

HERON TRACKS

CWC | CHIPPEWA
WATERSHED
CONSERVANCY



The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy
Volume 30 Number 3 Summer 2023



Marl Lake Conservation Easement

Executive Director's Corner

I keep coming back to Leopold's land ethic.

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for). The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

I see the land ethic at work in people like Gilbert Starks, who earlier this year donated his property so that it could become the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy's twenty-fifth nature preserve, and in Linda Walterreit who has now twice placed conservation easements on her properties to preserve them for future generations.

I see the land ethic in our volunteers that monitor preserves and conservation easements; in those that remove invasive species and those that restore native trees and plants; and in those that pick up litter along the roadside. I see it in those that teach others to love and respect the natural world and in those that contribute to the work of others with gifts of time, treasure, or talent. I see the land ethic in the actions, both small and large, of so many people in our community and around the world striving to tip the balance back in favor of the natural world and it uplifts me.

Stay Well and Happy Trails!

CWC Chair Notes

On Sunday, August 6, 2023, the comic strip *Rose Is Rose* by Pat Brady & Don Wimmer featured Meemaw and the boy walking in the woods. There was no ticket booth, entrance fees, or season pass required. The magnificent forest refused to profit from its beauty. All was free and everyone can afford free. That is CWC. If you have not read the comic look it up. It exactly describes us. Enjoy our properties. We are having a Fall Fundraiser on October 6 at the Little Flower Barn at Coldwater Lake. Please join us and help keep our woodland experiences free.

Marilyn Fosburg, Chair CWC

CWC Staff & Board Changes

Alexis Hansen recently left her position as Development & Outreach Coordinator to take on the role of Director of Isabella Count Parks and Recreation. Alexis originally joined the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy in 2018 as a part-time employee before transitioning to full-time in 2020. We wish Alexis the best and look forward to collaborating with her in her new role.

Autumn Baker joined the CWC staff in July as our new Development & Donor Relations Coordinator. Autumn is a life-long nature lover who has been volunteering with CWC since 2022 as a stewardship volunteer and as a preserve and conservation easement monitor. In addition to her monitoring and stewardship work with the CWC, she also volunteers as a preserve steward for the Michigan Nature Association and as a vernal pool monitor with the Michigan Vernal Pools Partnership. She's very excited to have the opportunity to work in the field of conservation. Autumn can be reached at autumn@cwc-mi.org.

Caroline Roberts has joined the CWC as our newest member of the Board of Directors. Caroline is a 2023 graduate of Central Michigan University and is the Business and Community Development Assistant Manager for Middle Michigan Development Corporation. If Caroline's name sounds familiar, it's because she was a summer intern with the CWC in 2021 and has stayed active with the organization as a volunteer since then. We're excited to have Caroline's perspective added to the Board.

The World of Fungi

Have you ever peeled back the bark on a downed log and discovered a network of entangled white threads working their way through the wood? If so, you've taken a glimpse into the hidden world of fungi. Those individual threads, known as hyphae, make up the majority of a fungus' body and are collectively known as the mycelium. The mushrooms that we see above the surface are just a small part of a much larger organism. The mushrooms themselves are actually the reproductive or fruiting body of the fungus and typically only appear for short periods when conditions are right.

Fungi serve several different functions in ecosystems. Probably the best known of these is as a decomposer. Many species of fungi break down organic matter and return its components to a form that is usable by plants and other organisms. Without fungi, the carbon and other elements locked in fallen leaves and branches would be forever unavailable to the growing plants of the forest.

Other fungi form mutually beneficial symbiotic relationships with certain species of plants. Their mycelial network connects with the plants' roots system and effectively acts an extension of that system, collecting water and minerals from a much larger area than the plant alone and sharing them with the plant in exchange for sugars. This same mycelial network is used to pass materials and chemical signals between individual plants with and even across species. Because fungi are so good at pulling things from the soil, we are beginning to use them for bioremediation projects that clean and restore polluted ecosystems!

Still other species act as parasites on plants, animals or even other fungi, taking sustenance without providing a service in return. A few species will even alter the behavior of their host causing them to act in ways that benefit the fungus but not necessarily in the best interest of the host. Some species of fungi even act as predators, with their underground hyphae snaring nematodes and other microscopic organisms! The variety of lifestyles available to fungi is limited only by their biologic capabilities.

Fungi are found throughout the year but late summer and fall seems to bring the largest variety of species to Central Michigan with October often presenting the widest variety of species. We have identified upwards of ninety species on some of our identification hikes. If you'd like to learn more about the fabulous fungi in our region, join us for one of five scheduled dates this fall. Info at cwc-mi@org.





Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust (such as the CWC) which contains permanent restrictions on the use or development of land to protect clearly defined conservation values, such as wildlife habitat, scenic or open space, prime farmland, or historical significance. It limits but does not necessarily prohibit all use, depending upon the terms of the easement agreement. Because the purpose of the easement is to protect the conservation values of the land, each easement is written in a way that seeks to balance the landowner's desires with the best conservation outcomes.

CWC holds roughly 4700 acres in conservation easements, and these properties require annual monitoring. On these visits, a staff member or volunteer will walk the property either alone or with the landowner. For many landowners, this is a time to present land management projects and discuss the flora and fauna they observe on the property. If the property is not a residence, it is not unusual for the monitor to visit solo.

When monitoring an easement, we evaluate multiple criteria. First, we confirm that the landowner is not violating the specifics of the easement, such as unauthorized building or logging. We also observe the property boundaries to ensure a neighbor is not encroaching. This visit is also an opportunity to note if any notable natural alterations have occurred. The volunteer is responsible for filling out a monitoring form and submitting it with photographs and a map or route of the visit.

Being a conservation easement monitor is an excellent opportunity to tour a property not open to the public. I enjoy chatting with landowners who share a passion for the natural world. I am always eager to hear their stories and the history of the land, and most landowners are delighted to share. You become more invested in preserving these places when you listen to the treasured memories that have taken place there.

Conservation easements are a vital part of the CWC's mission and give individuals a chance to protect their land permanently. We all benefit from these thousands of protected acres as they hold natural features that make Central Michigan the special place we love. - Autumn Baker

A Woods of Her Own

Linda Walterreit has long recognized the need for conservation. In 2016, she signed a Conservation Easement with the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy to permanently protect nearly sixty-four acres of farmland and natural space in Isabella County's Fremont Township.

Linda always dreamed of owning a woods but never thought it would be possible. She lived next to a woods but it was not hers. She despaired of the thought that someday that woods may be cleared. When it came up for sale late last year, Linda jumped at the chance to place a bid on the property. When the bidding closed, Linda was at last the proud owner of a woods of her own.

In late May, Linda signed an amendment to her Conservation Easement that added approximately thirty additional acres of farmland and thirty acres of woods to the lands that she has permanently protected.

Linda's new woods is filled with a variety of mature deciduous trees including red oak, sugar maple, black cherry, American beech, paper birch, and red maple. The trees grow over a diverse shrub layer and carpet of herbaceous plants including mayapple, violets, ferns, trout lily, blue cohosh, wild strawberry, and numerous sedges and grasses. Linda was especially excited to find her first trillium bloom on the property this spring.

The addition of Linda's 59.61 acres brings the total acreage of conservation easements held by the CWC in Isabella County to 609 acres.



On Friday June 9th, more than fifty people gathered to celebrate the official dedication of Starks Preserve, the CWC's twenty-fifth nature preserve. Guests were treated to a variety refreshments before brief remarks by CWC Executive Director Mike LeValley, CWC founder John Mitchell, and property donor Gilbert Starks. After the preserve sign was unveiled, guests had the opportunity to tour the 8.8 acre property. Starks Preserve is located on Bruder Drive in Isabella County's Deerfield Township.

CWC FALL FUNDRAISER

THURSDAY, OCT 5TH, 2023

LITTLE FLOWER BARN
565 N COLDWATER RD.
LAKE ISABELLA, MI 48893



Join us from 5:30 to 8:30 pm for dinner, drinks, live music, and drawings to raise funds for local conservation!

Register or become a sponsor online at:
<https://bit.ly/2023CWCfallfundraiser>

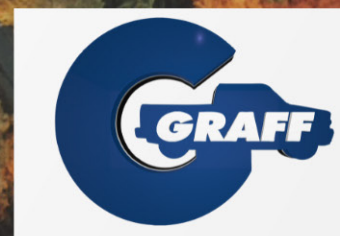
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