

HERON TRACKS

The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy
Volume 23 Number 1 Winter 2016

HICKORY HILL EASEMENT PRESERVES A FAMILY LEGACY



"A light breeze tickled the surface of Russell Lake, and wood ducks flushed from the grassy shore line the first time I walked there more than nine years ago," said CWC Executive Director Stan Lilley. "This was a place I knew we needed to protect for the benefit of future generations, and I was glad to know that was exactly what the landowner, Haldon Smith, wanted."

Mr. Smith passed away before seeing that happen, but his children, Laurie Smith and David Mattern shared their family's love for the land and continued the process their father started. On December 30, 2015, the dream became a reality with the signing of a permanent conservation easement on 528 acres of their 550 acre property in southern Clare County. The land is in the fourth generation of family ownership going back to their great-grandfather, Josiah Littlefield. Immediately abutting the Neithercut Woodland to the east, owned by

Central Michigan University, the nearly 100 percent wooded parcel includes 17-acre Russell Lake and will be called the Hickory Hill Conservation Easement.

Laurie and David made a joint statement, saying, "For as long as we can remember we have been coming to this area to be with family. From a very early age we were taught that this Hickory Hill land was ours to care about and care for, to enjoy and share with family and friends and then to pass along to the next generation. We are the fourth generation, beginning with our great-grandfather, to have stewardship of this property, but it turns out that, since we have no children, there will be no next generation in our family. With the Conservancy we can still keep our family tradition alive and make sure what we love about this place is available to another generation."

Lilley said, "This land remains privately owned and is not open for public

access, but it provides a significant public benefit, nevertheless, because it more than doubles the protected natural space and wildlife habitat afforded by Neithercut Woodland, and it also offers scenic views from M-115."

"This conservation easement was donated by Laurie and David not just because the land holds a special meaning for the family, but because they want to ensure that future generations of Clare County residents will have this natural space to enjoy as well. Sometimes these things take time to complete, but what a wonderful investment in the future. It is an honor to be entrusted with the promise to ensure this land remains natural space," said Lilley.



Executive Director's Corner

RANDOM NOTES

Transition and Inspiration

If you follow our web site, you have probably seen that we are seeking candidates to be the next executive director. If you don't follow the web site, this will be news to you. I am planning to retire on April 30, 2016, after more than 11 ½ years as executive director of this inspiring organization. It has been my pleasure and my honor to help the CWC to make the transition from an all-volunteer organization to a professionally staffed one; from a well-intentioned locally-known group to a nationally accredited land trust, part of the Land Trust Alliance, made up of more than 1,700 groups of all sizes protecting critical open space, wildlife habitat and water quality across the country. And I do mean this has been an inspiring position. How could I not be inspired by the many families and individuals I have met over the years, who have had the vision and fortitude to help to ensure a future of natural space for the next generations

by placing a conservation easement on their land? How could I not be inspired by those who have given their land to the CWC to be stewarded as preserves, with public access where appropriate, and with their love for the land always at the forefront?

"How could I not be inspired by so many who give their time as volunteers, whether it's serving on the board of directors, on a committee, as a preserve steward, leading a nature walk, or planning and executing an event?"

And how could I not be inspired by those who give their hard-earned dollars so that we can buy more land, meet our promises to monitor the easements, teach people about nature and our connections to it? This work has always been an inspiration and it has been my privilege to be a part of something so much bigger than me. And so I thank everyone who has had a part in the growth and successes of the CWC over the past



Stan Lilley, CWC Executive Director

30 years, especially the past 11-plus years that I have been here.

All of the above said, I don't want anyone to think that I intend, like the old soldier that I am, to simply fade away. On the contrary, I expect to be an active volunteer, and I still hope to encounter many of you on the trails and at events. I'll just be turning over the reins to someone as yet unidentified, who brings fresh vision and energy, and perhaps a slightly different skillset to transition the CWC to the next level.

p.s. Want to help to send me out on a truly high note? Let's finish fundraising for the Bundy Hill project by April 30th, so we can start getting people out there to enjoy the land. About another hundred thousand dollars would do it.....

Info from the Intern



Jon Breithaupt, Intern

Winter Recreation in CWC Preserves

While winter is essentially in full swing in the Mid-Michigan region, one can't help but notice how mild it has been. With 2015 being the warmest year in recorded history, perhaps it shouldn't be much of a surprise at all, but I digress. The change of season presents us with a slew of different outdoor recreational opportunities at Chippewa Watershed Conservancy (CWC) preserves.

Indubitably, one of many Michigan-der's favorite winter pastimes is ice fishing. Braving the cold, many of us choose to haul out an ice shanty, auger, a couple poles rigged to conquer our freshwater foes and – if we are lucky – a portable heater to level nature's playing field. Halls Lake Natural Area provides us with public access to a scenic, quiet and sublime inland lake where northern pike, bluegill and other panfish forage for winter food sources.

For those seeking more active recreational experiences, we cannot forget about the grandeur that Sylvan Solace and Audubon Woods preserves boast during the bone-chill of winter. The trail systems at these two permanently protected areas are exceptional for a backcountry activity such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing or a hiking foray.

The three aforementioned CWC preserves take on an entirely new character during the winter months. Coniferous trees are crowned with every new dusting of snow. Animals retreat to their homes, allowing us to foster a deeper connection to the natural environment as the sounds of nature become restricted to the Chippewa River cascading over rocks and other organic debris.

Don't let the cold keep you inside – winter recreation opportunities are abounding at our preserves.



John Mitchell, CWC Board President

I feel guilty. I feel guilty when I drive my car – even if it is on the small side and does get fairly good gas mileage. I feel guilty when I turn on the furnace, the lights, and most everything else that uses energy and therefore generates CO₂. I feel guilty because I know what is happening; know our greenhouse gas pollution will cause worldwide temperature increases and a rising sea level for hundreds of years - even if we stop emitting today. Some damage is done

President's Statement

and a whole lot more is likely before we turn this ship around.

We shopped for a car recently and could not find one that met our needs and ideal of an environmentally friendly vehicle. We want to solarize the house and drive electric. But I also don't want to stand in the rain breaking down my son's wheelchair to fit it in a car that, well; I'll refrain from the description. So until I manage to conform my needs to reality I need to find a way to live with this guilt.

So here is my plan. I entered my data into the calculator on 'Carbon Footprint Ltd' (<http://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>) and my carbon footprint is about 12.5 tons. William Nordhaus of Yale estimates that we need a carbon tax today of about \$20 per ton to get us on a path to eliminating carbon pollution by 2100. Others suggest various different amounts, but I'll go with Nordhaus. So, my 12.5 tons of CO₂ equivalents at \$20 per ton add up to \$250. That is my carbon debt for 2016. I know there ARE a few other things I do that have negative

environmental consequences. We'll skip my other sins for now.

Stan; the check for \$250 is in the mail. I am prepaying my carbon tax. Better yet, think of it as the Citizens' Climate Lobby's proposed 'Carbon Fee and Dividend' with mine designated for the CWC. Since the United States government is not charging it, I am charging myself and sending it to the CWC because I know that something very real will be done to permanently maintain the earth's ability to absorb and sequester my carbon pollution. Put this in the Acquisition Fund. Use it for Bundy Hill or some other place where trees will grow, flowers will bloom, and carbon will stay out of the atmosphere.

I will continue my regular donations to the CWC. I will continue to work towards a solar powered home and car. That will take some time, but the whole idea of pricing carbon is to get us to change our behavior. Meanwhile I will create a personal local carbon pollution offset. I hope each of you will join me. Are you in?

NEW HELP FOR BUNDY HILL

At an elevation of 1,270 feet, Bundy Hill is the highest point in the county. Rising nearly 300 feet above the surrounding terrain, some say it is the "Mount," in Mount Pleasant, although it is about 12 miles west of town.

In October 2015, the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy announced a campaign to buy 100 acres of land around the hill to create a preserve that will be permanently available for recreation and nature education, like the popular nearby 78-acre Sylvan Solace Preserve, 5 1/2 miles to the east.

We are seeking to raise a total of \$240,000, to acquire the parcel to include administrative and closing costs, signage and stewardship endowment funds to ensure that it can be properly maintained and monitored in perpetuity.

Our campaign began with a kickoff at the fall fundraiser hosted by Dianne and Mike Morey, and initially netted \$39,000. Contributions have since grown to \$75,000.00, nearly a third of what we need in less than four months, plus

several pending pledges. A very encouraging beginning!

We have limited time to make this dream a reality

A purchase agreement signed with the family of the late Wakelin and Kathleen McNeel gives us until October 2016 to complete the purchase.

Now, thanks to **generous matching challenges from Isabella Bank and the Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation**, we have an opportunity to turn the next \$45,000.00 in contributions in 2016 into \$90,000.00 for the project.

If you have lived in Isabella County for a while, chances you have heard of Bundy Hill, even if you haven't visited. Bundy Hill is a glacial moraine remnant, as can be seen by the presence of several large boulders on its slopes, including one near the summit that is over 40 feet in circumference and is estimated to weigh more than twenty tons.

The property is part of a larger parcel owned by the McNeel family since 1955. Public access, with permission from the

family has been available, with a telephone number to call, but most people did not realize it. (Please do not try to visit the property now. It remains privately owned until we can complete the purchase, and is leased to hunting.)

So what's in it for you?

After the fundraising is complete, we plan to upgrade the footpath to the summit and replace old trail signage. This property is ideal for future educational events and nature walks like the ones the late Wakelin McNeel, Jr. conducted there. We expect to schedule many such activities in the future. The footpath will be open to the public for use anytime as well. This place is a part of our heritage and we owe it to future generations to make sure it is available.

We encourage anyone interested in helping to go to either our web site or Facebook page for details, updates and various ways to contribute. We only have a few months to meet the challenges and raise the additional funds necessary. Every dollar matters.

Thank You

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Drone Video Carl Crawford, Certified Home Inspections of Michigan

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Hall's Lake and Audubon Woods Trail Maintenance Jonathon Breithaupt

Hall's Lake and Sylvan Solace Trail Walks Jonathon Breithaupt and Mike LeValley

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Bundy Hill Memories

Many locals tell stories about their childhood experiences at Bundy Hill. These range from hiking the property, to sneaking out to party there while in high school, to skiing and tobogganing in winter. Members of the Quaker community recall Sunday meetings and tree planting there. Others remember participating in natural science field trips and tree planting with Wakelin McNeel, Jr., a Central Michigan University professor who was tragically killed in a bicycle-car accident in 1970, while he was on the way to his beloved Bundy Hill. Here is a sample of some of the stories we have received.

Years ago, Hilt Foster and Ed Claus had permission to deer hunt on Bundy Hill from Katy McNeel. Prior to the opening of the season, we would mix up a jug of martinis and tread to the Hill to rebuild their blinds, made of nothing but sticks and leaves. It was a fun afternoon.
~ Jack Weisenburger

The Todd, Norman and Green children worked the field foothills of the Bundy. We were referred to as the Bundy Hillbillies.
~ Diana Green

*In the early 1970s a trip guided by Katy McNeel
Seeing 50-60 deer on a walk
In early spring seeing 100-200 deer off M-20
Huge snowmobile safaris
Morels in the spring
Hills ravaged by motorcycles*
~ Larry Schaftenaar

If the roads weren't plowed, we skied cross country and downhill!
~ Carole Howard

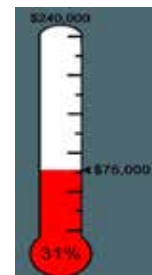
Do you have a Bundy Hill Story to share?

Call us at 989-772-5777 or email
stan@chippewawatershedconservancy.org



Want to contribute to Bundy Hill online, now?

Click here with your phone QR Code reader



CWC PROTECTED LAND

County	Acres
Clare	2,494
Gratiot	149
Isabella	839
Mecosta	491
Montcalm	816
Midland	8
34 Easements	4,284 Acres
19 Preserves	511 Acres
1 Government Transfer	(2 Acres)
TOTAL	4,795 Acres

BANQUET SPONSORS SOUGHT

We are looking for 20 sponsors to step up in support of our 21st Annual CWC Spring Banquet, Thursday, April 28, 2016, by contributing \$200.00 each to underwrite the cost.

You don't have to attend to be a sponsor, and your entire \$200.00 contribution is tax-deductible. Want to be recognized as a Patron family? How about as a Patron business? You will be acknowledged by name at the banquet and in the newsletter as a 21st Banquet Patron. And you will have the good feeling of knowing that you are helping to ensure that all of the proceeds generated by the banquet go to support the mission of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy to preserve open space and wildlife habitat.

So how about it? Are you ready to step up and become a 21st Spring Banquet Patron? Just send a check to CWC, P.O. Box 896, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48804-0896, or contribute online. Mark your contribution "Banquet Patron" and we'll include you on our Patron list.

Will you be a Conservation Champion?

Whether you are feeling the crunch of the snow beneath your feet as you near the icy edge of the Pine River, or catching the first spring smells after the thaw at Sylvan Solace, you understand the importance of preservation. Since 1985, the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy has preserved nearly 5,000 acres of land in Clare, Isabella, Gratiot, Mecosta, and Montcalm counties. This land provides vital natural habitat for birds and small animals, a healthy watershed for area lakes and rivers, and amazing

opportunities for people to relax, rejuvenate and reconnect with nature.

Of course you know that raising funds to support all of these things is a never ending task. Are you aware how easy it is to make a recurring donation to the CWC? It's as simple as going to the web site, clicking on "Get Involved," and then on "Online Giving." You have the choice to go through Network for Good or through PayPal and selecting a recurring gift option.

Would you be willing to help support the operational costs of the CWC with an annual commitment of \$20 a month? That's the same as a one-time gift of \$240, but it seems much easier on the checkbook. A little bit each month adds up to a big difference for conservation by the end of the year. Will you be a conservation champion?

21st Annual CWC Spring Banquet

Thursday, April 28, 2016



1559 S. Chippewa Road
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Jane Keon



Featuring:

- Silent Auction & Social Hour, 5:30 pm
Including Baskets by the CWC Board
- Deluxe Dinner Buffet, 6:30 pm
Prime Rib and Champagne Chicken
- Music by Charlie Walmsley
- 50/50 Raffle
- \$400 Motorless Motion Raffle
- Live Auction

**\$50 ADVANCED REGISTRATION,
\$55 AT THE DOOR**

Jane Keon comes from a family with long ties to the Chippewa River Watershed. Her family settled in Gratiot County in 1854. She received her BA and MA from Michigan State University and taught English from 1978 – 2004. Ms. Keon has been a member of the Pine River Super Fund Citizens Task Force since its formation in 1997. Four years later, she became the Chair of the group, a position she held for the next 12 years. She is currently the Secretary. The Pine River Superfund Citizens Task Force is a group of volunteer overseers of sites contaminated with chemicals and radioactive waste in the St. Louis area. The Environmental Protection Agency is working with the city to clean up a failed Superfund site that is leaking into the Pine River. Ms. Keon has been the recipient of many awards, including the Alma College Community Service Award and the Spirit of St. Louis Award in 2011. In 2014, she was one of seven women recognized by the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy for their significant contributions to the watershed. She is the author of a new book, *Tombstone Town*, about her experiences as a member of the task force.

2016 SPRING BANQUET RESERVATION FORM



Reservation Name _____
 Street Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ Email _____
 Check Enclosed Bill My Card Visa Mastercard
 Card Number _____ Exp. _____ CVV# _____
 Name on Card _____

Banquet Reservation \$ _____
 \$50/person
 (\$55 at door)
 50/50 Raffle Tickets \$ _____
 1 Ticket @ \$10
 3 Tickets @ \$20
 Motorless Motion Gift Certificate Raffle \$ _____
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 Banquet Sponsor \$ _____
 \$200
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 (8 dinners plus acknowledgement @ \$450)
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- \$25 (Regular) \$50 (Supporter) \$100 (Defender) \$250 (Guardian)
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- I wish to remain anonymous
- I wish to receive the newsletter electronically
- Please send my acknowledgement by email

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- Check Enclosed Bill My Card Visa Mastercard

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Make Check To: Chippewa Watershed Conservancy

Mail Check To: PO Box 896

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Win-16



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