



the washtenaw land trust journal

A publication of the Washtenaw Land Trust • Volume 5 • Number 2 • Summer, 2006

KEEPING FORESTS HEALTHY

Like many forests in Michigan, the wooded areas at the Land Trust's Sharon Hills Nature Preserve have seen many changes over the years. Some of the changes aren't good for the long-term health of the ecosystem there. A recently drafted conservation plan for this 67-acre natural area is one step toward keeping the woods healthy well into the future.

What makes a good conservation plan?

A conservation plan provides management recommendations to reach identified objectives for a particular piece of land. In the case of Sharon Hills, the Land Trust's objective is to improve the quality of natural habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

The conservation plan considers the soil types, geology, pre-settlement vegetation, and history of the land. Then, taking these factors into account, the management plan suggests ways to increase the amount and quality of food and cover.

Sharon Hills Then and Now

The Sharon Hills Nature Preserve is located in the Sharon Short Hills of Washtenaw County, south of Chelsea and north of Manchester (map on page 4.) Thousands of years ago, this area was sculpted by the advance and retreat of glaciers. Today, the visible remnants of that long-ago history include moraine ridges, outwash deposits of sand and gravel, and kettle lakes and wetlands. Sharon Hills Nature Preserve with its rolling hills and two kettle wetlands is a lovely place to examine this geological story.

Evidence of less distant history can be seen at the Preserve as well. After the glaciers receded but before European settlement in the early 1800s, most of the vegetation on this site was mixed oak forest or black oak barren. Today, indications of these ecosystems remain in the form of oak-hickory forest, remnant oak savanna, aspen stands, and a small stand of black walnut trees. If you keep an eye out, you can even find a few small sections of tall-grass prairie.

In recent history, the land has become more and more wooded. Aerial photographs from the 1940s show the land as largely open. The photos also show a home and outbuildings, where only foundations remain today.



Janaé Reneaud

The Washtenaw Land Trust's Sharon Hills Nature Preserve

What's next for Sharon Hills?

The newly written conservation plan includes recommended Forest Stand Improvement techniques. That's quite a mouthful; what does it mean? In this case, it may mean removing some trees to improve the overall health of the forest. It may seem a little odd for a conservation organization to cut down trees, but cutting some trees will allow others to flourish. Though there are certainly no plans for clear-cutting, our wood-lot may look a little more open in the future. You can be confident that the conservation plan has been carefully designed with the best interest of a healthy ecosystem in mind.

Prescribed burns and invasive species control will also foster the native Michigan species that are key to this stewardship plan (see story page 4). The Land Trust is looking for volunteers to help with the project. If you'd like to be part of the stewardship team at any of our nature preserves, please contact the Land Trust at 734-302-LAND(5263).

The Washtenaw Land Trust's stewardship work is funded in part through a grant from the Forest Stewardship Program of the U.S. Forest Service administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and through a grant from the Landowner Incentive Program of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.



Steve Maslowski / USFWS

A good sign for the forest

On the most recent Land Trust hike, hikers at Sharon Hills were treated to the sight of a bright-red Scarlet Tanager, his rich, brilliant color almost glowing against the dark green forest leaves.

These birds prefer to live in the interior of forests. Forest fragmentation means destruction of their preferred habitat. We're glad they find Sharon Hills a good home, and our plan is to help keep it that way!

Do You Own Forest Land?

Andy Henriksen at the County Conservation District's Forestry Assistance Program created the Washtenaw Land Trust's conservation plan for Sharon Hills. And he may be able to help you, too!

If you'd like to learn more, please contact Andy at:
7203 Jackson Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103
734-761-6721 x5
andy.henriksen@mi.nacdn.net

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OUR MISSION: Washtenaw Land Trust protects farmland and natural areas in and around Washtenaw County.

Far Country

By Susan Lackey
WLT Executive Director



One day this spring, I took a walk in the woods. Hardly an unusual occurrence, but this walk was particularly important. It took place in western Michigan; it was on my mother's farm; and a land protection specialist from another land conservancy accompanied me.

You see, after years of listening to my mother threaten to haunt any subsequent landowner who cut down her woods, or built houses on her farm, she's found a less drastic – and more effective – solution. She's going to place a conservation agreement on her land.

It was interesting to find my own family in the shoes that so many of you have occupied over the years.

I keep wanting to ask the question, "does our land stack up?" "Will the conservancy want to protect it?" It's a little bit like sending your kid out to play for the first time. You so want everyone else to see the same 'special-ness' that you do.

My mother has her own set of conflicts. Like many of us, she kept putting off the decision. For many years we've talked about the alternatives. There were always other, higher-priority, things to do. Besides, she said, 'I trust you to do what's right if I don't get this done.' So, I quote Steve Small to her, "If you care about your land, make plans for it." Too often, we see situations where a landowner trusted their children, and, for any number of reasons, the children couldn't or wouldn't follow their parent's wishes.

She's also concerned about what she might be giving up. 'What happens,' she asks, 'if I need the value represented in the land to care for myself as I age?' So, we say, make the easement part of your estate plan. You can always change your mind.

Finally, she asks, 'How much intrusion will this bring? Will I have to ask permission to add on to the house, or rebuild a barn? Can I build a new septic field?' She was told: 'We come to monitor once a year, and that's all.'

The moral of this, of course, is that the questions you have are the same ones everyone has. Call us if you're interested in protecting your land. Chances are, we'll understand how special it really is.

Notes From The Land

Thank you, volunteers!



The Land Trust would like to thank the volunteers who helped teach kids about wildlife, mail letters, review policies, create hiking trails, and more: Cindy

Browne, Anya Dale, Kitty Donohoe, Margaret Engle, Rob Ewing, Marianne James, Andy Henriksen, Rick Meader, Bill McCort, Jim Melby, Sara Newman, Carol Peacock, Lisë Sayer, Jeanie Schultz, Scott Simonds, Laura Slider, Bob Tetens, and Jim Tolen.

Would you like to help out?

Contact us at 734-302-LAND (5263) or info@washtenawlandtrust.org.

We would also like to thank Theresa Schenk for her valued service on the board over the past years. She has stepped down to spend more time on her family's farm business and to honcho her lively daughter. We will miss her and wish her back soon!

Treasury Offers Guidance to

Assessors on Conservation Land

The Michigan Department of Treasury has released clarified guidelines to all property tax assessors regarding the proper way to assess conservation agreement land. The bulletin confirms that local property tax assessors "...must recognize that development restrictions affect valuation." This memo should make it easier for landowners who donate conservation agreements to receive assessments that accurately represent the taxable value of conservation land.

DNR releases list of Washtenaw land consolidation parcels

As part of a state-wide land consolidation effort, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has released its list of state-owned properties in Washtenaw County that fall outside of dedicated DNR project boundaries. Each parcel has been classified into one of three categories:

- Retain under DNR ownership and administration
 - Find an alternate conservation owner/administrator
 - Exchange or sell with proceeds used to protect lands of greater natural resource, cultural resource, or recreational value.
- The Land Trust is working with impacted townships and the Washtenaw County Department of Parks and Recreation to determine which parcels targeted for divestment may be a good fit for continued protection at a local level.

New State Incentives for Conservation Proposed

Currently, there are no state incentives for conservation in Michigan. A proposed package of legislation would provide new state benefits for private conservation. These benefits would be in addition to current incentives, which include potential federal income tax deductions, property tax reductions, and estate tax benefits.

The bills under consideration are Michigan Senate Bills 317 (in committee), 1004 (passed in the Senate), and 1038 (in committee), and Michigan House Bill 4524 (in committee.) These bills are sponsored by a number of influential state Senators and are supported by the chairs of the committees to which they have been assigned. They have a reasonable chance of being acted on - and soon!

Would you like to know more and show your support?

You can find information and legislator contacts at www.washtenawlandtrust.org.

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Washtenaw Land Trust

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Published periodically by the Washtenaw Land Trust. Vol. 5, Num. 2, Summer, 2006

Answers to Your Questions

Will land protected by the Land Trust stay protected forever?

The short answer is Yes. Hidden in that answer is a lot of behind-the-scenes work the Land Trust must do to ensure that protected land stays that way forever.

All our projects are voluntary, so before any parcel of land is protected the Land Trust works closely with the landowners to make certain they understand what's involved in permanently protecting their land. Then the Land Trust does a legal review of all land protection agreements. This is to reduce any possibility that the agreements might be contested in the future. Once the agreement is complete, the Land Trust monitors every protected property at least once a year, to verify that the protection agreements are being honored. To make certain the Land Trust will last as long as the land does, we work actively to assure our future as a strong, sustainable, and fiscally responsible organization. The Land Trust will defend these natural areas and open spaces, so that they may remain protected forever.

Does the Land Trust focus just on farmland?

No. The Land Trust does protect farmland, but certainly not to the exclusion of natural areas! (Since there are good matching grants available, the Land Trust does do a lot of fundraising for farmland protection – stretching your gifts further. Give today and you can quadruple your gift! See details on p.7.) The Land Trust's high-priority target areas include:

- Fragile natural areas – along the great natural river corridors (the Huron, Raisin, and Saline Rivers) and surrounding the blocks of already-protected land (the Waterloo-Pinckney-Sharon region)
- Key working farms – in the areas that have the best chance for a sustainable agricultural industry, particularly southern and western Washtenaw County and rural Jackson County

Do you have questions?

Send 'em in!
Call 734-302-LAND (5263)
or email:
info@washtenawlandtrust.org.

Jackson/Waterloo-area conservation gains steam!



Land Trust volunteer Charity Steere (at right) visits a Waterloo-area fen wetland with the landowners and a state biologist.

The Land Trust is pleased to announce that it has been awarded a \$10,000 grant from The Jackson County Community Foundation to support land protection efforts in and around the Waterloo area.

One of the Land Trust's top land protection priorities is to reduce the rate of land fragmentation in the Waterloo-Pinckney region. This region makes up the largest block of public recreation land in Michigan's Lower Peninsula. However, this important recreational and natural resource is increasingly threatened by incompatible residential development.

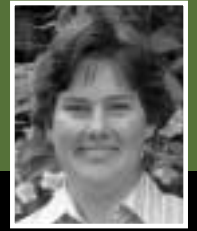
"This grant will allow the Land Trust to jumpstart its land protection work in the Waterloo area," said Charity Steere, chair of the Land Trust's Land Protection Committee.

The project includes identifying and prioritizing buffer lands and in-holdings, identifying appropriate protection techniques, developing a landowner outreach plan, and educating landowners on land protection options.

For this project, the Land Trust will collaborate with groups such as the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Ducks Unlimited, and Michigan Audubon.

"Everyone seems to be excited to hit the ground running!" said Charity.

Across the Board



By Janet Crone
WLT Board Treasurer

When my husband and I returned to the area four years ago from West Michigan, I finally had a chance to fulfill a long time dream of taking the Master Gardener class at the Michigan State Extension. Finally, I was going to learn how to produce a yard filled with beautiful shrubs and flowers! Along the way and in tandem with a growing (pun intended) interest in cooking healthier food for what was rapidly becoming an empty nest, I found that I really prefer growing vegetables.

Alas, our yard is too shady to grow everything I would like, and Charlie and I have taken to heading to the farmer's market every Saturday morning to forage for the week's groceries. I'm really excited that we have so much variety available within a short distance of where it was grown and within a short time period from its harvest. Our fresh produce is often bought directly from the local farmers. At nearby stores, we buy eggs, meat, and even some packaged goods that have been grown in the area. I've been having a lot of fun with packages of Rabble Roasters – soy nuts with some fantastic flavors. Honey ginger is my current favorite, and when a guest comments on how great they are, I'm quick to reply that they're from a farm just north of Ann Arbor.

My point is that, particularly with rising fuel costs, buying local is more important than ever. But that won't always be possible unless we take steps to preserve the farm lands that remain. Your continued support of the Washtenaw Land Trust not only helps to preserve the beautiful natural areas of this part of Michigan, it also helps to maintain agriculture here so that you – and I! – can enjoy the harvest.

Protecting Our Land, Preserving Our Legacy

How Fire Can Help Protect Our Natural Heritage

When you hear the words "setting fire to the landscape", what comes to mind? Images of marauding vandals? Or thoughts of a safe and helpful ecological practice?

Although it may seem strange, fire can be beneficial to the landscape. Fire stimulates the growth of many native Michigan plants. At the same time, a prescribed ecological burn can suppress some of the invasive foreign plants that will crowd out the native plants.

Why is this so? Historically, fires occurred about every 3-10 years in Michigan's prairies and forests. Fires started from natural causes like lightning, and they were also sometimes ignited by Native Americans to help clear fields. As a result, Michigan's native plants became well adapted to periodic fires. A prescribed ecological burn can simulate those historic fires and help our native plants to thrive.

A plant species is considered invasive if it is alien to the ecosystem under consideration and is particularly adaptable and aggressive. On top of their vigorous growth habits, these species often also lack natural predators in the ecosystem. The end result is rampant growth that pushes out native plants. Common invasive plants include autumn olive, garlic mustard, Japanese honeysuckle, purple loosestrife, and glossy buckthorn. Fortunately, some of these invasives are susceptible to fire.

At the Land Trust's Sharon Hills Preserve, there are plenty of invasive species to contend with! The biggest offender at the moment is probably autumn olive, but garlic mustard is coming on fast. In Fall 2005 and Spring 2006, Dave Borneman, a habitat restoration specialist, did the first prescribed burns at Sharon Hills. Hopefully these will knock back some of the invaders.

Prescribed ecological burns are safe. Dave heads the City of Ann Arbor's Natural Area Preservation department and has 16 years of professional experience with controlled fires. He coordinates with local fire departments, works with a trained crew, creates "burn breaks" to control the fire, aims to limit the amount of smoke created, and – last but not least – has plenty of water on hand.

Prescribed ecological burns are an important component of the conservation plan for Sharon Hills Preserve (see cover story.) When done in a carefully planned and controlled way, fire can help the environment thrive.



Top: The dogwood trees at Sharon Hills seemed to flower in super-abundance this spring!

Inset: Prescribed ecological burns are safe and are performed by a trained, experienced crew. The burns stimulate growth of native Michigan plants.



Suzie Heiney

Charity Steere

Would you like to lend a hand?

Talented volunteers just like you do much of the work of the Land Trust. They are helping with land stewardship, fundraising, and a wide range of other activities. Virtually any level of involvement or skill can aid in protecting our natural heritage. If you would like to help, please contact the office at info@washtenawlandtrust.org or 734-302-LAND (5263).

To visit Sharon Hills Nature Preserve

The rolling hills nestling wetlands, open fields and shady woods make the Sharon Hills Preserve a great place to go walking or cross-country skiing in the right season! The preserve is located southwest of Ann Arbor in Sharon Township, on Sharon Hollow Road between Walker and Washburn Roads. It is open to the public for quiet recreation.



Directions:

From I-94, exit onto M-52 and go south to Grass Lake Road, go west (right) to Sharon Hollow Road, and go south (left) two miles. Shortly past Tollen Drive, you can park in the grassy parking area on the east (left) side of the road.

Doing Good While Doing Well

Thank You To 2005 Business Supporters of the Washtenaw Land Trust

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Land Caretakers



Business Highlight: General Motors Powertrain

By Daphne Adams, Business Communications, General Motors Powertrain - Ypsilanti

Founded in 1908, General Motors (GM) is the world's largest automaker and employs about 327,000 people around the world.

The local Powertrain facility, the Willow Run plant in Ypsilanti, has a long history. It had formerly turned out over 8,000 B-24 Liberator bombers during World War II. General Motors purchased the facility in late August of 1953, and 12 weeks later was producing transmissions at this facility.

One of GM's environmental principles is to participate in educating the public regarding environmental conservation. One way that we do this is through the Global Rivers Environmental Education Network (GREEN) program. GM works with a local environmental partner to administer the program, which includes classroom work and hands-on river sampling. It is very rewarding to watch the students see environmental stewardship in action and know that they can have an impact.

The leadership of GM recognizes the importance of giving back to the community. GM Powertrain-Ypsilanti, through its Community Relations Committee, is proud to partner with and support the mission of the Washtenaw Land Trust. As plant manager Kingsley Wootton said in reference to the peace he feels out boating on local lakes, "Nature soothes the soul."



2006 Chevy Silverado hybrid



**World's Best Powertrains
from the World's Best
(environmentally friendly) People!**

GM's vision is to be the world leader in transportation products and related services by earning our customers' enthusiasm through continuous improvement driven by the integrity, teamwork and innovation of GM people.

Upcoming Events



Sunday July 9, noon: Huron River Day. Celebrate the beautiful Huron River at events in various locations along (and on!) the river. The Land Trust will be at a "halfway stop" at Bandemer Park for canoeists voyaging from Delhi Park to Gallup Park. You can come join us at noon to learn how parks like Bandemer with the help of Washtenaw Land Trust have become part of a connected river greenway, and learn about future plans for the park. Sponsored by the City of Ann Arbor.

Saturday Sep. 16: Stewardship workday at Beckwith Conservancy near Stockbridge. Help clean up the trails at this wooded preserve along Portage Creek.

Tuesday Oct. 3, 6:30 pm: Landowners Information Session. Come learn what it takes to protect your land with a conservation agreement. Pose your questions to an expert panel and receive materials you can take home with you. This session is ideal for landowners or anyone interested in learning more about conservation options.

Saturday Oct. 7 (time TBD): Guided hike at Sharon Hills Nature Preserve with Andy Henriksen, forester with Washtenaw County Conservation District.

Thursday Nov. 2: Lanternglow Party - Exclusively for the Land Trust's leading supporters: Get a window into life in 1800s Michigan at this special thank-you reception and exclusive guided tour of the Waterloo Farm Museum.



Yes! You can protect natural areas and open spaces!

The first land trust in Michigan, the Washtenaw Land Trust protects the natural areas and working farms of Washtenaw, Jackson, and Ingham counties. We've completed more than 40 projects directly protecting over 2,000 acres and have been a leader in campaigns that will protect thousands more acres.

**You can help the Land Trust do more.
Make a gift today.**



Enclosed please find my gift of:
 \$___ for general support of land protection programs
 \$___ to help meet the Farmland Protection Challenge - my gift will be matched 4-to-1!

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Suzie Heiney

Did you know?

Scores of local kids explored the out-of-doors and learned about the environment at the Earth Day festivities at Matthaei Botanical Gardens on April 22. Those who stopped by the Land Trust's booth tried their hand at identifying animal tracks as they guessed "whose footprints are these?" Fittingly, nature itself got the last word, of course: With a wide range of planned activities, it was the frogs in the frog pond that seemed to be the biggest hit of all, as kids used nets to get a closer look. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped make this day a success!



Lisè Sayer

Wish List

You may be able to grant the Land Trust's "wishes"! If you can help, please contact Suzie Heiney at 734-302-LAND (5263) or suzie@washtenawlandtrust.org.

Thank you!

- New county plat maps
- Copy paper (recycled preferred)
- Bookshelves
- Postage stamps (first class and postcard rate)
- New DVD-RWs
- Leafblower
- Lighter-weight chainsaw, 12-inch blade
- Binder clips