



# LANDMARKS

Newsletter of the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy

Fall 2021



Superior Greenway Nature Trail at Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve.

Photo by Mark Even

## Resiliency - SMLC and Nature

By Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

Resiliency has become a buzzword, but trying to find a singular definition was challenging. There is a broad spectrum where the term is applied, including at the individual and organizational level, and within specific fields such as ecology, engineering and psychology.

**The online Oxford Learner's Dictionary states: Resilience - the ability of people or things to recover quickly after something unpleasant, such as shock, injury, etc.**

This may resonate on an individual level as we all emerge from the pandemic, hopefully healthy, safe and feeling more resilient than we might have when it started.

There are two reasons for my interest in resiliency, first, SMLC's long-term sustainability and second, the ability of SMLC's lands to survive and thrive from an ecosystem perspective.

Looking at this from an SMLC standpoint, Professor David Denyer of the Cranfield University School of Management in the United Kingdom describes organizational resiliency as *the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper.*

SMLC has been steadily working towards long-term sustainability for the past 10 years or more. Yet, when the pandemic hit no one had anticipated it and SMLC was not prepared for the scale of change that was needed. Fortunately, we were able to quickly respond and we are continuing to adapt. SMLC enacted the required orders and instituted needed temporary changes, some of which we have added to our ongoing operational functionality (virtual events and Zoom meetings are 2 examples).

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A newsletter published by:



## Conservation is in our Nature.

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



2021 is shaping up to be another challenging but also hopeful year. For some people, the word of the year is "Resiliency" (see pages 1 and 11). This is true for SMLC as well. Following the state re-opening in June, we began offering our regular outdoor public events starting with the Bat Count at the Conservancy Farm in early July. Since then we have held a handful of public events including a Dedication for the new Secrest Nature Preserve (see page 4 for news on the preserve opening). Although it has felt good to be able to conduct more normal activities, the office closed again to the public and indoor gatherings in late August. This was after a short reprieve of being more open earlier in the summer.

In the spirit of the Naturehood – where we all unite for conservation – SMLC was pleased to hold the rescheduled Red Barn Bash on October 23rd at the historic Ypsilanti Freighthouse. We enjoyed seeing everyone who attended and who participated in our first-ever virtual event that ran through October. **Thank you to our first-ever Honorary Chairs:** Mandy Grewal, Supervisor, Pittsfield Township; Melissa Prowse, Supervisor of Planning and Resource Development, Oakland County Parks; and Sue Shink, Chair, Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners. SMLC also expresses deep appreciation to all of our sponsors, donors and volunteers for making this event so special!

Many thanks are due to longstanding donors, Bill Secrest and Misty Callies, for their strong commitment to local land conservation. Because of their generosity, SMLC was able to purchase a 2010 Chevrolet Silverado this past June and it has already proven immensely useful for our programmatic efforts. Additionally, the *SMLC Conservation Video series* was made possible due to their financial and hands-on support. SMLC showcased the series as part of this year's Red Barn Bash. Featured videos include: The Superior Greenway in the Spring; Sibley Prairie in the Summer; and Lost Lake Nature Preserve in Autumn. SMLC plans to release the beautiful, educational, and inspiring videos for public viewing in 2022.

Finally, **conservation continues** through the pandemic and SMLC was successful in receiving two stewardship grants earlier this year to help with needed projects - see page 5 for details. **Thank you** for being part of this journey and supporting SMLC along the way.



SMLC's new pickup truck.

Photo by Julie McLaughlin



# 2021 Stewardship Fund Campaign

Land stewardship is a necessary and ongoing endeavor after natural areas and open space have been acquired for preservation in southeast Michigan. Most lands benefit from human intervention after years of degradation caused by clearing, filling, dumping and other unnatural changes. Doing nothing, in many cases, means lower quality wildlife habitat, little to no public access infrastructure, and more vulnerability to climate change. Successful land stewardship requires funding, professional and voluntary assistance, and adaptive management.

*“Caring for the land, the significance of doing things for life, then watching the fabric of diversity reweave a carpet of color, sound, movement and beauty in our forests, meadows, and wetlands - there is no greater joy.”*

- Shawn Severance,

## SMLC Stewardship Committee Chair

To meet this growing need, the SMLC Board of Directors is establishing a new public Stewardship Fund. The Fund’s purpose is to support the ongoing stewardship costs associated with nature preserve ownership, conservation easement responsibilities, and building/equipment upkeep.

**The Carls Foundation** will award SMLC a \$75,000 matching grant if SMLC raises \$75,000 by 12-31-21. Achieving this goal will result in **\$150,000 in initial seed funding** to address projected stewardship needs during the next 5 years. The new permanent Fund will continue to receive public support in order to provide for longer range future expenses.

The opportunity to support this important new Fund and have your gift doubled is now. You can help SMLC continue our longstanding and successful land stewardship work with your gift today. **Thank You.**



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SMLC is deeply grateful to all of the other businesses, individuals, and volunteers who contributed to our Red Barn Bash, especially to: Boisvenu & Company, P.C.; Guardian Plumbing and Heating; Margolis Nursery and Companies; Moosejaw; O&W Distributors, Inc.; and Tammy's Tastings.



# Secrest Nature Preserve is Open

By Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

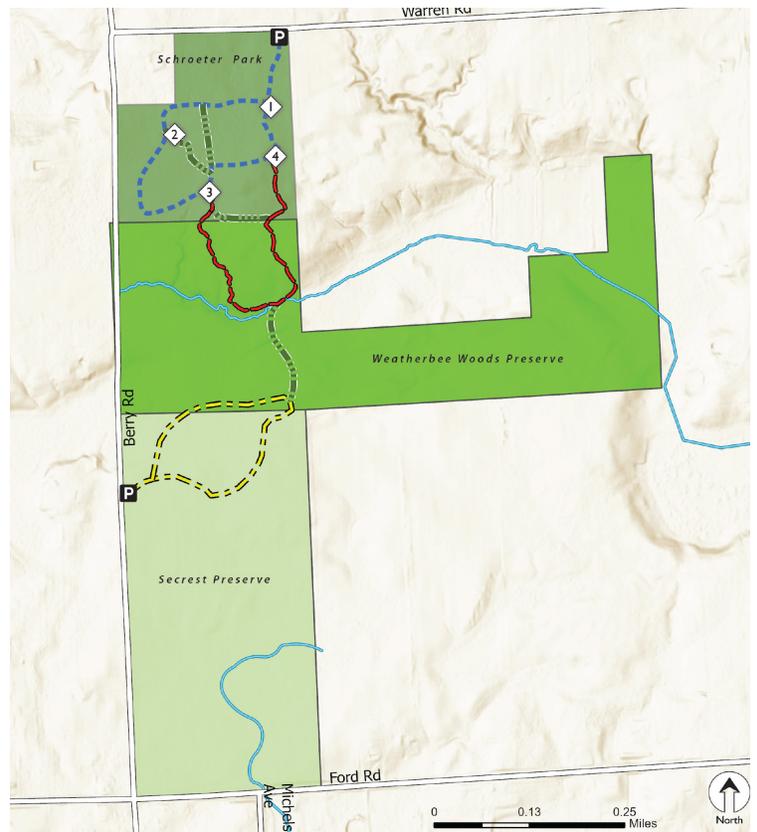
On September 12th, SMLC held a private Dedication event to preview the grand opening of the Secrest Nature Preserve. Attendees of the Dedication included members of the Secrest family, who have been instrumental in supporting land protection efforts in Superior Township and across the region for many years, the Superior Greenway Partners, and members of SMLC’s Board of Directors and local Superior Township Chapter.

Attendees previewed the new trail and connection to the existing trails at Washtenaw County’s Weatherbee Woods Preserve and Superior Township’s Schroeter Park to the north. This 2-mile trail system is part of the consolidation of 278 acres of protected land north of Ford Road in the Greenway. Visitors to the Secrest Preserve will find scenic vistas of neighboring farmland and a beautiful old-growth oak woods along the new loop trail where it adjoins Weatherbee Woods.

**“One of the successes of the County’s NAPP program has been working with local partners to protect more land and provide additional recreation trails for the public. The purchase of the property is a great example of both of these: extending existing trails from Weatherbee Woods, owned by Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation, and partnering with SMLC and the City of Ann Arbor’s Greenbelt program to see this land protected and open to the public.”**  
 - Ginny Leikam, Superintendent of Planning and NAPP, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission

The 80-acre preserve is a late 2019 addition to the Superior Greenway, a 2,700+-acre wildlife and public recreation corridor, located in Superior Township. The acquisition was made possible with significant support from Washtenaw County’s Natural Areas Preservation Program (NAPP), who holds the conservation easement on the property, and the City of Ann Arbor’s Greenbelt program.

## Secrest Nature Preserve Trail Map



**The Secrest Family planting a ceremonial tree.**

Photo by Joey Geffen



## LeFurge Woods Visitor Improvements

*By Julie McLaughlin, Stewardship and Outreach Manager*

In 2020 during the height of COVID lockdowns, visitors flocked to natural areas in record numbers. SMLC nature preserves were no exception to this, especially the already popular LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve. With increased traffic came increased impacts: more feet stomping through muddy hiking trails, cars parking beyond designated areas, and trash being dumped at trailheads.

As an organization committed to providing people with access to nature, SMLC saw this as an opportunity to engage with our local communities, and to provide a positive experience for new trail users. Thanks to the 2021 Restoration and Resilience Fund Sponsorship from the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), Toyota Motor North America, IP, and the Hilton Effect Foundation, we implemented several conservation and maintenance projects at LeFurge Woods.

Visitors will immediately have a more enjoyable experience due to the upgraded parking lot and new parking bollards installed. These cues to care are important in showing visitors that we are working actively to address issues at the nature preserve. They also serve a purpose of keeping cars off of natural areas such as meadows, which can then be enjoyed by all in the community.

In addition, the trailhead has been transformed from a hedgerow of mostly invasive shrubs, to a rain garden of native plants, which functions to hold and filter parking lot runoff and as a teaching tool for visitors (see box for details.)

Further down the trail, several boardwalks and footbridges have been installed to keep visitors on the trail in wet areas, and to protect the wet areas from foot traffic as well as to keep hiker's feet dry, providing a more positive hiking experience. Additional and more accurate trail maps provide a sense of safety for new visitors as well as encourage them to return to explore new trails.

We encourage you to come out and see the new and improved LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve public amenities!

### Digging out the future rain garden.

*Photo by Julie McLaughlin*



## SMLC's New Rain Garden

*By Julie McLaughlin*

Rain gardens capture stormwater runoff before it pollutes our local rivers - while providing beautiful gardenscapes throughout the growing season. As part of the visitor improvements to LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve, and as the final step in receiving my Master Rain Gardener certification, I led a team of volunteers to design, build, and install SMLC's first-ever rain garden at the trailhead of this preserve.

At LeFurge Woods, parking lot and farm field runoff leads directly downhill from the entrance into several wetlands. The speed and quantity of water during extreme precipitation events, which are increasing due to climate change, results in gullies being formed along the trail and sedimentation and other pollutants being dumped into the wetlands.

The garden was designed and installed with the help of a Master Gardener (Ella Bourland) and Stewardship Interns (Russell Love, Cade Schafer, and Allison Vega). Funding was provided by the National Environmental Education Foundation (see details above).

The rain garden is also a template for future work. Already, three volunteers with the MSU Extension's Conservation Stewards Program have signed on to plan two additional rain gardens, with plants provided by the Washtenaw County Conservation District through a School & Community Habitat Grant.

## Misty Callies, Event Planning Committee Chair

Misty has spearheaded the bi-annual Red Barn Bash fundraising event since 2014. She first got involved by supporting her husband, Bill Secrest, who is a long-serving Board Director. Misty comes from a rural background and they moved to Superior Township because of its rural character. "SMLC's work here and elsewhere, along with its many partners, has helped counteract the continuing pressure of development," she says.

Misty believes that everyone, to the extent possible, has a responsibility to lead a productive, inspired life, and giving to the community is part of that. If you are considering volunteering, she says, "Just do it, but start slowly, finding what interests and rewards you. You want to enjoy it and feel positive about the work you're doing."



**Event Planning Committee Chair Misty Callies.**

*Photo by Joey Geffen*



**Drone photography of Slack Lake.**

*Photo by George Kasdorf*

## George Kasdorf, Stewardship Volunteer

If you've enjoyed a visit to an SMLC nature preserve in the past 5 years, you likely owe some gratitude to George Kasdorf. Behind the scenes, George helps to maintain SMLC's natural areas, as well as the various equipment and infrastructure that goes into creating public access to nature.

George joined SMLC after recently retiring and wanting to keep busy. The Conservancy Farm where he is based reminded his wife of their property in Indiana. He enjoys most of his volunteer activities, including "riding around on a tractor mowing on a warm summer day, fixing something that is broke." Tackling big projects is no big deal – last winter he cleared a 20 acre field at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve!

George's appreciation for land protection is personal: "I enjoy getting out in the woods, running (literally) through the fields on the trails, and SMLC helps to preserve the ability to do that by helping to curb development that is so prevalent in the area."



**Fringed gentian in bloom.**

*Photo by Julie McLaughlin*



## Mitch Hall, Board of Directors Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair

Mitch Hall got involved because he loved running on the area trails while he worked for Domino's Pizza Headquarters (for 30 years!). As he neared retirement, he wanted to work on things he cared about - SMLC stood out for conserving land in the area.

Mitch is proud of the work the Finance Committee is doing to help SMLC be able to protect more land forever. One recent achievement was changing the SMLC Stewardship Endowment investments to meet environmental, social and governance standards.

Mitch says, "Even though I don't have much experience with land conservation, I've been able to find ways that I can help SMLC. Since I'm a finance guy, that has meant I've focused on being the SMLC Treasurer, and being on the Finance Committee. And I can tell you that SMLC needs your talent (and your resources) to achieve its mission."



**Interns and volunteers constructing a new trail.**

*Photo by Julie McLaughlin*

## Russell Love, Vernal Pools Intern

As a student at Eastern Michigan University, Russell led volunteers, interns, and staff on a quest to document and monitor vernal pools across several SMLC nature preserves. In between pool visits, he was also an instrumental part of the Stewardship team, jumping in with a positive attitude to help with trail maintenance, invasive species management, and restoration.



**Monitoring vernal pools in spring.**

*Photo by Julie McLaughlin*

Russell joined the SMLC team in order to expand his experience in fieldwork while also gaining a greater understanding of the environment and how to preserve it. He is currently in school pursuing environmental science and wanted to get some hands-on experience to accompany his degree. "SMLC seemed like the perfect place for me to both learn about nature and help give back to the community."

One notable experience volunteering with SMLC was introducing native plants to Jack R. Smiley nature preserve as part of a prairie planting. "It was great to see so many people from the community coming together to help make our natural areas even more beautiful than they already are."

He wants potential volunteers to know that no level of knowledge or experience is too small to volunteer!

## Many thanks to our volunteers...

To the **Landmarks** newsletter contributors: Misty Callies, Mitch Hall, George Kasdorf, Russell Love, Bill Secrest, Jack Smiley, and John Woollam.

To our **photographers**: Mark Even, Joey Geffen, George Kasdorf, and Jack Smiley.

To the **stewardship volunteers**: Joyce Arakelian, Michael Arnold, Cathy Bach, Ruby Barron, Nora Bhandari, Amena Bidery, Laura Bien, Carla Bisaro, Kevin Bohannon, Ella Bourland, Mars and Quinn Castman, Amelia Clark, Andrea DeAgostino, Eva Deck, Sarah Ferrero, Bryan Garchar, Jeffrey and Marilyn Gilbert, Ann Gladwin, Alex Goren, Colby Gura, Toby Hartman, Michelle Hartzog, Bill Hickey, Adam Huttenstine, Tristan Janisse, George Kasdorf, Shahrose Khan, Ellen Kurath, Russell Love, Sally Lunn, Nyah Maddox, Andy Magsam, Wayne McGarrah, Michelle, Jim and Cameron McIntyre, Rita Mitchell, Robert Moll, Bridget and Jack Neview, Tiffany Ng, David Olson, Patrick Pelley, Cassie Russ, Cade Schafer, Lauren Sellman, Shawn Severance, Moamen Shukeir, Jack Smiley, James and Sue Smith, Gene and Margaret Szedenits, Parker Tousignant, Allison and Lisa Vega, Ali Vogt, Kristin Warzyniec; and Dana, Greg and Frankie Wnuk.

To our **event and tabling volunteers**: Brenda Baker, Carla Bisaro, Kevin Bohannon, Marty Davis-Merritts, Michelle, Jim and Cameron McIntyre, and Stephanie Nicholas.

And a special thank you to our **Event Planning Committee**: Michelle Andrzejak, Misty Callies, Heidi Guenther, Michelle McIntyre, Maria Vicini, and Rebecca Wauldron.

**Thanks to everyone who volunteered with SMLC this year!**

We are always looking for dedicated people who want to help SMLC achieve our mission. For more information about volunteering, please contact Julie McLaughlin at [jmclaughlin@smlcland.org](mailto:jmclaughlin@smlcland.org) or call 734-484-6565.

### Partnership award recipients at Secrest Dedication.

Photo by Joey Geffen



## SMLC's 2021 Award Recipients

**City of Ann Arbor (Greenbelt program)**  
- *Community Partner Award*

**Superior Charter Township**  
- *Community Partner Award*

**Washtenaw County Natural Areas Preservation Program** - *Community Partner Award*

**James T. Weiner** - *Jack R. Smiley Conservation Award*

**Jeffrey and Marilyn Gilbert** - *Legacy Volunteer Award*

**Jim and Pat Robertson** - *Legacy Volunteer Award*

### Jill Lewis and James Weiner

Photo by Joey Geffen



## Conservation Profile: John Woollam

*By the J.A. Woollam Foundation and Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director*

This Conservation Profile highlights Professor John Woollam and the J.A. Woollam Foundation, headquartered in Lincoln, NE. In 2013, John and Cyndi Woollam made a major contribution to purchase SMLC's Lost Lake Nature Preserve and the Foundation helped fund and manage initial property-readiness projects including the removal of old buildings and extensive historic trash, and the construction of the public trail and parking area.

John and the Foundation are no strangers to conservation. They have worked on projects large and small. They often do these in collaboration with other major donors for large conservation projects.

The Foundation also does conservation on its own. John grew up in the Kalamazoo area of Michigan. During those years he developed a strong love



**John Woollam.**

*Photo courtesy of the J.A. Woollam Foundation*

of special places around the state. One of those includes the forests surrounding the small lake near Kalamazoo where his family had a summer cottage. These forests are now totally protected in perpetuity.

Another example where a deep love developed is land surrounding a hunting and fishing club in the northeastern lower peninsula. Large areas are now protected from future development, including the headwaters of the Thunder Bay River and miles of stream.

**“It’s important that these precious remaining areas of Michigan and elsewhere be protected for future generations to enjoy and appreciate. It’s also important to provide habitat for plants and animals to have safe and adequate space to survive and propagate.”**

However, in most of its work the J.A. Woollam Foundation collaborates with other donors to help small to intermediate-size Land Trusts such as SMLC. These land trusts then either purchase nature preserves outright, or purchase conservation easements to forever conserve and protect special places.

Much of J.A. Woollam Foundation’s conservation work is done in Michigan, Nebraska and a few other places. For example, in the last 20 or so years it has worked with about a dozen Michigan land trusts to protect land from Detroit to the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula.

SMLC’s Lost Lake Preserve is at the heart of what the Foundation loves to do: protect land bordering water, including marshes and wetlands often near lake shores. Lost Lake was an ideal opportunity for the Foundation to help protect one of the best remaining pristine lakes in southeast Michigan.

The J.A. Woollam Foundation encourages readers to search their hearts for those places you love and want to forever protect. John states, “working together, we can achieve amazing progress and forever protect these special places.”

## What's Up in Superior Township?

By Bill Secrest, Superior Township Chapter  
Steering Committee Co-Chair

For thirty years the Superior Township Chapter of the SMLC has helped its "parent" establish 2,700 acres of preserved open spaces—forests, meadows, streams, and farmland. Now known as the Superior Greenway, a crown jewel of land preservation in southeast Michigan, our greenbelt is a work in progress. Passing the "for sale" signs that dot our Township, we know our work is far from finished. Suburban sprawl leans in from all sides, but we stand with our many partners—individuals, government agencies, and other environmental groups—to defend our Mother Earth.

This fall we've just opened our newest preserve. Our committee is also creating a native plant meadow at the entrance to the J. R. Smiley Preserve and Greenway trail—just across the road from our Township Hall. This is great advertising! Meanwhile, local university interns are working with the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, collecting data on the effulgent life in our vernal ponds. Our community organic gardens are nourishing local families with healthy food, and full moon campfires and seasonal nature walks are resuming post pandemic.

Bringing the neighbors who care together with the expertise of the SMLC is providing great avenues of hope in the midst of these environmentally troubled times. Interested in doing likewise in your locale? Join with some like-minded neighbors and do what we're doing. It's the interrelationship between conservancies and the communities they serve that build living "Naturehoods".

### Bumblebees at the Community Garden.

Photo by Jack Smiley



## SMLC's Community Organic Garden

Begun in 2005, SMLC's Community Organic Garden welcomed 16 new gardeners this year who enjoyed growing their own flowers and veggies at the Conservancy Farm. This was much better than last year when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a delay in opening the garden and a number of people found other garden spots for the year. Thirty-two plots were used this year and gardeners ventured from as far away as Novi and Detroit.

Bountiful harvests included such crops as beans, corn, tomatoes, squash, peppers, lettuce, strawberries, cucumbers, bok choy and potatoes. Marigolds, hollyhocks and zinnias were some of the popular flowers which were grown. Ashley Sapp, of Ann Arbor, summed up the garden nicely. "It was a beautiful season. The garden teaches us many valuable lessons--patience, perseverance, humility, and more."



**Strawberries, onions, beans and corn grew well at the Community Organic Garden.** Photo by Jack Smiley

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](http://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.**





## Red-backed Salamander

From the Smithsonian's National Zoo Reptile Discovery Center

Eastern red-backed salamanders extend from Minnesota to North Carolina and northeastern Tennessee in the United States, and from western Ontario to southern Quebec and throughout Nova Scotia in Canada.

Due to their lack of lungs, eastern red-backed salamanders need to live in damp or moist habitats in order to breathe. They are often found in or under logs, leaf-litter and burrows of deciduous forests. In colder months, these salamanders go under the frozen ground.

Noticeably territorial, eastern red-backed salamanders will mark their territory with their scent and dung to notify other salamanders of their presence, range and size. If another salamander enters their territory, these salamanders will exhibit threatening displays to scare off the intruder.

Eastern red-backed salamanders can evade predators by dropping all or part of their tail in the event of an attack. In its place, a new tail will eventually grow, though this new tail may be duller in color.



**This salamander was found under a log at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve.** Photo by Julie McLaughlin

Continued from page 1

When we plan for 2022 and beyond, we will consider whether future changes are needed such as virtual programming. It is too early to measure SMLC's resiliency given what has occurred. However, one positive indicator is the level of donor and funder support we received in 2020 and 2021.

### Thank you!

Ecosystem resiliency is an important factor for conservation planning and decision-making. Michael Grove, an ASLA Fellow with the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) writes, "*Ecological resiliency refers to the amount of external disturbance that an ecosystem can withstand and recover from, without fundamentally altering its vital processes and structures. Individual species or components of an ecosystem might undergo dramatic elasticity, although the system as a whole retains its integrity.*"

Space does not allow me to expand upon all the ways an ecosystem, such as a natural wetland, demonstrates resiliency. One significant measure is biodiversity – the variety of plant, animal, and

fungi life that co-exist and enhance the overall system within that wetland. Biodiversity informs SMLC's stewardship work, for example, removing monoculture invasive species so the native plant species can survive; restoring degraded lands so that improved habitats can emerge; and planting native species to diversify all life in that location.

To incorporate ecosystem resiliency more fully into SMLC's conservation decision-making means increased annual funding and capacity to do so. This is a worthy goal since resiliency is clearly needed for thriving organizations and ecosystems.

### Get Email Updates from SMLC



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[info@smlcland.org](mailto:info@smlcland.org)

**Yes!** I want to help preserve critical natural habitat in southeast 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.*

## Wish List

SMLC could use the following items:

Item Needed	Retail Cost
6' x 18' utility trailer	\$3,500
3 point hitch tractor wood chipper attachment	\$2,500
Riding lawnmower (used)	\$1,400
Fire Safety Equipment	\$1,100
Good working order black and white Business Printer	\$250
New or gently used linens for our Farmhouse kitchen and bathroom	\$150
Pack of leather gloves for volunteers	\$100
Vernal pool monitoring kits	\$75 each

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

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