



There's no place like *Leelanau*.

Conserving the Land, Water and Scenic Character of Leelanau County



2019 Annual Report

From Your Director

*Of all the paths you take in life, make sure
a few of them are dirt.* — John Muir

I have some great news for you. But first, a brief look at the bigger picture—or the main path—if you will.

Few things do my heart as good as seeing my five-year-old daughter—or any child, for that matter—skipping down a woodland path. I hear her giggling as she's shouting out the names of the trees she passes. Maple! Oak! Black Cherry! Beech! I see her stooping down to greet every frog or toad she encounters. These are some of life's most precious, and most powerful, moments. You and I, we understand the ripple effect a love of nature has, particularly a love of our own peninsula. Indeed, the sound of children's laughter in the woods is a profound affirmation that our collective efforts to protect Leelanau are fostering hope for our world.

Thanks to you, the Conservancy continues to blaze a very different metaphorical path. This path defines progress by how much of Leelanau's woods, farms and waters—or in the eloquent words of our Chairman, Ross Satterwhite, the soul of our peninsula—are saved rather than altered. Thanks to you, we are quickly approaching 15,000 acres of our precious county preserved forever. And, needless to say, we're pretty proud of our literal paths as well—26 miles of trails on our 27 natural areas—the ones you love to experience over and over again, like at Whaleback, DeYoung, Clay Cliffs, Kehl Lake, Houdek Dunes, and of course, Palmer Woods—just to name a few.

So what's the big news? Well, I couldn't be more delighted to announce that in 2020 and beyond, we are poised to save more places we cherish and to open more new trails. Oh, did I say 27 natural areas? Well, we're working hard to increase that number to 28! And, we are on our way toward expanding two of our largest natural areas and their fabulous trail systems too.

- By now, you have heard that your Conservancy is getting closer to adding 350 beautiful, forested acres to our Palmer Woods Forest Reserve! We have just a few short months to complete our fundraising goal of \$3.5M, and we are almost there. Our aim is to expand Palmer Woods to over 1000 acres. And, in the process, enhancing wildlife habitat, water quality protection and laying the groundwork for 40 miles of hiking, skiing and bike trails. You can help us make this dream come true—

visit: leelanauconservancy.org/palmerwoods1000

- You may also have heard that we are closing in on protecting a major portion of the forested wetland complex on the south end of Lime Lake. This is an ecological and water-cleansing powerhouse for Lime Lake, Little Traverse Lake and Good Harbor Bay. We have a wonderful opportunity to purchase these lands to create a brand new Lime Lake Preserve. We'd be grateful for your help here too—visit: leelanauconservancy.org/support
- Speaking of new trails, last summer, we acquired the first ever dry-land access to our fabulous 547-acre Cedar River Preserve, now with nearly two miles of forever-wild Lake Leelanau shoreline. Later this year, we will open our very first hiking trail skirting forested wetlands, a rare kettle-hole pond and possessing lovely ridgeline views. Stay tuned!
- And, in December of 2019, we added our brand new Stites Natural Area! Stites (which rhymes with "lights") is 50 acres of beautiful rolling hardwoods donated by Ray and Jan Pezzi, all within walking distance of the village of Suttons Bay. Keep an eye out—a ribbon-cutting at this new hiking trail is planned for this summer!

And let's not leave out that the Conservancy continues to be one of America's leading trailblazers in protecting clean water and family farms through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Our innovative program is helping to protect watershed features and productive food-growing lands on more than a dozen Leelanau farms—comprising nearly 1,600 acres. Thanks to you, this initiative to permanently protect clean water and more family farms is going strong!

At milepost 2020, there is no small number of challenges ahead, from saving that beautiful woodland, wetland or farm you love to building climate resilience on our lands. Your Conservancy may be small, but together we truly are a mighty and lasting force for good. Together, we really are making a difference.

Whether the path be metaphorical or one of actual dirt upon which children laugh and sing, we are grateful beyond words to be with you on this journey. Thank you.



Thomas Nelson
Executive Director



Cover photo of a snowy owl by Sheen Watkins
Photography, photo right at Kehl Lake by Phil
Stinson, profile photos by Tristen Roman



Chairman's Message:



The Leelanau Conservancy turned 31 years old this year. Those of you that attended the celebration in the big tent stretched wide across the field at the Dechow Farm in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore might remember the spectacular summer day we had. The brilliant sun, cloudless sky, brisk wind, and crystal clear air. It was pure Leelanau. A wonderful day for supporters to gather to celebrate the accomplishments of conservation, and for the staff and board to thank those across the community for generously supporting the work we do. Thirty-one years is a long time.

But saving the soul of something is never quick work.

Through the incredible support of the community, our collective success these first 31 years has been extraordinary: 27 natural areas created, 9,128 acres of natural lands protected, 5,269 acres of farmland preserved, 51 miles of stream and lake frontage protected and 26 miles of walking and biking trails available to the community. Wetlands and forests, dune-scapes and sweeping grasslands. Cliffs and seeps and fallow fields and acres of trillium woods. Diverse habitats for plants, shrubs, trees, insects, birds, fish and wildlife. The myriad of viewsheds and sparkling vistas. It is truly remarkable.

Yet with all we have accomplished, the mission of the Conservancy has never been more relevant and urgent. The assault on our environment, the stress on our water quality, plant and animal species, and the pressure on farmland and sustainable agriculture has never been greater. We are truly in a battle to save the soul of this peninsula.

2020 brings the Leelanau Conservancy yet more important challenges to do this. We must continue to grow our general membership and volunteer base. These two groups are critical to the ongoing financial health of the organization and to maintaining our broad community support. We must also increase our Sustainers Circle contributors. Their annual contributions fund a significant portion of the overhead that allows our team to do the work we do. Lastly, like every year, we must continue to raise more funds to put directly into the conservation of land and water. Every day we remain so grateful to our donors, our ambassadors and volunteers, and community partners for the financial, emotional, and executorial help you give us. Thank you. You are the foundation of it all.

Looking ahead, this year the Conservancy will be focused on another major initiative for farmland that, if fully realized, will allow us to access \$3.5 million dollars of federal funding for farm preservation projects over the next three years. Projects targeted to protect working farmlands and their important watersheds, prime and unique soils, and diverse forestry. We have also just announced a public campaign to help the Conservancy add more recreational land and trails in the county (see back cover). Both are big initiatives and at the core of our mission.

Also, in 2020 we will be expanding our focus on growing the Conservancy's endowment resources. The endowment is an immensely important source of funding needed to meet the long-term stewardship obligations of our protected lands. Care of our natural areas, preserves and conservation easements are in perpetuity obligations. The Conservancy is preserving these lands forever and it is imperative we continue to build the stewardship resources required to do so.

We are grateful to have an incredibly talented staff in place to address these challenges. Their skill and depth of knowledge of the environmental and conservation sciences and of the fundraising, stewardship, finance, and communications disciplines might surprise you. They are so dedicated to this work. It is their sweat and tears and persistence and ambition and gall and fearlessness that continues to drive the organization forward. A willingness to stretch and to take on seemingly unreachable challenges. Plus an unwavering faith in the need to protect, preserve and steward these lands. We are so grateful to them. It's been that way since Ed and Bobbie Collins had the vision 31 years ago, and Brian and Susan Price first started us on this journey.

Every now and then I step back and marvel at the nature of this 240,000-acre peninsula and the effect it has on all of us. It's remarkable. This land and water nurtures us, heals us, inspires us, and brings us peace, understanding and meaning. It helps restore us and reminds us of the beauty in our world, and in others. It reminds us how good our lives can be.

Thank you for supporting this endeavor. Saving the soul of something is never quick work.

Ross Satterwhite
Chairman



A photograph of a winter forest. The ground is covered in a thick layer of snow, with some footprints visible. Numerous bare trees with thin trunks and branches stand in the forest, their dark silhouettes contrasting against the bright, snowy landscape. The lighting suggests a sunny day, with soft shadows cast on the snow.

Into the Woods...

**A Suttons Bay Couple Donates
50 Acres for a New Natural Area**

Photo by Mark Smith

A Suttons Bay couple has generously donated 50 acres just outside of the village that will become a new Leelanau Conservancy Natural Area. We are grateful to Ray and Jan Pezzi for their incredible gift. “We are tree huggers,” says Ray. “And we are excited to share this beautiful land with the public.”

Natural Areas & Preserves Director Becky Hill is excited too. “This is our first Natural Area near Suttons Bay, and I love that villagers can get to it without a car,” she says. The long, winding ridgelines here are the result of glacial deposits of sand and gravel. Deep valleys have been carved out by melting streams; the rolling terrain will make for some great trails.

“The views when the leaves are off the trees stretch all the way to Old Mission,” adds Becky. “It will take some time to plan out and mark trails so for now, access will be limited to guided hikes only.”

The land is located along Broadway, about a quarter-mile from the Suttons Bay Post Office and so close to Suttons Bay Schools that the cross-country team has trained there. The land had once been slated for development, with up to 60 houses planned. But over the years two different developers tried unsuccessfully to market a housing development. While the steep hills and valleys will make for great trails, they were an impediment to developers. “You could have had a few McMansions on the ridge,” says Ray, “but the cuts the bulldozers would have made, and the amount of sand and gravel that would need to be moved...well it would have destroyed the habitat and been expensive to reshape the land to accommodate so many houses.”

After watching the property change hands over the last decade, cringing every time they heard the sound of chainsaws, the Pezzis decided that enough was enough. They purchased the 50 acres over the last few years as parcels became available, and began talking to the Leelanau Conservancy

about the possibilities of permanent protection.

Ray and Jan, both in their early 60s, inherited a love for nature from their respective families. Ray grew up in Dearborn but spent time on his grandparents' "magical" hunting lands near West Branch, located along a tributary of the Rifle River. "When I wasn't trying to catch brook trout, I was always trooping around in the woods," he says. Ray discovered Leelanau via a friend, who owned a condo at Sugar Loaf. They came up often to play golf. "My God," he says, "It was so beautiful. I thought, to myself, 'If only I could find a way to make a living here.'" Ray had worked as a national sales manager for Proctor and Gamble and later for AT&T, and moved to Bellaire in Antrim County, when a position opened up.

Ray met Jan, a former pre-school teacher who was living in Suttons Bay, on Match.com. (Both were recently divorced). Two months later, they tied the knot. "I knew it was right the second I met him," says Jan. Her ties to Leelanau run deeper; Jan's parents, Phyllis (Merchant) and David Stites were raised near Acme, and her distant relatives were some of the first settlers in Northport.

Jan's father became a stonemason, following in the footsteps of his father, whose handiwork touched "just about every building in Traverse City and on Northport Point," says Jan.

Jan and her two sisters were raised near Flint, where her father owned a company called Genesee Cut Stone and Marble. But they came north often for vacations and to visit family. She grew up on a 40-acre farm where her father's passion was to restore an old corn field by planting thousands of tree seedlings, purchased annually from the local conservation district. "One of my big motivations in protecting and offering our land to the Leelanau Conservancy is to honor the memory of my parents," says Jan.

The Pezzis built their house in 2007 on a quiet

cul-de-sac just a stone's throw from the new natural area, and out their back door is a steep trail that leads up to the property. They love walking their dogs here and care deeply about the future of the trees. Ray has treated some of the oaks to prevent a disease known as oak wilt. On a tour of the property in December, Ray said, "I wish you could have seen it before the developer cut down so many trees and before the emerald ash borer appeared. Still, there are some magnificent trees up here." Some are more than a century old and three feet in diameter.

Ray is concerned about beech bark disease and the wildlife which depend on their nuts as a food source. To compensate, he has planted Midwest crab apple, American hazelnut and white oaks. The Pezzis also gathered hundreds of nuts from a 200-year-old burr oak tree that stood in the front yard where Jan grew up and planted them on the soon-to-be natural area land.

Ray says that he has flushed grouse and woodcock, and has run into a flock of 20 turkeys while walking his dog. Deer and bobcat, even bear tracks appear on an old two track. The Pezzis' walks often cause them to reflect on those who taught them both to love nature. "I think my parents would be really pleased," says Jan. Stay tuned for more information on when the David & Phyllis Stites Natural Area will be open for hiking.

"It was abundantly clear from the first moment that Ray and Jan Pezzi are in love with the woods, with nature and care deeply for their community," says Tom Nelson, Conservancy Executive Director. "Their wholehearted desire is to share this place with others who will undoubtedly fall in love with it too. We at the Conservancy understand this love at a fundamental level, of course. And, Ray and Jan will always be our heroes."

Right: Ray and Jan Pezzi; the new Dave and Phyllis Stites Natural Area is named for Jan's parents, nature lovers who were raised near Traverse City.





John Gallagher Jr. says that he and his family “have been blessed” to own more than 400 acres of breathtakingly gorgeous farmland in Leelanau’s Elmwood Township. Panoramic views from the land’s highest point take in neat rows of cherry trees and pockets of northern hardwoods, with West Grand Traverse Bay and Power Island as a stunning backdrop.

From here, the Gallaghers can see the Cherry Festival fireworks, watch the Blue Angels’ air show, and can even hear concerts on The Open Space. “No one knows we’re here,” says John Jr. And he kind of likes it that way. In September, the family protected 172 acres of their 400-acre-plus holdings with a conservation easement. A conservation easement is a legal agreement that keeps land in private ownership and on the tax rolls, but restricts development in order to protect the land’s natural features.

John Jr. is one of seven children in a long line of Gallaghers—he is in fact, the 5th generation descended from ancestors who came over from Ireland. His sister, Maria Lammers, owns and operates the Gallagher Farm Market on M-72 that their parents purchased for retail sales in 1972.

Their father, John Sr., who went by “Jack,” was born on a centennial farm on Long Lake. In 1953, Jack married a young woman named Bernadine, who had been raised on a farm on Gills Pier. They purchased the family farm in 1963, starting out with 160 acres and an old farmhouse, making do with a hand pump and an outhouse until they could afford to make improvements. John Jr. and his six siblings were raised here, and his mom, 88, still lives in the house.

As more land came available, Jack “kept adding to the core,” says John Jr. “He was very wise.” Tragically, his father died at 60 after a battle with lymphoma in the late ‘80s. “Dad wanted to keep the land in farming and I told him that is what I wanted to do,” says John Jr., who studied horticulture at MSU. He was 29 when he took over.

Bumping along in a pickup truck one fall day he and his son, Jordan, talk about what makes this land so great for growing cherries. “The air flow and drainage here is ideal,” says Jordan. “We can often escape a frost that strikes other farms. And the sandy soil is perfect for fruit. If the soil is too

heavy, you can’t grow sweets.”

Jordan earned a degree in Natural Resources Management from Grand Valley State University. “This guy,” says Jordan, gesturing at his dad, “told me that I needed to study something that could help the farm.” Soil science is his expertise, and as a side job, Jordan represents a line of sustainable fertilizers and pesticides produced for agriculture. What excites him is a “less is more” approach, using the right thing in just the right amount to minimize cost and to maximize sustainability.

A unique feature on the land is an irrigation pond (see photo left). Jack worked with the DNR to create the pond, fed by five springs which converge in a forested valley. It has doubled as a swimming and fishing hole for the family over many decades. John Jr.’s own 10 children and 15 grandchildren play here today. John Jr. stocks the pond with rainbow trout and gauges the health of the pond by the fish, which are sensitive to their surroundings. “Too much nitrogen or other nutrient runoff kill the fish,” says John Jr.

At one of the highest points on the land, we’re joined by John Jr.’s oldest child, Johnny, 36, and his wife, Rose. Johnny works full time as Leelanau County Treasurer, and Rose is Traverse City East Middle School’s principal. They were high school sweethearts who met at St. Mary’s and have five children.

Like Jordan, Johnny knew he had to bring something unique to the family business and so he studied accounting. In addition to pitching in on the farm, he serves as financial advisor and keeps the books. However for him, the farm is much more than the numbers on a balance sheet.

“This is a legacy farm,” says Johnny. “You can’t reproduce this. Or create this atmosphere and environment anywhere in the county. We were so fortunate to grow up here and almost never left the farm. It was our playground with the pond, the woods...an awesome way of life. We want the farming industry to be valued now and going forward. It’s a calling.”

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Photos: Top: L-R John Gallagher Jr. with daughter-in-law Rose and sons Johnny and Jordan. Their farm in Elmwood Township features stunning views of West Grand Traverse Bay and Power Island.

Middle: An irrigation pond serves as a family gathering spot as well as an environmental indicator on the farm. Photo by Rose Gallagher.

Bottom: Cherry trees on the Gallagher’s farm.



CHERRY FARMING: A FAMILY AFFAIR

The Gallagher's land was protected as part of the Conservancy's role in our Northwest Michigan Fruitbelt Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant. The family was compensated for removing the development rights from 172 acres with 50% of the funds coming from this federal program administered by the USDA-NRCS. The Gallaghers donated a portion of the value and donations to the Leelanau Conservancy's farmland protection fund covered the rest.

"This agricultural conservation easement will permanently protect important groundwater springs that form the headwaters of a small stream flowing through the Conservancy's DeYoung Natural Area and eventually into Cedar Lake and West Grand Traverse Bay," says Matt Heiman, Natural Lands Protection Director, who worked with the family on the project. "The conservation easement also helps protect a very scenic ridgeline enjoyed by boaters out on West Bay. Protection of this productive farm will also ensure 89 acres of prime and unique agricultural soils will forever be available for farming." Photo by Mark Smith.



Gallagher Story Continued

Rose agrees. “We both appreciate so much the sacrifices of previous generations,” she says. “I feel like we are honoring them by keeping one of the most beautiful places in the county intact so that our children and those who come after us will know this life.”

Johnny is the oldest of John Jr.’s 10 children and he and Rose built a house just a stone’s throw from where his dad grew up. He said when he went off to Central Michigan University at 18, he couldn’t stand being away. “This farm always lures you back,” he says, adding that he left CMU after six months and came home and graduated from Northwestern Michigan College.

They talk about the challenges cherry farmers face from bad weather to a devastating fruit fly to Turkish imports that are driving down prices. Last year the Gallaghers grew nearly two million pounds of cherries. “Our processor has been more than fair,” says John Jr., but adds that imported cherries are “selling at below-cost prices.” To make matters worse, the Gallaghers lost an estimated 300,000 pounds when the cherries split in a heavy rain on a 90-degree day.

The Gallaghers see diversification as the key to survival. In recent years they have ripped out older trees and planted new ones which will eventually double or even triple the amount of fruit harvested from the same effort and space. Funds from their sale of development rights to the Leelanau Conservancy will help them to convert more trees from old to new. “Cherries are a long-term commitment,” says Johnny. It takes seven years to see any return on investment. “We know that every step we take has an effect on our future, and everything we do has intention.”

To bring in more revenue, last year they created a cherry u-pick and a hilltop wedding venue called Bay View Weddings, which Rose runs. The Gallaghers have faced bad years, gone into debt, but refuse to give up. Jordan and his wife, Colleen, who have two children, also live nearby. He says common goals of “farm, family and faith, and not necessarily in that order,” help them to all get along. “No matter how bad things got, we never talked about selling off a piece,” he adds. “Instead, we all just said let’s work another 10 hours. We are focused on continuous improvement, innovative practices and protecting the environment. We go home after a long day and think about what we can improve. Our appetite for growth and advancement is voracious, and we are always asking questions and looking for opportunities to do it all better.”





The Emens land connects six other already-protected properties. Photo by Mark Smith.

“Leelanau Woods” Protected

There is a book that Dick Emens reads every year during the holidays, titled “*Self Renewal*,” by John Gardner. It’s his way to welcome the new year, reading fireside in his cabin on Little Traverse Lake—a place he has been coming to since 1939, when he was just five years old. He and his wife, Bea Wolper, spend the holidays at the cabin with their family, taking a break from their law practice in Columbus, Ohio.

Dick, 85, talks about two things that are central to his own self-renewal: travel and nature. On a phone call in late January, he reveals that he is about to take a trip to Africa with an old college friend. He says he’ll be wearing his Leelanau Conservancy hat, which he takes along on trips all over the world.

Dick’s other love—nature—speaks to why he and Bea made the decision at the end of the year to offer the Leelanau Conservancy 80 acres of beloved land located a few miles away from their cabin. The Emens sold the land they call “Leelanau Woods” to the Conservancy for half of its appraised value. It is located along Schomberg Road.

The Emens thought they might build here one day, turning their Little Traverse Lake house over to the couple’s six children and eight grandchildren. But over the years, they just kept adding on to the lake house, and held on to Leelanau Woods as a place to hike with family on the property’s old logging roads. “When I walked the land for the first time, I fell in love with it,” says Dick. “The Jack-in-the-pulpits there are 18 inches tall. There are hundreds of trillium and other wildflowers. It’s a gorgeous spot; from the high ridge you can see Lime Lake and Little Traverse Lake.”

Last fall, they decided it was time to sell the land, and reached out to the Conservancy. It will be restricted with a conservation easement and then resold to a new buyer at appraised value, allowing

the Conservancy to protect “Leelanau Woods” while also recouping its costs. This conservation tool, known in our business as “buy, restrict, resell” will permit the new landowner to build just one home here, in an area that won’t compromise the ecological values of the property or destroy the view of the ridgeline seen from Schomberg Road.

An added bonus: the Emens’ land connects six other contiguous properties already protected with conservation easements. “Together, it adds up to a three-mile-long corridor and 950 total acres of protected lands and intact hardwood forest, ideal for wildlife and birds,” says Matt Heiman, Natural Lands Protection Director.

The Emens are longtime Sustainers who also made significant gifts to help protect the Swanson Farm and the new Lime Lake Preserve. “We believe strongly in the mission of the Leelanau Conservancy,” says Bea. “Leelanau Woods has been an extra-special part of our lives and it was important to both of us to see it protected because it’s just so beautiful.”

“We’re thrilled with everything that the Conservancy has done to protect Leelanau County’s beauty,” adds Dick. “It’s just been a wonderful effort and we’re very glad to have been a part of it.”



Dick Emens and Bea Wolper at Oregon’s Crater Lake. Notice Dick’s Conservancy hat, which he says he has worn all over the world.

Living in Harmony with Beavers— Nature’s Engineers

Snow falls softly on the trees surrounding Carol Waters’ tiny cabin near Maple City as we wait for her to answer our knock. I have never met this 82-year-old woman, who protected 15 acres here along beautiful Lime Creek some 23 years ago. But before I take my coat off, I find myself enveloped in a warm hug. There is a plate of freshly baked cookies on the table, and a teapot steams on the stove.

Conservation Easement Program Manager Yarrow Brown and I have come to hear the story of Carol’s changing landscape, and to learn about the relationship she has developed with the beavers who have transformed the ecosystem surrounding her home.

Carol’s love for nature began when she was a little girl, living downstate near Lake Saint Clair. She and her sister spent hours on the lake, ice skating in winter, swinging from a huge willow tree in summer. Her love for Leelanau originated during family trips to Glen Lake and later when she brought her own four children up from Detroit for vacations.

The former owner of the Lime Creek cabin and property was a friend of Carol’s from Detroit named Barbara Cruden. “I admired her so much,” says Carol. “She was a great mentor and naturalist and was always teaching me how to be a better observer on this land.” Over a 15-year period, the two friends would be involved in three Leelanau Conservancy conservation easement projects totaling 167 acres.

Around the time Carol had discovered the Lime Creek property, her life was changing rapidly. Her children were grown, and her 28-year-marriage had just ended. One day the phone rang, and it was Barbara, offering to sell her the cabin and surrounding land. Barbara had bought land on nearby Wells Lake, which had been protected by the Leelanau Conservancy. “My life had just broken apart,” says Carol, then 50. “I did a happy dance. It was perfect.”

Private Conservation Easements

As of the end of 2019, the Leelanau Conservancy has worked with over 180 landowners like Carol Waters to preserve over 10,000 acres of cherished family lands with conservation easements (CE). A CE is an individualized legal agreement designed to protect the natural features of land in perpetuity. A longstanding Leelanau Conservancy philosophy also provides that the CE must be good for both the land and the landowner. Collectively, these private lands are helping to protect Leelanau’s water quality, wildlife habitat and are to reduce the impact of climate change. Learn more about CE’s and read more landowner stories about people who have chosen to conserve their lands at LeelanauConservancy.org (search landowner stories.)

Pristine Lime Creek, a major tributary to Lime Lake, runs through Carol Waters’ land. Photo by Mark Smith

She moved into the tiny cabin and spent her days wandering the property. During that first winter she parked her car just off the road and hauled supplies in by sled. Carol remembers star-filled skies and the utter peace of the land. “The earth teaches you, if you are open to it,” she says. In 1996 she worked with the Conservancy to permanently protect her land with a conservation easement. “I just felt it was really important because wetlands are the beginning of it all,” says Carol, who serves on the Good Harbor Bay Watershed steering committee. “If you don’t protect them, you can forget about the water quality of the lakes.”

It wasn’t until the last decade that the beavers arrived and built the first of two dams. Carol and a friend had noticed that the stream level kept fluctuating. They followed the stream toward her neighbor’s property, which grew deeper and wider, and discovered a tangle of mud, branches and rocks. Carol says that both she and her neighbor were thrilled.

Since then, these industrious native creatures have been busy. The view out Carol’s southern window reveals a hillside once flush with poplars now dotted with stumps. Beavers chewed down dozens of trees; then slid or dragged them toward the stream. Eventually their construction created a large pond that in the process led to the demise of a stand of cedar trees. These nocturnal, herbivorous rodents create one or more dams to provide still, deep water to protect them and their kits from predators, and to float food and building material. A great source for more info on beavers and how they are being used to restore watersheds is the U.S. Forest Service: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/features/working-beavers-restore-watersheds>.

Beavers in North America once topped 60 million, but as of 1988 populations were estimated at 6–12 million. The decline is the result of extensive hunting for fur as well as removing beavers, whose activities conflict with other land uses. Beavers use powerful front teeth to cut trees and other plants that they use both for building and for food.

Beavers can cause damage and are considered pests

by some landowners and municipalities. On Carol’s land, they have caused the water to come a bit too close to her guest cottage along the creek. She enlisted Yarrow’s help and that of experts from the Department of Natural Resources. Because her conservation easement provides for maintaining her existing structures, she had the right to remove the beavers or to disrupt their dams. But in the end, Carol says the beavers created a second dam and relocated, drawing water away from the cottage.

“I think they are good community members and they listened to our concerns,” adds Carol, noting that these creatures are so elusive that she rarely sees them. “I believe we can co-exist. The beavers have brought so many gifts. We now have heron and ducks, fish and lots of frogs and toads that never used to be here.”

“Beavers are hydrological engineers,” she says, citing a book about beavers titled “*Eager*” by Ben Goldfarb, that she refers to often. “They know how to spread water out and they shaped North America.” The book documents how beavers have been reintroduced in the West to help with water conservation efforts. It also notes that once beavers arrive on the scene, the habitat they create supports 80% of biodiversity. A group known as “Beaver Believers” contends that these large rodents can “right any environmental wrong. They can restore wetlands, heal lands compacted by grazing. They are a kind of magic helping to store water and sustain other creatures.”

“I just want to learn more about why they are here, and welcome them as a part of the landscape,” says Carol. “Eventually they will go where the food is and will move on. They are ecosystem engineers, spreading water, and we haven’t given them enough credit.”

On our way out the door, there are more hugs from this woman who doesn’t own a TV or a computer, who does not engage in social media and gets her news via a small radio. Ten words on a hand-painted plaque on the door sums up her philosophy: “Sing songs, plant seeds, pick weeds, make medicine, trust yourself.”

—Carolyn Faught



Top: Carol Waters; middle: beavers at work on Carol’s land. Photo by Mark Smith; bottom beaver photo by Amanda/shutterstock.com





Why It Matters

With your help we protect the “land, water and scenic character” of Leelanau County. But what does that really mean? What is it, really, that we are protecting? Here are just a few things to appreciate, thanks to you.

1. Thousands of trees clean our air, host birds like scarlet tanagers, and combat climate change—photo by Sheen Watkins
2. Dark skies, revealing the Northern Lights—photo by Ken Scott
3. Rare ecosystems, like the bluffs at Clay Cliffs—photo by David Weidner Photography
4. Dragonflies and mayflies, the food of native trout—photo by Sheen Watkins Photography
5. Inter-generational bonding that can happen on a hike in Leelanau—photo by Mark Smith
6. Opportunities for children to leave screens behind and fall in love with nature—photo by Mark Smith
7. Pristine water to cool off and wiggle your toes in; clean beaches to walk or gather on—Leland Report photo of Whaleback
8. Two tracks that lead to magical places and never become paved roads—photo by Mark Smith
9. Fungus that reminds us how funky and amazing nature can be. Mushrooms play an important role in our ecosystem and are a key player in the food web—photo by Mark Smith
10. Native plants and trees, which evolved with local wildlife, host more insects and produce more fruit than non-native plants to feed birds and other critters—photo by Sheen Watkins
11. Family farms protect a way of life and are an economic driver. Thanks to you, over 5,000 acres are available for future generations—photo by Jere Brown
12. Wetlands, which are home to amazing birds like sandhill cranes, along the Cedar River—photo by Ed Ketterer
13. Traditions passed from generation to generation such as hunting for white-tailed deer—photo by Michael Collier
14. Food for wildlife—like acorns that fall from the trees at Palmer Woods—photo by Sheen Watkins Photography
15. Quiet opportunities in nature to recreate, learn, restore, renew—photo by Ed Ketterer

2019 Project Highlights



Cedar River Preserve Grows to 546 Acres

The 80 acres added to the Preserve have been on our priority list for nearly 30 years, when our founders Ed and Bobbie Collins first dreamt of protecting this unique area. It is one of the last large, undeveloped parcels overlooking Lake Leelanau and features 20 acres of wetlands and 60 acres of northern hardwoods that shelter beautiful flora like trillium and squirrel corn. An extended ridgeline overlooks a geologic feature known as a kettle hole and the ridge offers sweeping views of South Lake Leelanau and the Solon Swamp. The new property promises to be a spectacular hiking destination, given the views from the ridge. Stay tuned for updates on when it will be open for you to explore. Photo above by Drew Palmer, with Lake Collins, named for our founders, in the forefront.

Cedar River Land Swap Completed

Around the same time that we purchased the addition to the Cedar River Preserve, a land swap with the State of Michigan that had been four years

in the making was finalized. Six parcels within the Solon Swamp changed hands, consolidating 500 forever-wild acres, which are some of the most ecologically intact lands and waters in the Lower Peninsula. This includes 1.75 miles of never-to-be-developed frontage on Lake Leelanau at the mouth of Victoria Creek.

New Preserve in the Works on Lime Lake

In May, thanks to you, we were able to act fast and purchase six acres of near-pristine forested wetland at the south end of Lime Lake. The property was under threat of development that included a fill road that would have bisected the wetlands and three houses along the shore. We are happy to report that this property will never be developed and instead is the first piece of a new natural area, the proposed Lime Lake Preserve. Now, we are working to purchase an additional 25 acres to help maintain Lime Lake's water quality and protect over 1,000 feet of natural shoreline. The land is spectacular; you can see Sugar Loaf from the shore, and across the lake to the northeast is the 40-acre Teichner Preserve. Photo below by Mark Smith



Steimel Brothers Protect 76 Acres

Al and Mark Steimel have protected the farm once owned by their great-grandparents with a conservation easement. The brothers have a deep attachment to this prime fruit-growing land in Leland Township. They specialize in growing apples for the fresh market. Their land is adjacent to and in close proximity to other protected farms. These blocks of preserved lands help to keep agriculture viable in our county and provide critical habitat needed for wildlife and ecological processes.



New Boardwalk at Kehl Lake Natural Area

This 400-foot boardwalk winds through lush ferns, cardinal flowers and towering hemlocks along the lake, leading to a new platform overlooking the marsh. It's a great place to see migrating birds and waterfowl that pass through in spring and fall. The new platform replaces one built by volunteers in the 1990s which had rotted in recent years due to high water. Thanks in part to a \$5,000 grant from the Leelanau Township Community Foundation, the new structure will be a great destination for hikers in all seasons. The Conservancy contracted with

Child and Family Services' YouthWork program, a division of AmeriCorps, which teaches job skills to young adults.



Palmer Woods Bike Trails

Over the last year, we installed our first two single-track mountain bike loops. These cover nearly six miles of challenging, fun terrain. Given their remarkable popularity, we are already witnessing a whole new generation of champions for Leelanau.



DeYoung House Renovation

This summer, we began our journey into historic restoration of the 164-year-old DeYoung farmhouse. The 191-acre DeYoung Natural Area contains the only remaining buildings of any of our natural areas, so much thought and deliberation went into the vision for the house's future. After over a decade since protecting the land, we are now in the midst of restoring the home thanks to you. The work is expected to be completed in 2020. Our vision for the property is to raise the visibility of conservation stewardship and volunteerism as a community priority, for now and for the future.



Water Monitoring Program Continues

Your support allows us to annually monitor the water quality of seven county lakes and 19 streams and share this data with lake associations and landowners interested in taking action to keep our waters clean. In 2019, during Earth Week, we held our first-ever workbee where volunteers sampled for aquatic insects called macroinvertebrates in Mebert Creek—another way to gauge stream health.



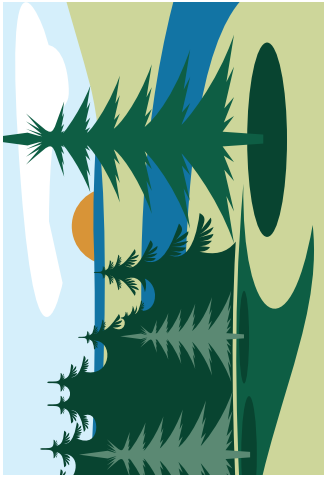
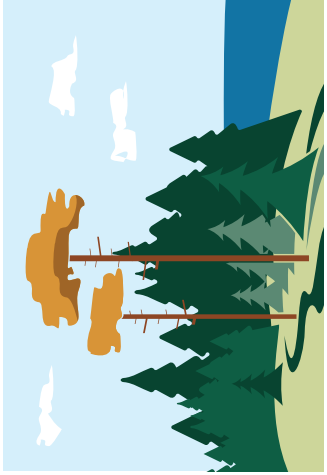
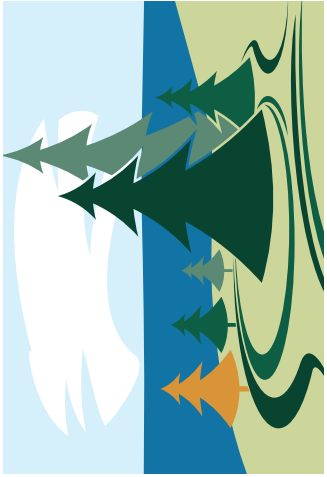
Water Partnerships

The Leelanau Conservancy continues to serve on the Leelanau Clean Water board and played a major role in helping to put on the 2019 Clean Water Symposium in June. Area stakeholders gathered to learn about the threats to our water and what they can do to help.

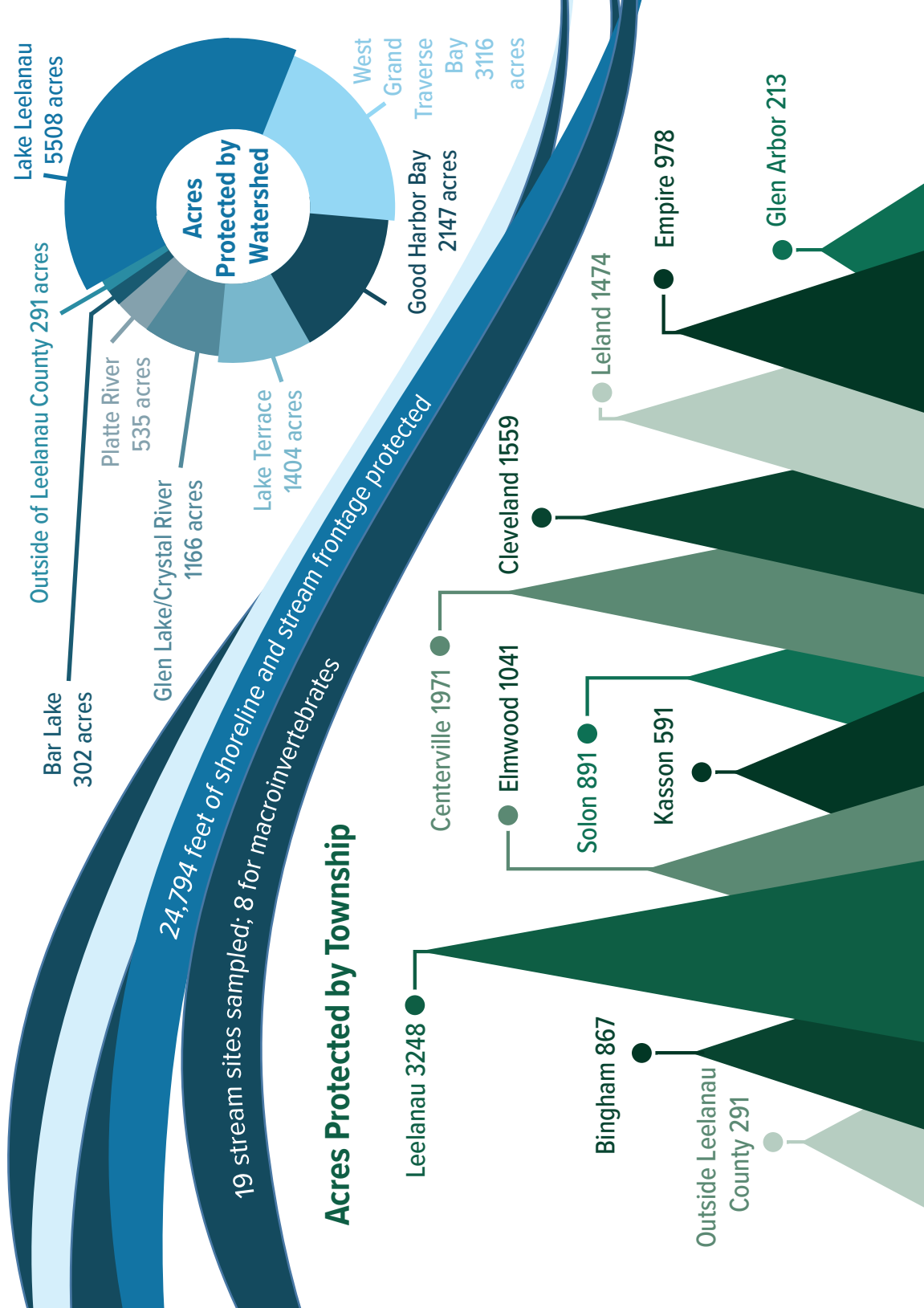
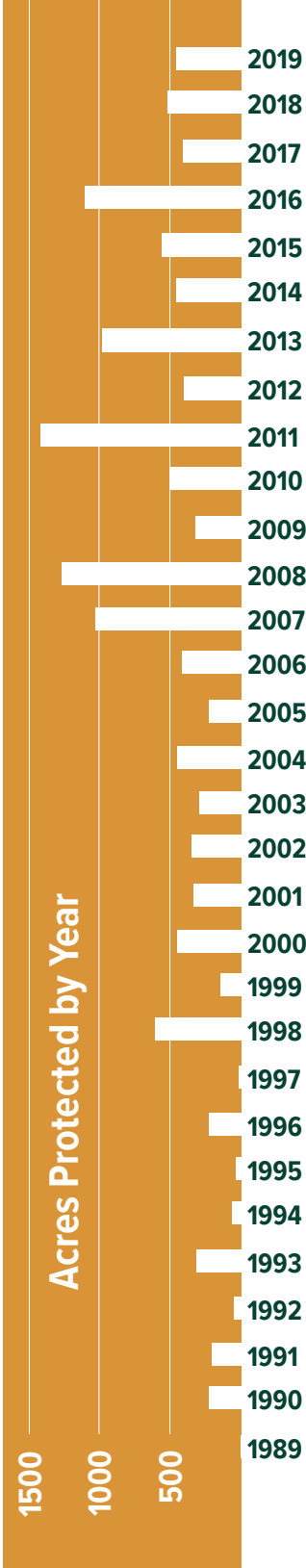
Photos above and below by Mark Smith



Leelanau Conservancy 2019: Year in Review



453 Acres Protected in 2019, 14,600 Total Acres Protected (all time)



3,174 acres of land open to the public

25.81 miles of public trails maintained

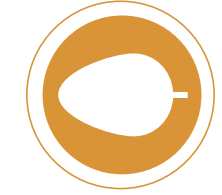
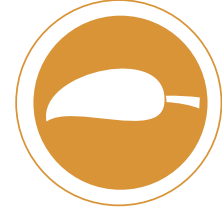
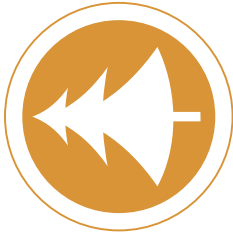
2.75 miles of new mountain bike trail added

462 hikers attended 34 docent-led hikes

9505 visitors to Whaleback Natural Area

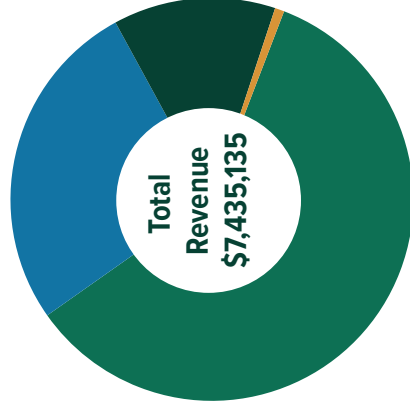
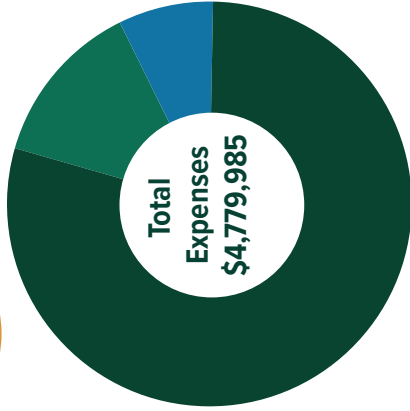
250 students visited properties on field trips

379 volunteers spent 5734 hours volunteering



182 conservation easements monitored

5272 trees planted



Programs (Land Projects & Stewardship)
\$3,905,485

Administration
\$554,306

Fundraising
\$320,194

Private Cash Donations
\$4,416,382

Private Gifts of Land or Development Rights
\$1,994,300

Public Grants
\$968,644

Other (Merchandise Etc.)
\$55,809

General Endowment
\$4,310,986

Stewardship Endowment
\$3,263,759

3170 donors gave

11 new Heritage Society Members joined

Founders Society

The Founders Society recognizes those donors whose generous and long term support has resulted in cumulative lifetime giving of \$25,000 or more to the Leelanau Conservancy. Many of these individuals have also included us in their estate plans, which supports our future.

\$1 Million +

Anonymous
Mr. and Mrs. William L. Fortune, Sr.
Miss Sally Reahard
Ann Stack
The Carls Foundation

\$500,000 - \$999,999

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Gifts of Land or Development Rights

Almost 200 individuals and families have made gifts of land or development rights to the Leelanau Conservancy since our founding in 1988. The generosity of these donors allows the Leelanau Conservancy to leverage fundraised dollars to conserve even more of what you love most about Leelanau. The names below reflect donors from 2019. For a list of all land or development rights donors, please visit Leelanau Conservancy.org.

J. Richard Emens & Beatrice E. Wolper

John A. Gallagher, Jr.
Jan and Ray Pezzi

Allen Steimel
Mark Steimel



Photo by Karen Mulvahill

Richard O. Ristine Heritage Society

The Heritage Society recognizes donors who have shared in the mission of the Leelanau Conservancy by making a gift through a will, bequest, trust, annuity, insurance or other planned gift. This important group is helping to ensure the long-term financial capabilities of the Conservancy. If you would like information about this special giving circle or about making a planned gift, contact Leslee Spraggins, Planned Giving Officer.

Anonymous (24)

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Elizabeth Bracken Wiese & Fred Wiese
Nancy and Stuart Winston

The Holtons on “Protecting This Incredible Place”

In and around Northport, it's safe to say that nearly everyone knows Kent and Becky Holton. Kent founded Northport's Music in the Park and still chooses the bands and runs the show for this beloved Friday-night tradition. He and Becky are also super involved in the Northport Community Arts Center. Kent is its longest serving board member; Becky serves as Treasurer and head usher. “We live in a great community, and feel like it's important to give back,” says Becky.

The Holtons' generosity extends well beyond their tiny village. We first met the Holtons over 20 years ago, when they started volunteering for the Leelanau Conservancy. Kent is an electrician and a sound magician of sorts, who for many years loaned his time and equipment to provide music and ensure that those speaking at our gatherings were heard loud and clear. “We came to a couple of events early on and I thought, ‘Wow, that sound is bad, and I can fix this,’” says Kent. “Whenever I was available, I helped out.” We can't recall a time when Kent has said he wasn't available. And so in 2014, we chose him as our Volunteer of the Year.

The Holtons have also been members of our Sustainers Circle for the last 17 years. And most recently, Becky and Kent have joined our Heritage Society. Through wills, bequests, and other estate planning, Heritage Society members ensure their support will not end after their lifetimes.

Kent, 61, was raised in Northport. “We think that the Conservancy is doing great work,” he says. “I've seen so many farms that I knew as a child convert to development and it's really important to keep the old farms going that are left. These places and the forests are what give this county our character.”

Becky spent her summers growing up on Gills Pier. Her late mother, Mary Lyons, was also a Leelanau Conservancy “Volunteer of the Year” and served on the board of directors. She was also one of the earliest proponents of farmland preservation in Leelanau, and helped to start our local farm markets. “That's how we got involved,” says Becky. “We attended a Conservancy

Picnic at Peterson Park and I can remember thinking, ‘Everyone here really cares a lot.’” She is a fan of Clay Cliffs Natural Area, especially in winter, where she often meets friends to snowshoe. “I love the views of both lakes, and seeing the ice balls build up on the shore from the viewing platform up there.” Kehl Lake Natural Area, close to their home near Gills Pier, is her second favorite.

Late last year Becky and Kent notified us that they had named the Leelanau Conservancy as a beneficiary in their will. “I was the executor for my brother's estate, who died unexpectedly,” says Becky, who works as a controller for a Traverse City restaurant chain. “He cared a great deal about a number of organizations he had been a part of, but had not included them in his will.” Becky surmises that given the chance, her brother might have updated his giving plans.

“It made me realize that we wanted to be really thoughtful about where to direct our money after we are gone, and to make sure that it will be put to good and meaningful use,” adds Becky. “We really believe in the Leelanau Conservancy, and know that our bequest will be used for something that we care a great deal about—protecting this incredible place.”

If you would like more information about joining the Heritage Society, please contact Planned Giving Officer, Leslee Spraggins: 231-256-9665 or lspraggins@leelanauconservancy.org.



Becky and Kent Holton: New Heritage Society Members



Photo of the Cedar River Preserve by Ed Ketterer



Welcome New Sustainers!

Thank you, Sustainers Circle Members, whether you have recently joined or been with us since year one, we are grateful for your participation in this important giving circle. And to all of those members who increased your annual gift this year, we are grateful! Your annual pledge to support our operations ensures that our long-term goals to conserve Leelanau's land and water resources can be met.

Meet New Sustainer Circle Members Lisa Genesen and David Tabolt who make their Sustainers gift via our Evergreen monthly giving program. They talk about what inspired them to join:

"For over 30 years, Leelanau County has been our second home. It refreshes and sustains us. It never disappoints. We are a short paddle from the Teichner Preserve and a brisk winter walk across frozen waters from the new Lime Lake Preserve. Both are gifts from others who share our passion for the "land of delight." What better way to give thanks than to support the Leelanau Conservancy's efforts to preserve and protect it for generations yet to come."

The people listed at right joined our Sustainers Circle in 2019. If you would like more information on joining this giving circle please contact Meg Delor, Development Director mdelor@leelanauconservancy.org.



Joined in 2019

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 Andrew Bamford and Tamera Wales
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 Mr. and Mrs. Howard Veneklasen
 Elizabeth and James Waters
 David Weisbach and Joan Neal
 Ms. Jane Wilsher
 Bill and Rita Witler
 Susan Witt
 Mike and Trish Young

Left: New Sustainers David
 Tabolt and Lisa Genesen

2019 Donors

We strive for accurate record keeping. If your name has been omitted or listed incorrectly, please contact Meg Delor, Development Director, at 231-256-9665 or mdelor@leelanauconservancy.org

* indicates Sustainers Circle Member

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Jim and Patty Croom*
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Edmund F. and Virginia B. Ball Foundation
Esperance Family Foundation
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Jan Garfinkle and Mike O'Donnell*
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Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation
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Our Wildflower Rescue group gathered for their annual holiday potluck lunch at the Old Art Building. It was a festive, friendship-filled event—a reminder to the staff who also attended just how great this group is for so many reasons. We are SO grateful to this extraordinary volunteer group who has rescued thousands of plants and raised significant funds for Conservancy projects. If you would like to make some great friends and get out into the woods during next year's wildflower season, call Events and Volunteer Coordinator, Lindy Kellogg, or email her at lkellogg@leelanauconservancy.org.

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David Leith attends most of our workbees, including one at Chippewa Run where he got soaking wet, helping to plant native trees and shrubs. Thanks David, and all the volunteers who help to get things done!

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At a board reunion in August, current board member Ed Ketterer (left) connects with former Board Chairman Frank Siepker, and former Board Secretary Deb Fellows. We are grateful to all board members, past and present, who have helped to guide us in our mission and lent us their valuable expertise.

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Steve and Deb Martineau attended our Heritage Society event in September at the Glen Lake Yacht Club. Steve served on our board of directors, most recently as Chairman. He still serves on two committees. Thanks to the Martineaus for the many ways they have supported us over the years!

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Director Tom Nelson led a new year's hike to show off the new boardwalk and observation platform at Kehl Lake Natural Area, with over 30 people attending. Your support makes great things happen! Photo by Jen Reid.

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Photo by Sheen Watkins

Volunteers Matter!

We are grateful to all who volunteered in 2019, from our talented photographers to our mailing crews to those who wear themselves out in the field, digging wildflowers or pulling invasive species. Thank you. Want to get involved? Contact Events and Volunteer Manager Lindy Kellogg: lkellogg@leelanauconservancy.org.

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Volunteer Spotlight: Sharon Oriel



We've got some amazing volunteers; among them is Sharon Oriel. Sharon's love for the special natural features of Leelanau compelled her to join our docent program in 2008. Since then, she has led or co-led hikes throughout the year on our Preserves and Natural Areas. Sharon served as a docent liaison, assisting staff in coordinating docent activities. She also joined our Stewardship Committee as a community member in 2009, and shortly after was invited to serve on our Board of Directors. After her nine-year board tenure ended in 2018, the year she also served as President, Sharon didn't stop volunteering. Today she continues to serve on the Stewardship Committee and leads hikes as a docent, continuing her dedication to our mission.

"As a member of the Leelanau Conservancy Board, I served with other dedicated volunteers to protect and steward some of the most environmentally rich land and water in our amazing county. As a docent, I get to share these places with others and hopefully inspire them to be stewards of the earth, wherever they live."



1



4

Thank you to all our volunteers!

1. We invited volunteers to tour the new addition at Cedar River Preserve as a part of our fall thank-you event.

2. Thanks to everyone who helped to paint the DeYoung Powerhouse.

3. Kerry Kelly mows the field to help us get ready for the 30th Anniversary Rally last August.

4. Docents visit the proposed addition to Palmer Woods with our stewardship staff.

5. Volunteers help to tackle invasive wild parsnip, which can grow up to five feet tall, at DeYoung Natural Area.

6. A group of 8th graders from the Lake Forest Open Lands Conservation Explorers program helped to create a new fern garden at Palmer Woods Forest Reserve last summer.



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5



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Spring at Kehl Lake Natural Area
Photo by Phil Stinson

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We are grateful to everyone who made a gift to honor or remember a loved one in 2019. Gifts such as these are directed toward the care and maintenance of our natural areas and preserves.

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January 1- December 31, 2019

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Mike and Marie Stearns

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January 1- December 31, 2019

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Mary Kay Alpers

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Photo of Houdek Dunes
birch by Phil Stinson

Leelanau Conservancy
105 North First Street
P. O. Box 1007
Leland, MI 49654
231-256-9665
info@leelanauconservancy.org
www.leelanauconservancy.org

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Palmer Woods: Big News!

The Conservancy has an opportunity to add 350 acres to our current Palmer Woods Forest Reserve. This addition will bring this natural area to over 1,000 acres of majestic hardwood forests protected for native plants and animals, clean water, and public recreation. The Palmer Woods 1000-Acre Project is truly transformative, offering opportunities for our county that we do not have elsewhere. Visit leelanauconservancy.org/palmerwoods1000 to learn how you can support this project and sign up for one of the planned monthly hikes through this beautiful forest.

Photo by Rick Gans

