

# HERON TRACKS

The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy  
Volume 26 Number 3 Fall 2019





# President's Statement

## Beautiful Autumn

*"Two sounds of autumn are unmistakable...the hurrying rustle of crisp leaves blown along the street by a gusty wind, and the gabble of a flock of migrating geese." ~ Hal Borland*

Autumn is my favorite season of the year, between summer and winter, during which temperatures are generally cool in the mornings, warming during the day, and cooling again in the evening. We often call this time of year fall in the United States because leaves fall from the trees at this time. Autumn is usually defined in the Northern Hemisphere as the period between the autumnal equinox, September 22nd and the winter solstice (year's shortest day),

December 21 or 22. The autumn temperatures transition between summer heat and winter cold.

Autumn is connected with the harvesting of crops. Animals gather food in autumn in preparation for the coming winter, and those with fur often grow thicker coats. Many birds migrate toward the Equator to escape the falling temperatures.

**It would be a mistake to forget about autumn with its warm days, colorful leaves and earthy fragrances**

Autumn is full of a special beauty and waiting to be discovered. The harmony of temperature, bright colors of leaves are delightful indeed. After the warmth of summer and with the dampness of autumn there is an explosion

of mushrooms and toadstools happening across our area on the woodland floors and decaying logs. I would encourage you to take advantage of this colorful time of year and visit one of our many wonderful preserves. You may want to mark your calendar and join Sister Marie Kopin on Saturday October 12th at the beautiful Halls Lake Natural Area. Then again on Saturday October 26th at our Bundy Hill Preserve in a search for wild mushrooms. These two events will each culminate with the identification of each participant's findings.

The discovery and uniqueness of wild mushrooms along with the colors of fall foliage are but a couple of the magical processes of nature. Take time to enjoy this lovely time of year.

Steve Pung, Board President

## Executive Director's Corner



As I write this I've been on the job as executive director of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy for exactly eight weeks, but I've been a part of CWC community for much longer.

I hope you noticed that I used the word community to describe the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy. Because that's what we are – we are a community that cares deeply about preserving and restoring our natural world and its land, water, and wildlife resources. However,

as you know, the CWC does not exist as a community in isolation. It's between, within, surrounding and surrounded by, entwined and enmeshed with many other communities. Your family, your circle of friends, your workplace, your place of worship, your clubs, your school, your neighborhood, your hometown, your region – these are all communities to which you belong.

**You're going to hear me talk a lot about community in the coming months**

Community is so important to what the CWC does that it's included in our vision statement: "We see a world where communities are enriched by being connected to land, water, and wildlife resources." As a member of the CWC community, you probably already feel that your life is enriched by those connections.

Now I want to challenge you: figure out a way to connect

the members of your other communities to those things about the CWC that enrich your life so much. You are not just a member of the CWC community, you are also an advocate and an ambassador. Pass this newsletter along to someone else when you've finished reading it. Share our social media posts with friends. Invite someone along the next time you go for a hike at a CWC preserve. Bring someone new to one of volunteer outings. Buy an extra ticket to our next spring banquet. Invite us to talk to a community organization to which you belong. Mention us in conversation. These are small actions but combined they can help us make our vision a reality.

I am proud to be a part of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy community. The CWC staff and board is working hard to expand both the breadth and depth of our community.

**Will you help us in this effort?**

## SEEING OPPORTUNITY IN AN INVASIVE SPECIES

There is a grove of invasive black locust trees at Sylvan Solace Preserve. Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) is native to the southern and central United States, but it was planted across the country due to one outstanding feature. It is extremely resistant to rot. Before the advent of metal posts, farmers across the nation planted black locust seedlings with the intent of harvesting them as fence posts when they reached the appropriate size. Amazingly, if the posts were put in the ground immediately after harvest, the post would sometimes grow roots and may even grow into a full-sized tree.

If life gives you locusts, build bridges. It's not quite the old familiar saying about lemons, but it's appropriate. The same property of rot-resistance that makes locust ideal for fence post also makes them ideal for building puncheons (aka bog bridges) across low wet ground.

If you walked the trails at Hall's Lake Natural Area this spring or early summer, you probably noticed that several short segments of the Lakeshore Trail were perpetually wet or even underwater at times. Our normal inclination is to walk around mud rather than through it, but this means that our trails become wider allowing for more erosion and soil compaction. Fortunately, with the black locust we had a solution at hand.

In August we harvested one of the largest black locust trees at Sylvan Solace. The bark was peeled from the tree by hand using a draw knife. The sections of log that would be used as the treadway were flattened on one side by chainsaw and axe. The treadway was kept deliberately rough to offer traction. Other small sections of the log that would be used as sills (the part that would sit on the ground) were notched for the treadway to sit. Then everything was hauled out of the woods and to Hall's Lake Natural Area.



At Hall's Lake the logs had to be hauled through the woods to one of the boggy sites along the trail and the puncheon assembled. Green wood is heavy – rather than carrying we hauled the sections into the woods using a folding kayak dolly. Once everything was on location assembly was easy. The sills were placed on the ground in the right location and the treadway placed in the notches. The most difficult part of installation was pounding 10 inch spikes through the treadway and into the sills using a 4-pound hand sledge.

The puncheon may look a little odd right now sitting in the middle of a trail, unintentionally widened where people previously walked around a muddy stretch, but when water levels rise again next spring it will simultaneously offer a dry place to tread and help prevent erosion. Eventually the sides of the trail will return to a more natural state.

We have a lot more locust and several additional low, muddy sections of trail at Hall's Lake. I can see more puncheons in our future.





## Preschool Preservers Program

The laughter of small children blended with bird song echoes a joyous scene as children are running through the tall grass as the sun bathes the meadow and a playful ruckus as three year olds jostle for the best view. This moment captures the essence of childhood: the discovery of the natural world and its intricate and beautiful details.

This simple act of childhood exploration is the pillar behind CWC's mission to get children out into the natural world and foster a love for the outdoors. Families are invited to bring children out to CWC's local natural areas for programs that correlates with the life skills and curriculum. The program has already hosted several pilot programs with local childcare center in Lake Isabella called Izzy's. Both Sylvan Solace Preserve and Bundy Hill were a success, and with the trial runs complete, programs are up for registration from local preschools, learning and childcare centers, including all of the above. They have been sent out to local preschools with information to register. If you are interested in the Preschool Preservers Program, contact alexis@cwc-mi.org for more details.





## Program Officially Launched

ous chorus through the woods of Sylvan Solace Preserve. Children  
l a gentle breeze blows. The discovery of a tiny caterpillar creates a  
moment of serenity and purity illustrates one of the most basic joys of  
autiful creations.

newest program, Preschool Preservers. The program was created to  
doors during the critical stages of brain development. Local preschools  
ture preserves for hands on, sensory based learning  
n they are being taught in the classroom. CWC  
with preschool aged groups from a local  
s Kids. The children there have visited  
ill Nature Preserve. The pilot programs  
mpleted CWC has officially opened the  
reschools in both formal and informal  
homeschool groups. Invitations have  
ormation on the program and how to  
hool Preservers Program please email





# A Responsibility to the Land

The Chippewa Watershed Conservancy owns 629 acres of land across central Michigan. Those acres are spread across twenty-three individual preserves. Our largest preserve is 100 acres and our two smallest preserves each measure just an acre. People often ask me in conversation if any new preserves are in the works. It's exciting to see new land protected. People will readily donate money for land acquisition projects. But our mission doesn't end once a parcel comes into our possession and is declared a nature preserve. Instead, I would argue that our work has just begun, for now we bear the responsibility of maintaining and restoring that land.

Maintaining our nature preserves requires a delicate touch. We can love a piece of land to death: changing it to suit our purposes, opening it for public access, and using it to the point that it becomes degraded. Conversely, we can, with the best of intentions, "allow nature to take its course" and see the conservation values degraded by lack of attention. When it comes to land conservation, overuse and neglect are two sides of the same coin.

One of the greatest maintenance challenges that we face on our preserves is the spread of invasive plant species. For a plant to be considered invasive, it must meet two important criteria. First, it must be an alien (non-native) species – a species occurring outside its natural range. Second, it must be aggressive - it must be able to outcompete other plants.

Across our preserves, our most prevalent invasive species is autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*), a species of shrub native to Asia. Planting of this

species was once encouraged for erosion control and wildlife habitat. The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men...

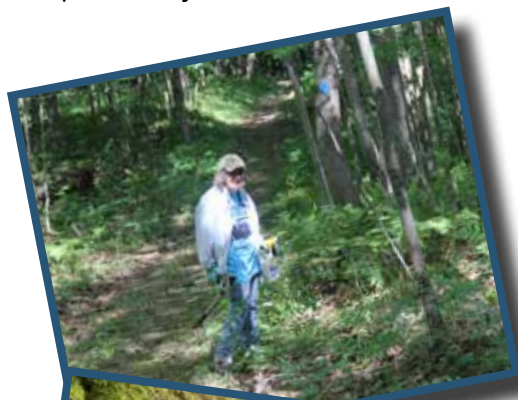
The problem is that autumn olive does not stay where it was originally planted. Birds eat the berries and deposit the seeds within their droppings, often far from the parent plant. When the seeds germinate, they quickly grow in sunny places. In shaded locations the shrubs grow slowly, biding their time, waiting for an opportunity. Autumn olive often grows so thickly that it crowds out all other species. Recent research has even shown that the autumn olive changes the chemistry of the soil, deterring competition from native species.

We've been fighting the spread of autumn olive for years - pulling seedlings, lopping or cutting larger shrubs and then spraying the stumps with an herbicide to prevent regrowth. The largest plants require a chain saw to tackle adequately! This year we've focused most of our efforts at Bundy Hill Preserve. At the time of writing we've probably cleared more than 3 acres of autumn olive during volunteer work sessions and the work will continue into October. If you've been to Bundy Hill recently you should have been able to see our progress along the start of the Summit Trail. We've really opened up the forest, revealing a field that was previously hidden from view.

In addition to our work at Bundy Hill, our volunteers have spent time removing autumn olive at Audubon Woods Preserve, Williams-Blackburn Preserve, and Hall's Lake Natural Area. We also reached out to faculty and students from Ferris State University for a September work session at our Peterson Natural Area in Mecosta County. A group of a dozen energetic student volunteers came out and cleared

more than an acre on one of the hottest days of the month.

Are we ever going to be able to completely eradicate autumn olive from CWC properties? Probably not, but we can get it to a point where we can control it, where it will no longer be a scourge. It will take time and lots of effort, but we have the responsibility to the land.



### Educational Program Leaders

Sister Marie Kopin  
Michelle Fournier  
Stan Lilley

### Invasive Species Control

Brenda Kerr  
Cathy Murray  
Kelley Moss  
Lisa Bierk  
Hunter Torolski  
Ben Zeitler  
Stan Lilley  
and many more!

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Pat Block

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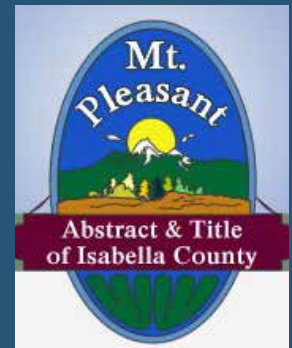
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### Game Cam Action

This momma bobcat and her two kittens was captured by CWC game cams at Hall's Lake Natural Area.



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