

HERON TRACKS

The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy
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Executive Director's Corner

Do you have a favorite book? Does it speak to you? Clutch at your emotions? Make you think? Challenge you? Inspire you? Open your mind?

For me that book is *Swampwalker's Journal: A Wetlands Year* by artist and naturalist David M. Carroll. Originally published in 1999, I picked up the first paperback edition sometime in 2001 or 2002. The James Burroughs Medal (for distinguished natural history writing) on its cover did much to recommend it to me. From the first page I was enthralled by Carroll's writing and illustrations of aquatic plants and animals. Every few years this book makes its way back onto my reading list – it is the book I have reread the most times as an adult. In fact, I pulled it off the shelf this morning and by the time you read these words I will have read it again.



Mike LeValley, Executive Director

On its surface, the title of this book tells you everything you need to know about it. *Swampwalker's Journal* is an accounting of one man's year spent exploring the wetlands near his home. But at its core, like so many great books, this book is about love – a love of place so deep that it drives not just the actions of a single year but rather decades of exploration. It is a love that causes one to think of individual animals, trees, boulders, and streams as old friends. It is the same kind of love that drove Henry David Thoreau to write of "tramping eight or ten miles through the deepest snow to keep an appointment with a beech-tree, or a yellow-birch, or an old acquaintance among the pines."

It is the same love that drives the work of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy. It underlies everything we do from land protection, to providing access to recreation, to creating educational opportunities. It is the same love that drives our supporters to keep annual lists and life lists of birds and of wildflowers, to record the seasonal comings-and-goings of monarch butterflies, or to record the daily weather. It is the same love that drives old men and old women to plant trees under whose shade they know they will never sit.

One of my favorite quotes is attributed to Jacques Cousteau. "People protect what they love, they love what they understand, and they understand what they are taught." Last year we saw people fall in love with the outdoors in record numbers, but love can be fleeting. It must be cultivated and nurtured so that it grows in both breadth and depth. My own love of nature took years to develop into what it is today so that I, like Carroll, am often happiest when knee deep in a swamp.

We don't know if the children who today explore Sylvan Solace or Bundy Hill with their families will grow to become the next David Carroll, Jacques Cousteau, or Henry David Thoreau. We cannot control their destinies but we CAN provide them the opportunities to explore and develop their love. We can do the same for those that are called to nature later in life. And we can nurture our own love for nature by getting outside to explore, by expanding our knowledge through books, by and by sharing our knowledge with others.

Stay Well and Happy Trails!

25 Years of Sylvan Solace: CWC celebrates the silver anniversary of one of its most popular preserves.



John Mitchell and friends
circa 1997



Donna and John Buckley at
the trailhead in 1997

Fall in love with Winter



Everyone loves to be outdoors during the warmer months of the year. Not so much during the cold, gray days of winter. We're working to change that by introducing people to the sport of snowshoeing. This winter we've held introductory snowshoe hikes at Sylvan Solace, Bundy Hill, and Hall's Lake; taught snowshoeing to scouts at Sylvan Solace; practiced yoga on snowshoes; and used snowshoes to track wildlife through deep snow. Between these events more than one hundred people tried snowshoes for the first time. Was it always easy? No. Did people fall down? Yes. But when we asked if they would try snowshoeing again every single person replied "Yes!"

Activities like snowshoeing fit in perfectly with the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy's vision of "a world where communities are enriched by being connected to land, water, and wildlife resources". How can we not be excited to get people into the outdoors in a way that allows them connect with the natural environment while minimizing their impact on the land, requires limited equipment, and is a great workout that almost everyone can do? By helping people build connections with the land, we're increasing the odds that they will become good environmental stewards and pass those values down to the next generations. It's an easy win for everyone involved.



Hello fellow outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers! Have you had the opportunity to work on any of the challenge events that CWC is offering in 2021?

The Bundy Hill Vertical Mile Challenge is a physical challenge which requires thirty-one treks to the top and logging at least thirty-seven miles on the Bundy Hill trails! Personally, I have completed five of those thirty-one hikes; the first one just happened to be another CWC sponsored event: the New Year's Day Sunrise Hike!

Another great way to explore the various preserves and waterways in our area is by downloading the CWC's 2021 Passport To Adventure! There are some great activities and ideas in the passport including fishing, paddling, snowshoeing, bird watching, amphibian hunts, and so much more!

If you participate in any of the Conservancy's events or enjoy any of the CWC's locations, I urge you to become a member today. The benefits and enjoyment that you will gain from becoming a member are truly priceless.

- Lynette Bellinger
CWC Member



How We Connect With The Community

Online

- Website: Average of 2830 monthly pageviews in 2020 (up 29% since 01 January 2020)
 - Facebook: 2280 total page likes (up 36% since 01 January 2020)
2420 total follows (up 40% since 01 January 2020)
 - Instagram: 690 followers (up 56% since 01 January 2020)

In Print

- Heron Tracks (Newsletter - printed 3 times per year): Over 600 print copies distributed each issue
 - Chip Chat (e-news): 700 subscribers (up 25% since 01 January 2020)

In Person

- Operating in Clare, Gratiot, Isabella, Mecosta, and Montcalm Counties
- Twenty-two publicly accessible nature preserves—always free and open to the public
 - Estimated ten thousand preserve visitors in 2021
- More than two dozen in-person social or environmental education programs conducted annually
 - Dozens of annual volunteer opportunities

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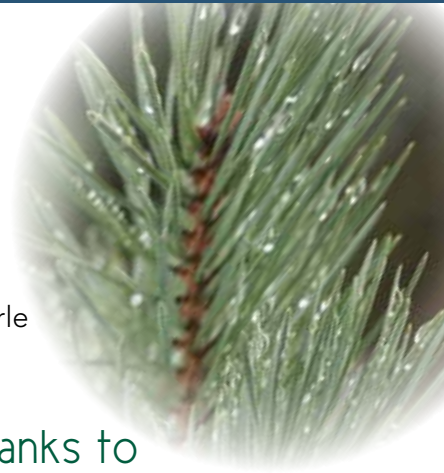
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