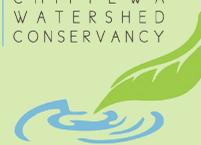


HERON TRACKS

CWC | CHIPPEWA
WATERSHED
CONSERVANCY



The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy
Volume 33 Number 1 Winter 2026



*Chippewa River at
Bulger Preserve*

Executive Director's Corner

Our community is amazing!

In early December, we informed you about our loss of a multi-year operating grant. This grant represented about twenty percent of our annual budget. We asked you to help bridge the gap in support by making a year-end contribution to the CWC and you responded in a big way. Despite the loss of grant funding, thanks to you, we were still able to meet our budget needs for the year. But the challenge has not gone away; the grant funding is likely not coming back. We ask that you consider how much the natural world and the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy means to you as we move forward in 2026. Every gift matters!

Financial support is not the only way that individuals can contribute to the CWC. In this issue of *Heron Tracks*, you'll find an article about our newest nature preserve, the Bulger Preserve. Since 2022, we've added five new preserves to our holdings with all but one of these being a donation. The vast majority of lands that we protect, both our nature preserves and conservation easements, were donated to the CWC by individuals like you who cared enough to protect land that was important to them. Even when we have purchased properties, landowners have worked with us either on a reduced price or on ensuring that we had enough time to fundraise for the purchase.

You can also make a difference by giving your time. With our small staff, we often need help. In the past year, dozens of members of our community joined us on stewardship outings, served on our committees, and acted as volunteer monitors of our preserves and easements. You can be assured that there will be plenty of opportunities to get involved again over the coming year! Right now, you can help us by answering a survey. Every three years, the CWC staff and board reviews and updates our strategic plan. As part of this process, we want to know how you think the Conservancy is doing, specifically by answering some questions about our organization's mission, vision, and values. Your answers will be taken into consideration as we move forward with updating this plan. The survey can be answered at: bit.ly/CWC2026survey

Thank you for all that you do to support the CWC. Stay Well and Happy Trails!

CWC Chair Notes

Over the past several months I have several times caught myself thinking that this has been a particularly long winter, quickly followed by the thought that it is probably a typical Michigan winter, and we have simply gotten used to short winters in recent years. Whatever the truth is, we've certainly had our fair share of cold weather, and I hope this newsletter finds you all well and with a warm home to enjoy. Winter can be a great time to hunker down and relax a bit, though it also brings new and different opportunities for those inclined to venture out. Besides the obvious winter sports, I find this to be a great time to explore off-trail (maybe just a little bit) and get a closer look at the ice forming on a small brook, or see those trees that have grown together from a different angle, or perhaps to follow some tracks through the woods to find where that creature has been spending its time. Like those adventurous souls who choose to not let cold keep them at home, the CWC has continued to push ahead and pursue new opportunities as well. In fact, in this newsletter, you will read of a new preserve that was recently added to the roster thanks to the generosity of some longtime CWC friends. There are many more exciting plans being developed now that you will see unfurled in 2026. As usual, none of this is possible without you, and I hope you can take advantage of the last bit of winter to get out and enjoy the fruits of your generosity and dedication to the CWC by relishing some different views of your favorite preserves while things are still frozen!



Introducing Bulger Preserve

Donated to the CWC in December 2025, the Bulger Preserve is located along the Chippewa River in Deerfield Township, Isabella County. The property was received as a gift from Scott McNaught and Janice Burke. They requested that the preserve be named after former owners William and Margery Bulger who had preserved the property in its natural state. This preserve is our 28th owned property.

Located within the Rivercrest Subdivision at the northwest corner of Bluegrass Road and Cedar Drive, the preserve is bounded to the northwest by the Chippewa River and has approximately 150 feet of river frontage. Access to the property and limited roadside parking are available along Cedar Drive.

This 1+ acre property is forested in a mix of upland and floodplain species including oaks, maples, and cedar. The property provides suitable habitat for a wide variety of resident and migratory birds, aquatic and terrestrial mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and insects. The previous owners reported numerous sighting of bald eagles and osprey perched in the trees along the riverbank. The preserve is likely habitat for the wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*), a state threatened species, and the Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*), a state species of special concern, both of which have been observed on nearby CWC preserves.

A public tour of the preserve will be held in the spring and CWC staff will begin conducting flora and fauna surveys of the property later this year.



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Little Flower Barn- Event space

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Cathy Murray- Compound & stereo microscopes



Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*)
Sylvan Solace Preserve
courtesy of Stan Lilley

Chippewa Watershed Conservancy Mission, Vision, and Values Survey

Every three years, the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy (CWC) updates our strategic plan. This includes reviewing our mission, vision, and values as an organization. We'd like your input as we move forward with our examination of these items. We have created a short survey to help us determine what is important to our community (especially to our supporters) and inform our direction for the future. You can find our current mission, vision, and values here:

cwc-mi.org/cwc-mission-vision-and-values-survey

Go to this link to complete the survey:

bit.ly/CWC2026survey

If you are unable to access the survey in the digital format, please call the office at 989-772-5777 and we can mail you a printed version.



Save the Date

The 2026 CWC Fall Fundraiser is scheduled for **Wednesday, October 7th** at Little Flower Barn. Mark your calendars to join us for an evening of dinner, drinks, art show, and raffles to raise funds to support our mission!

Give Local
Isabella

Mark your calendars for Give Local Isabella on **May 5, 2026**. This 24-hour community-wide fundraising event is hosted annually by the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation to support the long-term financial sustainability of local charities in a virtual format. Last year we added \$5,695 to our endowment thanks to the generosity of community members. Let's see if we can exceed that amount this year!

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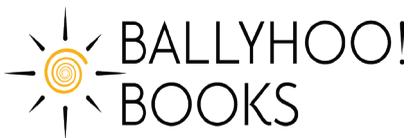
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