



Superior Township Chapter

Update

Preserving the rural character and natural habitats of Superior Township

Summer 2020

I Stand Corrected

By Brenda Baker—Co-Chair

During one of our Superior Township Chapter Steering Committee meetings several months ago, someone mentioned the small hill at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve that is noticeable to most passing motorists on Prospect Road. Another person referred to the hill as “Mount Smiley,” an unofficial name used as shorthand. Jack Smiley, the “mountain’s” namesake, happened to be sitting in that evening. When the group tried to estimate the height of the hill, Jack chimed in matter-of-factly, “Mount Smiley is shrinking.”

Being one of those who remembers before any part of LeFurge Woods was preserved and the hill was originally created, I looked back in my mind’s eye and concluded, “Yeah, I guess you’re right.” Like so many things in life, the shrinking of the hill had played out so slowly, I never noticed it until someone pointed it out.

In the weeks following that meeting, I thought back to the early days of the Superior Township Chapter (then known as the Superior Land Conservancy), and how it had felt to support our parent organization, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (SMLC), as we worked to protect a sizeable piece of land in the heart of my beloved Township against development associated with urban sprawl.

Close to Home

By Bill Secrest—Co-Chair

During the strange spring of 2020, driven like the rest of the world into social isolation, my wife, Misty, and I turned our gaze to the natural world – a close study of the seasonal procession in the Superior Greenway preserves. We watched as the subtle emergence of buds on the tips of limbs gradually unfurled into leaves and the light and airy forest grew lush and dark. The spring peepers awoke from their long winter slumbers and burst into song. Wildflowers bloomed in succession. The birds flew through on their seasonal journeys or nested and raised their hatchlings. There is nothing virtual out there. We were awakened to a marvelous sense of wonder at the interconnectedness of this living world. And we were not alone.



Gray skies overlooking the Conservancy Farm

Photo by Jim McIntyre

Daily, the parking lot at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve was overflowing. Families, having been confined to their homes to avoid the pandemic, escaped their boredom and loneliness by walking its trails. We enjoyed sharing their enjoyment, albeit at a safe distance. I recall in particular the memory of one family—mom, dad, an infant, a toddler, and an eight-year-old girl. The little girl was beaming behind a huge

bouquet of trillium that she’d been harvesting. I mentioned that ordinarily we don’t pick the wildflowers, but we’d make a special allowance for her as she’d found such a lovely batch.

Update

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of the
Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy

8383 Vreeland Road
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*...Preserving the rural character
and natural habitats of
Superior Township*

Our Steering Committee

Brenda Baker, *Co-Chair*
Bill Secrest, *Co-Chair*
Cathy Bach
Carla Bisaro
Jim McIntyre
Michelle McIntyre
Special Advisor: Jack R. Smiley

SMLC Staff

Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director
Julie McLaughlin, Stewardship &
Outreach Manager
Kathy Hammond, Office Specialist

Volunteer Profile—Cathy Bach

By Michelle McIntyre—STC Steering Committee Member

On a beautiful evening this spring, I sat with Cathy on the deck of her Superior Township home where she has lived with her husband Brian for almost 20 years. Surrounded by natural beauty like native trees and plants, beautifully tended flowerbeds, and a little pond filled with lily pads, we talked for almost two hours about her passion for nature and her volunteer work as a fellow Steering Committee Member of SMLC's Superior Township Chapter.

Cathy's passion for the out-of-doors started early in her life. In elementary school, she joined the Girl Scouts in her home state of New York. She attended camp each summer and then, after moving to Michigan, continued to participate in Girl Scout camps as a counselor. Also crediting her Mom, Cathy mentioned that taking walks in the woods with her Mom and helping in the flower gardens were big influences. In her adult years, Cathy's passion for nature continued to grow. One of the highlights of her career in ecology was her 20+ summers spent teaching at U of M's Biological station in northern Michigan. There, not only was she surrounded by a beautiful natural environment, but she also had the privilege of sharing her knowledge and enthusiasm with students.

Cathy completed her undergraduate studies at Kalamazoo College. During this time, she volunteered at an environmental education center where inner city youth from Boston learned the importance of wild places and

native species. There were many great moments and experiences she recalls from this time. One of the more humorous moments came at the end of a camp season. Cathy Bach looked on as a camper wrote her name. The resulting spelling? M-I-S-S B-A-R-K. It was then she realized the northeastern accent combined with the lack of nametags led her campers to associate her name with the bark of a tree! Cathy went on to receive her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and then to become an Eastern Michigan University professor for 18 years. Three classes she taught included Principles of Conservation, Ecology, and Animal Plant Interactions.

Now in retirement, one of Cathy's favorite activities is volunteering with the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy. She is a highly valued and respected member of our Superior Township Chapter Steering Committee. In 2018 Cathy was integral in bringing to life the chapter's idea for a native plant garden. She spearheaded the grant writing needed to secure funds for the project, with great success! Cathy also suggested the garden be designed to support beneficial



Cathy in the garden at her Superior Twp. home.
Photo by Brian Hazlett

See Volunteer Profile on pg. 8



Cultivating Connections to Help Future Conservationists

By Elizabeth Keller—Director at Wandering Washtenaw

The Human connection to Nature has no boundaries. There are physical ties, emotional bridges, sensory-driven experiences, and so much more to discover when one wanders outside! The feel and smell of a flowery breeze on your skin, the melody of a bird's song, the beauty of a butterfly landing on a flower, these things can't be manufactured. These moments are magic and they are out there waiting for anyone and everyone that is willing to take a step into Nature.

Through my unique position as Co-Founder of Wandering Washtenaw, I have witnessed people of all ages and walks of life interacting with the natural world. Children are my favorite group to be with outdoors. Their curiosity, lack of filter, and imagination is a beautiful thing to see. They notice and appreciate so much and remind grown-ups to stop, to look, and to delight in their surroundings. Children get down on the level of ants and are amazed at their ability to carry food ten times their size! They innocently wish on dandelions and yell in wide-open spaces just to hear the echo. This always brings a smile to my face. I hope it does for you too!

Children are not the only ones benefiting from time in the great outdoors; adults experience numerous benefits as well. When I'm out leading a walk at a preserve or local park, I am able to observe the effects of Nature first-

hand. I see the stress of a long week falling off the shoulders of the participants as the peace of the forest washes over them. People chat happily in groups of two or three as they stroll along the path. Some will point out pretty flowers and trees while others share their plant knowledge or identify a passing bird. I also hear newcomers make comments such as: "I didn't even know this park existed," or "This path is so cool!"

Often people mention they haven't been out like this in forever and they will definitely be coming back to check out other places. Hearing that is the most exciting thing for me. I truly believe that if people get out and cultivate relationships with their nearby parks and preserves they will come to care about them, they will work to protect them, and they will fight to conserve them!

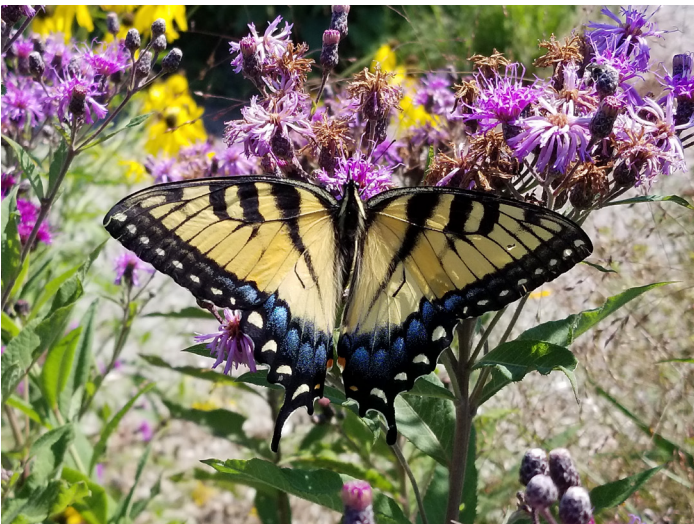
Parsnips in Michigan

By Carla Bisaro—STC Steering Committee Member

When wild parsnip was discovered blooming in the roadside ditch at the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve last summer, some observers became immediately alarmed. This plant, along with the giant hogweed and the more common cow parsnip, carries the threat of phytophotodermatitis, serious skin damage and blistering from contact with the sap and exposure to sunlight.

Because all three plants, members of the carrot family, are similar in appearance, it is important to learn to distinguish one from the other. At Argo Park in Ann Arbor, near the canoe livery, a large information board has been erected to illustrate the plants and their differences in order to identify them.

Size and flower color are the two greatest distinguishing characteristics. Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is the largest of the three, reaching a mature height of six to 12 feet or more; cow parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*) falls in the middle with a height of about eight feet.



A new resident of our Native Plant and Insect Garden
Photo by Jim McIntyre

See Parsnips on pg. 6

A Local Couple's Story of a Lifelong Love of Nature

By Gene & Margaret Szedenits—SMLC Volunteers

We both grew up in urban environments, surrounded by buildings, concrete, and traffic. Pet dogs or cats made up most of the nonhuman life we saw. The smaller amount of visible wildlife consisted of pigeons, squirrels, and the very rare sighting of a garbage-fat raccoon. But we were fortunate in that there were nearby parks with a lot of green. Gene had the Cleveland Metropolitan Park, the city's Emerald Necklace, to tramp through and Margaret could play in the green spaces created for the 1964 New York World's Fair. We developed a love of being in nature without even realizing it.

Later in life when we met and married, this love of being in nature and being surrounded by green spaces was one of the things we had in common. We were lucky enough to get treed acreage in Superior Township where we can feel quite spoiled by our daily view out any window. We have grown accustomed to common wonders that would have thrilled us as children like near-daily visits from deer or the variety of colorful birds at our feeder. Our excitement is now reserved for less frequent sightings, sometimes years apart, such as bald eagle, coyote, pileated woodpecker, and fox. We count ourselves very fortunate that such sights have become so familiar...and we are even more fortunate to have parts of the Superior Greenway around us to provide us with even more variety of habitat and wildlife.

Our young experiences gave us more than just a love of nature. As a Boy Scout Gene would go camping, and those trips often included some sort of project to help maintain the area. Margaret would volunteer at Queens Botanical Gardens with her sisters, helping out with whatever needed doing in the gardens. We acquired a sense of service to the natural areas and to whomever would enjoy them after us.

So now, in addition to working on our own property, we feel an obligation to pitch in on maintaining the greater natural areas around us. In spite of our strong introversion, we enjoy spending time outside working with others on preserves, whether Girl Scouts planting the Native Plant and Insect Garden at the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve for Rouge Rescue

or Julie McLaughlin removing invasives at the LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve for SMLC. We actually miss seeing the familiar faces and welcoming new ones during this time of quarantine and look forward to someday gathering again in aid of the outdoor places we love.

Corrected

Continued from pg. 1

In other words, to protect nature from ruin by people.

Time passed. The size of LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve more than doubled, as SMLC partnered with Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor Greenbelt, Superior Township, and private donors to acquire and protect additional acreage. The ponds created by the same wetlands project that resulted in Mount Smiley teemed with water-loving plant species, birds, amphibians, crayfish, muskrats, and more. A fire pit with a couple of picnic tables and an outhouse was established for Full Moon Campfires and other Conservancy events.

A small parking area was added, and enhanced several years later. Boardwalks were installed over wet stretches of trails and footbridges erected across streams, some of these as Eagle Scout projects.

My commute to and from work takes me past the LeFurge Woods parking area. For a long time, it was typical to see zero to two cars there in the late afternoon. It gradually increased to three or four cars. Then more. And then Stay Home Stay Safe happened, and it was springtime. I was laid off for a while, too, but I still had occasion to drive by. Cars could be seen overflowing from the parking lot onto Prospect Road at various times of day, any day of the week.

My younger self had been wrong. We have not protected nature from ruin by people. We have protected nature from ruin *for* people.



Chemical Defenses Make Wild Parsnips a Formidable Foe

By Cathy Bach—STC Steering Committee Member

Invasive wild parsnip is a fascinating example of how plants protect themselves from insects feeding on them, and how insect herbivores adapt to a plant's defenses. Wild parsnip, *Pastinaca sativa*, contains chemicals called furanocoumarins in all of its tissues – leaves, stems, roots, flowers and seeds. Furanocoumarins have the ability to cross-link DNA in the presence of UV light, which would kill any insect feeding on the plant in sunlight. But there is a very common herbivore that has no problem feeding on wild parsnip, the parsnip webworm, *Depressaria pastinacella*. What enables this insect to be able to feed on this plant? The parsnip webworm uses silk to tie together the flowers in the flower head into a tent, which creates a shaded environment in which it can feed on flowers and fruits for its entire life. No UV light, no cross-linking of DNA, no problems for the parsnip webworm.

Parsnip webworms (the larvae of the parsnip webworm moth) also feed on many of the relatives of wild parsnip, for example, Queen Anne's Lace. Most of these relatives also contain furanocoumarins. If you would like



A wild parsnip removed from the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve.
Photo by Jim McIntyre

to see a parsnip webworm, just check out the flower heads of the Queen Anne's Lace right behind the Conservancy Farm in the late summer. We found lots of them on the kids' nature hike during last year's SMLC fall picnic.

Humans, on the other hand, can be adversely affected by touching wild parsnip. They can experience parsnip rash, more officially known as phytophotodermatitis. A casual brush against the plant is likely to do no harm, but under the correct conditions, the resulting blisters can be quite painful. Before I even knew about this plant, I discovered the hard way exactly what those perfect conditions are. While teaching an ecology class, we sampled insects in a field and inadvertently damaged some of the tissues of wild parsnip plants, and it was a very hot and sunny day. The result of sweaty skin touching damaged plants in the sun: large blisters (some as big as 1" across), but only on the students who did not heed my warning about wearing long sleeves and long pants. If you want to remove this plant, be sure to protect your skin!

Save the Date!

SMLC's 1st Virtual Fundraising Event

Snap the Season

September 21 - October 4, 2020

For the first time, SMLC is offering a virtual fundraising event, [#snapsmlc](#). We're challenging supporters and new folks alike to make a donation, visit an SMLC nature preserve or four, and challenge your friends to do the same.

Capture the autumn season during your visit by snapping photos of your favorite sightings and sharing them on social media. Cool prizes will be awarded!

This fall, get outdoors and celebrate the natural beauty around you, support SMLC's conservation work, and have fun with your friends, too.

Visit www.smlcland.org/snap for details!

Close to Home

Continued from pg. 1

The family, though unfamiliar with the usual protocols of visiting a preserve, had discovered the joys it could bring. Such appreciation will gradually grow into respect and care.

The Superior Greenway serves as a learning lab to introduce Mother Nature to those who seemingly live apart from her. Everyone has the opportunity to plunge into the heart of our living world, relish her beauty, and rediscover our innate kinship with the fragile web of life.

This is the work of the hour. We all must learn to understand and cherish our greater family. I trust that the little girl, beaming with her trilliums, will not soon forget the magical life out beyond the city sidewalks, and will grow to see the beauty of the flowers left in place on the forest floor...

Parsnips

Continued from pg. 3

The wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) is the smallest with an average mature height of five feet. Both giant hogweed and cow parsnip have white blossoms, hence the often-confused identity. Timing can help determine identity, as cow parsnip blooms in early June, while giant hogweed blooms in late June or early July. Wild parsnip claims its distinction in its June to mid-July yellow blooms.

Of these three plants, only cow parsnip is a native plant; the other two are described as invasive species and noxious weeds. Giant hogweed is native to the Caucasus region of Asia, while wild parsnip comes to us from Eurasia. Cow parsnip and wild parsnip are equally abundant statewide, and giant hogweed has only limited distribution in the state of Michigan. If you see either of these invasive species at an SMLC nature preserve, please take a photo and report your sighting to the Stewardship and Outreach Manager at jmclaughlin@smlcand.org

Message from SMLC

It is no surprise that COVID-19 has been an imposing presence in SMLC's Operations and Governance this year. As our new operational year began in April, the Governor's lockdown brought with it a host of new requirements for us to follow. Led by Jill Lewis, Staff had to determine how the new requirements applied to SMLC and then implement those changes, with support from the Board. SMLC had to close our Conservancy Farm offices and Staff worked from home. In addition, SMLC had to: make policy changes; delay, defer or significantly alter many activities (e.g., the Garden Program, volunteer activities, fundraising); apply for financial assistance (PPP loan/grant), and communicate to our membership about these changes. STC Steering Committee members, as well as the Board and other Committees, became familiar with meeting remotely via Zoom.

As the lockdown was eased, in phases, SMLC began to resume the activities allowed at each phase. We are still not completely back to "normal", with the Conservancy Farm not yet open to the public and group activities still on hold. As of this writing, we don't know when full reopening will occur.

However, throughout this pandemic, SMLC's Nature Preserves, including those in the extensive Superior Greenway, have remained open to the public. SMLC is grateful to be able to provide access to nature as a place of solace, respite and healing during these challenging times. I hope you have enjoyed an "escape" to one of our preserves in the past months – or visit one today!

Mary Ericson—President
Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy

Headwaters of the Rouge: Sources of Life in the River

By Jaclyn Heikkila—Friends of the Rouge

Friends of the Rouge applauds the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy for preserving and restoring natural areas that make up some of the headwaters of the Rouge River. Headwaters offer a variety of ecosystem services that benefit humans, free of charge. Headwaters help filter and store pollutants such as excess nitrogen and phosphorus while sending clean, cool water downstream. Headwaters also control flooding by absorbing or slowing significant amounts of rainwater, runoff and snowmelt and recharge the groundwater. Large flood events from excessive rainfall can erode streambanks and increase sediment in the river which can wash away insect and fish habitat.

Wherever you are, you're in a watershed. Those who live or recreate in Superior Township may be unaware, but if you're at the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve, Kosch-Headwaters Preserve, or even SMLC's new Secrest Preserve, you're in the Rouge River watershed! Both of these preserves are home to some of the headwaters of the Rouge.



The Rouge River on a beautiful, sunny day.
Photo by Jaclyn Heikkila

Headwaters are the source or beginning of a river. They can originate from underground springs or wetlands and may not flow throughout the year or have a proper name, but all of the most iconic rivers start at humble headwater streams. Headwaters are like the capillaries of our streams, flowing into and joining other tributaries, compounding

into large river branches. According to the EPA, headwater streams make up about 53% of the total river miles in the continental United States. The Rouge River watershed drains water from 467 square miles into 4 branches (Main, Upper, Middle, and Lower) and spans 3 counties (Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne) and 48 municipalities in Southeast Michigan. All the water in the Rouge makes its way to the Detroit River which then flows into Lake Erie. River headwaters are critical in the health of the Rouge River because anything that happens upstream, affects everything downstream.

Southeast Michigan is highly developed, and with more than 50% of land in the Rouge watershed urbanized, pollution from runoff and flooding are major concerns. The landscape has many impervious surfaces, where water cannot penetrate into the soil as it naturally would, like roads, parking lots and roofs. With less than 25% of the watershed remaining undeveloped, natural areas are imperative to protect and maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Headwaters provide habitat for a diversity of plants, animals, birds, insects, amphibians and fish. Some species live in the headwaters year round while others may need them seasonally or for different parts of their life cycles. This diversity also supports a robust food web both in the stream and on the land, providing valuable food resources to birds, snakes and bats that can rely on stream animals including insects, salamanders, and fish for prey.

Restoration efforts by the Superior Township Chapter of Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy during the annual Rouge Rescue river cleanup at Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve and Kosch-Headwaters Preserve have been happening for over 10 years. Together, our efforts continue to protect the critical headwaters of the Rouge River, preventing downstream flooding and pollution, recharge groundwater, and provide valuable habitat for fish and wildlife. Next time you find yourself in Superior Township take a moment to appreciate the amazing source of life for the Rouge River.

YES! I want to help preserve critical natural habitat in Superior Township by supporting Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy.

\$ _____ Total Gift

Or, direct my donation:

\$ _____ Land Protection Fund

\$ _____ Stewardship Endowment Fund

☐ Check here to let SMLC use my gift where it is needed most

\$ _____ Superior Township Fund

Please make checks payable to Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy and mail to: **Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy
8383 Vreeland Rd
Superior Township, MI 48198**

Or, make a secure online credit card donation at **www.smlcland.org**

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All donations are tax deductible to the extent provided by law. The donor received no goods or services in exchange for this donation. Email used only for SMLC news/announcements. We will never give or sell your personal information to any other group.

"The poetry of the earth is never dead."

—John Keats

Volunteer Profile

Continued from pg. 2

insects and provide public education, an idea we all loved from the start. Known as the Native Plant and Insect Garden at the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve, this garden includes an array of plants and educational signage. If you haven't visited our showcase garden, you're missing out. We are all grateful for the many years of service Cathy has given to this organization and our community!

One final note:

Washtenaw County's Natural Areas Preservation Program (NAPP) has been a significant contributor to conservation success within the Superior Greenway. The NAPP millage is up for renewal on November 3, 2020. SMLC is greatly appreciative of the help we've received for Superior Township land protection.

Thank you NAPP!

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