

# HERON TRACKS

The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy  
Volume 28 Number 3 Fall 2021



Turkey Tail Mushroom at  
Hall's Lake Natural Area 2021

## Executive Director's Corner

What is our responsibility toward the land?  
What form should our management of land take?  
Should we manage "wild" lands at all? These are among the questions that every land steward, every conservationist, every conscientious landowner, and indeed every society must answer.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the world has experienced an unprecedented surge in the use of parks and other natural areas. This trend was already happening prior to COVID but it rapidly accelerated in March 2020 when COVID shut down other avenues of recreation. People desperately want to connect with the outdoors – lines at national parks look more like those we associate with rides at amusement parks and campgrounds are perpetually full to capacity. Many popular national and state parks have instituted timed admissions to attempt to cope with the influx of users. Locally we've seen this trend expressed by record usage of Chippewa Watershed Conservancy Preserves. Visitation to CWC preserves was at an all-time high in 2020 and then surged a further 30 percent in 2021!

The vision of the CWC is a world where communities are enriched by being connected to land, water, and wildlife resources. The desire to connect people to the land must be balanced with our desire to protect and restore land. This duality of purpose means in some circumstances we take actions that encourage land use such as building new trails and access sites. In other circumstance we work to repair damage caused by human use; closing trails, taking measures to control erosion, or removing introduced species. The situation is complex to say the least.

Perhaps the best known (and most often quoted) writing on mankind's responsibility toward the land is found in Aldo Leopold's famous essay "The Land Ethic". Published in Leopold's posthumous masterpiece *A Sand County Almanac* in 1949, this penultimate expression of Leopold's thoughts on land conservation did not appear out of thin air. Rather, this work was the result of decades of practical experience, observation, and thought on the subject.

Although edited extensively, the majority of text in "The Land Ethic" was lifted directly from a 1933 lecture titled "The Conservation Ethic" that Leopold delivered to the Southwestern Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science but Leopold's thoughts on the subject go back even further. In 1923, he wrote that "[T]he privilege of possessing the earth entails the responsibility of passing it on, the better for our use, not only to immediate posterity, but to the unknown future, the nature of which is not given us to know."

With that heady task to consider, it is no wonder that land management decisions can be so difficult at times! We must weigh our actions today not only with the view of their immediate impact but also with the view of how those actions will resound across years, decades or perhaps centuries. We must make decisions about conservation that consider not only land, water, and wildlife resources but also the current and future needs of people. What Leopold understood is that, despite our best efforts at pretending otherwise, humanity is not apart from nature. We are a part of nature. We have always been a part of nature and will always be a part of nature. We just have to choose how we want to play that part.

Stay Well and Happy Trails!



Mike at the Aldo Leopold Shack  
near Baraboo, WI (2015)

*Mike LeVilly*



## ***Rolphs Inducted Into Conservation Legacy Society***

A generous donation was made to CWC in 2021 from the Ron H. and Marilyn F. Rolph Trust in the amount of \$130,533.62. Ron and Marilyn were long time supporters of CWC and other natural resources protection organizations. Both are graduates of Central Michigan University, where they met, and although they eventually left the area, they remained supporters of charities in Central Michigan throughout their lives. The Rolphs were both educators who started out teaching in the Detroit suburbs. Ron eventually became the high school principal in his home town of Birmingham, and Marilyn taught junior high English. The couple later moved to Holland where Ron served as superintendent of public schools and the couple ultimately retired there. The pair loved nature and enjoyed travelling to enjoy beautiful natural settings.

We are forever grateful for the generosity of the Rolphs and wish to honor their legacy by inducting them as the newest members of our Conservation Legacy Society. Their generous estate planning will make it possible for future generations to enjoy the clean water, open space and wildlife habitat that we experience in our community today and assures that the CWC has the resources to honor our commitment to protect and steward lands in perpetuity.

## ***New Szok River Access Site Completed***

The Stephen and Agnes Szok Riverbend Preserve was gifted to the CWC in 2018 with the intent that it be developed as a public river access site. After several years of planning, work on the access site is finally complete. This new site, located along River Road in Isabella County's Chippewa Township, provides the only formal public access along a 24 mile stretch of the Chippewa River between Island Park in Mt. Pleasant and Geneva Rd. in Midland County and opens up a previously inaccessible stretch of the Chippewa River to paddle-sports enthusiasts and anglers. The access site consists of a set of timber and aggregate stairs that descends approximately 30 feet from E. River Road to the waterline. The descent is broken up by a pair of landings and a wooden observation deck overlooks the river next to the lower landing. Thank you to the many private individuals and organizations that helped fund this project including the Towsley Foundation, the Midland Area Community Foundation, the Carls Foundation, and the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network. While the site is available to paddlers now, an official opening is scheduled for next year.



## 2021 President's Bob Ball Award Winner



*Cathy Murray*



Cathy leads a fern walk at Audubon Woods in August of 2021.

A highlight of our Fall Fundraiser was the announcement of Cathy Murray as recipient of the 2021 Bob Ball Award. The Robert (Bob) Ball Award is given annually to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the CWC's purpose of protecting natural habitat and open space.

Cathy is being recognized for her long-term service as a volunteer to the CWC. Among her many contributions, Cathy has served as a preserve monitor and steward for more than a decade; as a conservation easement monitor; and as a volunteer on numerous biological surveys of preserves. Cathy has also dedicated hundreds of hours toward the removal of invasive species such as autumn olive, glossy buckthorn, and Japanese barberry from CWC preserves. Cathy is constantly striving to learn more about the flora and fauna of Central Michigan and she has cataloged hundreds of species sightings on CWC preserves through iNaturalist. She is more than willing to share her knowledge with others and has led a series of popular fern identification walks at Audubon Woods Preserve.

When notified of the award and why it was being given, Cathy stated that she was honored but that she "would have done it all anyway." It's that spirit of selfless service that makes Cathy especially deserving of this award.





## 2021 CWC Fall Fundraiser

On Thursday, October 14th the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy hosted our Fall Fundraiser at Little Flower Barn in Lake Isabella. This event marked the first large gathering hosted by the CWC since the cancellation of our 2020 Spring Banquet. It was great to see old friends and many new faces.

The evening began with a social hour that gave everyone time to catch up with people whom they may not have seen in person since our 2019 Spring Banquet. The social hour also gave everyone the chance to participate in prize raffles that replaced the previous silent and live auctions. Raffle items included a Traverse City vacation package, a wine tasting experience at Young Farms Winery, totes filled with items from the Mt. Pleasant Farmer's Market, and a custom charcuterie board package. The wine pull, introduced during our 2019 Spring Banquet, was also very popular with attendees. Participants in the wine pull paid \$10 to draw a numbered cork that corresponded with a randomly numbered bottle of wine. Unlike the raffles, everyone who participated in the wine pull was a guaranteed winner. The Big Rapids area band Cold Leather Seats provided entertainment throughout the evening, playing a mix of rock, folk, country, and Americana favorites.

The social hour was followed by a fall-themed buffet dinner capped off by a selection of seasonal pies. After dinner, CWC Executive Director Mike LeValley gave a recap of everything that has happened since the cancellation of our 2020 Banquet. Highlights of his presentation included the increased usage of our preserves over the past two years, volunteer successes at removing invasive species, completion of a new river access site at Szok Riverbend Preserve, and construction of a new trail at Hall's Lake Natural Area. Mike followed this update with the announcement of Cathy Murray as the 2021 Bob Ball Award recipient.

The evening closed with the drawing of raffle winners. We began by drawing winners for the in-person raffles. It was fun watching people scanning dozens of raffle tickets for winning numbers with yelps of excitement and surprise from winners and groans of disappointment from those who hadn't won. The final drawings of the evening were for a Florida Vacation Package (won by Jack and Cora Neyer) and a 50/50 drawing (won and graciously donated back by Claudia Roth).

Overall the evening was a great success thanks to our volunteers, sponsors, and members, and our event planning committee. Together we raised more than \$12,000 to support our operations.





## ***New Preserve Signage at Neyer and Hiawatha Hills***

A big thank you to the volunteers from Central Michigan University's Alternative Breaks Program who recently joined CWC staff to install signs at Neyer Preserve and Hiawatha Hills Preserve. The signs were purchased through a generous grant from the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation with funding provided by three individual funds at the Community Foundation. Thank you to the Andy Wheeler Community Needs Fund, the Joanne Golden Family Community Impact fund, and the W. Sidney Smith and Judith French Smith Family Fund for recognizing the importance of access to nature in our community.

With the dramatic increase in interest in outdoor recreation over the past 20 months, it is increasingly important for the public to be able to identify areas where recreational access is both safe and allowed. These signs will increase our visibility in the community and make the properties easier to find by both people who are searching for them and by those who may just be in the neighborhood. In addition to the signs installed at the Neyer and Hiawatha Hills properties, a sign for the Sponseller Preserve was purchased through the grant and will be installed at a later date.

## ***Peterson Natural Area Pavilion Gets New Roof***

Visitors to the Alyce J. Peterson Natural Area might have noticed a recent upgrade. When the property was acquired in 2008, a farmhouse and several outbuildings were removed from the site. Only one pole building was left standing, with the intent of turning it into a picnic and education pavilion. Over the years, the weather has taken a toll on the building's roof. This fall, thanks in part to a Community Needs Grant from the Mecosta Area Community Foundation, we were able to replace the old shingle roof with a new metal roof. Future plans for the property include the purchase of picnic tables for the pavilion and new signage to increase visibility of the property.



*After: New OSB decking*



*Before: Badly damaged roof*



*After: New metal roof*



*Before: Rotted decking*

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