

HERON TRACKS

CWC | CHIPPEWA
WATERSHED
CONSERVANCY



The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy
Volume 32 Number 3 Summer 2025



*Showy Ladyslipper Orchids at
Hall's Lake Natural Area*

Executive Director's Corner

We continue to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy. In the previous *Heron Tracks*, I shared with you a brief summary of my personal history with the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy. In this issue, we asked for your stories and boy did you deliver! From a family cottage at Hall's Lake, to visiting our booth at the Mt. Pleasant Farmers' Market, to seeking advice on invasive species management, the stories about how individuals came to know and support the CWC are as diverse as the people sharing them.



Mike and Avery after completing the addition to the deer enclosure at Neyer Preserve

But it is your experiences and your memories that keep you coming back. From chance encounters with wildlife and wildflowers, to knowledge imparted on hikes, to a surprise engagement on one of our preserves, the memories of these places enrich lives in many ways. Way back in my first "Executive Director's Corner" in the Fall 2019 issue, I wrote about our vision of "a world where communities are enriched by being connected to land, water, and wildlife resources". I think it is safe to say that everyone who has shared their story in these pages would agree that over the past forty years, the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy has enriched our lives and our community.

This shared community of nature-lovers is also enriched by the people within it. For me personally, this includes the various volunteers, board and committee members, and staff with whom I have the genuine pleasure to work. One of the most rewarding aspects for me is working with people at the very beginning of their careers in conservation. I'd like to take a moment to say farewell and good luck to our 2025 summer intern, Avery Geisen. Avery joined us in mid-May after graduating from Central Michigan University with a degree in Environmental Studies and spent sixteen weeks with us before moving on to her first full-time job. The story of Avery's experience with the CWC didn't fit on these pages but can be found on our website at <https://cwc-mi.org/intern-insights-july-2025/>.

Stay Well and Happy Trails!

Purple Pitcher Plants (*Sarracenia purpurea*) were recently discovered at Hall's Lake Natural Area

Chippewa Watershed Conservancy History

The First Twenty Years (1985-2005)

1985

CWC incorporated as the Isabella County Nature Conservancy

1994

Isabella County Nature Conservancy reorganizes as the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy Board of Directors and officers elected and bylaws adopted

1995

McNeel Preserve established as first CWC nature preserve
First CWC newsletter published; officially becomes *Heron Tracks* with next issue

1996

CWC establishes endowment fund at Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation
Hiawatha Hills Preserve and Sylvan Solace Preserve established

1998

Hamlin Conservation Easement signed as first CWC conservation easement

2000

Coldwater Lake Preserve established; later renamed as Kjolhede's Kove Preserve
Stearns Conservation Easement and Marl Lake Conservation Easement signed

2001

Island Lake Conservation Easement signed

2002

Meridian Road Preserve established
Seldom Seen Conservation Easement signed

2003

Stan Lilley hired as assistant to CWC Board President, becoming the first paid CWC staff member
Collins Conservation Easements and Groshon Conservation Easement signed

2004

Bartlett Conservation Easement signed
Stan Lilley promoted to be CWC's first Executive Director

2005

Litwiller Conservation Easement, Owen Conservation Easement, Swetz Conservation Easement, Carter Conservation Easement, Severson Conservation Easement, and Sponseller Conservation Easement all signed

Part two (2006 – present) will be included in the Fall issue of *Heron Tracks*

CWC Supporter Stories

To read these in their entirety please visit: <https://cwc-mi.org/cwc-stories>



"From early on, my free time was spent exploring the fields and forests of Michigan. My parents fostered a fascination of the natural world around us. They would tell us the folk tale of Queen Anne's Lace and point out to us the different birds and their mating habits. They would also name different animals from afar and tell us how they fit into their ecosystem. I donate and became a member of CWC to support their mission of conservation and preservation. I support their mission so I can take my kids someday to the preserves. I want to be able to show them the same species my parents showed me and tell them their stories." -**Torri Basso**

"My residence is next to the Chippewa River. It is a privilege to have this experience. Knowing that there is an organization protecting the watershed of this central Michigan river has great importance.

Some people have lost their interest in environmental issues. The CWC continues to act and promote the importance of fresh, clean water and a safe environment.

Congratulations and Thank You for your efforts." -**Ginger Judge**

"I got involved with Chippewa Watershed Conservancy for a hundred reasons: the people who created and grew the organization, those who made the incredible commitment of entrusting their land to its care, and supporters who, like me, find immense joy and connection through nature.

A particularly resonant aspect of the CWC for me has always been the caliber of its educators and presenters. I often recall the captivating stories shared at the annual fundraisers; I still reminisce about Stan Lilley's remarkable nature skills, which left a lasting impression. These experiences highlight the CWC as a beautiful organization comprised of beautiful people, all united in their love for our precious lands. We are merely temporary stewards of these natural spaces, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure their beauty endures for future generations. The CWC embodies this commitment, making it an organization I wholeheartedly support."

-**Amy Shindorf**

"What can I say? Many of my great outdoor memories have happened at a CWC preserve. From accidentally coming across a barred owl along the trail, witnessing a beaver munching on some goodies across the river (both at Sylvan), to finding two Blanding's turtles at Hall's Lake on the same day, and accidentally discovering an eastern newt at Hall's while flipping a log, it is always an adventure! I find a lot of peace in the woods and I am especially glad that these wonderful properties are available for all to enjoy!" -**Karen Green**

"I discovered CWC while at the Mt. Pleasant Farmers' Market in 2022. It was a no-brainer for me to get involved—it was obvious this organization was doing work I wanted to be a part of. Sylvan Solace seemed the perfect property for me to become a steward for because it was my "lunchtime hiking spot." I spent the first visit to Hall's Lake chasing Northern Leopard Frogs along the Lakeshore Trail and poking around in the various wetlands and never looked back! The more time I spend there, the more I love it... it feels like "home." Summer of 2023 Mike asked if I had ever considered a career change and invited me to come in for an interview. The rest is history! Now I get paid to share salamander facts with people. What more could a person ask for?!"

-**Autumn Baker**

"CWC preserves like Bundy Hill, Sylvan Solace, Hall's Lake, and others have provided me with wonderful subjects to photograph, such as wildflowers, snakes, insects, frogs, deer, and numerous species of birds. And the trails help keep me active and hiking in the outdoors all year long.

I consider myself lucky to have the opportunity to access so many acres and miles of wetland, woodland, and river banks that the CWC maintains and protects. I can't thank the CWC enough for their work in protecting mid-Michigan's outdoor spaces and getting folks interested in the outdoors; I'm proud to support their ongoing efforts." -**Jason Mahokey**



"I became interested in conservation at an early age. I was one of the first girls to attend Camp Kett. It was a conservation camp which included a deer drive and other outdoor activities. I was very active in 4-H both as a member and a leader and I completed and led many projects in the nature area. Until retirement I lived in the country on a large parcel of wild land. We put a conservation easement on the property before selling it and moving to Mt. Pleasant. Joining CWC was a natural for me. I enjoyed what I was doing and what CWC was accomplishing. I am proud to have been a past Chairman and I hope I have been an effective leader in adding new acreage and making more people aware of CWC." -**Marilyn Fosburg**

"My grandfather built our family cottage at Halls Lake in 1942 and as a child I remember spending endless hours on the East Side of the lake catching turtles. Because of the efforts of Stan Lilley and many other supporters, the CWC purchased this property preserving it for future generations. The Halls Lake Natural Area is now a treasured gem enjoyed by our family and friends." -**Alan and Kathy Johns**

"When I bought 15 acres of overgrown forest on the Chippewa River in 2022, I knew it was a special place, even if I couldn't see the forest for the trees at first. With help from the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy and Executive Director Mike LeValley, I began removing invasive autumn olive and saw a dramatic improvement in the health of the land. The CWC's guidance, community engagement, and deep knowledge of local habitats inspired me to join the board in 2023. I'm grateful to be part of a group that not only protects our natural spaces but also warmly welcomed me into this beautiful Michigan community." -**Karin Jenson**

"The trails, fields, and forests protected by the CWC have quietly held space for some of the most significant chapters of my life. Thank you for preserving these spaces— not just for the wildlife, not just for the community, but for people like me, who have found comfort, connection, and continuity on your trails. Your work matters more than you know." -**Lizzette Betancourt**

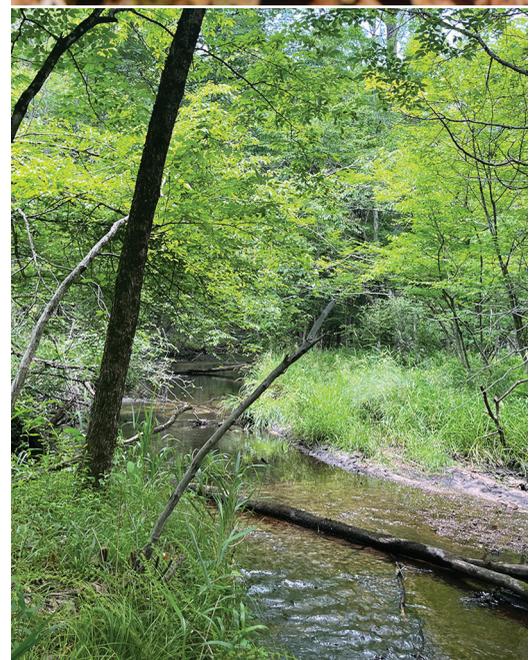
"I started visiting CWC properties after driving past the brown road-side signs enough times to become curious enough to follow them to Bundy Hill one day. For a while, my interaction with the CWC was limited to visits to the preserves every month or so. Then I met my now-fiancé, Caroline Roberts, who was crazy about the CWC.

Through her, I became much more involved with the organization and its overall mission. When the time came for me to propose to Caroline, I knew I wanted to do it outside and within Isabella county. Working with those parameters, and given our shared love for the organization, I figured there was no better proposal spot than our favorite CWC preserve, Hall's Lake Natural Area.

When the day came, I asked if she wanted to go for a hike at a preserve after work, as we do often do on summer afternoons. Unbeknownst to her, I ran out to Hall's alone first and stashed some roses behind a tree, right where there's a gap in the foliage that provides a wide view of the lake.

Shortly after, we came back to the preserve together. As we approached the break in the trees, I went down to where the roses laid. I called her over under the guise of a particularly interesting plant I had found, which is not uncommon for Hall's. As she approached, I pulled out the roses and the ring.

The rest of the hike back to the vehicle was much less eventful compared to that moment, but no less enchanting, as is the nature of Hall's and its significance to us. We are forever grateful for the CWC and its stewardship of wild places that affords people the opportunity to create memories in the outdoors." -**Owen Howard**



Orchid Adventures

This year, I had a goal to document every native orchid species at Halls Lake Natural Area. The inspiration began after our intern, Ivy, found a population of Showy Ladyslipper (*Cypripedium reginae*) past bloom last summer. I was determined to photograph them in bloom for the 2025 summer newsletter cover. I kept a close eye on the plants, anticipating the beauty I would see if the deer behaved themselves. In mid-May, I went on a brief hike one Sunday morning, and my eye caught a bright pink bulb not far off the trail. A single blooming Pink Ladyslipper (*Cypripedium acaule*)! A fallen branch leaned on the flower stalk. I removed the branch and took many pictures of the crooked, but still utterly perfect, orchid. Exactly a month later to the day, I took my friend Jessica on a tour of Hall's Lake Natural Area. The grand finale was a hike through the emergent wetlands—hummock-hopping, watching out for special plants, all the while darting through Poison Sumac—to see the Showy Ladyslippers! Along the way, I nearly stepped on a Fen Orchid (*Liparis loeselii*). The orchid list continued to grow! We arrived to be greeted by our target species in full bloom (as seen on the cover!).

Next on the list was a Ragged Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera lacera*) location reported by Cathy Murray from a decade ago. I had to keep this streak going... Ten days after the last two discoveries, I found Cathy's orchid!

Currently, the Small Green Wood Orchid (*Platanthera clavellata*) and Downy Rattlesnake Plantain (*Goodyera pubescens*) are in flower. While I haven't seen any evidence of the two Coralroot species we observed last year, you can be sure I'm keeping my eyes peeled!

That's the awesome thing about CWC's work—we get to be the stewards of these beautiful, wild places, and ALL of you make it possible! Finding these sensitive species is a testament to the care of this property by not only the Conservancy, but all who acted as stewards before us. -Autumn Baker



Pink Ladyslipper,
Cypripedium acaule



Fen Orchid,
Liparis loeselii



Showy Ladyslipper,
Cypripedium reginae



Ragged Fringed Orchid,
Platanthera lacera



Small Green Wood Orchid,
Platanthera clavellata



Downy Rattlesnake Plantain,
Goodyera pubescens



Spotted Coralroot,
Corallorhiza maculata



Autumn Coralroot,
Corallorhiza odontorhiza



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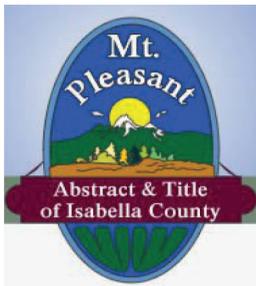
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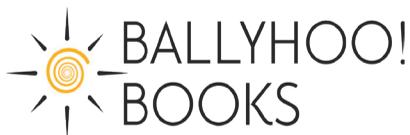
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