

A vibrant yellow bird with black stripes on its wings is perched on a branch with green leaves. The bird is the central focus, looking slightly to the left. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and blue.

THE SPROUT

NICHES LAND TRUST | FALL 2017 | VOLUME 21 ISSUE 4

SPECIAL EDITION | DONATED LAND

“Laws change; people die; the land remains.” - Abraham Lincoln

A Letter From Our President...

Dear Members,

I am sure that almost all of you have been to a national park and enjoyed its beauty and wilderness. The world is a better place for having publicly accessible natural areas for people to connect with the natural world. Ken Burns called our national parks America's best idea in his PBS series. Fortunately, we have long benefitted from individual landowners who were willing and able to donate their land for conservation, like Laurance Rockefeller who systematically bought ranches in the Tetons and then donated them to the National Park Service. If you have enjoyed any NICHES properties, you know that beauty and inspiration can be found in our Hoosier landscapes. Many local natural areas have been donated to NICHES, allowing us to enjoy the thrill of the outdoors.

This issue of *The Sprout* is a celebration of the people and lands that were donated to NICHES Land Trust, from Weaver Island in the Wabash River, our first in 1997, to Honey Branch Bluff along Big Pine Creek, our latest addition in 2016. Altogether there have been 27 donations of natural lands to NICHES over the years. We in the NICHES family thank every one of these donors for allowing us the opportunity to commune with nature locally. If you love your land and want to ensure that it will be free of development, and a home for native plants and animals forever, give us a call. We want to hear your stories and dreams for the land, and we look forward to working with you to make those dreams a reality.



Linda Anderson
NICHES Board President



NICHES 1st
Property!

Weaver Island

Carroll County

Donated in 1996

NICHES 1st Hermit:
Kelsie Niffenegger!
Camped on Weaver Island
and journaled for 7 days!
Contact NICHES to be the
2018 hermit!



The **Weaver Family Nature Reserve** consists of two islands totaling 20 acres on the Wabash River north of Delphi in Carroll County. The smaller island, 5.4 acres, includes a Great Blue Heron rookery. Please do not disturb the herons during nesting season – late March through June. The first property ever acquired by NICHES, the two islands in the Wabash River were a gift from the Dix Weaver family in 1996. Public access only by boat.

Wise Island

Tippecanoe County

Donated in 2009



Wise Island is a 2-acre island in the middle of the Wabash River in the northeast corner of Tippecanoe county. Silver maples and cottonwoods dominate the island woods. Abundant bird life visits and nests on the island, including Belted Kingfishers and Bald Eagles. The island is a potential stopover site when canoeing down the Wabash River. The island was once owned by the Wise, Hanna, and Brenneman families; it was donated to NICHES by the Wise Family in 2009. Only accessible by boat.



Honey Branch Bluff
Warren County
Donated in 2016

Honey Branch Bluff includes a 35-foot sandstone bluff crowned with native white pine and ornamented with red cedar jutting over Big Pine Creek. In December 2016, NICHES acquired 24 acres along Big Pine Creek from Kathleen Kitch, Dana Goodman, and Pam and Mike Murr.

“After we decided to donate a parcel of our land, NICHES made the entire process very simple and painless. Gus guided us along with information needed and before we knew it, we had to come up with a name for it...which was actually the hardest part! We finally came up with “Honey Branch Bluffs” which identifies the area by the small Honey Branch Creek running into the Big Pine Creek and the beautiful bluffs that line the creek.”

Pam Murr

Thank you to our sponsors!



Bob Rohrman Subaru



Carroll County
INDIANA
**ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION**



Dow AgroSciences

Big Pine Creek Watershed

Rhus Radicans is a 20 acre property donated to NICHES Land Trust by the former owners Jim Ahlrich (deceased) and Bill McFee in the fall 2014. The property provided NICHES Land Trust's first holding along Big Pine Creek. Pictured (left to right) Gus Nyberg, Jim Ahlrich, Bill McFee.



Rhus Radicans
Warren County
Donated in 2014



Hewitt Estate
Warren County
Donated in 2008

Photo by Dana Goodman

Dana used to climb "Yee Haw," a giant white pine tree, every morning to start his day.



Crows Grove
Warren County
Donated in 2015

In 2008, Bryce **Hewitt's estate** increased the amount of protected land in the Big Pine Creek Valley by donating 163 acres to NICHES. Bryce wanted the woods to be protected forever and continue to be enjoyed by enthusiasts as a natural area. No trails, no parking lot.

Crows Grove is a gorgeous property that was generously donated to NICHES Land Trust by Ronald and Martha Crow Pugh and Chester and Freda Crow Butler in loving memory of Russell and Ruth Crow, the parents of Martha Crow Pugh and Freda Crow Butler.

Phil & Joan Ferguson Nature Preserve



Clinton County

Donated in 2013

A property of fantastic features, the **Ferguson Preserve** offers rich habitat situated along Kilmore Creek. Located in Clinton County, this property came to NICHES from Jeff Ferguson. Jeff Ferguson was introduced to NICHES by founding member, Susan Ulrich. Jeff has a lifelong passion for the natural world, instilled by his parents, Phil and Joan Ferguson. He has a long-term concern for the land and for a wide variety of song birds reliant on habitat access. This led him to donate 21 acres of land and creek to NICHES for permanent conservation. No trails and no parking.

“I have seen NICHES grow and thrive in the four years since I have been a member. Because of this, I have committed myself to leave a portion of my estate to the organization. When I look out at the preserve from my home, it truly makes my heart glow and my soul smile. I know that it offers food, water, and shelter for a broad range of wildlife. And it will remain that way forever.”



Wildcat Creek Foundation & Jerry E. Clegg Foundation

Clegg Memorial Garden

Donated in 2015

Photo by Kelly Boich

Clegg Memorial Garden is one of NICHES most well-known properties. Sitting along Wildcat Creek, it is an easily accessible property, and the NICHES Land Trust office headquarters is located there! Clegg Memorial Garden was owned by Ruth and Harold Clegg since the late 1930's. The Cleggs opened the property to the public as a memorial on April 18, 1965, in honor of their son, Jerry E. Clegg. Harold and Ruth Clegg endowed the memorial garden through the Jerry E. Clegg Foundation, after their passing. NICHES acquired Clegg Memorial Garden in 2015, after merging with the Jerry E. Clegg Foundation.

Mussel Shoals, Heron Bottoms, Sixbey, Peter's Mill, and McCallister properties (not pictured) were acquired by NICHES after merging with the Wildcat Creek Foundation in 2013.

NICHES is honored to be chosen as the hometown charity for the Bob Rohrman Subaru "Share the Love" event again this year! Any Subaru purchased or leased at a Rohrman Subaru between November 16, 2017, and January 2, 2018, results in a \$250 contribution to a charity of your choice. Please help spread the word to choose NICHES for your local charity







Deer Creek

Berkshire -Tarnowski Forest Preserve
Donated in 2013

NICHES acquired a few properties located along Deer Creek in Carroll County. These properties are Mary I. Gerard Nature Reserve, Berkshire-Tarnowski Forest Preserve, and the newly acquired Whistler Woods!

In honor of his mother, **Mary I. Gerard**, Charles Gerard donated 6-acres of bottomland woods along Deer Creek east of Delphi. A noted local historian, Charles Gerard, avidly supported local organizations dedicated to historical preservation and natural area conservation. Mr. Gerard authored numerous publications of local interest, including, “The Mystique of Deer Creek.” The Gerard property has a short trail to a creek and shale bluff.

Berkshire-Tarnowski was donated to NICHES by Judy Berkshire and Jim Tarnowski in 2013. This property is 44 acres of reforestation older than twenty years with three-quarters of a mile frontage along Deer Creek. There is a new parking lot (south of 350 North) and a loop trail!

Whistler Woods was recently donated/obtained from DNR/INDOT. This newly acquired property is home to shale bluffs, the state-listed endangered Forked Aster, and other rare species such as: Kalms Lobelia, Turtlehead, and American Spikenard.

NICHES Stewardship Endowment



*Each petal is worth \$2500

We're up to
\$15,000!

All contributions
made by December
25, 2017, will be
matched by the Roy
Whistler
Foundation up to
\$50,000!

Help bring color to
our coneflower with
your contributions!



Estate Planning with Nancy Litzenberger

Long-time supporter and former NICHES Board Member, Nancy Litzenberger, worked with NICHES to include the conservation of 40 acres of the woods adjacent to Wright Rock Creek along with a stewardship budget in her estate plan. Nancy's woods are classic Warren County, including rolling hills cloaked in mature oaks, rare oak woodland plants, like the Poke Milkweed pictured above, along with some sandstone rock outcrops.

“NICHES is very thankful for Nancy's choice to work with us to protect her land and add additional acreage to our Wright Rock Creek Nature Preserve. The addition will help secure a long-term future for the plants and animals that call the area home.”

Gus Nyberg

Contact NICHES to ensure that your land is protected in your estate plan.



Thank you to the McAllister Foundation & The Community Foundation of Greater Lafayette for the donation of funds for NICHES new stewardship truck!

Frogs Glory
Carroll County
Donated in 2012



In May of 2012, Margaret Marchand donated the 37 acres edging the Tippecanoe River in Carroll County to NICHES for

conservation, stewardship, and public access. At Margaret's request, the preserve is named after the nickname of a school-house that Margaret's mother attended. **Frogs Glory** is in the process of being restored to oak hickory woodland with a section of prairie.

A 33-acre refuge in Montgomery County, located in the northeast corner of Crawfordsville, **Walnut Fork Wildlife Refuge** features quite diverse native plant and wildlife populations. The refuge was gifted to NICHES from the city of Crawfordsville in 1999 and, shepherded by past NICHES board president Ted Harris. The city welcomes school groups and others to use the property; however, the land is intended primarily as a wildlife refuge rather than a place where people wander freely. Entrance by permission only.

Walnut Fork Wildlife Area
Montgomery County
Donated in 1999



Black Rock Barrens Warren County Donated to NICHS 2000



Photo by Ming Li

This 100-acre wooded area (which adjoins the east boundary of NICHS Weiler-Leopold property) was originally purchased by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in the summer of 1999 on behalf of NICHS. The property was then donated to NICHS upon TNC receiving a grant award from the Indiana Heritage Trust at the end of 2000. Your purchase of the environmental license plate helps to support the protection of Indiana natural areas.



One section of the **Black Rock Barrens** is situated in a siltstone glade community, which is extremely rare in the Midwest. Sixty acres are wooded; the remaining 40 acres of bottomlands were reforested in spring 2001. Although adjacent to Weiler-Leopold, the character of Black Rock Barrens differs notably. Walk the adjoining trail systems that meet in the shared parking lot to gain a feel for the distinct habitats.

Black Rock Barrens has a variety of spring woodland wildflowers starting with Salt & Pepper in March. The best wildflower display is at the base of the slopes where the most moisture accumulates. Flora species include Spring Beauty, Sessile Trillium, Blue Woodland Phlox, and in late spring masses of Wild Hyacinth—a panoply of literally thousands of plants.

Box turtles sighted during NICHS BioBlitz
2017 at Black Rock Barrens!



NICHS Land Trust 13

Jasper and Newton County Properties



Holley Savanna

Gretchen Vacendak and her late husband James used their property as a country escape, a place for their three boys to explore nature. NICHES is honored to have the responsibility for the management of the property, now known as the **James P. Vacendak Wildlife Preserve**.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) transferred **Holley Savanna** ownership to NICHES. The addition of Holley marked NICHES twentieth protected property and its first property in Newton County. The acreage had been willed to TNC by Carroll O. Holley in 1989 to be preserved as timber land and a wildlife preserve.

NICHES acquired the 36-acre **Gish Property** of wet flat woods, white oak dominated, upland sand woods, and hay field by donation from Fay Gish Hill. Fay decided to donate her property after watching NICHES Fisher Oak Savanna property develop over the years of restoring it back to its native ecosystem.

NICHES obtained the 10 acre property known as “**The Ranch**” in 2011 from the Jasper County Soil and Water Conservation District. It was originally donated as a memorial to Ruth and James Robertson by the Wallace and Robertson families.

Vacendak Wildlife Preserve
Newton County
Donated in 2014

Holley Savanna
Newton County
Donated in 2005

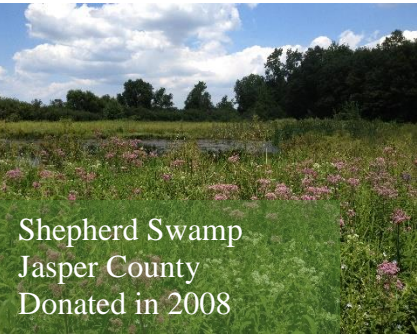
Gish Property
Jasper County
Donated in 2014

The Ranch
Jasper County
Donated in 2011



Holley Savanna

Shepherd Swamp & Wright Rock Creek



Shepherd Swamp
Jasper County
Donated in 2008

Shepherd Swamp is the centerfold shot in this edition of the Sprout. The photo was taken by Aaron Newman Photography. Shepherd Swamp was acquired by NICHES from Bruce and Carolyn Shepherd in 2008. Long before the swamp belonged to NICHES, restoration and conservation were underway. In 1991, the last harvest was pulled from the field and the restoration of the Shepherd Swamp started.

Tile lines were removed allowing the depression in the field to once again hold water. The southern end of the property was planted to oaks and the intervening area to the south was planted to prairie. The prairie and wetland were burned frequently, invasive species were sprayed and cut, and new seed was harvested from local natural areas to encourage native species. Bruce and Carolyn Shepherd transformed the soybean field into a thriving wetland, an incredible accomplishment. NICHES completed the restoration of the portion of the property north of the wetland in 2009. Today the whole property has been restored to native plant communities!

NICHES canoe the *Sea Shepherd* was donated by Bruce & Carolyn! Attend a monthly Thursday night Wildcat Creek Float May – October.



Wright Rock Creek Nature Reserve
Warren County
Donated in 2001

Photo by Dave Krohne

The woods of Wright Rock Creek are home to a diversity of wildlife, which is what attracted Gladys and Al Wright to the property. From their very first view of it—a snowy day in which a buck deer and his mate ran past—Gladys knew she wanted to buy the land. In the early 1980s, the Wrights purchased it with the intent of preserving the natural habitat. In December 2001, they donated this property to NICHES to ensure that it would be maintained in its natural state as a refuge for wildlife forever. When Gladys and Al approached NICHES about donating, they asked that hunting would be prohibited on the property, and NICHES agreed. (All such reserved rights on donated properties must be approved in writing by the board of directors.)

NICHES Calendar of Events

NICHES Members Only: Haunted Hike @ Moyer-Gould
Saturday, October 21, 6:00 – 9:00pm
Bring a friend! (1/2 off membership day!)

NICHES Board Meeting @ Clegg Memorial Garden
Tuesday, October 24, 6:00 – 7:00 pm

Kokomo Community Listening Session @ Kokomo Library
Thursday, November 9, 5:30 – 7:30 pm

The Nature Shorts Film Festival @ The Lafayette Theater
Tuesday, November 14, 6:00 – 9:00pm

NICHES Members Only: Grand Kids & Cranes @ Jasper Pulaski
Friday, November 24, 4:45 – 5:45 pm EST.



Thanks to the Purdue's Boiler Out (international student volunteer group) for helping clean up Wildcat Creek! Photo by: Andy Dewald

Uncredited photos by NICHES Staff Members