue Water Indigenous Alliance at Ode Zibi in Burtchville. Members of the BWIA chose indigenous names for each of the TLC preserves in the languages of their native First Nations members, including Anishinaabemowin, Huron-Wendat, Lenape, and Lakota. At least 40 people attended. John represented the Oneida people and gave the opening prayer for the ceremony.

John was a long-time resident of Saint Clair County, but also a member of the Turtle Clan of the Oneida Nation of the Thames, located along the Thames River southwest of London, Ontario, within one of the largest forested areas remaining between Sarnia and Hamilton. John's Oneida name was "La Lewa". We are still trying to find the meaning. According to the Oneida Nation of the Thames web site, *"The Turtle Clan is associated with the land and earth, drawing inspiration from the Iroquois creation story of the earth growing on the back of a turtle. Thus, they possess a profound environmental connection to Mother Earth"*.

The Oneida Nation of the Thames has a unique history dating back to 1840 when about 200 Oneida men, women, and children in New York State lost their homeland through numerous agreements and treaties. They purchased land in Ontario with their own funds, not allotted or granted by the government, and established the Oneida Nation of the Thames, not as a reserve but as



Blue Water Indigenous Alliance TLC preserve naming ceremony at Ode Zibi in Burtchville, 2020 October 8. John Kennedy left and Joshua Whiting right. Photograph by Bill Collins.

a settlement. John's family was originally from the Niagara Falls, New York, area. They became members of the Oneida Nation of the Thames after his parents moved to Teeterville, Ontario, about halfway between the settlement and Hamilton, Ontario.

John and I stayed in contact since 2020 and occasionally discussed issues regarding the Blue Water Indigenous Alliance, the local indigenous community, native archaeological sites in the area, and useful plants. The TLC assisted the BWIA in obtaining and administering grant funding to develop a cultural center at Ode Zibi. I also advised the BWIA and individual members on leadership structure and organizing as a non-profit corporation.

One day, John showed me a carved rock he had installed at the International Flag Plaza just north of the Blue Water Bridges in Port Huron. Until that day, I was unaware of the rock, which John hand-carved as a monument to Native Americans in the area - past,

present, and future. Interestingly, that rock apparently came from the pit at the former Silver Trails Scout Reservation. John's carvings depict a faceless and handless man to represent the past, a middle-aged woman to represent the present, and a young child wrapped in a blanket to represent the future. The child faces the sunrise in the east, and so faces the future.

Being part of the Oneida Nation, or "People of the Standing Stone", I'm sure this was the source of John's inspiration. The Oneida creation story is that a large stone was originally placed in an Oneida village by the Great Spirit. As the Oneida people moved, so too did the stone which is said to carry a special significance and meaning to the nation.

Over the course of 5 years, John's family, friends, and many donors raised funds for the monument and eventually got approvals. Installation finally happened on September 23, 2017 with the help of John's family, the Saint Clair County Labor Council, and the Saint Clair County Allied Veterans Council Color Guard. At that time, my father and I were traveling back and forth to a hospital in Pontiac to be with my mother, who would pass away four days after the rock was installed.

John was a home builder and roofer for many years, working across southeast Michigan and beyond. He definitely had the right build for roofing. John was also a finish carpenter and loved to work out in his shed. Like my father, he did a lot of lathe work. John is quoted in a Times Herald article about carving his monument rock: *"I'm an old carpenter, and I have a wood lathe back in the shed, so I made me some whacker tools"*.

I enjoyed John's many stories, and particularly his laugh. If you knew John, one thing became very clear right away – the man loved golf. He grew up playing golf with his brothers and would play in every tournament he could. Golf is really not my thing, especially considering the land use aspect, but John soon had me agree that we'd golf together one day, if you can believe it. Sadly, we didn't make that happen.

In early 2021, John and I served on the same committee that selected the Seven Grandfathers' Teachings display to be installed along the Blue Water River Walk in Port Huron. The monument consists of seven oak logs carved on Walpole Island, Ontario depicting an eagle as the spirit of love, beaver as the spirit of wisdom, wolf as the spirit of humility, raven as the spirit of honesty, bison as the spirit of respect, turtle as the spirit of truth, and bear as the spirit of courage. Although I was invited to be on the committee, I didn't feel qualified and deferred to the consensus of the indigenous members.



John Kennedy praying at the Oneida Nation rock on 2017 September 23. Port Huron Times Herald.

In November of 2021, I asked John to come up to the hospital room to pray for my father in his final weeks. It was comforting to have John there, yet almost surreal as he sprinkled tobacco over my father as he prayed. I wondered if my father was aware of what John was doing. I thought back to my father's friend from the Sarnia First Nations Reserve, hoping that he'd approve. It was also ironic that tobacco is what brought an early end to my father's life. Not long after, we had to explain to a nurse what all that stuff was on my father's bed. On December 1, John, along with TLC Member Tom Dennis, gave prayers at my father's grave site service.

After a few years of no local pow wows, John and his daughter Becky began organizing the annual Blue Water Traditional Pow Wow in 2019. The first were held at the Port Huron Museum, but starting in 2022, moved to the Fort Gratiot Light Station Park because they needed more space. Lacking representation as a federally-recognized tribe, the new pow wow and creation of the Blue Water Indigenous Alliance generated long-absent attention for the native community of Saint Clair County and vicinity.

In early spring of 2022, I was working as a consultant on a dune and swale site in Fort Gratiot. A few large sand ridges struck me as possible sites for indigenous burials. Fortunately, the landowner was cooperative and provided a backhoe and operator so we could dig investigation trenches. I invited John to join me mostly out of respect, but because I knew he would be very interested. We dug three long trenches, portions beyond 6 feet deep, until we hit ground water. We found no sign of anything, not even charcoal or a disturbed soil profile. John was convinced that there had been something there in the past. I still wonder.

John and I talked about collecting edible, medicinal, and fiber plants. Finally, on a nice spring day in 2024, we decided to go dig up some Sassafras roots to make sweet tea using his special recipe. The last time I saw John was at our Thumb Heritage Festival on June 1, 2024, organized by the TLC and Clyde Historical Society. John, his wife Pat, and their daughter Becky were at the festival to promote the next Blue Water Traditional Pow Wow. John gave me a bottle of the sassafras sweet tea he made with the roots we dug in the spring. It tasted great and was very refreshing that day. He also gave me a small colorful woven bag of tobacco. Of course I recognized the spiritual symbolism and had no interest in smoking it.

John and I maintained contact. I recall one of the last projects he wanted to do was an Iroquois Tree of Peace ceremony. I regret that I didn't have time to help him with that. I have a package he gave me with an explanation of the ceremony. Maybe it will yet happen in his honor.

I thank John's wife, Pat, for providing details for this article. [Here](#) is a link to John's obituary.



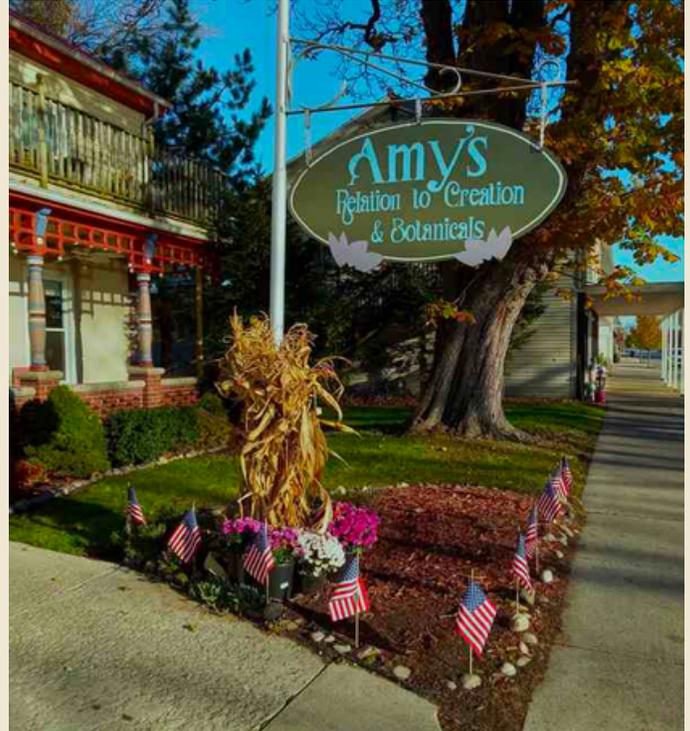
John Kennedy at the 2023 Traditional Pow Wow at the Fort Gratiot Light Station Park. Port Huron Times Herald.

Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals, Marine City

Owner: Amy Martinez, RN, BSN, TLC Member

If you find yourself in the Marine City area on a cold winter day, stop in at Amy's Relation To Creation and Botanicals where you'll find an interesting variety of botanical products and maybe even a hot drink while you can sit in a very nicely restored home with a view of the Saint Clair River.

Amy's Relation to Creation & Botanicals, LLC is a family-owned and operated botanical store located at 256 South Water Street in Marine City. A variety of natural products are available including teas, coffees, utensils, dried herbs, live plants, herbal tinctures, essential oils, salves, and other medicinal, wellness, personal care, and cleaning products. Owner, Amy Martinez, offers many locally-sourced, natural, unprocessed, unique, and eco-friendly products. The store is open from 9 am to 6 pm Tuesday through Saturday, but open until 8 pm on Thursdays from April 4 through December. In addition to the store, Amy offers a meeting room available for rent



for small groups, for health presentations, wellness consultations, tutoring for nursing students, and Bible studies. For more information or to reserve the meeting room, click [here](#) or call 810-335-4622. For a schedule of events click [here](#).

You Got The Power To Restore and Fix in 2026

Save Nature Any Place Sustain Native Animals & Plants

Wildlife Thrown Away

Fallen leaves are vital for wildlife. They provide food, insulation, cover, and a place for wildlife to overwinter, among other benefits. When homeowners dispose of fallen leaves, they not only throw away organic gold, they destroy habitat and condemn the wildlife hidden among the leaves to the landfill, compost facility, or incinerator. Have you ever considered how much

wildlife is in those leaves? Everything from moths, cocoons, caterpillars, firefly larvae, spiders, sowbugs, centipedes, millipedes, worms, toads, salamanders, and many others. What might future archaeologists digging through the layers of our landfills think about us?

(pictured right) Known as sowbugs, roly-polies, woodlice, and many other names, these little terrestrial crustaceans have fascinated children for ages, including future conservancy executive directors, and they are important for breaking down organic matter in many ecosystems.



It's the middle of winter, but spring "clean-up" could be only about 6 weeks away for many. Think about the many wee creatures before you bag and toss. There are babes in the lawn. For more reading, see this National Wildlife Federation [Blog post](#).

In 2026, we are continuing to highlight restoration of natural habitat on private land, neighborhood efforts, and programs like Homegrown National Park: Homegrown National Park, National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat: Create & Certify, and the TLC Naturehood registry.



Restoration doesn't need to be complicated. In one way, it represents the truest expression of private land ownership and democratic ideals. As a landowner, you are vested with a great deal of power and responsibility.

While the world is distracted by money and appearance, there can be a benevolent and unpretentious aspect to 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 humankind now and for generations to come, all right where you live. Every little piece of land now matters, 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 a lot of impact. If you only have a few flower pots or a small patch of dirt at your disposal, you will surely benefit a few of our beleaguered pollinators. Regardless, there is a lot to be said for adding a little beauty to our world. For a basic guide on restoring or creating natural habitat on your property, see our TLC Restoration and Weed Guide [here](#).

Clyde Historical Society

The Clyde Historical Society meets on the third Thursday of each month. Their next meeting is March 19 at 6:30 pm at the Ruby Lions Club Hall located at 4535 Brott Road in Ruby. The Clyde Historical Society brings together people interested in the history of the area and local

genealogy. They promote an appreciation for the local history and its people; and collection, protection, and preservation of significant historical items. For more information, see the [Clyde Historical Society Facebook page](#).

TLC Winter Stewardship

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

Date	Activity	Location
February - April	invasive shrub removal	Touma Family Sanctuary
February - April	invasive weed control	Cunningham Connector Sanctuary
February - April	invasive shrub removal	Bidwell Sanctuary

Support the TLC

Please consider a generous donation to help us match The Carls Foundation \$100,000 challenge grant. The Carls Foundation will match every dollar you give to support the ability of the TLC to maintain our stewardship workers and long-term capacity and fundraising to continue our mission. We are still fundraising to repay acquisition loans for the 113-acre Morley Sanctuary north of Bay City, and also the 31.62-acre Touma Family Sanctuary in Fort Gratiot. Your donations help us move on to the next new preserve.

Donations can be made through the Givebutter link on our website: [Thumbland.org](https://www.thumbland.org). We also accept checks payable to "Thumb Land Conservancy" and mailed to the address below. Please include your mailing address and e-mail address. Having your phone number may also be helpful. We do not distribute your information.

Please keep in mind that we welcome donations in honor or memory of someone or something.

Whether it is a one time gift, or a monthly donation, we appreciate your support!

If you've been reading our newsletters and annual reports, you know that the TLC is all about land acquisition and stewardship to protect our natural areas and provide opportunities for outdoor public recreation in a region where very few groups are working. We are all volunteer except a few contract workers. The TLC has very low administrative costs and spends the bulk of our funding on preserve acquisition, and secondarily on preserve stewardship. The TLC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity. All donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed.



New beginning for an old Tamarack.

Thumb Land Conservancy
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[ThumbLand.org](https://www.thumbland.org) mail@thumbland.org



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