

# LANDMARKS

**Newsletter of the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy** 

Fall 2023



**Looking out over Lost Lake in the early autumn** *Photo by Charles Scott* 

# Land Conservation is a Collaboration

By Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

Recently a small group of us hiked Lost Lake during the annual Fall Frolic event in honor of its  $10^{\text{th}}$  Anniversary. It was fun revisiting the story of SMLC's acquisition and how that came about and reflecting on the many partners and people who made it happen. SMLC is deeply appreciative of John Woollam and the J.A. Woollam Foundation for their encouragement and significant support in helping protect this incredible landscape.

In addition, the Six Rivers Land Conservancy holds the conservation easement at Lost Lake. Their job is to annually monitor the site and identify issues that may need addressing. If needed, they are a legal defense partner with SMLC if problems arise such as the ET Rover Pipeline proposal in 2014. This proposal would have routed the planned pipeline through Lost Lake's pristine lakes. Fortunately, the pipeline was rerouted to a different location in 2015. This was partially due to a series of efforts by both conservancies opposing this proposal.

Land Conservation is Collaboration. Without a **community of support**, land conservancies would not be able to fund the acquisition and ongoing land stewardship that our preserves and easements require. The costs of land and easement purchases, including due diligence, and the ongoing stewardship, including land restoration and public access when it's a nature preserve, are prohibitive otherwise. Everyone involved steps up and lends a hand to save the land.

Continued on page 11

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# **LANDMARKS**

A newsletter published by:



# Conservation is in our Nature.

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### Message from the Executive Director, Jill A. Lewis



This year has been one of preparation, resolution and change. The main goal has been SMLC's Land Trust Accreditation pursuit (see page 3 for more). Many people have contributed to SMLC's readiness and for that, we are deeply grateful!

Relatedly, SMLC has improved our recordkeeping including making a significant change to keeping our most important land trust records in digital format. This is an ongoing project that will serve the organization well into the future. Many thanks to Kathy Hammond, SMLC's Office Specialist, for all her help with this.

Finally, SMLC has also made changes in the financial arena related to bookkeeping, forecasting and reporting to be in line with more recent Accreditation requirements. A number of beneficial changes were made in the past year including but not limited to: board reporting, end of year budgeting, and reducing financial risk. Many thanks to Mitch Hall and the Finance Committee for their help.

This year, SMLC's stewardship work has been focused on maintaining our nature preserves including but not limited to parking lot improvements at Lost Lake Nature Preserve and the Conservancy Farm. Many thanks to Richard Kent and George Kasdorf for their help! Additionally, our 2023 nature preserve monitor, Chloe Hernandez, mapped all preserve signage to create a baseline going forward. Finally, staff completed conservation easement baseline supplemental reports – updating on-the-ground conditions that are useful when monitoring.

SMLC's biennial fundraising event, the October 28<sup>th</sup> Red Barn Bash, is another activity where many people are involved in raising needed funds for SMLC and creating an enjoyable evening for the attendees. Many thanks to everyone who helped make this year's event a successful one!

SMLC relies on donor support for our work. If not for you, we would not have the means to take care of needed preserve maintenance (such

as the projects noted above) nor achieve our annual land and monitoring easement requirements. Your 2023 gift will not only help SMLC fulfill our mission but also the day-to-day requirements of being a land conservancy. Please consider donating now or before year-end. Gifts of any size are greatly appreciated!

Thank you.



Having fun at a Fall Frolic. Photo by Jonathan Schechter

Spring Landmarks Correction:
John Schlansker, 2022 ELLC (Eco-Logical Leadership Club)

# Land Trust Accreditation Update

By Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

The good news is SMLC's pursuit of Land Trust Accreditation has significantly progressed! In early June SMLC submitted our application (following the submission of the pre-application in late February). Both of these activities were big projects. In September, a required call was completed with the designated Land Trust Commissioner and staff person, and SMLC's Accreditation Team. During this call, SMLC's team answered questions pertaining to our applications. Following this call, SMLC received a final list of Additional Requested Information. We have until late November to submit these final documents. The Commission will then meet in early 2024 and SMLC will be notified in February if we are Accredited.

Being Accredited will likely open doors for SMLC including funding, community partnerships, and land conservation projects. Achieving it will be a big step for SMLC and we are glad to be this much closer to this longstanding goal.

**Thank you** to everyone who has helped us get here!



It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air, that emanation from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.

-Robert Louis Stevenson



























SMLC is deeply grateful to all of the other businesses, individuals, and volunteers who contributed to our Red Barn Bash, especially to: Boisvenu and Company, By the Pound, Plastipak/Absopure, and Slow Farm.



Red Barn Bash Event Hosts: Bill & Vivienne Young



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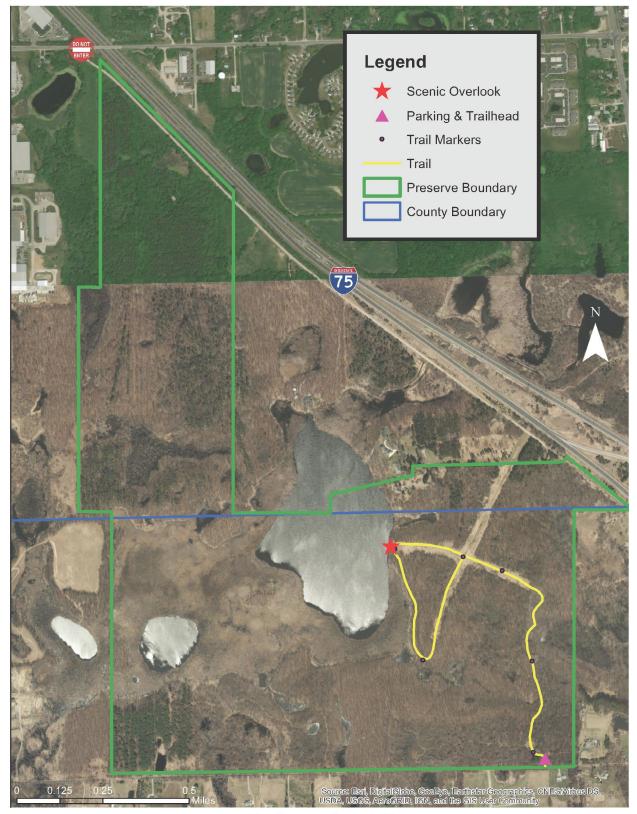
# Benefits of Land Trust Accreditation:

- 55% more financial supporters and land trust budgets double in size\*
- 3x more volunteers\*
- 5x more land protected\*
- Qualifying for opportunities limited to accredited land trusts

\*as compared to eligible non-accredited land trusts; per the Land Trust Accreditation Commission

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# **Lost Lake Nature Preserve Trail Map**



#### The Preserve Loop Trail

The trail is approximately **2.5 miles** in total length. It meanders through a dense forest which opens up to an old airplane "prairie" runway and leads to the scenic overlook of Slack Lake at one mile. Past the overlook the trail follows the lakeshore through an old growth forest before it reconnects with the runway. The trail is great for hiking and cross country skiing, however, the lake is not accessible to the public.

### Lost Lake Nature Preserve - A Look Back

By James T. Weiner, SMLC Land Protection Committee Chair

The Lost Lake Nature Preserve (Lost Lake) is one of my favorite SMLC preserves. SMLC's journey to acquire Lost Lake is full of twists and turns but it was well worth it! The 538-acre preserve is a regional gem consisting of 2 lakes, 200 acres of wetlands, and 250 acres of forest and upland meadows with several spectacular views and overlooks.

In 2011, SMLC was first introduced to Lost Lake by John Woollam. John has funded many land conservation projects throughout Michigan while living in Nebraska. He grew up in Michigan and spent time at Lost Lake during his childhood. The property was for sale for years as the owners aged and the price had dropped to \$2.4 million. Through John, SMLC was invited to visit the property and our jaws dropped ... it was a beautiful natural property that none of us knew about.

In May of 2013, the price dropped again to \$1.1 million (just as I was going on a two-week holiday). John offered to fund the acquisition and I got a phone call. I had just enough time to call the realtor from the airport and ask him not to accept any offers until I returned. When I got back, he had 3 offers (after years of getting no purchase offers). I was authorized by the SMLC Board to offer \$1 million cash. The realtor opined an offer of \$1.1 million with closing within 60 days would be accepted – it was.

Boy, was the summer that followed eventful! SMLC began our due diligence and also brought in Six Rivers Land Conservancy (Six Rivers) to hold the conservation easement. Fortunately, Six Rivers was familiar with the property and brought in Oakland County Parks, who had an interest in the site years before. SMLC's due diligence work was greatly facilitated by their help. The conservancies, with John's assistance, finalized the conservation easement and closed on the easement and fee land purchases in August 2013. The J.A. Woollam Foundation invested another \$240,000 in property readiness and Lost Lake opened for public access in 2015.

Since its acquisition we had a scare when ET Rover wanted to put a petroleum pipeline through Lost Lake in 2014 (but agreed to re-route it to a different location in early 2015). Since then, SMLC has also accomplished a couple restoration projects with the help of our partners Ducks Unlimited and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. There is a lot more work to do there to keep it natural, invasive free ... but it's a breathtaking preserve that I strongly encourage you to visit!



**Aerial of Lost Lake Nature Preserve.** *Photo by Wendy Pellerito* 

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**2012 Newnan Nature Sanctuary dedication.** *Photo by Jim Bloch* 

# The Edna S. Newnan Nature Sanctuary

By Garret Johnson, Michigan Nature Association Executive Director

### **Brief History of the Sanctuary Property**

Edna Newnan purchased a 100.84-acre parcel in Wales Township, St. Clair County, in 1971 and eventually deeded it to the Edna Newnan Revocable Trust. Her son, Hal Newnan, the sole Trustee after her death pursued his mother's vision to have the land maintained in a natural condition for wildlife habitat for the benefit of current and future generations. The original parcel was split, leaving two parcels containing a residence, barn and other structures with surrounding acreage set aside to be conserved. The Trust granted a conservation easement over the 87.91-acre property to the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (SMLC) and donated the fee property to the Michigan Nature Association (MNA) in October 2011. Both donations were in keeping with Edna's wishes.

<u>Public amenities</u>: there is a small gravel parking area located along Webb Road, and a loop trail that runs along edge of the forest remnant and adjacent old fields. The site is open to the public during daylight hours.

#### **Conservation Importance**

This sanctuary is located in a primarily agricultural region. The established mesic southern forest, dominated by beech and maple trees, serves as a good stopover habitat for neo-tropical migratory birds and is refuge for other plants and animals historically found here. The forest remnant also contains a number of vernal pools, providing ideal habitat for salamanders and other amphibians.

There are swales and wet pockets found throughout the sanctuary which tend to be dominated by dogwoods, meadowsweet, sedges, mosses, shrubby St. Johns' wort and more. The majority of the sanctuary is expected to eventually succeed into southern mesic forest and as it does, the value of the migratory stopover site will increase even further. The remainder of the sanctuary, which was previously farmed, is composed of old field habitat.

The Riley-Wales Drain flows south through the sanctuary, bisecting the property. It feeds into the Pine River, which subsequently flows into the St. Clair River.

#### Restoration

The vision for site restoration is to implement management practices to guide the current direction of succession toward a mature southern mesic forest community, realizing that there will likely be pockets of shrub carr or wetland openings within the forest, thus adding to the natural diversity of the sanctuary.

## The Importance of Easements

Conservation easements are an important conservation tool. They allow the current and subsequent landowners to protect natural areas on the property while living there or maintain it as natural lands with no residence for their enjoyment. Easements protect conservation values on the property itself such as wetlands or woods and larger conservation values that the property may be part of or near such as a river or watershed.

Easements generally restrict onsite development and have other restrictions that can include things such as no commercial activity or mining. They allow the landowners to steward their property's natural resources including removing invasive species and planting native trees. In this way, easements are a valuable way to protect natural lands in a local area without having to own them.

#### Volunteers cleaning up trash.

Photo by Scott Tyrrell



# Many thanks to our volunteers...

To the *Landmarks* newsletter contributors: Brenda Baker, Garret Johnson, Jim McIntyre, Bill Secrest, Jack Smiley, and Jim Weiner.

To our **photographers**: Jim Bloch, Joel Geffen, Martha Hitchiner, George Kasdorf, Wendy Pellerito, Jonathan Schechter, Charles Scott, and Scott Tyrrell.

To our **stewardship** and **legal team** volunteers: Richard Barnes, Julie Cameron, Tim Devine, Blake Duddles, Mary Ericson, Matthew Fischer, George Kasdorf, Richard Kent, Ethan Larson, Heather Martinez, Jim McIntyre, John Metzler, Anderson Miles, Robert Moll, Daniel Smith, Kristina Sokoloski, Peter Sonbell, Alex Tuckey, Jim Weiner, and Emily Wollan.

To our **outreach** and **Red Barn Bash** volunteers: David Amamoto, Marie Awn, Brenda Baker, Linda Berauer, Carla Bisaro, Misty Callies, Marty Davis-Merritts, Glenn Gates, Heidi Gunther, Heidi Haire, Mitch Hall, Gary Hanafee, Martha Hitchiner, Mark Higbee, Alicia Homeszyn, Mia Kang, Jessica Kassis, Allison LaPlatt-Weaver, Jeremiah Lee, Amanda Louks, Joan Martin, Jim McIntyre, Michelle McIntyre, Paul Morin, Susan Morse, Anne Marie Opipari, Erin Prior, Cindy Reinhart, Wesley Ruiz, Cassie Russ, Bill Secrest, Ryan Sullivan, Maria Vicini, and John Weber.

Thanks to everyone who volunteered with SMLC this year!

### **Annual Nature Preserve Monitoring**

SMLC annually monitors all of our nature preserves per SMLC and Land Trust Accreditation requirements. The main monitoring criteria are to assess the property's boundaries and interior to make sure there is no unwanted or illegal trespass, property damage or other problematic issues and assess the public access infrastructure, trails, and signage to verify these are in good condition. Actual or potential problems are documented for SMLC's staff and legal team to address. Seasonal contractors and volunteer monitors are key to supporting SMLC staff in achieving this goal.

#### **Thank You Chloe Hernandez!**

Chloe was SMLC's 2023 Nature Preserve Monitor from June – early September. Chloe helped SMLC achieve our annual goal of monitoring all 18 nature preserves by assessing 13 sites during her tenure including capturing data points and taking photos. She created the final site visit reports and maps as part of her work. Chloe starts her master's degree program at UofM this fall – thank you so much Chloe!



### Volunteers Wanted!

We are always looking for dedicated people who want to help SMLC achieve our mission. For more information, please contact Alan McTaggart at amctaggart@smlcland.org or call 734-484-6565.

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### Dan Ezekiel

By William Secrest, SMLC Board Director

Dan Ezekiel is the Honorary Chair of this year's Red Barn Bash, the biennial fund-raising celebration of the SMLC. Dan, 66, has, with his wonderful wife Tina, two children and three grandkids with whom he loves to go camping. A cyclist who rides some 4,000 miles per year, he keeps his eyes on the development pressures that are continuously threatening the farmlands and open spaces in our southeast Michigan region. Throughout his life Dan has spearheaded programs and operations to safeguard our natural environment.

His love of nature began when he was a kid growing up in Ann Arbor. In 1970 he was enthralled with the inauguration of the first Earth Day. He subsequently twice attended the National Outdoor Leadership School. In 1971 the school had him backpacking for 35 days in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming. Two years later, he ventured out for a 31-day kayak adventure around Prince William Sound in Alaska. Thus primed, Dan enrolled in the School of Natural Resources' Environmental Education program at the University of Michigan. He studied under his mentor, Dan Stapt, who helped confirm that "nature is a wonderful place to be".



WCPARC holds the conservation easement at Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve.

Photo by Charles Scott

Both Dan and Tina spent their professional careers teaching, Dan as a middle school science teacher at Ann Arbor Forsythe. During his 29 years there he conducted the largest science fair in Michigan. Dan also helped launch Recycle Ann Arbor in 1978, one of the first curbside recycling programs in the Midwest.

In 2000, the Open Space Natural Preservation millage was passed in Washtenaw County, and since 2014 Dan has helped guide the county's preservation projects as a member of the Parks and Recreation Commission. Along the same lines as the county program, the city of Ann Arbor passed the Greenbelt millage in 2003. Dan chaired the Advisory Commission for this program from 2011-2013.



Dan holding the SMLC Partner Award (WCPARC) at the 2021 Secrest Preserve Dedication Photo by Joel Geffen

Between these two government programs, more than 10,000 acres have been preserved for farms and wild lands including the 2,750 acres now known as the Superior Greenway. This project, championed by SMLC, partnered with government programs and private donors to create the greenbelt amidst the sprawling metroplex of Wayne and eastern Washtenaw counties.

Along with his leadership in the government programs, Dan is currently an elected leader of the Sierra Club's Huron Valley Chapter. They are currently hard at work to fold diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives into their ongoing mission.

Dan's dedication to nature has helped preserve open space for the benefit of current and future generations of people, plants, and animals.

### **Eco-Logical Leadership Giving Club:**

If you are interested in becoming an ELLC member, please contact Jill Lewis at jlewis@smlcland.org or 734-484-6565.

# Recent Chapter Achievements

By Brenda Baker, STC Co-Chair

The STC Garden Committee obtained two grants to fund the installation of a Native Plant and Insect Garden near the entrance of the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve; followed two years later by a prairie restoration project adjacent to the Garden. Maintenance activities continue with generous volunteer labor.

The Garden Committee displayed their initial achievements at the Washtenaw County Native Plant Expo and Marketplace. Their efforts were so well received that they are now a regular participant. This year, the President of the Michigan Bluebird Society saw them there and invited the Chapter to be an exhibitor at the Spring Bluebird Festival in 2024!

The STC continues to represent SMLC at Washtenaw Community College's "Welcome Days"—Fall, Winter, and sometimes Summer—welcoming new and returning students at the start of a new term. This helps us reach a different demographic and meet folks from a little farther away. The Chapter can also be found at Superior Township's Superior Day event each spring.

Finally, the Chapter will now be hosting four annual public hikes in Superior Township in addition to 1 Full Moon Campfire event:

- Winter Walkabout, formerly hosted by the staff
- Spring has Sprung at Springhill
- Midsummer Greenway Delight
- Autumn Spectacular



**Every garden needs little helpers.** *Photo by Wendy Pellerito* 

# SMLC's Community Organic Garden

By Jack R. Smiley, Garden Coordinator

The Community Organic Garden was established by SMLC in 2005 at the Conservancy Farm. The Garden has proven to be a very popular program which has generated a lot of interest and support for the Conservancy.

The Garden helps to promote SMLC's mission of protecting farmland and natural habitat and it provides a number of benefits to both SMLC and the public. In particular, the Community Organic Garden:

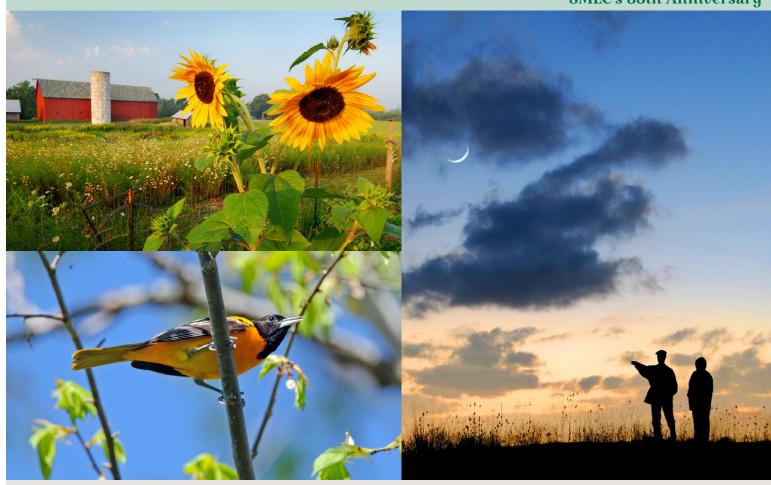
- Fosters an awareness of the need for local food and locally protected farmland
- Enables people to get in touch with the land and with nature
- Provides an opportunity for individuals and families to grow their own healthy food
- Demonstrates sustainable agricultural practices that enrich the soil, conserve soil moisture and utilize only organic fertilizers and pest control methods
- Shows that organic farming can be more compatible with wildlife than many traditional farming practices
- Acts as a learning center where creative growing techniques can be tried and compared.

Importantly, the Community Organic Garden has attracted a diverse segment of the population which might otherwise have little or no contact with SMLC or local land conservation efforts. It has served as a gateway for many people to get involved. If you would like to share in this wonderful experience next year, please contact the SMLC office.

If you would like to share in this garden experience we would welcome your participation. Plots are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Visit SMLC's website at smlcland.org for further information or contact the office at 734-484-6565 if you would like to reserve a garden plot for next year.

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(Clockwise from top left) **Sunflowers at Conservancy Farm.** *Photo by Charles Scott* **Overlooking the sunrise at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve.** *Photo by Charles Scott* **Baltimore Oriole.** *Photo by Martha Hitchiner* 

# A Landscape Full of Time Capsules

By Jim McIntyre, SMLC Board President

The last 35 years have been marked by substantial growth in most of our local communities, with some doubling—even tripling—in population. The steady expansion of housing developments, shopping centers, and infrastructure puts increasing pressure on the natural areas in southeast Michigan, compressing the once abundant flora and fauna into smaller and smaller spaces...all while available land continues to be developed at an alarming rate.

There is some solace to be had in the open spaces that have been protected from development, existing as scattered oases in this burgeoning suburban landscape. I like to think that these spaces represent more than just a temporary rest area, though. I like to think of them as time capsules—a glimpse into the past—showing us how the world used to be, places that are frozen in time, just as they were when they were acquired.

With each passing year, the importance of these time capsules is magnified by the changing world that surrounds them, their mere existence a testament to the dedication of the people who protected them years ago. When we think about what land conservation is, we need look no further than to see the window to the past that remains open due to these efforts, a world that can be remembered, enjoyed, and understood because of this work. Let's continue to create more of them for future generations to appreciate and cherish.



# Wildlife Sightings

### Great Blue Heron

By Alan McTaggart, Stewardship and Outreach Specialist

With piercing yellow eyes, distinctive blueish-gray plumage, and a guttural call that reminds the listener of its dinosaur ancestors, the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) is one of the most striking birds you'll find. They can be seen year-round throughout Michigan as well as most other states in the Lower 48, and are an incredibly widespread species, ranging from the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska to the Canadian Maritime provinces to the northern shores of Columbia and Venezuela, depending on the time of year.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of this species, from the standpoint of conservation, is their nesting behavior. Great Blue Herons usually nest in colonies called 'rookeries' in lowland swamps, islands, or forests adjacent to lakes, mainly building their nests high-up in trees and returning to those nests year-after-year if possible. This puts the heron at particular risk from various human activities along waterbodies, most notably sport fishing, camping, boating, and real estate development. This can cause the herons to abandon their rookeries.



**Great blue heron.** *Photo by Wendy Pellerito* 

To see herons at SMLC preserves, look for wetlands or visit Lost Lake Nature Preserve where a heron rookery is located across Slack Lake. At the SMLC office, we have the pleasure of regularly seeing Great Blue Herons just across the road from the Conservancy Farm as a pair have occasionally nested near a pond there. It's a fitting situation because land conservancies are at the forefront of efforts to preserve the valuable wetlands and shoreline that the Great Blue Heron and other species require to thrive.

#### Continued from page 1

At the Conservancy Farm and Lost Lake, federally funded grasslands (prairies) and wetlands restorations are providing improved wildlife habitat and scenic enjoyment. Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were instrumental in obtaining the grant funds, providing project management oversight and extensive land work. As the landowner, SMLC is responsible for the 15-year maintenance plans to keep the project areas in good conservation condition. At the Fall Frolic, we all admired the big bluestem that is prevalent in the Lost

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Lake prairie and some of the remaining wildflowers such as goldenrod.

These collaborations are funded by grant funds or private donations and help SMLC leverage our organization's donations, including to the new Stewardship Fund, to maximum effect. SMLC has a long history of collaboration. This is what allows us to continue our conservation work and provide public access to southeast Michigan's semi-wild lands.

SMLC is deeply grateful to all of our conservation partners including: the City of Ann Arbor's Greenbelt program; Detroit Audubon Society; the Michigan Dept. of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy; the Michigan Nature Association; Pittsfield Charter Township; Superior Charter Township; The Nature Conservancy's Lakeplain Prairies office; Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, the organizations named here, and many more.

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|------|---|
| 168: | Michigan by supporting Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy  |

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Our Mission The Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy conserves natural land and open space - including forests, wetlands, meadows, agricultural lands, and places of scenic beauty - to provide habitat for wildlife and to enrich the lives of people.

sell your personal information to any other group.

### Wish List

SMLC could use the following items:

| Item Needed  | Retail<br>Cost |
|--|----------------|
| 3 point hitch tractor wood chipper attachment          | \$2,500        |
| 4-5 drawer filing cabinet Letter-sized                 | \$300          |
| Good working order black and white<br>Business Printer | \$250          |
| Heavy-duty poster easels (2)                           | \$150          |
| Pack of leather gloves for volunteers                  | \$100          |
| Vernal pool monitoring kits                            | \$75 each      |
| Gently-used folding hand-saws                          | \$22 each      |
| Gently-used loppers                                    | \$15 each      |
| Bottled water for thirsty volunteers (24 pack)         | \$4 each       |

Please contact the SMLC office if you would like to make our wishes come true!

(734) 484-6565 | info@smlcland.org

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