



There's no place like *Leelanau*.

Conserving the Land, Water and Scenic Character of Leelanau County
Summer Newsletter 2019

**Protecting
The Wildest Place
in Leelanau**

**Cedar River Preserve Grows
to 546 Acres**

From the Director: Peninsula of Progress

Progress might have been alright once, but it has gone on too long. —Ogden Nash, American Poet

Picture a boy. He's ten years old. Brown hair, brown eyes, and ears far too big for his head. And he's just filthy. He has grass stains on his knees, black dirt under his fingernails, mud in his hair. His sneakers are soaked and spattered from chasing frogs at the pond. His hands and wrists are abraded from climbing trees. On a warm summer Saturday, he tromps into the house.

Boy: "Dad, did you know they're cutting down the woods next door?"

Dad: "Yes."

Boy: "Did you see the streets they are putting in at the farm down the road?"

Dad: "Yes, I saw that too."

Boy: "Did you see all the big houses going in up by the horse pasture?"

Dad: "Mm-hmm."

Boy: "Why?"

Dad: "'Why' what?"

Boy: "Why are they doing all that?"

Dad: (shrugs) "That's just progress, son."

Boy: (thinks to himself) "It sure doesn't feel like progress to me."

True story. I know, because I was that boy. My childhood community lost all of its farms and forests in the space of less than a decade. I've never forgotten that deep sense of loss, or the conviction I've held forever after, that the world needs a more apt, more joyful definition of "progress."

In a nutshell, this is why I work for the Leelanau Conservancy. It's because we are redefining the word "progress" every single day. Guess what? I have never had a brighter report on our Peninsula's "progress," which is really about a community holding onto and protecting its natural treasures.

Good Harbor Bay Watershed

Great news if you love clean water, especially if you live or play on Lime Lake, Little Traverse Lake or Good Harbor Bay. This spring, we averted the threat of serious impacts to the clean-water powerhouse at the south end of Lime Lake. This water flows through Shetland Creek, our Swanson Preserve and out into Good Harbor through Shalda Creek. A developer had planned three home sites, a fill-road, and bridge that would have bisected and permanently compromised the functionality of the wetland complex there. We have taken this threat off the table by buying out the developer—a real victory for the watershed. Further, we've negotiated a one-year option to buy additional acreage adjacent to the site. We have some significant fundraising to do yet, but by this time next year, I hope to be able to introduce you to our new Lime Lake Preserve!

Family Farms Protected

We have been working on no less than ten family farm preservation projects across seven townships—a total of well over 1,000 acres. These projects leverage a considerable amount of Federal Farm Bill grant funding, which makes our private fundraising go farther. For every \$1 we raise, we leverage another \$3 in cash and donated real estate value. The Steimel Farm, the first of these ten gems, was completed in May. (see page 8)

DeYoung Farmstead

We think of our DeYoung Natural Area as the gateway to rural Leelanau. This year, we've made a commitment to bringing the farmstead back to life, taking our mission to conserve the land, water and scenic character to the doorstep of Traverse City. Our vision is to raise the visibility of conservation stewardship and volunteerism as a community priority, for now and for the future. (see page 6)

Palmer Woods

Our 721-acre working forest laboratory at Palmer Woods—a landscape-scale forest preservation project—is one of our

best insurance policies to help keep Glen Lake blue. Also, over the last year, we have successfully installed our first two single-track mountain bike loops. These cover nearly six miles of challenging, incredibly fun terrain. Given their remarkable popularity already, we are witnessing a whole new generation of champions for Leelanau.

Cedar River Preserve

After years in the making, we have completed an agreement with the State of Michigan to consolidate our Cedar River Preserve, creating over 500 forever-wild acres which are some of the most ecologically intact lands and waters in the lower peninsula. This includes a whopping 1.75 miles of never-to-be developed frontage on Lake Leelanau at the mouth of Victoria Creek. The crowning jewel is the addition of 80 gorgeous acres—the only publicly accessible dry land access to a spectacular ridgeline, expansive views of the Cedar River Preserve and Lake Leelanau. (see page 3)

Because of your steady, generous support, not only are great things happening, we are joyfully redefining the word "Progress." And that ten-year-old boy? Trust me; he is eternally grateful to you.

Sincerely,



Thomas Nelson
Executive Director



Above: Tom points to the kettle hole on the new Cedar River Preserve addition. Cover and photo opposite page of the Cedar River Preserve by Drew Palmer.



SAVING SWAMPLAND

The Wildest Place Left in Leelanau

The Cedar River Preserve Grows to
546 Acres with an 80-Acre Addition
and State Land Swap to Provide New
Access and Fantastic Views

Conservancy founders Ed and Bobbie Collins remember well the trip they took to Chicago some 30 years ago in hopes of protecting an incredible piece of property along the Solon Swamp. It was the late 1980s, and they had managed to set up a lunch meeting with the landowners, Mr. and Mrs. Liu. As the miles ticked by, they talked about their dream of protecting this unique property and other parcels near it—an area known today as the Cedar River Preserve.

The Solon Swamp was among the fledgling organization's highest priorities: it is an undisturbed wetland complex with an amazing array of plant and animal life. The wetlands along the Cedar River—also known as Victoria Creek—serve to cleanse and protect much of the water that enters Lake Leelanau. “We wanted to buy the property outright and thought we could make that work,” says Bobbie. “Brian Price (the Leelanau Conservancy's founding executive director) had taken us up there to see the property, and we fell in love with it. We knew that given the fantastic views, it would certainly be developed someday. Brian put us in touch with the family.”

On the long drive to Chicago, Ed and Bobbie pondered what they might say but in the end, their meeting was a non-starter. “They weren't interested in selling,” says Ed. “The answer was, ‘not now, but maybe someday.’ Which is why Brian reached out regularly to the family, even after Mr. Liu died, but the answer was always no, thank you.”

After Brian retired, the property stayed on the Conservancy's radar. One night in April, Director of Land Programs Matt Heiman says his phone buzzed; it was an email from co-worker Yarrow Brown. “I snapped to attention when I saw the subject line: ‘Fan Liu property,’” says Matt. Yarrow had forwarded a note from a Realtor with the tip that the long-sought-after 80-acre property had just gone on the market. It was listed for \$450,000.

The Conservancy had to act quickly. In addition to the property's 20 acres of wetlands, there are 60 acres of mesic northern hardwoods that shelter beautiful wildflowers like trillium and squirrel corn. An extended ridgeline overlooks a geologic feature known as a kettle hole, which with current high groundwater levels forms a pond on the hillside. The ridge also offers sweeping views of South Lake Leelanau and the Cedar swamp. In other words, prime development sites with fantastic views in all directions.

continued on page 4...



Saving Swampland Continued

The land is, in fact, one of the last large, undeveloped parcels overlooking Lake Leelanau. “It also represents the only viable way to reach the Cedar River Preserve on foot,” says Matt. “At the base of the ridge the property includes 300 feet of shoreline on an unnamed inland lake connected to the Cedar River.” Some very unique and sensitive wetland plants such as rare orchids (grass pink and rose pogonia orchids), rare sedges and carnivorous plants (pitcher plant and sundew) exist in the area.

Within days the Leelanau Conservancy Land Protection Committee met and authorized a purchase agreement pending board approval. Two weeks later, the Board approved the deal.

Around the same time, a land swap with the State of Michigan that had been in the works for four years was finalized. The Conservancy traded parcels that would consolidate its holdings around where the Cedar River empties into Lake Leelanau. As a result the Conservancy gained ownership of the most ecologically sensitive parcels. In the exchange, the State also consolidated its holdings, and acquired dry land parcels friendly to hunters (see page 5).

“The timing was incredible,” says Conservancy Chairman Steve Martineau, who serves on the Land Protection Committee. “We’ve ended up with this whole block of ecologically significant land and it’s just been such a win-win for us, for the state and for the public overall.”

There was literally no time to fundraise for the project. “It was a now-or-never kind of opportunity,” says Tom Nelson, Executive Director. “And, the real credit for pulling this off goes to our donors. We were fortunate to have the funds on hand that gave us the wherewithal to make the purchase. And that is an amazing thing.”

Tom’s vision for the property? “We are excited to open up these previously inaccessible lands to the public, whether it’s the spectacular ridge or the lowlands that lead to two small lakes,” he says. “We think we can create one of the Leelanau Conservancy’s most beautiful trails, given the views from the ridge. However, we’ll need to raise the funds to build trails on the upland and a possible viewing platform.”

In early June, Ed and Bobbie visited the office, and Tom surprised them with the good news that the deal was just about to close. “We are just amazed at how the work from our earliest days has come full circle,” says Bobbie. “We couldn’t be more thrilled.”

Brian Price, who grew up exploring the Cedar River complex, was also happy to learn the news. Under his tenure as executive director, the Cedar River Preserve grew to over 400 acres. But the Fan Liu land was always in the back of his mind. “Sometimes,” he says, “even 30 years later, things can fall your way.”



The Grand Land Swap

Working with the DNR to Consolidate Holdings and Habitat

Great News! In May, a land swap with the State of Michigan that had been four years in the making was finalized. Conservation Easement Program Manager Yarrow Brown shepherded the process, where six parcels within the Solon Swamp changed hands. “We now own over a mile of frontage along the mouth of the river and both of the inland lakes, and that’s huge,” says Yarrow.

“There are over 260 different plant species in this area,” adds Yarrow. “Habitat for wildlife and plants and protecting water quality is why it was so important to protect the mouth of the river. All the water in the South Lake Leelanau watershed flows through the wetlands to the lake.”

Every natural area has something called a “Floristic Quality Index.” That’s like a report card rating a place’s ecological value. The Cedar River Preserve has a score of 91.1, the highest of any Conservancy natural area. (Areas with FQIs greater than 50 are extremely rare and represent areas of significant native biodiversity.)

The Leelanau Conservancy and the State of Michigan have a common goal—preserving land for the public good. However the priorities of each entity and their management practices can differ, and therein lies an opportunity. Both entities seek to consolidate their holdings for ease of management, and want to own land that fits in with their priorities.

In the case of the Solon Swamp, the Conservancy wished to own and steward those parcels around the mouth of the river, where it meets Lake Leelanau, because these

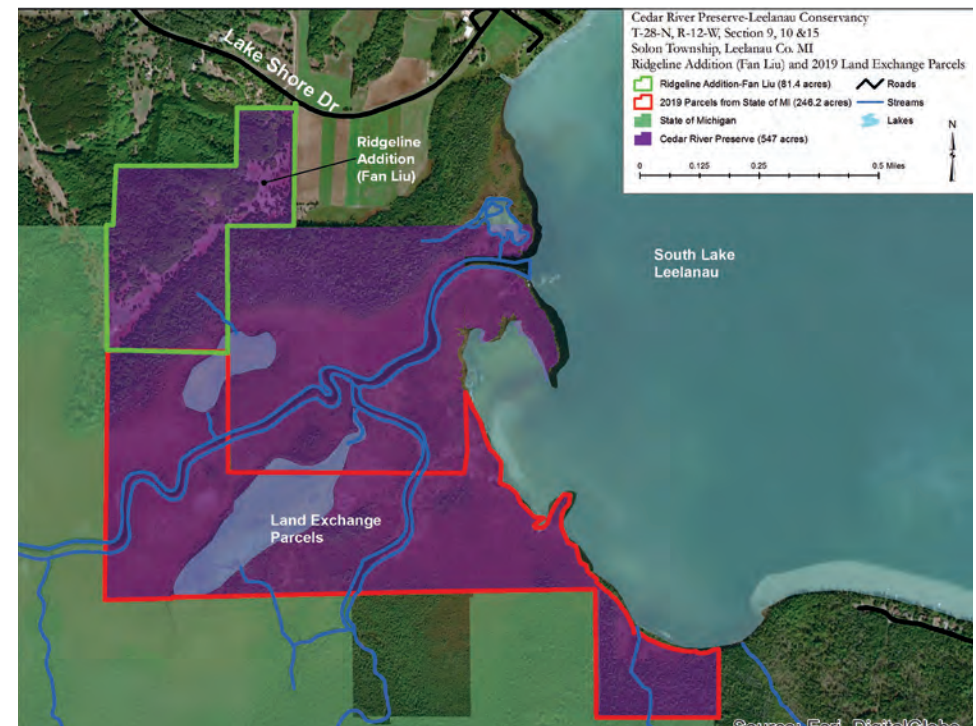
parcels are the most ecologically sensitive, and are the most likely to impact water quality. The Conservancy’s management practices in this area are basically to leave the land alone, and to let the river serve as a water trail for canoers and kayakers.

Luckily, the State of Michigan has a mechanism in place that authorizes the exchange of lands that have equal or greater value: Public Act 238. The State’s goal: “To improve management and enhance the public’s enjoyment of state recreation by acquiring private parcels that lie within the state’s project boundaries.”

“We’re proud of our own Yarrow Brown,

who did a superb job in coordinating a very complex transaction,” says Tom. “Now, the consolidation of these lands and waters into a contiguous area enables the Conservancy to enhance the long-term ecological health of this incredibly special resource that will be appreciated by its inhabitants—the plants and animals that call this place home—and the people who love the outdoors. This truly is Nature in one of its finest forms.”

To see a “story map” of how the Cedar River Preserve has grown over time and how land has been exchanged, visit the Cedar River Preserve page of our website.



All of the land in purple is now owned by the Leelanau Conservancy. The land outlined in green represents the new addition to the Cedar River Preserve.

The Vision for DeYoung Natural Area



Photo by Claire Wood

Where Hands-On Conservation Comes to Life

“Finally, our DeYoung Natural Area farmstead is about to blossom!” says Leelanau Conservancy Executive Director Tom Nelson. “For everyone who cherishes this iconic farmstead and natural area as a gateway to rural Leelanau, the Conservancy has fabulous news, work has commenced to restore the circa 1855 farmhouse as a functional hub for volunteerism and collaborative conservation initiatives.”

Vintage Building and Restoration LLC, which specializes in historic properties, has been hired to make the farmhouse a usable space, says Land Steward Chase Heise. “We’ll be adding some modern conveniences while maintaining the historic character.” A new well was recently installed, and plans are underway to repair joints in the large barn on the east side of Cherry Bend Road to straighten the walls and stabilize the structure.

The Conservancy preserved this 191-acre property in 2006 in partnership with Elmwood Township with help from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. The Leelanau Trail bisects the land, and a Universal Access trail leads to a lakeside fishing and viewing platform for all to enjoy. Upland trails wind past heritage-variety apple trees and over a small stream, offering sweeping views of Cedar Lake. Much of the shoreline—over a mile of frontage is protected—contains wetlands critical to the health of Cedar Lake.

The DeYoung Farm is a place rich in history. The farmstead is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was once owned by Louis DeYoung, an innovative farmer who was the first in the area to bring electricity into his home. He rigged up a car generator and two six-volt light bulbs to a water wheel which was powered by a stream that ran beneath his workshop. Louis was also one of the first farmers in Leelanau to plant cherry trees. He always dreamed of protecting his land and after

he died at age 104, his children worked with the Conservancy to make it a Natural Area. The deal included the farmhouse, two barns and several other outbuildings—the only one of our natural areas with buildings on the property.

“While the ecological value of the DeYoung land had long made it a priority for protection, we had expected to find other partners to manage the historic structures,” adds Nelson. “We never found another nonprofit to take on the building management and maintenance, but we made a promise to the family that we would care for their legacy and nurture this portal to some of the best lands the Leelanau Peninsula has to offer.”

Almost immediately after the property was purchased, the Conservancy put a new roof on the house to stem water damage in progress. It also rebuilt the front porch and installed new doors on the lower barn. The Power House, where Louis generated electricity via an underground waterwheel, has been largely restored. For five summers, graduate students from Eastern Michigan University’s historic preservation program spent time doing masonry work, repairing foundations, replacing windows and cataloging artifacts from the farmhouse.

The Conservancy has also partnered with schools and organizations like the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians to plant thousands of native trees and shrubs here. Volunteers learn about invasive species as they help to remove them. An “Edible Trails” project feeds wildlife and visitors. Bat boxes crafted by a local Eagle Scout were installed on the lower barn and nesting boxes donated by Wildbirds Unlimited shelter bluebirds along the Leelanau Trail.

The house and barn have potential as gathering places for staff, board, volunteers, and partners. But first, there’s a lot of work to be done. Chase is



excited to see Vintage Building and Restoration get started. “Choosing a contractor was interesting,” he says. “Some envisioned taking the house down to the studs and starting fresh, using all new modern materials to mimic a historic look. Our contractor is committed to following the Secretary of the Interior’s standards on the treatment of historic properties.”

That includes keeping items like the Home Comfort wood cook stove, rooftop lightning rods and porcelain door knobs. Refinishing the beech floors that Louis laid himself in the 1930s is also a priority. “There are so many cool little things to discover, like the intricate trim work on the exterior windows of the house,” adds Chase. “We want to utilize what’s already there, and if it’s not usable or fixable we will recreate it.” If all goes as planned, work on the house will be completed by the end of summer. Follow along, via our website and social media, as we share about our first historic restoration process.



“Work has commenced to restore the circa 1855 farmhouse as a functional hub for volunteerism and joint conservation initiatives.”

Photo by Emily Stuhldreher



Steimel Brothers Protect 76 Acres of Prime Fruit-Growing Farmland

Thanks to you, another critical farm in Leelanau has been forever preserved.

Al and Mark Steimel's roots run deep on the land they have protected with a conservation easement in Leland Township. Their great-grandfather, Charles Johnson, bought the farm in 1890 and grew apples along with potatoes and crops like hay, corn and oats to feed the farm's animals. The brothers have a deep attachment to this prime fruit-growing land, with its sweeping views of Lake Michigan peeking through the trees. It is, in fact, one of the highest points in Leland Township, says Al, as he points to a rise where his mother and aunt sunbathed and had family picnics.

The extraordinary elevation deterred the brothers from growing cherries. "The cost of digging a 450-foot-deep well and buying a cherry shaker was out of our reach," says Al. They continued to farm apples when they took over the land and in 1984 they planted varieties for the fresh market. Most recently they have been replacing the older varieties with Gala, Fuji and Royal Red Honeycrisp. They keep a block of McIntosh apples specifically to supply Tandem Ciders in Suttons Bay for the cidery's famous "Smackintosh" brand.

"Four generations and much hard work later, the legacy that Al and Mark will leave is now anchored into Leelanau County's agricultural history," says Kim Hayes, Land Protection Specialist. "It is fantastic that the Steimel Farm's ridge above Good Harbor Bay will provide food for future generations and protect acres of forestland as well."

Their land is both immediately adjacent to and in close proximity to other protected farms and conservation easements held by the Leelanau Conservancy. Among them: the Stanton Farm just across the road as well as nearby Hohnke, Kelenske and Lanham conservation easements. These blocks of preserved lands help to keep agriculture viable in our county and provide critical habitat blocks needed for wildlife and ecological processes.

"This is yet another tremendous farm preserved and water quality protected, thanks to our members,

in particular our Friends of Farming giving circle. Their support has leveraged the funding needed to keep this crucial family operation in production for the long haul," says Tom Nelson, Executive Director. "We owe a deep debt of gratitude to our Friends of Farming!"

This project was funded by a combination of federal grant and Conservancy dollars, as well as a donation by the landowners, resulting in a bargain sale of the conservation easement. The federal grant program is called the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP). See sidebar (right) for more great news.



Al Steimel stands in front of hardwood forest which has also been preserved. Good Harbor Bay can be seen through the trees.



FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Photo by Claudia Lockhart

More Great News!

Just as this newsletter was going to press, a 172-acre farm in Elmwood Township was soon to be protected. Find out more about our current land protection projects at leelanauconservancy.org; click on the NEWS tab for the latest stories about land protection. Additionally, five more farm projects are in the works, funded in part through the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Protection Partnership Program (RCPP). All of the above-mentioned projects are expected to be completed by year end. Collectively, these lands, along with the Steimel farm, will preserve 870 acres of farmland, forests and wetlands. Stay tuned for stories to come as these projects are finalized!



Photo by Mark Smith

Did You Know That...

- Farming in Leelanau is a \$35 million economic driver for our county
- Leelanau produces 20% of the nation's tart and 5% of the nation's sweet cherries
- Every \$1 earned by farmers leads to \$1.29 in revenue for local businesses
- Farming provides 1,600 local jobs
- Farmland provides buffers to critical natural habitat and can protect water quality better than developed land
- Rising land values increase the risk of farmers selling their land for development and decrease the ability of new farmers to buy land
- 40% of Michigan farmers are over 65; only 38% have plans to pass farms to heirs. Land absent a succession or estate plan is at risk of conversion to non-agricultural use

Spring + Summer Happenings

1. Docents spend hours training, including learning CPR and safety. Thanks to Josh Porter from Suttons Bay Fire and Rescue for his instruction! L-r: docents Mary Burton, Joan Longton and Bert Thomas. Photo: Ed Ketterer.

2. Hats off to Micah Thoreson who earned his Eagle Scout badge by building bat boxes. In May, he mounted one on the DeYoung Natural Area barn.

3. Thanks to Tandem Ciders for hosting our Earth Week Celebration again this year! People of all ages turned out to socialize and listen to Fauxgrass.

4. Over 40 people showed up for a docent-led hike to see the pink lady slippers in May at Houdek Dunes Natural Area. Photo by Mark Smith.

5. Our new Clay Cliffs limited-edition t-shirts are a big hit! Back side of t-shirt features Conservancy logo with There's no place like Leelanau. Visit our office or call to order: 231-256-9665. T-shirts are \$22 and stickers \$5.

6. At a joint workbee with TART Trails, volunteers pulled invasive wild parsnip at DeYoung Natural Area. Pictured: volunteers Pat O'Connor and David Leith.

7. Tom Nelson and supporter Chuck Ball, Executive Director of the Edmund and Virginia Ball Foundation, helped build a practice loop at Palmer Woods this July. The 2nd, 2.75 Central Ridge Loop opened this summer, bringing the mountain bike trails to 5.75 miles total.

8. Five-year-old Hanalei and her mom, Julie Kuieck, teamed up to gather water samples, part of our nearly 30-year-old water monitoring program.

9. The Leland Village Green is the new home of a Little Free Library, thanks to a generous gift by donors Bob and Jeanine Ball.

10. We've been working on the mountain bike trails at Palmer Woods, adding an intermediate 2.75-mile loop, thanks in large part to the Ball Foundation.

11. Meet new docents—nature lovers all! L-R: Karin Jacobson, Keith Rhodes, Joan Longton, Bert Thomas, and Mary Burton. Not pictured: Emmy Lou Cholak.

12. Over 170 volunteers and students planted nearly 1,000 trees during Earth Week! Thanks to partners Conservation Resource Alliance, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, and The Greenspire School.

13. Spring bird hikes were well attended. Including this scarlet tanager!

14. We had a fantastic Earth Week this year, including a hike at Kehl Lake Natural Area on a beautiful day.







More Happenings

15. The Wildflower Rescue Sale raised \$25,000 to help care for the Leland Village Green and to support other Conservancy projects. Thanks to all who helped make this sale one of our most successful ever.

16. During Earth Week volunteers sampled for aquatic insects in Mebert Creek. You can determine how healthy a river, lake, or stream is by looking at the variety of macroinvertebrates present. Pictured: Sam Krause and her fiancée, Michael Ogle.



17. We gather annually with conservation easement landowners. This June we also invited the public to attend the event: a workshop at Saving Birds Thru Habitat focused on how to improve habitat for birds and other wildlife. The group also toured a nearby conservation easement property on Bass Lake.

18. To celebrate Mary Grover's 80th birthday, and her son Tom's 50th, 11 family members pulled invasive garlic mustard at Clay Cliffs. "Four generations of our family have come to Little Traverse Lake to enjoy all that it offers," says Mary. "It seemed about time we all gave back, even a little, to the area we love."

19. We're proud of staffer Yarrow Brown, who won an Environmentalist of the Year award from Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council. "I was so surprised," says Yarrow, who runs our water monitoring program. "It's just what I do for my job. I was grateful and honored and the fight for clean water will never be over." Congrats!



20. We're grateful to yoga teacher Katherine Palms for offering a second summer series of yoga classes to benefit the Conservancy. Visit the events page of our new website to see class schedule and location. All levels are welcome.

Wildflower Rescuers and Garthe Farm Unite to Save Trillium and More

With the Leelanau Conservancy's Memorial Weekend Wildflower Rescue Plant Sale just 10 days away, volunteers were on a mission to dig 500 trillium plants in just over an hour. Four workers met up in Northport to carpool to the Garthe Farm, where owners Gene and Kathy Garthe met them with open arms.

The morning dig here was a win-win for both. The Wildflower Rescue Committee (WRC) looks for places where plants will be destroyed by construction and then digs up and sells the rescued plants at an annual plant sale on the Leland Village Green over Memorial Day Weekend.

This energetic group has been rescuing wildflowers since 1999. Volunteers have worked since that time not only to save the plants, but to educate the public about the value of the plants to the forest and as part of ecosystems. Wildflower Rescue saves primarily woodland or shade plants that are found in hardwood forests. Any plants protected by Michigan law are legally dug with permission of the property owner.

The trillium-filled forest on the Garthe farm is encroaching on their organic cherry orchard and must be kept in check—and the Garthes want to see the trillium removed instead of mowed down. “The woods will grow right into the orchard if we let it,” says Kathy. “It’s really important to have what we call ‘air drainage.’” She points to a rise just to the north of where the diggers are working. “We need the winds that come over the hill to keep the area cooler, which helps to reduce disease pressure.”

As we take in the beautiful forested hillside covered

in trillium under blue skies, Kathy says, “This view is one of those things where we feel blessed beyond blessings. We’d love to be a dig site every year.” In addition to offering up their wildflower-filled hillside, Kathy also serves on the Leelanau Conservancy’s Board of Directors and in 2015, she and Gene protected 200 acres of their farmland with a conservation easement. The protected land was settled

back to the Swanson Preserve, where another crew is waiting to pot them up for the sale. Still another crew is out at a second site, trying to dig as many plants as they can for the upcoming sale.

As Kathy Frerichs works, she talks about how these beautiful plants are also quite fragile. Picking them injures the plant and can even kill it because removing the flower and foliage robs the plant of its food source for next year.

Before they load their cars, volunteers take an allotted five minutes to dig something for themselves to take home. “That’s why I got involved,” says rescuer Judy Livingston. “I wanted to create a wildflower garden at my house, and then I just got hooked. It’s so beautiful to be out in the woods on a day like this.”

Postscript: This year’s sale raised over \$25,000 to help maintain the Village Green and assist with other Conservancy projects. Thank you, Wildflower Rescue Committee!



Wildflower Rescue. L-r Bob and Kathy Newell, Kathy Frerichs and Judy Livingston after a morning of digging trillium at the Garthe farm. At right: Northport area farmers, Gene and Kathy Garthe

by Gene’s great-grandfather, one of the first fruit farmers in Leelanau County.

As Kathy and Gene return to their orchard, volunteers are hard at work. Shovels in hand, they gently lift the trillium plants and remove most of the dirt, then place them into boxes. That makes them easier to transport



A Grassroots Effort to Protect Our Clean Water

At this year's Leelanau Clean Water Symposium, opening speaker John Hartig gave a riveting account of the degradation and rebirth of Detroit's Rouge River. The river had four crisis points in its history, from raw sewage and dead carp floating on its surface to the river's catching fire in 1969, shooting flames 50 feet into the air. While John's talk was disturbing, it was also inspiring. It illustrated how a group of passionate citizens worked with government and industry to bring about change and to revive this once-dead river.

While the threats to Leelanau's water are nowhere near this scale, a group called Leelanau Clean Water was formed in 2008 largely due to concerns about failing septic systems near our lakes and streams. County commissioners had just voted down an ordinance that would require septic system inspections to take place whenever a property changed hands (something that Benzie County enacted 27 years ago).

The first thing the group did was to form a board with key experts from around the county at the table to help inform the commissioners on water quality concerns. LCW's mission statement: "To restore, protect and sustain water resources, promote public awareness of environmental and economic importance, and provide accurate information to assist public participation in water resource decisions."

And so it is no surprise that at the symposium, concerns and threats to Leelanau's waters were presented along with success stories and ways lake associations can work on raising funds to continue their outreach efforts. A new sampling method known as qPCR (quantitative polymerase chain reaction) detected "human enteric bacteria" or human waste in four of Leelanau's lakes last fall. "That is bacteria

which is only found in the human gut," says staffer Yarrow Brown, who serves on LCW's board. "We don't know how much, but we do know it is present." The initial sampling for Lime Lake showed 28% of hot spots around the lake. Additional sampling is needed to learn more and that will happen this summer.

What does this mean? Given the number of aging septic systems around inland lakes and, it is estimated that many septic systems are failing and is the cause of this bacteria entering our water bodies. QPCR can also detect whether invasive species such as Eurasian milfoil or giant carp are in the lakes via DNA analysis. The Conservancy's 28-year water quality monitoring program predated LCW's formation, but long-term data from the program is integral to the group's conclusions.

"Water defines the Leelanau experience and we must do all we can to protect it," says Executive Director Tom Nelson. "The Conservancy's role is primarily about protecting land that protects water. But we also think that we can help to inform the public and raise the profile of Leelanau Clean Water, and encourage people to get involved to protect this irreplaceable resource."

Leelanau Clean Water: How You Can Get Involved

The group meets monthly on the 3rd Wednesday at the Leelanau Governmental Center from 9:30 to 11 am. The 10-member board welcomes questions and public comment and posts its meeting notes online. "People seem to love reading the notes and also can find a wealth of information on the LCW website," says Yarrow. Find it here: <https://www.leelanau.cc/lcw.asp>

A Must-Watch Nature Change Video:

Lovers of our clean and pristine water, be sure to take 16 minutes to watch Flushing the Future—The Challenge of Failing Septic Systems. You can find it online at NatureChange.org. Tune in to learn more.

Photo of Clay Cliffs by Mark Smith



“Leelanau is in my Cellular Matrix”

Cammie Buehler calls herself “a 5th generation Leelanau summer kid,” and her roots in this peninsula run deep. Her great-great grandfather, Leo Cloud, was a widowed mining engineer who worked in the west. When the railroad came to Omena in 1903, it enabled him to travel to and from the mines while his sister cared for his children in a home he built near the village. Over the course of her 43 years, Cammie has spent time at her grandparents cottage on Northport Point, and on Omena Point where her parents, Tom and Marsha Buehler, own a home. “Leelanau is in my cellular matrix,” she says.

Cammie’s summers in Leelanau and love of nature led her to earn a degree in Outdoor Education and Recreation Studies from Ohio University, with a goal of working in the snow sports industry. She moved out west after graduation, where she taught snowboarding by day and worked in restaurants at night to make ends meet. Looking back, she says she was struck by how little public access there was to water. “Everything is privately owned, and nothing seemed attainable; rather you were always working to facilitate someone else’s good time,” she says.

Cammie found herself feeling homesick in 2003, after a five-year relationship came to an end and she was laid off from work. She was 27 and told herself, “Go take a breath in Omena, do some restaurant work and see what happens.” She joined forces with an old friend, Andy Schudlich, who she had cooked with at the Riverside in Leland during college summers. In 2003, Cammie and Andy formed Epicure Catering. Today, they operate out of and host events at a beautiful old barn and commissary at Cherry Basket Farm in Omena, purchased by her parents and lovingly restored.

The catering life is a demanding one, but having access to Leelanau makes all the difference. “In Leelanau, we all work so hard just to be able to be here, but it’s never lost on me why I came back,” she says. “I love to hike, boat, walk my dog. There is so much public water front. The woods, orchards and views are important to my connection with this place. Leelanau feels relatively unchanged whereas everywhere else I’ve lived, growth has happened for the sake of growth.”



Her love for Leelanau and “cellular matrix” factor pretty much sums up what inspired Cammie to accept an invitation to join the Leelanau Conservancy’s Board of Directors last year, and most recently, why she joined the Richard O. Ristine Heritage Society. Cammie and Andy had been involved with the Conservancy since 2005; they donated appetizers for past Conservancy picnics and dinners at Cherry Basket Farm that raised thousands of dollars for our farmland preservation efforts. Most recently she has been instrumental in helping to put on our upcoming August 1st Rally. Cammie credits her mom, Marsha, for making her aware of the Conservancy’s mission; Marsha has served on our Outreach Committee for nearly two decades.

A cancer scare two years ago led her to create a will. Happily, the tumor of concern turned out to be benign, but the ordeal propelled her to get her affairs in order. “I wanted to make sure that no one I love has to go through any sort of administrative slog on my behalf,” says Cammie. “I feel lucky and grateful, and that’s what inspired me to write a will.” She consulted with the attorney that she and Andy use for Epicure Catering, and created a trust to avoid probate. “I’ve provisioned a flat amount to go to the Conservancy, and figure in 10 years, if I’m still around, I will reassess things,” adds Cammie.

“Not a lot of my peers have a will,” she says. “But I figure that all the people before me have made sure that the Leelanau I love was there for me and now it’s on me to help steward this peninsula for all who come after me.”

Corrections to our 2018 Annual Report:

We regret the following errors and omissions:

1. Patty Pelizari made a gift in memory of her parents, Jim and Pat Ganter
2. John McInnis made a gift in honor of his parents, Doug and Ann McInnis
3. Jim and Claudia Shannahan’s names were misspelled in our volunteer list

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Find Your Leelanau Adventure!

We are proud of our new website and hope you love it, too. You'll find gorgeous photos like this one by Jon Constant. You'll also find lots of info about our natural areas as well as event and volunteer information, and in-depth stories about the people who have protected their lands. Visit leelanauconservancy.org to see all the things your support has made happen!

