

HERON TRACKS

CWC CHIPPEWA
WATERSHED
CONSERVANCY



The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy
Volume 30 Number 4 Fall 2023



Executive Director's Corner

Maybe it's the change in the weather, the shortened days, or something else entirely, but the end of the year always puts me in a reflective mood.

It has been a good year for land protection. With the addition of two new nature preserves, the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy now owns twenty-six properties totaling more than 730 acres. Starks Preserve added nearly nine additional acres to our protected lands in Isabella County and the 80-acre Weting Preserve became our first preserve in Clare County. We now have nature preserves in every county of our service area! We also added 60 acres to the existing Walterreit Easement in Isabella County. Between preserves and easements, the CWC now protect 5,494 acres across five counties.

It has been a good year for fundraising. During the Give Local Isabella Giving Day in May, CWC supporters contributed nearly \$14,000 toward our endowment fund at the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation. In October, more than 130 of our supporters came together for our annual Fall Fundraiser and raised nearly \$16,000 to support the Conservancy. I also can't forget to thank everyone who gave during our Summer Membership Drive and at other times throughout the year. I hope that if you are able to give, an end of year gift to the CWC is still on your to-do list. Your support really does make an impact on our community!

It has also been a good year for volunteers. At Sylvan Solace, volunteers completed construction of a new section of hiking trail located east of the main entrance trail. At Mill Pond Natural Area, volunteers have removed hundreds (maybe thousands) of invasive buckthorn, Japanese barberry, privet, honeysuckle, and multiflora rose to make way for native trees and shrubs. In April, we planted more than 500 new trees and shrubs across the property. Before the end of the year, we plan to sow wildflower and native grass seed across more than an acre of freshly cleared land, with more trees, shrubs, and wildflowers on the 2024 to-do list.

This year we collaborated with Dow Chemical Company, United Way, and Central Michigan University to bring more than 100 volunteers to the corridor of parks and protected lands along the Chippewa River in Mt. Pleasant, including Mill Pond Natural Area. These volunteers picked up more than 150 pounds of waste from these public spaces. I can't forget to mention the volunteers that serve on our board and committees, and those who provide us with support throughout the year!

What's next? We still have a couple of unfinished projects we hope to complete before the end of the year. We're already planning projects and events for 2024. Despite all the plans, we still expect to be surprised by opportunities that are presented to us. I can hardly wait!

Stay Well and Happy Trails!
Mike LeValley

CWC Chair Notes

I am writing this newsletter as the current CWC Chair. I do not know if this will be true when the newsletter comes out. I enjoy leading and working with CWC but new blood is always needed to keep an organization fresh. I will continue to work with CWC even if I am not the chair. I am proud of what has been accomplished in the last few years. Being the chair is so easy when you have a great administrator, Mike LeValley, and Autumn Baker as Development & Donor Relations Coordinator, (she does almost everything) helper. During my time we have added many acres of land as preserves and easements and we have more "in the works." The CWC Board of Directors is very active in assessing new properties under consideration for protection and monitoring existing properties. Thank you everyone for your support and for making my job easy and fun. -Marilyn Fosburg

Announcing the new Weting Preserve

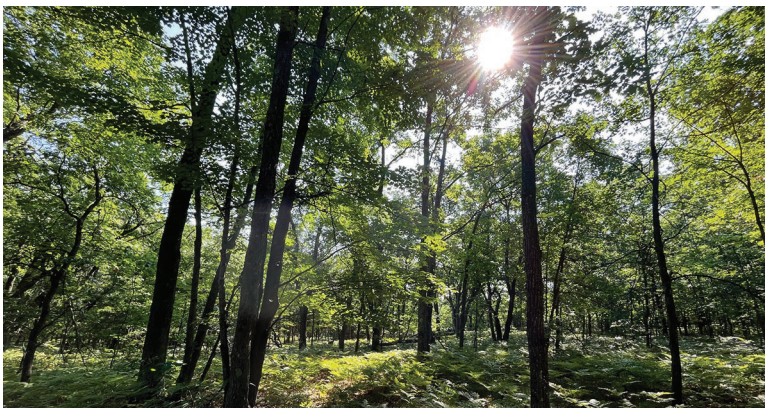
Last fall we were excited to announce the signing of the Weting Conservation Easement in Clare County. On August 15, 2023, almost one year to the day after signing the easement, the Weting family deeded the property to the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy to create the Howard and Hazel Weting Preserve. This is the Conservancy's twenty-sixth preserve and our first to be located in Clare County.

The family's decision to donate the property was influenced by a desire to see the land permanently protected and by the fact that the entire family now resides on the West Coast. During a June visit to the property Howard and Hazel's grandson John Weting commented "If we still lived in Marquette and could still easily visit several times a year, it might be a different story but I think we're making the right decision in donating the land."

Originally purchased by Howard and Hazel Weting in 1929, the property remained in the family for the ensuing 94 years. During that time, the Weting family consistently managed the land as habitat for wildlife and native plants. These efforts have paid off over time. Today, this 80-acre parcel is covered with a mixed age forest providing habitat for wildlife such as deer, turkey, grouse, porcupine, and numerous species of resident and migratory birds. A trail camera placed on the property, recently captured photos of a bobcat and other nocturnal species. John Weting reminisced, "I'm pretty sure this is what my grandparents would have wanted, to see it protected this way. I talked to my aunt about donating the property and she said she thought this would make them happy."

On October 1st, a group of CWC supporters and local residents joined together to tour the property including groves of thousands of red pine that were planted by the Weting family between the 1930s and 1970s, mature oaks and other hardwoods, and a dense stand of aspen and maple recovering from a 2013 regenerative timber harvest.

Weting Preserve is located on West Monroe Road in Freeman Township, Clare County. Information on the preserve is available online at: <https://cwc-mi.org/weting-preserve/>



2023 Fall Fundraiser and Bob Ball Award Presentation

On Thursday, October 5th, supporters and friends of Chippewa Watershed Conservancy gathered at Little Flower Barn in Lake Isabella to celebrate our third annual Fall Fundraiser. By all measures, the evening was a success as we saw many old friends, made new friends, and raised nearly \$16,000 for the Conservancy!

The evening began with a social hour which allowed everyone to catch up, enjoy an appetizer, and grab a drink at the bar. The social hour also gave people the chance to purchase tickets to win one of a dozen raffle prizes. Popular raffle items included a bird-themed gift basket provided by the Chippewa Valley Audubon, a day trip to the Leelanau Peninsula, a collection of nature-themed books, and much more. Entertainment during the social hour and throughout the evening was provided by the Big Rapids-area band Cold Leather Seats who played a mix of rock, folk, country, and Americana favorites.

The social hour was followed by a fall-themed buffet dinner which was capped off by a seasonal selection of pies and chocolate cake. After dinner, CWC Executive Director Mike LeValley gave a brief recap of everything that has happened in the past twelve months. Highlights of his presentation included the addition of two new nature preserves (Starks Preserve and Weting Preserve), the addition of 60 acres to Linda Walterreit's conservation easement, volunteer successes at removing invasive species, and the construction of a new trail at Sylvan Solace Preserve. The 2023 Bob Ball Award was given to Alexis Hansen for her work with the CWC.

The evening was capped off with the drawing of raffle winners. We began by drawing winners for the in-person raffles. It was fun watching people scanning dozens of raffle tickets for winning numbers with yelps of excitement and surprise from winners and groans of disappointment from those who hadn't won. The final drawings of the evening were for our Thunder Bay Resort Package (won by Sherrie Warner) and our 50/50 drawing (won and graciously donated back by Sue Knight).



2023 Bob Ball Award Recipient: Alexis Hansen

A highlight of our Fall Fundraiser was the announcement of Alexis Hansen as recipient of the 2023 Bob Ball Award. The Robert (Bob) Ball Award is given annually to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the CWC's mission of protecting Central Michigan's land, water, and wildlife resources to improve the quality of life for all.

Alexis was recognized for her service as the CWC's Development and Outreach Coordinator. Alexis joined the CWC in 2018 in a part-time capacity before transitioning to a full-time role in January 2020, just before the Covid-19 pandemic. Alexis was instrumental in helping to steer the CWC through the challenges posed by the pandemic and its aftermath.

Alexis has been both a key voice for the organization, making multiple media appearances, and a smiling face representing the CWC at dozens of events and leading numerous educational and social hikes. Often, the first contact that people had with the CWC was through Alexis. After twenty-five years of hosting a Spring Banquet came to an end in 2019, Alexis played a key role in the establishment of our Fall Fundraiser in 2021. It was especially fitting that she be honored during this event which she helped to create.

Although Alexis has recently moved on from the CWC to become the Isabella County Parks and Recreation Director, her impact on and legacy with the organization will continue. During the presentation of the award, Executive Director Mike LeValley noted that the many successes that the CWC experienced over the past four years would not have been possible without Alexis' input and efforts. Alexis stated that she was very humbled and honored to have received this award.



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Eagle Scout Project Benefits the CWC

Isaac Finch of Boy Scout Troop 604 in Mt. Pleasant recently completed his Eagle Scout Project of building and installing double-sided information kiosks at Szok Riverbend Preserve in Isabella County and Peterson Natural Area in Mecosta County. Isaac's project took months of planning and fundraising before construction was completed in late October. The design was based on existing kiosks at Bundy Hill and other CWC preserves but modified to incorporate a metal roof and display surfaces on both sides. The double-sided nature of the kiosk will allow us to display a map of the Chippewa River Water Trail at Szok Preserve. At Peterson, the kiosk will be used to not only display information about the CWC and Peterson Natural Area but also about the White Pine Trail which runs just past the preserve on the east.



A Single Day Vertical Mile at Bundy Hill?

The Bundy Hill Vertical Mile Challenge has been going on since 2021. With a trip from the trailhead to the summit having an elevation gain of 170 feet, participants have to climb Bundy Hill thirty-one times to complete the challenge, totaling a minimum of thirty-seven miles of hiking. While participants have an entire calendar year to accomplish the feat, most people who have completed the challenge take several months, climbing Bundy Hill once or twice a day. To our knowledge, no one had attempted to complete the challenge in a single 24-hour period.

That changed when Nick Pellegrino and Rachel Rasette laced up their boots in the predawn hours of October 7th. Nick and Rachel learned about the challenge at the CMU MainStage event on August and immediately warmed to the idea. After a month of training they were physically strong and well prepared for their attempt. Buoyed by frequent rest breaks and logistical and moral support from Rachel's family they hiked steadily and strongly throughout the day. By the time Rachel's family left for the day, the pair had completed twenty-four trips of the required thirty-one.

They started the twenty-fifth trip up the hill sometime around 9:00PM and projected that they would finish sometime after midnight. Unfortunately, this twenty-fifth trip proved to be their undoing; Nick rolled both ankles on the descent. Combined with a lingering respiratory illness, the difficulty of the terrain, darkness, and the monotony of walking the same path repeatedly, this proved to be too much. Nick stated, "Rachel initiated the conversation about how we attempted the challenge to have fun and to set a personal goal for ourselves... [It] was pretty close to becoming the complete opposite of fun." After a lengthy discussion, Nick and Rachel made the hard decision to call off their attempt. "Come to find out on day of hike, we didn't mentally train for what 31 trips up a hill and 31 trips down that same hill was going to do to us..."

Ultimately, although Nick and Rachel did not finish the Bundy Hill Vertical Mile Challenge in a single day, they did complete the challenge by completing their final hikes on October 22nd. "Maybe not the way we intended, and maybe not the way we hoped, but we still set out to do something and we did what we wanted to do in some capacity." Well done!

A 24-hour vertical mile at Bundy Hill remains a goal yet to be conquered, for now.



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Thank You to CMU Alternative Breaks Program Volunteers, Alma College Alternative Breaks Program Volunteers, and The Wildlife Society CMU Chapter Volunteers for their recent work clearing invasive species at Millpond Natural Area.

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