



There's no place like *Leelanau*.

Conserving the Land, Water and Scenic Character of Leelanau County

2023 Summer Newsletter



Letter from our Board President

The mission drives the work of the Leelanau Conservancy. But beyond the mission, another theme has emerged for me. It's the way the work itself is conducted, and the culture of hospitality inherent to the organization. Having spent my career in the hospitality industry, I have learned that the way an organization conducts business is as important as the work itself.

Before joining the board at the Conservancy in 2018, I had no board experience, either corporate or nonprofit. I have never held an office job. My career has been in owner-operated restaurants and venues or as an owner-operator myself. The world of board governance and Roberts Rules was foreign to me, and I was nervous. That worry was all for naught. I was welcomed with open arms and given the tools, education, and support I needed to succeed.

The mission of the organization to conserve the land, water, and scenic character of Leelanau County frames decision making. This sounds simple, succinct. It is anything but.

The Land Protection team works closely with families who wish to conserve their properties for future generations. In doing so, the team has gained a body of knowledge about the county, its residents, and the challenges encountered by landowners when making such consequential decisions. The team is aware of and sensitive to these concerns and takes care that they are addressed.

Once land is under the purview of the Conservancy, it must be stewarded and monitored annually, whether it is one of 28 (!) public natural areas or more than 200 private conservation easements. The Stewardship team

works with dedicated volunteers to ensure the flora and fauna of public natural areas are protected and the areas are safe for users, and that our conservation easement commitments to private landowners are being honored.

How do we keep the community informed of the efforts of the organization? Enter the Communications and Events team. Their mindful approach to relaying the importance and urgency of the work, with clarity and transparency, is no small task. Each event is a multifaceted endeavor, and each supports a specific facet of our mission. Hospitality is in the forefront!

Working hand in hand with individual donors and community members to relay the significance of our work while learning of their concerns and intentions is vital to advancing our mission. This is the charge of the Fund Development team.

With all these moving parts and interactions, what strikes me again and again is the hospitality mindset with which the staff, board, donors, and volunteers conduct the work, whether they are conscious of it or not.

The success of our mission depends on the time invested and strength of our mutual respect, relationship building, anticipating needs, fostering trust, and the guest experience. These elements are also the cornerstones of sound hospitality.

What sets our organization apart is the emotional intelligence inherent to the community that has coalesced around the Conservancy, bound by our connections to one another and our love for this peninsula. I experienced it firsthand when I joined the board and am proud to be on this team and to help extend the experience to others.

We are honored to be entrusted to do this work and could not do it without your support. There is a finite amount of land in Leelanau County, and it has never been under as much pressure as it is today. So, the time is now. We roll up our sleeves and continue our work, with your help and the humility and grace present with mindful hospitality.

Sincerely,



Cammie Buehler
Board President



Cover photo by Sheen Watkins
Photo of Cammie Buehler by EE Berger



Take a journey with us.

When thinking about how to celebrate 35 years of protecting Leelanau, we wanted to do something that invites all trail lovers to immerse themselves in the beauty of Leelanau and forge a deeper connection with nature. A trail challenge is the perfect way to do just that. And with over 35 miles of trails throughout our natural areas, there's room for adventure.

The Trail Challenge is simple. You have all of 2023 to complete 35 miles of hiking, biking, paddling, skiing, or snowshoeing in Leelanau Conservancy Natural Areas. Simply sign up on our website, log your miles, and turn in your log when you're finished. When you've completed the challenge, we'll send you a beautiful 35-year commemorative patch and sticker.

Challengers have several options other than hiking to achieve 35 miles. Mountain biking at Palmer Woods Forest Reserve and paddling the Cedar River Preserve count towards the challenge. Take a tip from our staff and paddle the Cedar River on a summer evening for

cooler temperatures and gorgeous sunsets. Joining a docent hike or a volunteer workbee also counts!

Participating in this trail challenge is also a great way to unplug and get your body moving. Our trails are as different as our natural areas. You can find plenty of flat, easy hikes, as well as more challenging, hilly hikes. Your 35 miles are unique to you and can be done any way you choose. The Trail Challenge offers opportunity to explore a variety of Leelanau landscapes. From streams to wetlands, enchanting forests and serene lakeshores. Each trail promises unique sights and sounds that are nothing short of ethereal. In fact, we've already heard from folks who are working on the challenge or who have already completed it.

"Frankie, the Pug, is on a mission to get his miles in. He's not fast and furious, but he's consistent." - Pam Neuman

"So many wonderful things along the way. Today, our last hikes of the challenge, we saw a glorious sight. We heard the call of the red shoulder hawk.

In short order there were THREE red shoulder hawks playing directly above us in the sun. Their soaring and flipping and playing lasted for minutes and we were able to see their markings clearly with our binoculars. That was on Krumwiede. On Swanson, we spied a couple of golden crown kinglets flitting around branches playing. At Teichner, there were a number of ring-billed seagulls laughing and playing at the edge of some fast melting ice. This was the most fun challenge, EVER!!" - Bob and Kristin

"Muddy shoes, bald eagles, old stories, and many laughs." - Kathy Wiley

"So many favorites! We saw beavers at Chippewa Run, great views from Clay Cliffs and Whaleback, lots of beautiful trillium and ramps. We experienced new trails that we hadn't done before. We met great people along the way who told us of other areas to explore. It was a wonderful adventure!" - Anne

So, lace up your hiking boots, grab your bike, kayak or canoe, and let our natural areas be your Leelanau adventure.



The Cedar River Preserve: The Ecological Gem of Leelanau

This 548-acre wetland complex is home to countless rare flora and fauna. A mixture of fen, shrub scrub, and aquatic plantlife provide invaluable wildlife habitat.

Photo by Emily Stuhldreher



A sign near the mouth of the Cedar River Preserve marks the water trail.

Thirty-three years ago, the Leelanau Conservancy started the work to save Victoria Creek, also known as the Cedar River or the Solon Swamp.

With help from hundreds of citizens passionate about water quality, we protected the first 100 acres of what is now the Cedar River Preserve in 1990. Then in 2004, we protected an additional 80 acres near the mouth of the river. Still later, a land exchange with the State of Michigan conserved more land. The preserve is now at 548 acres and rich with birds, beavers, muskrats, otters, mink, turtles, fish, and rare plant life. It helps keep our water quality high and provides necessary habitat for fish and other wildlife.

Professional botanist and Leelanau local Liana May is proud that the county is home to such a complex and delicate wetland system. She said, "It's essentially the biological gem of Leelanau County. It's one of the largest intact wetland

complexes in this region, largely due to it having a low amount of human disturbance," she explained.

The Past

There has been no major impact on the river and surrounding wetlands in over 100 years. "It doesn't appear to have undergone many disturbances in the past. It was definitely impacted when they put in the Leland Dam in the late 1800s, and the lake level was raised a few feet. But other than that, and logging, there's been no other signs of significant human impact," May said. The surrounding forests were logged to the edge of the wetlands in the early 1900s. The forest surrounding the Solon Swamp today is second growth; however, the original wetlands are centuries old and still intact. "So, the wetland forest and the upland forest have all been logged, but when you get down to the herbaceous wetland area, the fen, it's pretty much the same it's been historically," added May.

Sundew are one of many carnivorous plant species that can be found at the Cedar River Preserve. Carnivorous plants like sundew obtain nutrients by trapping and eating insects. They have several mechanisms to capture prey, like sticky surfaces, snap traps, or pitcher-like structures. Sundews trap their insects by exuding a sweet substance from their shimmering tentacles. Once their prey is stuck, the sundew wraps it up and dines.

Photo By Mark Smith



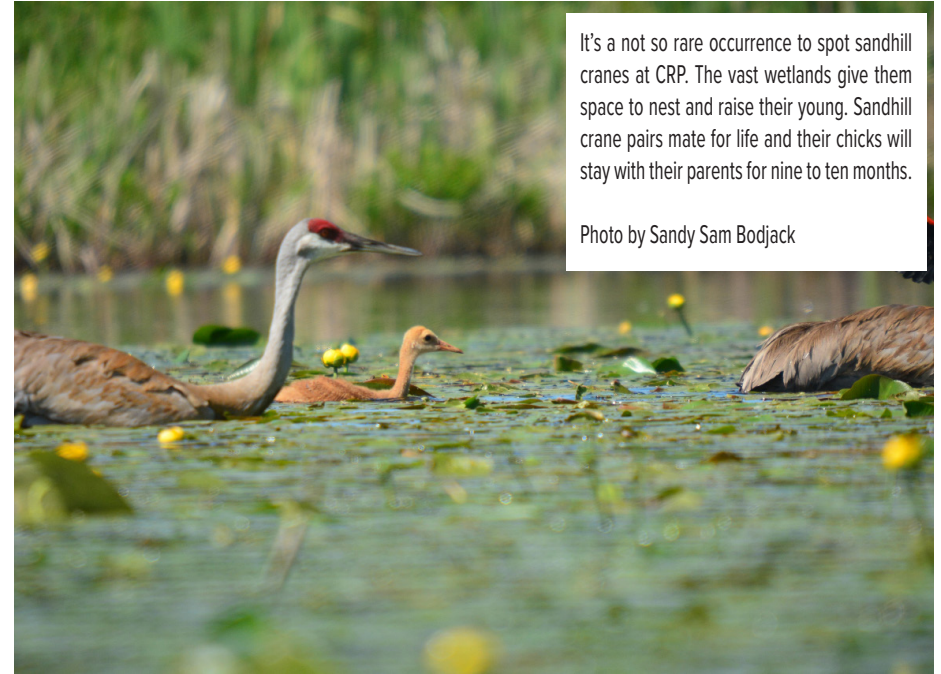
The Present

A few years ago, a Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA) was taken at the Cedar River Preserve. An FQA is a land rating system based on factors like plant species quality. An FQA rating of 50 is considered a rare wetland with plenty of interesting plant life and quality habitat. The CRP is rated at a jaw-dropping 96. With low human impact, the preserve and its surrounding wetlands have thrived. The beautiful preserve is best enjoyed by kayak or canoe. The waterway from the mouth of Lake Leelanau to the Village of Cedar is protected and open to all. A paddle through the Cedar River Preserve is the perfect place to view stunning yellow pond lilies, see a mink slip into the water, discover nesting sandhill cranes, or watch an osprey dive for its dinner.

Because the Cedar River Preserve is a large swath of wetland, it cleans the water of Lake Leelanau. As water flows through the wetlands, aquatic vegetation catches and filters debris. While one could look at some of these plants and think they're weeds, they're not. "There's a bunch of these different, broad-leafed plants that grow underwater and make up the structure of these underwater ecosystems. This underwater vegetation is where many fish and other macroinvertebrate nurseries are," said May.

It's a not so rare occurrence to spot sandhill cranes at CRP. The vast wetlands give them space to nest and raise their young. Sandhill crane pairs mate for life and their chicks will stay with their parents for nine to ten months.

Photo by Sandy Sam Bodjack



The Future

Under the care of the Leelanau Conservancy and the Department of Natural Resources, the Cedar River and its surrounding wetlands will remain healthy and intact for years to come. Of course, there will always be threats to the Cedar River, the biggest being boat traffic and invasive species. "The physical impact from the boat is the wake," May said. "The river is so slow moving that the aquatic community isn't used to a wake. Also, you have a lot of boats that cut across the shallow banks and chop up vegetation like wild rice and lilies." And oil, gas, and other chemicals used in boat maintenance aren't good for the river's sediment. Increased boat traffic also makes the Cedar River vulnerable to invasive species like Eurasian milfoil. And while spots of infestation have been caught in Lake Leelanau, Eurasian milfoil is much harder to combat in a river because it flows.

Leelanau has seen some changes. The Cedar River Preserve is one of the wildest places left in Leelanau—the Everglades of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Even today, the river is subject to forces that would alter it if permitted. Despite this, the Cedar River has continued to hold onto its roots. In essence, it is the same river today as it was centuries ago, and we look forward to seeing its beauty, resilience, and wildlife thriving for another 100 years.

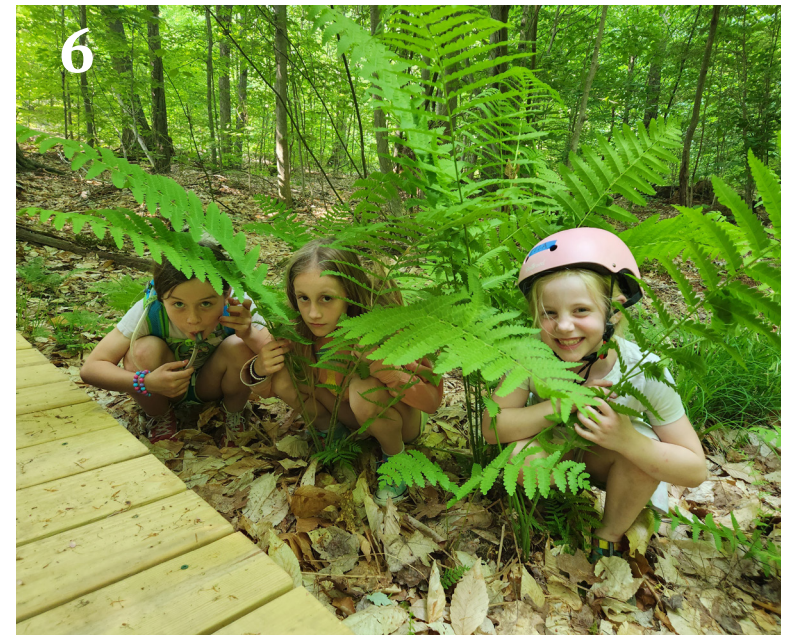


Nuphar is the scientific name for a water lily. Specifically, these are yellow pond lilies and they lace the edge of the Cedar River. Beautiful in bloom or not, their floating leaves provide shade, which helps reduce algae growth and maintain water quality by keeping the water cool. They're also beneficial habitat and shelter for fish, frogs, and insects. Their yellow flowers float above water and bloom June through September.

Photo by Emily Stuhldreher

Stewardship & More

1. Every year students from Leland Public School help volunteers unload plants at the Village Green for the Wildflower Rescue Sale. This year the sale raised \$23,000 for the Conservancy.
2. Land Steward Caleb Garone came across this fallen tree at Lighthouse West. His reaction? "When life gives you downed trees and 'landslides,' take a moment to enjoy the spring ephemerals along the way."
3. In May the stewardship staff planted over 200 trees at Clay Cliffs in response to Emerald Ash Borer and Beech Bark Disease. Planting trees is especially important because the spring ephemerals that make Clay Cliffs a woodland wonderland every spring rely on a closed canopy forest to thrive.
4. A new section of Palmer Woods is getting a trail. AmeriCorps member Suzanne Bessette and Land Stewards Chad Jordan and Caleb flagged a trail route for the trailbuilders to perfect. Factors that go into flagging are terrain, views, and mitigating impact to flora.
5. The LC Collective led a family-friendly Trails Day in Early June. Thanks to all who came out to hike, bike, and paddle with us.
6. We had so much fun celebrating Summer Trails Day with the LC Collective. Participants hiked, biked, and paddled some of our natural areas. A family friendly hike at the end made for plenty of fun and smiles.





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7. This jelly-like mass dotted with black spots is a collection of salamander eggs. Female salamanders lay their egg masses and often attach them to aquatic vegetation or on the underside of submerged rocks. With enough floating vegetation, she may lay her eggs in a sunny spot near the water's surface. This mass was found at a vernal pool at Lighthouse West.
8. A small, sweet spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*) at Kehl Lake Natural Area. These wildflowers bloom early in the spring and are an important early nectar source for bees. Photo By Sheen Watkins.
9. Executive Director Tom Nelson led a paddle at the Cedar River Preserve. Around 20 people enjoyed a leisurely paddle down the river. Along the way a nesting sandhill crane and a northern water snake were spotted. Afterwards, Tom discussed the importance of the preserve for water quality in Lake Leelanau.



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Lighthouse West Natural Area Grows by 27 Acres

Thousands of birds make Lighthouse West a stop on their migration journeys. Thanks to your support, more of this tip-of-the-peninsula bird paradise is protected and now connects to state land.



While conserving the land, water, and scenic character of Leelanau is our mission, it is your support that makes it possible.

At the end of 2022, we added 27 acres to the Lighthouse West Natural Area. Known for being a popular stop for migratory birds, the tip of Leelanau is filled with natural beauty. With help from donors like you and a longstanding relationship with landowners Bob and Betty Brenner, we were able to protect more of this wildlife hub.

The Brenners bought the property in 1968. They built a retirement home for the two of them where they live now, and their deck overlooks a breathtaking view of Lake Michigan. The rest of the acreage they left for Leelanau wilderness.

Director of Natural Land Protection Matt Heiman started discussing conservation options with the Brenners in 2011. Matt and the Brenners kept in touch over the years, and when they decided to sell, they contacted the Conservancy first. Knowing the high ecological value of the parcel, combined

with the potential to establish a publicly accessible trail connecting the two fragmented units of Leelanau State Park, we purchased the property.

“Working with Bob and Betty was a dream come true for a land protection professional. They love this land deeply and stewarded it for over 34 years with the utmost care to maintain the diverse, high-quality natural communities found here today. The Conservancy is honored to continue their legacy of love for the land.” - Matt Heiman

More than 150 migratory bird species visit Lighthouse West every spring.

This unique location provides a serene and undisturbed habitat where migrating birds can rest and refuel during their long journey north. For many of the birds, the tip of Leelanau is their last stop before finding nesting grounds in the Upper Peninsula and Canada. In addition, several important species, such as rose-breasted grosbeak, American redstart, Baltimore oriole, and eastern meadowlark, stay put once arriving and nest in the mesic northern hardwoods, forested dunes, northern cedar wetland, and old field succession habitats found at Lighthouse West.



Your support has made it possible to protect
this special migratory bird habitat forever.

The forested shoreline is a paradise for migrating birds. The forest, wetlands, and water provide all they need to eat, drink, and build nests. At Lighthouse West Natural Area you'll find many species of birds, including several sparrows and warblers, scarlet tanagers, winter wrens, purple martin, and many other songbirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl species.

Speaking of waterfowl, they're attracted to Lighthouse West because of the vernal pools. A vernal pool is a seasonal wetland that forms during the spring due to snowmelt or rainfall, and dries up later in the year. They're characterized by their ability to hold water long enough for specialized species to complete their life cycles, including amphibians like frogs and salamanders. Vernal pools play a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity and provide a buffet of invertebrates and amphibians for waterfowl like ducks and great blue herons to eat.

A remarkable occurrence at the natural area is something called raptor kettling. The kettling conditions involve raptors taking the same route during migration to take advantage of the best warm winds (thermal updrafts) and other wind currents to help with flying. While the birds seem to be flocking together, their goals and behavior are still individual—they are not actually cooperating in any way other than to share airspace to take advantage of the best possible flight dynamics. This helps them save energy, conserve strength, and fly more efficiently. A raptor can be loosely defined as a bird of prey. Specifically, raptors actively hunt and eat other vertebrates, have hooked beaks, strong feet with sharp talons, and clear eyesight (think hawks, owls, eagles, and osprey). Raptors migrate alone, except in rare moments when they all take advantage of favorable migration conditions simultaneously. When a flock of raptors are flying together, it's called a "kettle" or "kettling." They're not doing it on purpose, it just happens by rare chance, and those rare chances happen at Lighthouse West.

We're particularly excited about this addition because it creates a protected wildlife corridor that connects Lighthouse West Natural Area to the Leelanau State Park. This means more room for our wildlife to roam, and more public access to quiet enjoyment of nature.

At the peninsula's tip, where land meets water, nature thrives, and bird song fills the air, Lighthouse West is a testament to the power of conservation and the irreplaceable value of protecting these fragile ecosystems. It's a place where both birds and humans can find solace and inspiration, joined in shared appreciation for the wonders of the natural world.



The Therapeutic Effects of Forest Bathing

Time spent in nature has impressive healing powers for mind and body.

By Brighid Driscoll



Photos By Mark Smith



Growing up, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. Her way of living was simpler than everyday life now. She washed everything with vinegar and sunshine, kept a meticulous garden, and could make clothing and meals from scratch. When midday rolled around, she would tell us kids to go outside. To her, time spent outdoors could cure almost any everyday ailment: fatigue, headache, bad mood, and boredom. Today, she's a proud great-grandmother to my brother's baby boy. She regularly advises him that the baby should get outside air to help his sleep and disposition. Somehow it always works.

Spending time outside makes you feel good, but are there health benefits to doing so? Studies say yes.

Forest bathing, known as “Shinrin-yoku” in Japanese, is a practice that emerged in Japan in the 1980s as a response to increasing urbanization and stress levels. Developed by the Japanese government as a form of therapy, it aimed to promote wellness by immersing oneself in nature. Forest bathing involves walking through forests, focusing on the senses, and engaging with the natural environment.

The concept draws inspiration from ancient Shinto and Buddhist traditions, which recognized the healing power

of nature. However, Dr. Qing Li, a Japanese researcher, scientifically studied the practice's benefits on reduced stress, improved mood, and enhanced immune system function. Dr. Li's research supported the idea that spending time in forests, inhaling phytoncides emitted by trees, and experiencing the calming atmosphere could have positive effects on human health. Phytoncides are invisible, volatile compounds emitted by plants that serve as a natural defense mechanism.

Recognizing its potential, forest bathing quickly gained popularity in Japan and gradually spread to other countries. Today, it is embraced as a form of ecotherapy worldwide, offering a respite from the pressures of modern life.

Forest bathing's healing power comes from its ability to make us slow down. This isn't a vigorous hike but rather a leisurely walk. Take moments to stop and look, listen, and feel. If your breath gets heavy, pause, and listen to the sound of the forest. If your legs tire, sit and admire the moss covering a fallen tree trunk. The act is about being, not doing.

Another health benefit comes from phytoncides. When exposed to phytoncides, typically found in forests and

other natural environments, we can experience health benefits. Inhalation of phytoncides has been linked to reduced stress levels, improved mood, and enhanced immune function. Research suggests that exposure to phytoncides can lower blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels, promoting relaxation and well-being. Also, phytoncides have been linked to increased natural killer cell activity, which enhances the body's ability to fight cancerous cells and pathogens. Even more good news? The phytoncide benefits of one forest walk can last for weeks.

It's incredible that a walk in the woods can do that. Happily, for all, the Conservancy has lots of natural land and forests to bathe in. Some of my favorites for forest bathing include Palmer Woods Forest Reserve, Kehl Lake Natural Area, and Swanson Preserve. However, any of our natural areas will provide the benefits of forest bathing. I feel grateful to be part of an organization that protects the ecological wonders of Leelanau. The benefits of land protection are far-reaching. From protecting forest-floor trillium to enhancing human health, conserving Leelanau's unique places will keep the peninsula and its people healthy and vibrant for years to come.

– Leave No Trace – a New Conservancy Partnership

We are pleased to announce that we have become an official Community Partner with Leave No Trace, the international organization that teaches best practice principles for responsible recreation in nature. With this new partnership, we will be aligning with their 7 Principle framework for minimizing impact in our natural areas and sharing guidelines with our community.

You will begin to see these principles shared in our social media and communications, on our natural area kiosks, in new natural area guides, and by our team. These ideas are not a new approach to the way we manage properties, but a new way to talk about it with supporters and visitors. Leave No Trace shares a message of empowerment; how we can all be part of the solution in sustainable outdoor recreation.

Our team includes two Leave No Trace Certified Trainers, Executive Administrator Stacie Longwell Sadowski and Volunteer Docent Gloria Garrett. For more information on Leave No Trace in the Leelanau Conservancy Natural Areas, contact Stacie at ssadowski@leelanauconservancy.org.





The 7 Principles of Leave No Trace

1. KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Be prepared! Remember food and water, and clothes to protect you from cold, heat, and rain.
- Use maps to plan where you're going. Check them along the way so you'll stay on course and won't get lost.
- Take a photo of the natural area map at the trailhead kiosk for use during your visit.
- Cell phone reception can vary, so let someone know where you are going.
- Learn about the areas you plan to visit. Read books, check our website, and talk to people before you go. The more you know, the more fun you'll have.

2. STICK TO TRAILS

- Walk and ride on designated trails to protect trailside plants.
- Do not step on flowers or small trees. Once damaged, they may not grow back.
- Respect private property by staying on designated trails.
- Overnight camping and overnight parking are not allowed at Leelanau Conservancy natural areas.

3. STASH YOUR TRASH AND PICK UP POOP

- Pack it in, Pack it out. Dispose of litter—even crumbs, peels, and cores—in garbage bags and carry it home. Trash cans are not available at Leelanau Conservancy natural areas.
- Portable toilets are available at Palmer Woods Forest Reserve and DeYoung Natural Area only. Use bathrooms or outhouses when available. If not available, bury human waste in a small hole 6-8 inches deep and 200 feet or 70 big steps from water.
- Use a plastic bag to pack out your pet's poop to a garbage can offsite.
- Keep water clean. Do not put soap, food, or human or pet waste in lakes or streams.

4. LEAVE IT AS YOU FIND IT

- Leave plants, rocks, and historical items as you find them so others can enjoy them.
- Treat living plants with respect. Carving, hacking, or peeling plants may kill them.

5. BE CAREFUL WITH FIRE

- Use a camp stove for cooking. Stoves are easier to cook on and create less impact than a fire. (Note: visitors are not allowed to build fires on Conservancy lands)
- Portable fire pits are occasionally used under the supervision of staff for special events only.

6. KEEP WILDLIFE WILD

- Observe wildlife from a distance and never approach, feed, or follow them.
- Human food is unhealthy for all wildlife and feeding them starts bad habits.
- Protect wildlife and your food by securely storing your meals and trash.

7. SHARE OUR TRAILS AND MANAGE YOUR PET

- Be considerate when passing others on the trail.
- Keep your pet under control to protect it, other visitors, and wildlife. Michigan Law requires dogs to be leashed when in public.
- Listen to nature. Avoid making loud noises or yelling. You will see more wildlife if you are quiet.
- Be sure the fun you have outdoors does not bother anyone else. Remember, other visitors are there to enjoy the outdoors too.

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Summer is a great time to find your Leelanau adventure. We are thrilled to announce that The Bart and Gail Ingraham Preserve located within the Cedar River Preserve is now open! The new trail traverses a ridgeline with views of the Cedar River and South Lake Leelanau and provides dry land access to the unique and diverse wetland complex. We'll see you out there. Photo by Drew Palmer.



At the Leelanau Conservancy, we believe the outdoors is for everyone. We strive to honor and celebrate our community's diversity through our work. Our mission to conserve the lands and waters of Leelanau County can only be realized through a steadfast commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in conservation and stewardship and in our relationships and business practices. We recognize and celebrate that the well-being of nature and people cannot be separated. The Conservancy commits to including, supporting, valuing, and welcoming all people with whom we work and serve, now and in the future. By including all people in conservation regardless of culture, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, abilities, or age, we can help shape a more inclusive, more equitable, and more vibrant future for Leelanau.