

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS



There's No Place Like Leelanau

*Conserving the Land, Water and  
Scenic Character of Leelanau County*  
Fall 2018 Newsletter: Vol. 20, No. 2



# A Message From the Director

One of my favorite memories is from a couple of summers ago—the first time our littlest daughter's feet touched the cool, clear waters of the big lake. She was not quite two years old, and my wife, Stephanie, and our three older daughters were huddled around her, thrilled to relive through her that magical, shimmering moment when we began our life-long union with this place we deeply cherish.

You understand this lump-in-your-throat moment. You and I share a profound belief that everyone should have the chance to bond with this Leelanau—the one we know and love. Saving Leelanau's Great Places While We Still Can has been our mantra since 1988. It is what the Leelanau Conservancy stood for 30 years ago. It is what we stand for today.

In 1988, the vast majority of the Leelanau Peninsula was up for grabs. When our beloved founders, Ed and Bobbie Collins, opened our doors three decades ago, a building boom was underway. And, it's now Conservancy lore that a young man named Brian Price heard that Ed and Bobbie were planning to put their life-long love of the Peninsula in action by establishing a land conservancy here. He banged out a resume, knocked on their door and said, "I'm your man." The rest is history. From that moment on, the Conservancy has been putting your love for Leelanau first, day-in and day-out. Your passion has been our passion for 30 years and counting.

We're proud that we haven't changed much since 1988. Yes, we've grown a bit in the course of saving nearly 14,000 acres (and counting), including 45 miles of streams and shoreline, and establishing 26 natural areas with 25 miles of trails. We continue to be a small, nimble and skillful organization serving one

beautiful county. And, because of you, we continue working to preserve this place like no other—where wildlife thrives, the water is still clean, forests and farms endure, and families are enriched by the pure magic of Leelanau.

My vision for the Conservancy for the next 30 years is straightforward: The Leelanau Peninsula undiminished, faithfully stewarded and cherished by all, for generations to come. Together, we must continue to be unrelenting in preserving her beauty and ecological integrity, upholding our promise to keep her healthy, and nurturing a community that cherishes her waters, forests and farms. In many ways, it's a much tougher proposition than it was in 1988. Our lives and the world around us are so much more complex. The sheer cacophony of our culture today could not have been predicted back then. But Leelanau has long been a refuge from the constantly shifting cultural chatter. It should absolutely remain so.

How will we do it? First, we must keep doing what we've always done—building trusting relationships and welcoming people of all walks of life to join our mission. Similarly, our work must continue to be rooted in the best scientific information available. Trusting relationships paired with good science constitute the rock-solid foundation of everything we do.

Second, we must be committed to fostering deep, personal connections between all generations and the Leelanau we cherish. People will stand up for what they love. We are matchmakers, creating ongoing opportunities for people to see, feel, touch, and fall in love with this peninsula. You remember where and when you fell in love with Leelanau, right? And then, you became a champion. If we are to keep her special,

we must be resolute in helping to create the next generation of champions for Leelanau.

Lastly, we must keep building alliances. We are part of something larger than ourselves—a wonderful mosaic of land, water and great people. And, each person can have a role in preserving this treasured place. The Conservancy must continue to forge strong partnerships because we are all, literally, in this together.

If we continue to work with dedication, skill, and love, Leelanau County 30 years from now will closely resemble the one you and I have experienced—a landscape laced with sparkling lakes and streams, verdant forests, productive family farms, and vibrant villages. It will not be easy, but it will be some of the greatest work we can possibly do. Think of it, generations to come will watch their children frolic in that clean, clear water and get lumps in their throats. And, they will remember us who did our part when they say, "There's no place like Leelanau."



Thomas Nelson  
Executive Director

*Tom Nelson  
with his  
daughter India  
at Good Harbor  
Beach*



# Our Founders Reflect

In mid-October the Leelanau Conservancy will celebrate the 30th anniversary of its opening ceremony. It is known as one of the most successful land trusts in the nation, thanks to the hundreds of past and present Supporters, Boards of Directors and Staff who share the vision to “conserve the land, water, and scenic character of Leelanau County.”

Back in 1988 there were few land trusts nationwide and conservation work was not broadly known. We were each lucky “summer kids” who since early childhood enjoyed the natural beauty, bounty, and waters of our respective peninsulas—Ed at Fish Creek in Door County, and Bobbie at Glen Lake in Leelanau County. We retired to Leland in 1979; and, as time went on, became concerned by the mounting pressure for development and its impact on fragile lands as has happened all over the country—particularly areas near our beautiful National Parks. We began to ask ourselves what we could do to make a difference, to “give back” for the great privilege of spending the rest of our lives in this special part of the world.

Intrigued by a 1987 Smithsonian Magazine article about the work of the venerable Brandywine Conservancy in Pennsylvania, we met with them. Their directors and staff generously provided valuable suggestions and guidance for founding a land trust. With the help of the late Larry Verdier, friend and attorney who later became our first

board chairman, we incorporated, and obtained 501(c)3 status.

In 1988 we purchased and donated the building that houses the Conservancy. A few of us volunteers began work to form a board of directors, mailed letters county-wide to a prospective membership, and were rewarded with an enthusiastic response. Dr. Harlan Hatcher, President-emeritus of the University of Michigan and international conservationist agreed to be our Honorary Chairman.

Brian Price appeared on the doorstep a few weeks later with a paper he had written on the geology of Leelanau County. We were so impressed with his knowledge and passion that we hired him on the spot! He became our first Executive Director, and his wife Susan came on board a couple of years later as our Director of Finance. They each contributed tremendously to the success of the Conservancy and recently retired after 27 dedicated years.

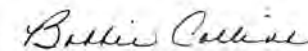

During the first few years we slowly gathered a talented staff, several of whom—Gayle Egeler, Carolyn Faught, Matt Heiman, and Tom Nelson our current Executive Director—remain and have been joined by additional collaborative and hard-working staff. The Board of Directors over the years has been exceptional in its selection of thoughtful and wise people from all over the County who so generously give of their time and talents. Our membership has continued to grow and now numbers over

2,500, including over 300 volunteers. Over 650 Sustainers pledge \$500 or more annually to our Operating Fund, and 153 members of the Richard O. Ristine Heritage Society have named the Leelanau Conservancy in their estate plans. Others have made generous gifts of land and in-kind donations.

The Leelanau Conservancy has adhered to the founding premise that it will operate only under the highest standards and practices, public accountability, and sound financial management. That was nationally acknowledged in 2008 when it became one of the first land trusts in the country to receive accreditation by the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

Thirty years ago, our first land preservation projects were what are now the Leland Village Green, the Glen Arbor Art Association land, and the Cedar River and Kehl Lake Natural Areas. We could not have envisioned then the scope of the Leelanau Conservancy's success to date (referenced in Tom Nelson's column.)

As Founders we are filled with immense gratitude for all those who have contributed in countless ways to the successes of the last 30 years. The next 30 will bring more—and changing—challenges but we know in our hearts the mission of the Leelanau Conservancy will be carried on by generations to come.



Ed and Bobbie Collins  
Conservancy Founders



*Leelanau Conservancy Founders, Ed and Bobbie Collins reflect on 30 years.*





# Summer Happenings

The Blanchette family enjoys the Clay Cliffs trail.



Docent Karl Hausler leads a hike at Lighthouse West. Photo by Marilyn Keigley



Staffer Emily Douglas and AmeriCorps Member Zack Pitman identify plants in the Cedar River Natural Area. Photo: Emily Stuhldreher



Our AmeriCorps members install water bars at Whaleback to stem trail erosion.



Volunteers Susan Hayes, Nora Bumb and Trudy Underhill help to make the annual Wildflower Rescue Plant Sale another big success.



Dr. Bill Scharf (r), with Director Tom Nelson, is chosen as our 2018 Volunteer of the Year for his longtime bird research on Gull Island and Chippewa Run Natural Area. See story on our website.



Volunteer carpenters Al Swiderski (sitting) and Dave Coyne with the six benches they built for our natural areas that will also feature plaques honoring the memory of a loved one.



Our thanks to Katherine Palms who led six yoga classes with nearly 100 students to benefit the Conservancy, raising awareness and over \$500 in donations. Photo: Katherine Palms



Georgianne Hammer and Annette Deibel arrive at the Heritage Society gathering at Brengman Brothers winery, where they heard the story of how this land was protected.



This new sustainably built, single-track mountain biking trail at Palmer Woods opens in mid-October. The “flow style” trail was professionally designed and constructed by an experienced contractor and

is open to all levels of riders. Volunteers aplenty will be needed to maintain this eventual six-mile loop. Coming soon: vegetation along the trail! Photo: Matt Belic



Some of our board and staff celebrate our Sustainers Circle at a July gathering.





## Friends of Farming Giving Circle Raises \$1.25 Million

Thanks to a special group of donors who are passionate about preserving farming in Leelanau, the Conservancy is protecting more farmland than ever. Since the group began in 2016, the 54 members of Friends of Farming have pledged nearly \$1.25 million to preserve and support Leelanau's farming heritage and future.

The backstory: In 2015, we applied to the Regional Conservation Protection Program (RCP) for funding to preserve farmland together with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, the Conservation Resource Alliance and other regional partners. Our partnership of regional conservation leaders was awarded \$8 million from the Federal program. The Leelanau Conservancy's share was \$2.7 million—enough to protect more than 12 family farms. But there was a catch.

The grants would only cover half the cost of purchasing farmland conservation easements. In order to claim the RCP grant monies and protect these farms in perpetuity, we would need to raise 25% of the cost—\$1.3 million—from our donors and the farmers would need to donate 25%. The farmers interested in protecting their land were all in, so the question became, "How can the Conservancy do our part?"

Thanks to the inspiring idea from board member Leslie Schmid, a new giving circle was established, called Friends of Farming. Tom and Marsha Buehler, owners of beautiful Cherry Basket Farm in Omena, along with Board Member Cammie Buehler and her Epicure Catering partner Andy Schudlich, became early supporters and have graciously hosted the annual Friends of Farming gatherings the past three years. At the most recent gathering, cherry farmer and former board member Don Gregory and our executive director and long-time farm preservation advocate Tom Nelson talked with attendees about the state of farming in Leelanau and nationally, and the tremendous impact of our work together.

Thanks to the members of Friends of Farming:

- Eight Farm Protection Projects have been completed totaling nearly 1,000 acres
- Eight more family farms are in the pipeline that would protect an additional 865 acres.
- A new web-based tool, Farmer2Farmer, was launched in 2017 that connects farm buyers, sellers and renters as well as on-site farm employers and farmworkers.

"The three-year pledge cycle is coming to an end and we are grateful to everyone who has contributed to such a successful initiative," says Executive Director Tom Nelson. "There are still so many more family farms in need of protection," adds Tom. "Forty percent of small farmer operators are over the age of 65 and 35% of farmers in Michigan are expected to retire within the next 10 years. What is unique about Leelanau is that our collective strength and commitment to family farming means we have a real chance to save the Leelanau we know and love—the one that has changed so little in the last 100 years." If you would like to get involved in preserving farming in Leelanau, contact Tom Nelson [tnelson@leelanauconservancy.org](mailto:tnelson@leelanauconservancy.org).



*Our thanks to Epicure Catering and Cherry Basket Farm for hosting the Friends of Farming group for the third year and donating the venue along with all the food and drink.*



# Bringing the Next Generation Along

The older I get, the more I enjoy being around young people. They give me hope for the future in what often seems to be a crazy and chaotic world. I am always surprised and refreshed by their optimism, energy and capabilities. When I say young, I mean everyone from our 30-something staffers to our 20-something AmeriCorps members to the middle-schoolers I met this summer.

One of the Conservancy's most important goals is to engage the next generation. They are the board members and Sustainers of tomorrow, the future conservationists who will protect this incredible peninsula. And so creating opportunities and developing partnerships that give young people the chance to fall in love with our natural areas is a top priority.

In May we partnered with the Greenspire School and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians on a day of tree planting at the DeYoung Natural Area. Over 100 students dug holes for 500 fruit and nut trees to create an "edible forest" for people and wildlife. See our website for that full story.

In June we welcomed three more school groups. At DeYoung, Pathfinder middle schoolers hauled brush and pulled invasive parsnip. Students from Leland and the Traverse City West "Greenagers" program filled bags with invasive garlic mustard at Clay Cliffs after first taking a hike with docent Ann McInnis. They also met some baby goats and learned about the conservation

grazing that had taken place there recently. A show of hands revealed that only a handful of the group had ever been to Clay Cliffs.

While you can add metrics like the numbers of students—nearly 300—the real impact of these outings is more elusive to measure. Not every kid is thrilled to be out in the woods. Some complain about the bugs, act bored, talk to their friends and try to act cool. But most of them, if given the chance, will find something to like. And given a group task, most will go to work like a hive of bees, and have fun at it. Case in point: Jay Merwin, a Greenager, turned to the girl next to him after uprooting a big garlic mustard plant: "Now this," he said, "is very satisfying."

On the way back to the bus after the workbee, I asked Jayla Ristow and Riley Sanchez if I could take their photograph, and how they had liked Clay Cliffs. The floodgates opened and they talked about their love of being outdoors, how our cities are polluted, and how people come up north for the Great Lakes, and that we need to keep them clean.

"We take for granted what we have here," said Riley, who also mentioned that her family was going camping the next day. "I'm going to take some garbage bags with me and pull all the garlic mustard I see."—Carolyn Faught

*Photos (right):*

*Over 300 school children helped over the course of the summer to pull invasive species, plant trees, and haul brush at our natural areas.*





# 30

## Years Preserving Beautiful Leelanau

Founded  
1988

Founders Ed and Bobbie Collins form a five-person board, donate building, and hire Brian Price who served 27 years as Executive Director. A year later, Susan Price was hired as Finance Director. First project completed: the Leland Village Green.

1989

Land that would become Kehl Lake NA with 1,700 feet of shoreline, is for sale and fundraising begins. The Leelanau Watershed Council established a partnership between lake associations and the Conservancy.

1990

Conservancy purchases 120 acres that becomes the Cedar River NA. First newsletter is published. The board grows to 10 and 250 acres are protected in the first two years; \$500,000 is raised from 600 donors.

### KEY

CE	Conservation Easement (private protected lands)
NA	Natural Area
MNRTF	Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund
SBDNL	Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
MDEQ	Michigan Department of Environmental Quality



Artist Tom Ford has been generously allowing us to utilize his wildlife illustrations in our publications since the Conservancy was founded. See his illustrations throughout this timeline.



Sustainers Circle created. Conservation easements (CE) protect 40 acres and majority of shoreline on Wells Lake. First Friends "Rally" is held at Fountain Point. Soper and Whittlesey Preserves are created through generous land donations.

1991

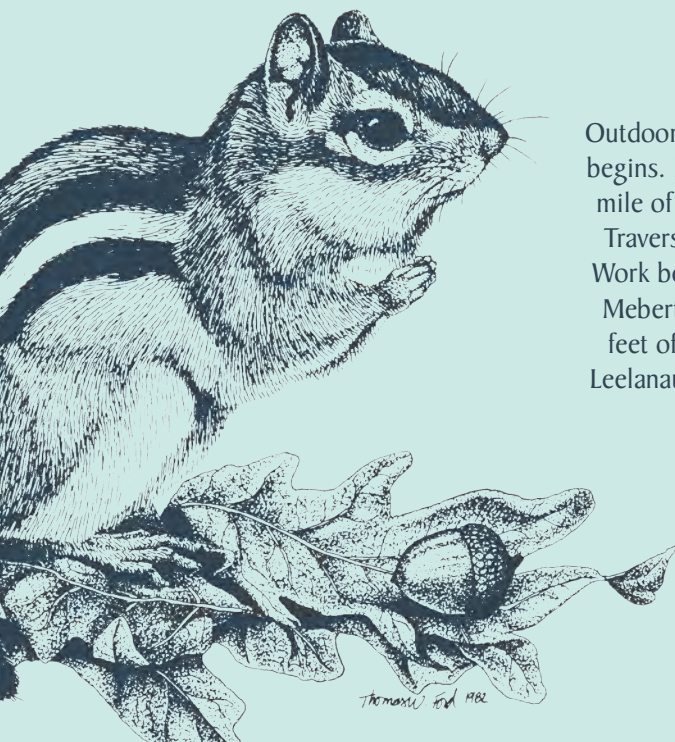
Al Hoffman and his family protect 42 acres of fragile dunes and 2,750 feet of shoreline at Cathead Point with donated CE. The Trust Fund awards \$75,000 to protect Mebert Creek.

Belanger Creek Preserve expands from 20 to 66 acres. Sustainers Circle reaches 46 members.

1993

First Wildflower Festival held in Omena, Ka. protect the first bird sanctuary on three landowners around Kehl Lake with addition of species.

1994



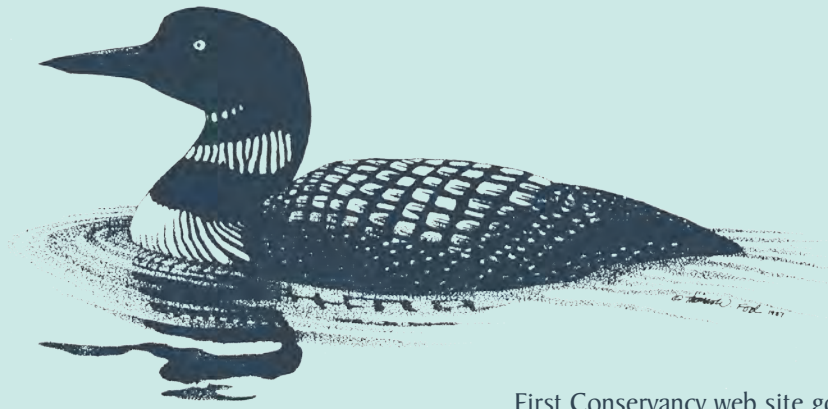
1992

Outdoor hike and education program begins. Raftshol Vineyard with its 1/2 mile of M-22 frontage along Grand Traverse Bay preserved with a CE. Work begins to protect the 150-acre Mebert Creek Preserve and 4,000 feet of wetland/shoreline on Lake Leelanau. First Blues at the Bluebird is held.

1994

Leland's Indiana Woods 106-acre project protects 1,250 feet of Lake Leelanau shoreline. Conservancy launches initiative to protect wetlands on Lake Leelanau and applies for state grants. Gull Island on Northport Bay, critical bird habitat, is purchased for \$45,000.





Lower Rescue Sale.  
Mary and Jim Charter  
donate 13 acres of their  
land. CEs donated by  
others protect 83 acres  
of Lake NA. Staff grows  
into a land protection  
specialist.

John Greeno donates land with 1,300  
feet of shoreline on Lake Leelanau  
near Mebert Creek. Leelanau  
Agricultural Alliance forms to work  
toward a farmland preservation  
program. Whaleback trail opens.

First Conservancy web site goes  
online. Houdek Dunes fundraising  
and management plan underway.

Krumwiede family donates a  
conservation easement on 110  
acres that eventually becomes the  
Krumwiede Forest Reserve.

Max and Mary Finton  
donate 100 acres that becomes Finton  
Area. Three landowners  
donate 195 acres. Trail  
opens. Houdek Dunes; \$150,000  
raised in three weeks to purchase.  
The Lake Leelanau Narrows  
had been slated to become  
the Sustainers Circle, now  
members, celebrates 10 years.  
Stewardship Director

1995

1997

1999

2001

1996

1998

2000

Whaleback NA purchased. Shuster  
family donates the first of three CEs  
protecting 1,000 feet of shoreline  
at the tip of the peninsula. Martha  
Teichner donates 20 acres near Lime  
Lake in honor of her parents, forming  
the Teichner Preserve.

80-acre Agosa property in East  
Leland protected through a purchased  
CE. Purchase agreement signed to  
acquire the 330-acre Houdek Dunes  
Natural Area—the largest purchase to  
date—for \$680,000. 40 more acres  
are added to the Kehl Lake NA.

Neighbors organize to protect the  
“Gateway to Empire”—the 95-acre  
Chippewa Run NA—and raise  
\$487,000. Farmland protection  
specialist hired. Docent program  
begins. Ted and Tali Lanham donate a  
CE that protects ridgeline views near  
Good Harbor Bay seen from M-22.

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Watershed Council collects data for massive zebra mussel study on inland lakes. We secure \$682,000 in federal funds to protect spectacular views and 88-acre Newton Farm on Jelinek Road and the 158-acre Casier Farm in Empire. Annual Plant Sale raises \$16,000 and 725 rescued trillium are sold. Annual Picnic features auction. First email sent to members. Narrows Preserve expands with 45-acre Hutchinson property; 40-acre wetland added to Kehl Lake Natural Area.

Lighthouse West NA is born thanks in part to \$632,000 in funding from MNRTF grant. Lake Leelanau Watershed initiative takes off with Bob and Eleanor Miller's 120-acre CE donation near Lake Leelanau. Conservancy transfers Crystal River property to the SBDNL after funding comes through. Purchase agreement for DeYoung Farm signed. Martha Teichner visits Teichner Preserve, expanded by 37 acres with her help.

Four farms totaling 460 acres and 20 acres in Hatlem Creek area are protected with CEs. Volunteers build trail at Chippewa Run. Kehl Lake NA expands by 30 acres and is buffered by another 132-acre CE. DeYoung gets new fishing pier, and receives \$910,000 MDNRTF grant toward \$2 million project. The first Leelanau Preservers tiles appear on the Villa Green. It's a record-breaking year for land protection with 1,156 acres permanently protected.

2003

2005

2007

2002

2004

2006

Historic Ruby Ellen Farm preserved—first farm project. Option signed to purchase CE on 4th generation 120-acre Stanek Farm. 1,000 feet of Crystal River (Oxbow property) purchased and transfers to Glen Harbor Twp. Four families donate CEs on 150 acres on Cathead Bay. Leelanau Preservers program launched. Congress considers including Crystal River in SBDNL. 127 acres around Victoria Lake preserved with CE. Lake Leelanau Watershed Initiative launched.

Crystal River purchase agreement is signed between Conservancy, SBDNL and The Homestead. A \$723,800 Clean Michigan Initiative Grant propels our work to protect Lake Leelanau's clean water. CMI funds help to purchase 80 acres in Solon Swamp. Omena Woods 110 acres protected through purchase of a CE.

Conservancy receives a \$2 million MNRTF grant to purchase 51 acres and 1,400 feet of shoreline adjacent to the Leelanau State Park. Fundraising for \$2 million begins. Farmland millage gets put to a vote and fails. Purchase of a 12-acre CE protects 2,300 feet of shoreline and Duck Lake Corners. Conservancy pitches in to help complete Suttons Bay Township's 45th Parallel Park. Volunteers build trail at Kehl Lake Natural Area.

Record breaking year for land protection with 1,156 acres preserved. A new Preserve of Jeff Lamoreaux. Crystal River Soper Preserve purchase. A new trail along the shoreline of four farms totaling 100 acres of forestland. Leelanau Preservers to receive



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An innovative program called Farm Ability begins, paying farmers to protect their land for 10 years, potentially paving the way to permanent protection. The Conservancy received a \$418,000 MDEQ grant to protect the Grand Traverse Bay Watershed. More shoreline along Cedar Lake preserved. Lighthouse West NA opens. Conservancy works with partners and schools to plant 1,000 Champion Black Willow cuttings. Three projects totaling 66 acres of farmland and sensitive private lands with CEs.

Glen Noonan donated two CEs totaling 506 acres. Four farmland purchased CEs protecting 665 acres were completed. The Swanson Farm, with 90 acres of wetlands and 2,000 feet of shoreline on Little Traverse Lake was officially preserved. New trails opened at Houdek Dunes and Krumwiede Forest Preserve. Native species planted at Teichner Preserve to restore wetland. A total of 1,397 acres were protected this year.

2009

2011

2008

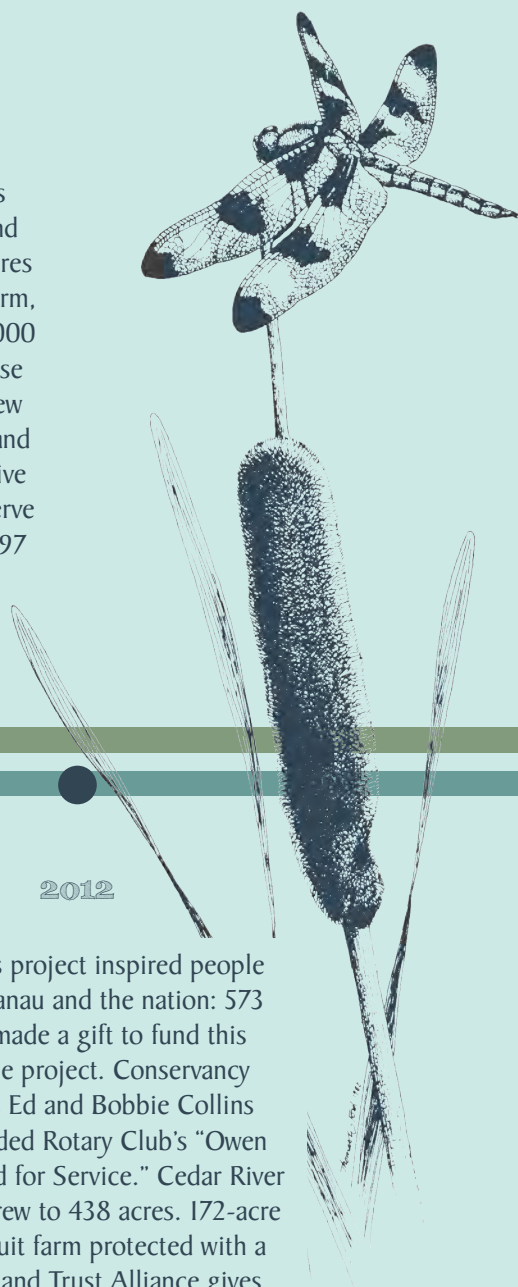
2010

2012

making year for CEs: 914  
rved in seven townships.  
s increased by 178 acres.  
erve opened in memory  
ont. 6.5 acres along the  
er preserved with a CE.  
ve doubles with 38-acre  
A 286-acre CE protects  
M-72 near Empire. Four  
ng 202 acres preserved.  
forest and wetland along  
ek purchased connecting  
lar River NA to state  
eelanau Conservancy was  
first group of land trusts  
national accreditation.

376 acres in the Glen Lake/Crystal River watershed and 115-acre wetland along the Cedar River were preserved. Option signed to purchase the historic Sonny Swanson farm. 480 acres of farmland owned by three families were protected with the help of a \$1.5 million grant. Eight CEs were completed. Stewardship crews tackled invasive species at two NA. 30 miles of shoreline were monitored by staff and volunteers, documenting invasive species. By year end the Conservancy had protected 8,005 acres since our founding.

Clay Cliffs project inspired people from Leelanau and the nation: 573 donors made a gift to fund this incredible project. Conservancy Founders Ed and Bobbie Collins were awarded Rotary Club's "Owen Bahle Award for Service." Cedar River Preserve Grew to 438 acres. 172-acre Stanton fruit farm protected with a CE. The Land Trust Alliance gives National Excellence Award to the Leelanau Conservancy and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.





Clay Cliffs NA opened to the public. 4 farmland projects totaling 383 completed and protected with CEs. Three other CEs totaling 229 acres protect water quality of Lake Leelanau and Grand Traverse Bay.

2013

Conservancy acquires the largest property in its history—the 707-acre majestic Palmer Woods Forest Reserve, and creates the first trails through this beautiful working forest. DeYoung Natural Area expands with the addition of 48 acres that take in numerous seeps and springs. 200 acre-historic Garthe farm near Northport protected with a CE. Mebert Creek Preserve grows by 40 acres. Good Harbor Bay Watershed plan completed.

2015

Crane sisters protect 715 feet of shoreline on Lake Leelanau while Michael Chetcuti preserves a Northport farm that takes in 360 feet of natural shoreline on Lake Michigan with a donated CE. The Dechow family donates a CE on 105 acres in the Bohemian Valley. Iconic 190-acre Putnam farm near Omena forever protected with purchase of a CE. Hatlem Creek Preserve grows by 32 acres.

2017

The five-year Leelanau Forever Campaign ends, having raised \$21 million in cash and pledges from over 2,700 donors to protect natural lands and farmland and to strengthen our endowment. 58 projects were completed through the campaign, including 25 family farms. Also in 2014: Houdek Dunes NA grows by 30 acres with donation from Mead family. A CE along Bass Lake in Omena preserves 3,100 feet of shoreline. Super volunteers construct Clay Cliffs deck and trails. Founding Executive Director Brian Price retires and passes the torch to Tom Nelson. Hatlem Creek Preserve expands by 20 acres. Ben Hohnke's 216 acres of prime fruit growing land preserved with CE.

2014

A private foundation donates a conservation easement on 8.7 ecologically rich acres and the Leo Creek Preserve is born. Two family farms totaling 351 acres—McManus and Lawton—are protected through a purchase of development rights. Cedar River grows by 40 acre. Earth Week hikes and events draw crowds.

2016





# Parker Family Protects Beloved Trout Stream



Above: The Parker family has swam, fished, and gone tubing in this stream for generations. Below: The protected land backs up to our Cedar River Natural Area (pictured), and is a "highway for wildlife," says Wes Parker.



Keith Parker (center) with sons Wes (left) and David stand near the pristine stream that will be protected by their conservation easement.



Cedar River photo by Emily Stuhldreher



At 87, Keith Parker shows no signs of slowing down. He'll drive a combine for eight hours, harvesting corn that feeds his 120 head of beef cattle. "He works 10 times harder than I do," says son David. Keith doesn't watch much TV, using the time instead to catch up on keeping the books. David and his brother, Wes, who live and work with their dad, attest to his remarkableness—from physical stamina to always seeming to do the right thing.

Keith grew up on the 340+ acre farm in the heart of Solon Township. In December, he preserved 99 acres with a conservation easement. The family hopes to preserve additional acreage in the future as funds become available through federal programs matched by private donations.

"I never want to see it developed," says Keith. "There have been a lot of offers over the years. Money is hard to come by and I almost sold it once but I'm fortunate that I didn't. If you are a farmer, development causes problems." Between the land they own and 20 parcels that they lease, the Parkers farm 750 acres.

The multi-faceted land they have forever protected takes in 1,300 feet along a Type I cold water trout stream. "We've never missed an opening day and always catch our limit before lunch," says Keith. The stream was just a bike ride away for his sons; Wes recalls escaping to cool off on a hot day and tubing wider sections nearby.

The protected land backs up to Cedar River Natural Area, and is a "highway for wildlife," says Wes. Twenty-two acres of wetland shelter bear and bobcat, deer and songbirds. On the upland is a hardwood forest and sweeping views of the Cedar River Valley. The conservation easement also takes in 16.5 acres of prime and unique farmland where the Parkers practice no-till methods. They grow mostly row crops to feed cattle, and sell the excess to a broker downstate.

Keith's grandfather, Charles Loeffler started farming here in the late 1800s while also working for the railroad, selling tickets at the Solon Township Depot. Charles' daughter, Esther, married Howard Parker, who owned a car dealership downstate. The dealership went under during the Depression, so the Parker family moved back

north and Keith and his two brothers were raised on the farm.

Keith attended the one-room schoolhouse just down the road, and in 5th grade, began earning \$5 a week to clean and start a fire every day before the teacher arrived. Today, the white-washed school house, with its fading paint, and surrounding undeveloped land still feels like a scene lost in time.

Keith took a bus into Traverse City for high school, where he met his wife of 63 years, Margaret. She died last summer, having raised six children in the modest ranch house that Keith built in 1956. To make ends meet, Keith worked full time as the supervisor of the power plant at the Traverse City State Hospital in addition to farming. Despite all of those demands, he also found time to serve on the Soil Conservation District's Board, and still chairs the Solon Township Board of Appeals.

Preserving their farm has been a goal for the Parkers for quite some time. They were vocal supporters of a millage that was on the ballot in 2006. The failed millage would have raised \$1 million annually to preserve farmland. "Dad has always been progressive and protecting farmland is something we very much believe in," says Wes. "All you have to do is to look at Long Lake Township, where all the farmland is just about gone."

"We really appreciate that the Conservancy was persistent and changed course after the millage failed," adds Wes. "They picked up the ball and ran with it."

The change in course led to, among other things, a new federal program that funds farmland protection and also preserves water quality. The streams and wetlands on the property made it a winner for the program, which funds 50% of the cost of purchasing a conservation easement. The Parkers will donate 25% of the value of the land, and generous donations from Conservancy supporters will cover the rest.

Neither Wes nor David have children. But there are a lot of nieces and nephews in the family. "It will be an opportunity for somebody, whether it stays in the family or not," says Wes. "The farm will keep going. And that's a great thing."

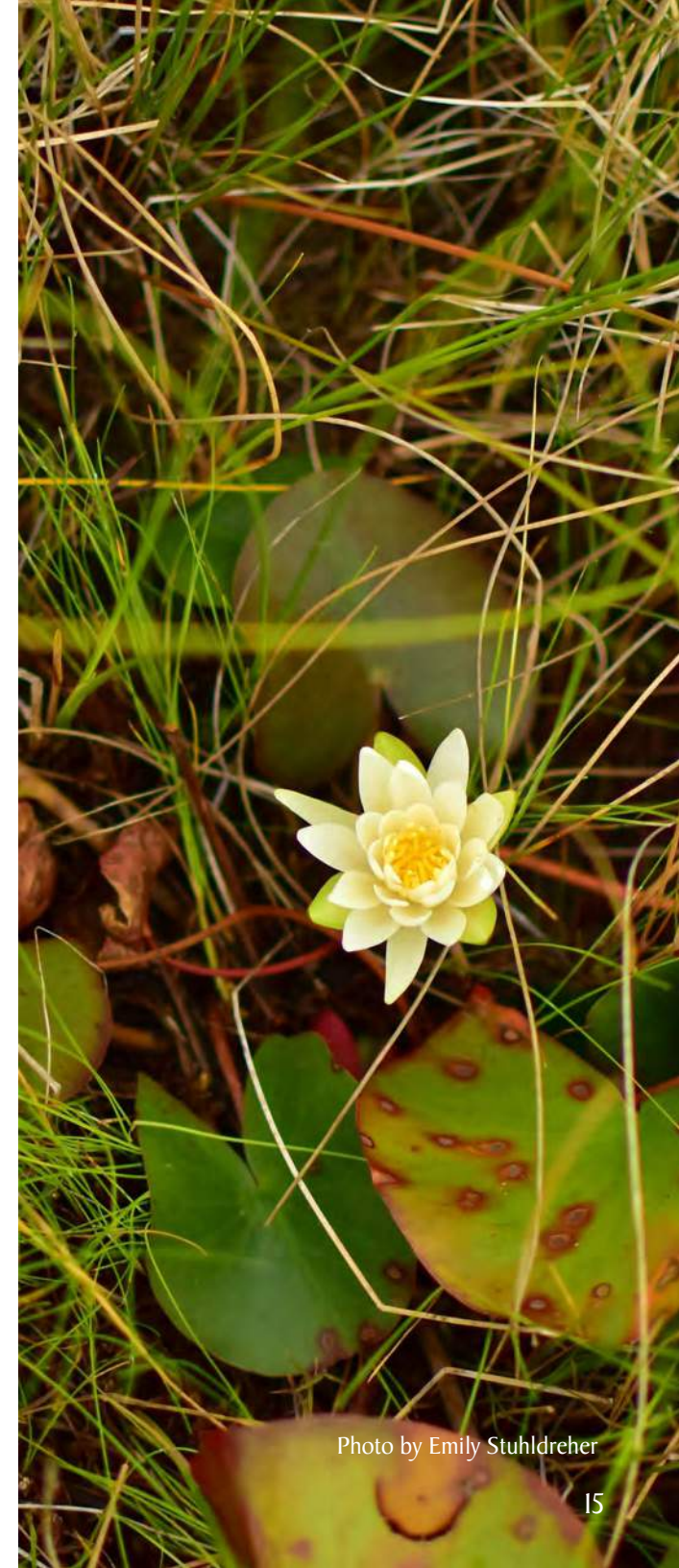


Photo by Emily Stuhldreher



# The Evolution of Stewardship

This spring, Natural Areas and Preserves Manager Becky Hill pondered how best to replace a boardwalk and wildlife viewing platform at Kehl Lake Natural Area. Fluctuating water levels have taken a toll on the old structure, designed and built by staff and a special group of volunteers in 1999. Back then, Northern Building Supply donated the lumber, which Brian Price, our founding Executive Director, ferried across the lake in an aluminum fishing boat.

At first Becky looked at some quick fixes—replacing a section of boardwalk that had been submerged for the last three springs. “But we figured that this problem wasn’t going away,” says Becky. “And we want the structure to last for the next 30-plus years.” Now plans call for installing a floating platform like the one at DeYoung Natural Area along Cedar Lake. “That structure is weathering the test of time very well,” adds Becky.

The care and maintenance of 26 natural areas 30 years after our founding is just one aspect of this duty and labor of love that we call “Stewardship.” In addition to building and maintaining signs and kiosks, trails and boardwalks, overlooks and stairways, it is also removing downed trees after a big storm. It is the annual battle of keeping invasive plant species under control. And it is harnessing the energy of dozens of hard-working volunteers who spend hundreds of hours lightening our load, doing everything from spreading mulch to building boardwalks to planting native wildflowers.

In addition, this department of the Conservancy is also responsible for annually monitoring all the lands—our own as well as over 200 private properties—that have been permanently preserved with donated or purchased conservation easements. Of the 13,500 acres we have protected, about 11,000 acres are privately owned. Monitoring involves maintaining strong working relationships with landowners and walking the properties every year. This practice ensures that the natural features

of these lands are intact and that the terms of these permanent conservation agreements are upheld, even when the land transfers to a new owner.

Most recently, Stewardship has also branched out into providing unique recreational opportunities to engage the next generation of Conservancy supporters who want to interact with nature in a more physically active way. This includes grooming cross-country ski trails at the 721-acre Palmer Woods Forest Reserve, and just this fall, constructing (and maintaining) a mountain biking trail, too. The new mountain biking trail took two years of planning and called for the hiring of experts to design and construct it.

“Building an ecologically sustainable trail system in keeping with our goals for Palmer Woods has been our highest priority from Day One,” says Executive Director Tom Nelson. “At the same time, there is a growing mountain of evidence that future champions of conservation are coming out of the ever-expanding audience of outdoor recreation enthusiasts. As an organization, we felt that the size and scale of Palmer Woods offered the perfect opportunity to connect these advocates with this place we love.”

How did we get here over the last 30 years? “In the beginning everything was a race against time, a race against development,” says Brian Price. “We were working hard at acquiring land, and raising the funds to do that. With a small staff, we were limited in what we could take on and figured that trails could wait if we could just get the land protected. That was our primary mission.”

“We also created a lot of preserves that we didn’t intend to put trails on,” he adds. “They were biological reserves, like Belanger Creek and the Cedar River Preserve, that were important to protect simply for their ecological value and were best left alone other than putting up a sign.”





But as more properties were acquired for natural areas, or conserved with conservation easements, “Stewardship moved to the front burner,” says Bobbie Collins, who founded the Conservancy with her husband, Ed. “After a board retreat in the late 1990s we began to talk about how we were going to manage all the lands we had protected.”

And yet, it was a struggle to balance it all with limited resources. Every dollar we raised went into the ground so to speak. We didn’t hire our first Stewardship Director until 2001. “We relied a lot on volunteers,” says Bobbie.

One of them was Tom Dunfee, a retired physician who with his wife, Gretchen, had moved permanently from Indiana to Little Traverse Lake. Tom, along with other dedicated volunteers like John Bull, Jim Vachow and Chuck Whetsel formed the nucleus of a group called the “Volunteer Stewardship Network,” organized in 2001 by our first Stewardship Director, Pete Nichols.

The group was instrumental in creating the trail at Houdek Dunes—digging dozens of postholes, trimming branches, painting markings on the trees to guide hikers. “We had a grand time,” recalls Tom. They would often meet for breakfast and get their marching orders from Brian and Pete. “There was good old-fashioned camaraderie and we worked in all seasons, half days, full days,” says Tom. The Network grew as they recruited and supervised other volunteers who helped to blaze trails at Teichner Preserve, Lighthouse West and Chippewa Run.

Tom eventually became a docent, leading hundreds of people on the trails he had helped to create. He joined the Stewardship Committee and later became a board member and Chairman, also playing a key role in raising funds to purchase the Swanson farm and Preserve. “I’ve loved being involved,” he says, “from being out in nature to serving as an ambassador to doing the hard work of building trails. It has given great meaning to my retirement.”

“Our stewardship work today stands on the shoulders

of volunteers like Tom,” says current Executive Director Tom Nelson. “We never could have accomplished all that we have without the dedication of our volunteers, and we need them now more than ever.”

Luckily, a special group of more than 20 volunteers called trail stewards help care for our many natural areas. They walk the trails at their designated natural area at least 6 times a year, and many every week, to check for downed trees blocking trails, pick up trash, clear back encroaching brush and watch for any other safety or environmental concerns.

The growing responsibilities of caring for protected lands has also required expanding our staff from one to four full-time positions over the last two decades, and this year we were also fortunate to have three AmeriCorps staff members join our ranks for 6-9 months of great stewardship opportunities.

The challenges going forward are immense, adds Nelson. “We need to ensure that we can uphold our promise to care for these places forever,” he says. “And that will take resources. One of our challenges is the perception that the work of stewardship may not seem as exciting as buying a piece of property, like Palmer Woods for example. But like raising a child, it actually is some of the best work we could ever do, and so, really, it is every bit as important. The support of our members and donations to our Stewardship Fund are critical to ensuring that our natural areas are safe, accessible, and worthy of falling in love with for all the generations to come.”

*Left: AmeriCorps Member Shelly Stusick carries on with a water-monitoring program that began over 25 years ago on area lakes and streams.*

*Right: Chase Heise clears the Clay Cliffs trail after a big storm—keeping our natural areas safe and accessible.*







# Clay Cliffs: Home for Eagles

Stewardship is what we call taking care of the land and water. But sometimes it means even more than that and in this case, looking after those who call our natural areas home.

Photo by Marilyn Keigley  
Story by Carolyn Faught

In 2013 while conducting a botanical survey along the shore beneath Clay Cliffs, two of our staff members came upon a pair of eagles. One, which looked to be an adult eagle, was trapped under a fallen tree limb. A juvenile, likely its offspring, was flapping its wings frantically in an attempt to pull the limb off the adult.

As Derek Shiels and Emily Douglas approached the trapped bird, the juvenile flew off and they got a clear view of the trapped bird. As luck would have it, Derek was wearing a Go-Pro camera on his hat. While he and Emily acted quickly to free the bird, the entire rescue was caught on camera. You can see it on the Leelanau Conservancy's YouTube channel.

Emily will never forget scrambling for the stick along the shore that Derek used to lift the limb and free the bird. She will never forget seeing the eagle with its six foot wingspan fly off into the lake, and then return to shore to rest and recover from its ordeal; seemingly fine.

Five years later, I tagged along with Emily and other members of our stewardship staff on a visit to Clay Cliffs. The tasks at hand included clearing the trails of fallen trees, so there was some chain-sawing to be done. We also brought back a sign to repair and surveyed just how much garlic mustard was showing up along the trail. Finally, we were there to check on an eagle's nest at Clay Cliffs to see if the pair was still inhabiting the nest.

Places like Clay Cliffs provide ideal habitat for bald eagles, which prefer tall living trees close to water. Fish are a primary food source although they will eat small mammals such as squirrels. According to the Michigan Audubon Society, after nearly going extinct across the U.S., the number of nesting pairs of bald eagles in Michigan has doubled over the last 15 years. Widespread use of the pesticide DDT in the past wreaked havoc with

the species, "causing neurological damage, brittle eggs, or just eggs that wouldn't hatch," says the Michigan Audubon Society's Heather Good. In the 1940s there were less than 40 pairs of nesting eagles in Michigan; now there are more than 800.

Although you might see an eagle swooping for their dinner as you stand on the Clay Cliffs overlook, the Conservancy doesn't publicize the location of the nest. "That's because if there is a lot of disturbance a nesting pair may abandon their chicks to find a more isolated location," explains Emily as she adjusts her binoculars, and searches the canopy for the nest.

Eagles start building or adding to their nests in February and it isn't until July that their young are fledged, at about 10 weeks old. Male and female eagles build their nest together as part of their courtship, adding sticks one to three months prior to mating, and lining it with moss and their own feathers. The average nest is huge—four to five feet in diameter and two to four feet deep. A pair of eagles will return to the same nest, especially if they successfully raise their young at that location.

With their pure white heads, intense eyes nearly the size of human eyeballs, and giant sharp talons used to capture their prey, these creatures are fascinating. Learn more about bald and golden eagles: [nationaleaglecenter.org](http://nationaleaglecenter.org).

Emily scans the canopy and points out the nest. Miraculously, within a few minutes an eagle flies in, a stick in its beak. It was an awesome moment for all of us, but especially for Emily. Saving the trapped eagle back in 2013 was one of the coolest experiences of her conservation career. "That could be him up there now, or his mate," she says. "I feel like we saved a family."

# Leelanau Converts

Years ago, Bruce and Betsy Wagner considered themselves to be “die-hard New Yorkers.” They never dreamed they would leave the city, move to Michigan and spend their retirement years in Leelanau. But life has a way of twisting and turning, and this is the story of how the Wagners came to love Leelanau, and how their passion for protecting it for future generations led to their planned giving.

The couple has known each other for a very long time. In fact, they met in kindergarten. It’s a story they like to tell, along with how years later their kids discovered report cards stashed in a drawer. Teacher comments made them howl, says Bruce, revealing that Betsy “liked rhythms” and Bruce was “a nice young man who likes to organize the class a lot.”

It was a glimpse into their future in some ways. Betsy pursued an arts education at Wells College and became a lifelong lover of music and a viola player. After graduation from Dartmouth, Bruce earned an MBA at the Wharton School, and climbed the ladder at the global agency, Grey Advertising.

Their parents were friends; and so growing up they saw each other on occasion, but eventually lost touch. One evening in 1975 they bumped into each other leaving a Broadway play. Both had launched their careers, worked abroad and were in their early 30s. They began dating and within a year, were married.

Upon his post-honeymoon return to work, Bruce had a message waiting from the White House, asking him to head up the advertising campaign for Gerald Ford’s primary run. Bruce took a leave of absence from Grey and they moved to D.C. for a year. After that came an opportunity to manage Grey’s Detroit office. “We weren’t keen on leaving Manhattan, but agreed that we

could do anything for two years,” says Betsy.

Just before the move, daughter, Sage was born, and their Leelanau story began. The family took a road trip to Mackinac Island and meandered back along the west side of the state, and stayed at The Homestead. “We were blown away, stunned,” says Bruce. “We fell in love with Leelanau, and Glen Arbor,” adds Betsy. They soon bought a condo at the Homestead.

Because Betsy’s family had a summer cottage on an island in Canada’s Muskoka Lakes, they spent more winter vacations in Leelanau than summer. After her parents died and the cottage was sold, “We became very Michigan centered and Leelanau became the go-to place,” says Bruce.

Eventually they sold the condo and built a home nearby on Sleeping Bear Bay and Sage and brother Alex spent endless hours on the beach with their cousins. The more time they spent in Leelanau, the more important it became to them. “We became a part of it and met people and realized this is where we wanted to be,” says Betsy.

After Bruce retired, they moved north in 2005. Soon after, he began volunteering with the Leelanau Conservancy and joined the board in 2009. Betsy devoted her energies to the Glen Arbor Art Association.

“It’s been a really good use of my time,” says Bruce. “Truly, I think that Leelanau brings a sense of stability and serenity to our family. We feel grounded here, connected with people as well as to nature.”

The Wagners joined the Richard O. Ristine Heritage Society in 2009. “Decades from now the magnificent legacy that is the Leelanau Conservancy will need taking care of,” says Bruce. “Our planned gift is a means toward future stewardship of the places we have all worked so hard to protect.”

## The Wagners’ Favorite Ways to Give:

1. Charitable Remainder Trust (CRUT). “The Leelanau Conservancy will receive a percentage of a trust after we die,” says Bruce. “It’s very easy to designate a percentage or an amount. All supporters should give it some consideration.”
2. IRA Distribution Direct to Leelanau Conservancy. When you are over 70 1/2 you are required to take a distribution from your IRA. You can take money out and pay no income tax on it if you give through your IRA. But if you take the money out and put it in your checking account to make a donation you have to pay the tax. It’s a great way to go by a long shot. It really makes your gift go much further, and is not hard to do.”

*As always, the Leelanau Conservancy recommends you consult with your financial and legal advisors.*



Photo by Ken Scott



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Sustainers give a group hug to the ancient American Chestnut tree at the Teichner Preserve on a hike in August. Since the year we started the Sustainers Circle in 1991, Sustainers have been integral to our success, providing stability that has made our organization thrive and given us the ability to take



on daunting projects. If you would like more info on joining, contact Gayle Egeler. Annual giving levels begin at \$500. Benefits include special events where Sustainers can meet our Staff, Board and other Sustainers who share their commitment to our work.

### Your 2018 donations and new federal tax law...and what we know for sure:

Your generosity keeps the Leelanau Conservancy working to save land, water and scenic views. Please talk to your tax advisor SOON about tax changes for YOU. We have many important projects in the works that need your help!

- Most individuals and corporations now have lower federal tax rates, and possibly more disposable income.

- Donations to the Leelanau Conservancy of highly appreciated assets (stocks, land, houses, etc.) could help you avoid capital gains tax.

- There is no tax on a withdrawal from your IRA if you are over 70 ½ and you direct your custodian at the financial institution to send the distribution directly to the Leelanau Conservancy. (When you reach 70 ½ a minimum distribution is required.)

- Call us if you have questions or suggestions!



Photo by  
Ken Scott