

HERON TRACKS

CWC | CHIPPEWA
WATERSHED
CONSERVANCY



The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy
Volume 32 Number 1 Winter 2025



*Chippewa River at
Sylvan Solace Preserve*

Executive Director's Corner

Forty years of conservation.

The Chippewa Watershed Conservancy was originally incorporated as the Isabella County Nature Conservancy on September 12, 1985 with the purpose of "purchas[ing] and improv[ing] real property for recreational and educational enjoyment by Michigan citizens". While our service area has expanded and our name has changed, our purpose remains largely the same. We're dedicated to protecting and restoring Central Michigan's land, water, and wildlife resources to improve the quality of life for all.

In the succeeding four decades, we've grown to the point where we now protect over 5,500 acres of land across seven Central Michigan Counties. This includes 27 publicly accessible nature preserves and 36 conservation easements on private land. In that same time, we have evolved from an all-volunteer organization to having two full-time staff members and have moved out of a basement home office and into our current home in the Hersee House at 306 S University Avenue in Mt. Pleasant. Every year, thousands of people walk our trails, hundreds volunteer at our work sessions, and hundreds more participate in our guided public events. It adds up to a legacy well worth celebrating!

Throughout the year, we'll be celebrating this anniversary and sharing memories from our past in Heron Tracks, on our website, and through our electronic newsletter and social media. We're also planning a series of special events throughout the year including an anniversary party on Friday, September 12th.

Do you have any special memories of the CWC or our protected properties? We'd love to hear about them and (with your permission) share them with others! We'd also love to see any photographs that you might have of the CWC's earlier years. Send your memories to cwc@cwc-mi.org; mail them to PO Box 896, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48804; or stop by our office at 306 S. University in Mt. Pleasant.

Stay Well and Happy Trails!

CWC Chair Notes

I distinctly recall when my mother turned 40. We were on vacation out west and as we drove the many miles across Nebraska and eastern Colorado, my sister and I made a sign to put in the back window of our car saying, "Honk, my mom is 40". It took quite a while for my parents to realize why people were honking at us...my sister and I were quite pleased with ourselves. At that age, 40 seemed so incredibly old. Now, having well surpassed that point myself, I look back at 40 and have a slightly different perspective. Entering each new decade is a milestone, but turning 40 is unique. It's an opportunity for reflection. It can bring connotations of maturity and feelings of accomplishment, or perhaps an acknowledgment that things haven't turned out as planned. It's a time to consider what is truly important and to make adjustments or double down on your commitments. And, like we did with my mom, it's an opportunity to draw attention (perhaps unwanted attention in that case) to something noteworthy – turning 40 and all that it takes to get there is an accomplishment to celebrate. Some reach that milestone and then calmly move on into the future. Some make those slight adjustments, perhaps learning a new skill or making more time to spend with their children or committing to read more – whatever it may be, and then proceeding apace...and, of course, some buy a sports car.

This year, the CWC turns 40, and throughout the year we'll take time to reflect on this noteworthy accomplishment by looking to the past and to the future. There may be minor adjustments to make here and there, and plenty of doubling down on the good. As we approach this milestone, I believe the organization is as strong now as it ever has been, with momentum on its side and an ever better grasp of what it will take to move forward. The official birthday is in September, so keep your eye out for more information - we look forward to celebrating with you! Personally, I'm so glad to be part of an organization that is growing and strong, with committed staff, volunteers, and supporters working together to protect our natural spaces well into the future...sorry Mike, doesn't look like the CWC is gonna buy a sports car.

CWC Conservation Legacy Society

Are you looking for a way to leave a lasting impact on Central Michigan's land, water, and wildlife resources? Consider becoming a member of our Conservation Legacy Society by leaving a planned gift to the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy as part of your estate planning. There are several different ways this can be accomplished.

Wills or Trusts

One of the simplest ways to create a lasting conservation legacy is to make a bequest gift by naming Chippewa Watershed Conservancy in your will or trust.

Life Insurance Policies

You can name Chippewa Watershed Conservancy as a primary or contingent beneficiary of your life insurance policies.

Retirement Plans

You can also name Chippewa Watershed Conservancy as a full or partial beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k) or other qualified retirement plans. This could reduce or eliminate the income and estate tax liabilities incurred when retirement account assets are passed to an individual.

Real Estate

You can donate land or other types of real property to the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy. Gifts of real estate may be either conserved in perpetuity as nature preserves or used as sale/trade land to support local land conservation projects. Please contact the Conservancy before including a gift of this nature in your estate.

The Conservancy strongly encourages prospective Conservation Legacy Society members to meet with their financial advisors to further explore the benefits of planned gifts. We will work closely with you and your financial advisor to design a giving plan that will meet your personal, financial, and charitable goals.

If you have already set up a planned gift for the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy, please consider letting us know. Knowing about your gift can help us better plan for the future.

What some of our current Conservation Legacy Society members have to say...



"The CWC has important promises to keep in perpetuity. A legacy contribution is our opportunity to help them keep those promises beyond our lifetimes." -Stan & Pat Lilley



"I have been involved with the CWC as a volunteer for many years. I have been so impressed with the dedication of the group, including the staff, board members, volunteers and CWC supporters through donations, as we all work together to accomplish the mission and vision of the CWC. Our support of land protection, water quality, wildlife habitat, and access to nature is crucial to central Michigan. In addition to current volunteer work, I am looking to future land protection and acquisition by supporting the CWC with a planned gift." -Pat Block

"The mission of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy closely parallels the passion in my heart... to protect and restore our land, water, and wildlife resources. The CWC provided a path for me to establish a Conservation Easement on our property, which was once only a dream to my late husband Jim and me. My Legacy gift will help the Conservancy continue its mission into the future. I can rest in peace, knowing that my part of the world is in good hands!" -Anne Messinger



"The CWC's conservation successes of today, the roughly 8.5 square miles protected to date, and the successes of tomorrow, both depend on the CWC's long-term strength. Jean and I have set aside funds in our wills to help ensure that the CWC will always be able to meet the needs of future generations while honoring its commitments. It feels good to know that we will always be part of the CWC and the natural wonders that it protects." -John & Jean Mitchell

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Give Local Isabella is a 24-hour community-wide fundraising event hosted by the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation. Held once a year on the first Tuesday in May, Give Local Isabella engages hundreds of community members in supporting the long-term financial sustainability of their favorite local charitable organizations in a virtual format. We invite you to invest in the future of our community by joining us on Tuesday, May 5, 2025, for the fun!

Save the Date!

The 2025 CWC Fall Fundraiser is scheduled for Thursday, October 2nd at Little Flower Barn. Mark your calendars to join us for an evening of dinner, drinks, local art, and raffles to raise funds to support our mission!



CWC To Join SPARCnet Project

We are excited to announce that CWC will contribute data to the Salamander Population and Adaptation Research Collaboration Network (SPARCnet). This regional initiative is designed to advance



our understanding of environmental change to salamander ecology. This project focuses on the Eastern Red-backed Salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*) found in forests throughout the northeastern United States and into Canada. These tiny salamanders make up an impressive biomass in the woodlands they inhabit while playing an integral role in the ecological health of these forests. Using a replicatable plot design, we will monitor populations at Sylvan Solace Preserve and Hall's Lake Natural Area. Following the SPARCnet protocol, three site visits will be completed in spring and fall. At these visits data will be collected to aid in research on morphology, abundance, age-class structure, life history, demography, and more. This information will help inform broader research in the region while also giving us a better understanding of this species distribution on our preserves. By monitoring these populations, we can gain deeper insights into the overall health of the forest and identify early warning signs of shifts or disruptions in the ecosystem. We look forward to sharing more details about this ongoing project in the future!

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